



A New History of British Columbia Politics

By John Belshaw

Once upon a time there were so many political historians in this land that their numbers blackened, well, if not the plains, then perhaps the overstuffed chairs in the faculty clubs. Most History Departments seemed to have several.

From the 1960s on their numbers fell. How bad is it? There really wasn't a single study of BC politics by a historian since Margaret Ormsby's 1958 *BC: A History* until Bob McDonald's new – and last – book, *A Long Way to Paradise*. Why this drought? In the 1960s, the old guard was challenged by social and labour historians, historians of race, women, and marginalized communities. Political history continued to be researched and produced but it ceased to be about the state and parliamentary politics: it now focused on extra-parliamentary movements, counter-balancing organizations and agencies in the body politic, protest movements and the like.

Louise Tilly rather famously said in 1980 that “if politics is conceived at

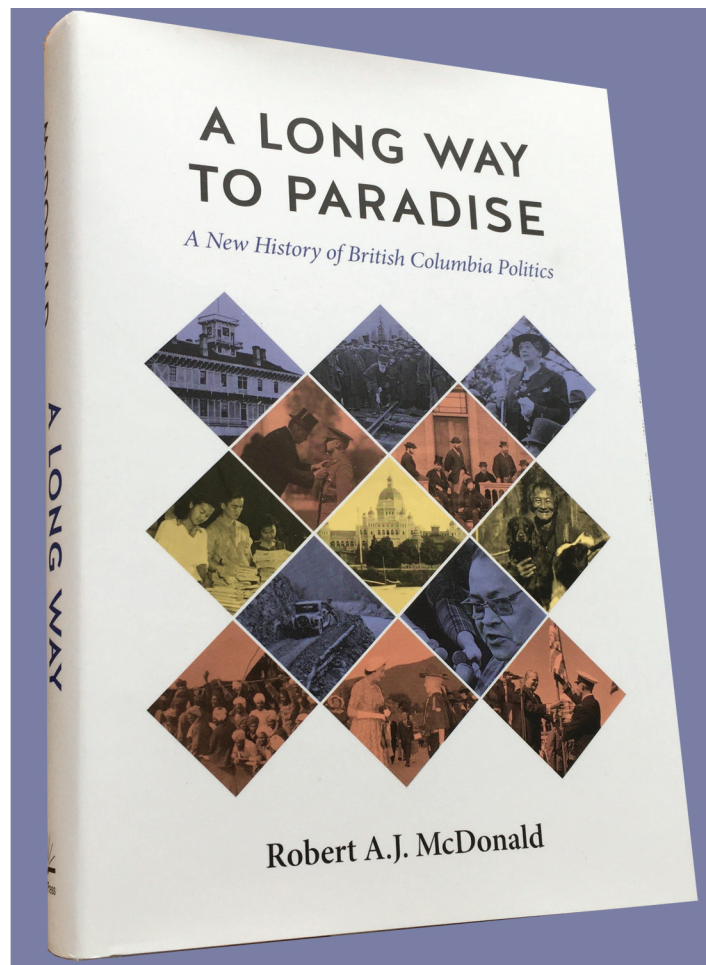
the formal level and at the centre of the nation state, women enter the political arena only when they are demanding rights in that arena, and then act in it.”

By reconceptualizing ‘politics’ as a space – one that exists beyond the ballot box and between elections – marginalized groups like women, people of colour, and less privileged classes could claim at least some of the main stage.

To paraphrase something Larry Glassford pointed out twenty years ago, political history shifted from what the *actors* did, to what *politics* did to someone – and it was usually harmful. BC Historians, as I say, still did political history but not in the same way.

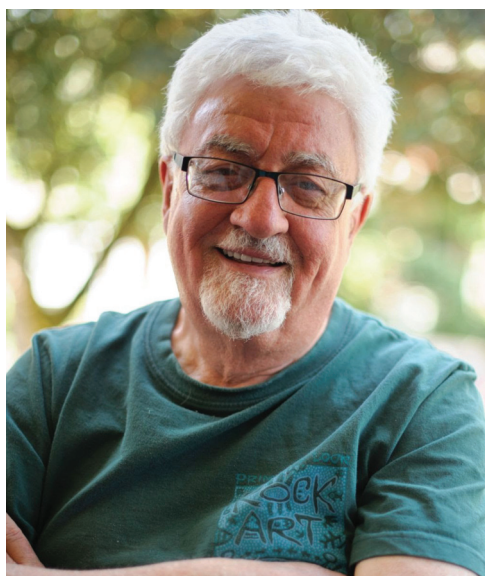
A lot of work on the street-level of politics needed to be done first. The more standard political history fell to the social scientists. Political scientists, geographers, sociologists, and social work scholars took up the cudgels. But these works – with few exceptions – bear the mark of their respective disciplines. Many were *about the past*, but few were *histories*. Few showed real historical method. Still, so long as someone's got one eye on the legislature, the historians could get on with their other stuff.

What's the case for the re-inclusion of political history in our diet? How



about the new and odious forms of populism? Political history necessitates and builds an understanding of the mechanisms of government. Done well it shows much more than electoral campaigns, partisan in- and out-fighting, the role of personalities, etc. It also shows the multiple forces that act on the political culture. This is timely as we are in the midst of intersecting crises at home and abroad and we need the tools to do more than run around like our hair is on fire. History, as always, provides those tools.

For the last forty or fifty years the ideological tide has been with the neo-liberal side. Bob's most central concern is



Robert A.J. McDonald, 1943–2019

PHOTOGRAPH BY KELLAN HIGGINS

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President's Note

Ah, the best-laid plans... We intended to hold this month's panel discussion at the Museum of Vancouver (with an additional live-stream to YouTube), but the renovation of the room we use is behind schedule! COVID has certainly taught us to be nimble. So we will proceed by Zoom as we have done now for two years and return to the once-familiar Joyce Walley Room at the MoV for our April and May lectures before taking our usual summer break.

Our last in-person lecture was Valerie Jerome's in February, 2020. We missed a month while adjusting to the new reality. Our first virtual presentation was that April featuring Dr. Henry Yu, speaking on Chinese immigration and the MoV exhibition "A Seat at the Table"; we are pleased to have him back with us as part of this month's panel.

We're delighted to present an evening focused on the posthumous publication of Bob McDonald's history of B.C. politics. It is almost three years since he died. For readers who have become involved with our society since then, Bob was my predecessor as president, a wonderful board member, raconteur, and hilarious companion at events large and small. His achievements as a scholar and teacher will be described by his university colleagues much better than I could.

Michael Kluckner

Welcome New Members

Christopher Keam	Babs Perowne
Peter Ladner	Gordon Price
Lloyd & Linda Lovatt	Sandra Takenaka
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A Long Way to Paradise-



John Belshaw, who will moderate the panel, was born in Vancouver, raised in East Burnaby and has the accent to prove it. He has lived most of his life (so far) on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish and Secwepemc peoples. He received his degrees from UBC, SFU, and the London School of Economics and is the author/co-author/editor of several books and studies on British Columbian and Canadian history, including *Vancouver Noir*. Dr. Belshaw is currently an Open Learning faculty member at Thompson Rivers University, serves on the board of the VHS, and lives in Strathcona where he studies cycling histories, conversational Welsh, and local breweries.

Upcoming Speakers

We intend to return to the Museum of Vancouver for the April and subsequent lectures. For those not wishing to attend in person, the lectures will be broadcast live on the Vancouver Historical Society's YouTube channel.

April 28th, 2022, 7 pm at the MoV

Aaron Chapman: Vancouver Vice

A best-selling author and raconteur of the City's underbelly, Chapman will talk about his latest work focusing on the West End in the 1980s.

May 26th, 2022, 7 pm at the MoV

Our AGM and a speaker to be announced in the next newsletter

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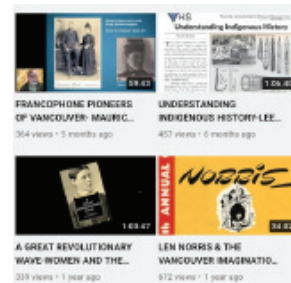


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Watch it again, Sam!

Visit our archive online:
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on YouTube" to find our lectures
going back to 2016

Elwin Xie, videographer



a Panel Discussion on Bob McDonald's Book

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liberalism in its many forms. At the end of *Paradise*, he acknowledges how the 1980s program of austerity under Social Credit introduced new ideas and approaches but also that it was an instance of continuity. It tapped into a subterranean reservoir of individualism, anti-statism, and anti-collectivism. Which is to say, it grew from threads that trail all the way back to the 19th century.

Knowing this is important, Bob

equips us to recognize what phenomena are locally grown and nurtured.

I think it is significant that Bob chose to bring this to a close in 1972 – or thereabouts. The last attempt at a comprehensive political history was Martin Robin's two-volume *Company Province*, which wrapped up in the same year and was published in 1972. Professor Robin – a political scientist – happily relied on sources that most historians would approach with suspicion. We have, in *Long*

Way to Paradise, a reply to that effort, a resetting and, without a doubt, a *real* history.

So, whatever happened to political history? *A Long Way to Paradise* is the answer. It digests all that research about power relations, elitism, ideology, labour, gender, race, Indigenous histories – all that stuff that historians have been grinding away at since the 1960s – and produces something genuinely new and challenging.



Lara Campbell is Professor of Gender, Sexuality, and Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, where she is currently serving as Associate Dean in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. She is the author and co-editor of several books and collections on the social welfare state and the Great Depression, suffrage and feminism in British Columbia, war resistance in Canadian history, and history of the 1960s. These include her 2020 UBC Press publication, *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia*. Her upcoming co-edited collection - *Feeling Feminism: Activism, Affect and Canada's Second Wave* – will be published by UBC Press in April 2022.

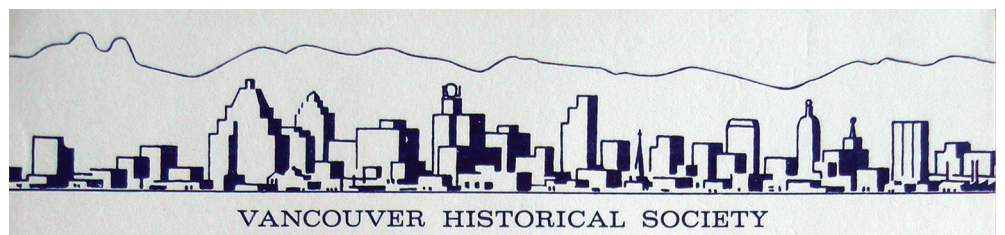


Henry Yu is a member of the UBC History Department and the Principal of St. John's College. He is as widely known for his engagement with community organizations as he is for his research and teaching. He has contributed to projects such as: the City of Vancouver's Dialogues between First Nations, Urban Aboriginal, and Immigrant Communities; the Landscapes of Injustice; the National Honorary Advisory Council of the National Association of Japanese Canadians; the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of BC; the Vancouver Chinatown Foundation; and the Pacific Canada Heritage Centre/Museum of Migration Society. Prof. Yu was an undergrad at UBC and completed his higher degrees from Princeton University.



A settler born and raised in Coast Salish and Nuuchah-nulth territories, Eryk Martin received his PhD from Simon Fraser University in 2016. At present, he's working on a history of anarchist activism in Vancouver. This book manuscript, *Black Flags Rising: Anarchism, Activism, and the Vancouver Five, 1967-1984*, focuses on anarchist political projects in order to explore the transformation of revolutionary politics and culture in the late twentieth century, both in Canada and abroad. He joined the Department of History at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in 2016, where he teaches courses on the history of Canada, British Columbia, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and political activism. He last spoke to the VHS in 2016.

Below: our 1960s stationery header – a drawing by Patricia Brammall.



Bringing the sounds of Indonesia to Vancouver

In September 2021, VHS started a collaboration with Dr. Nicolas Kenny's "HIST 486 – History of Vancouver" class at Simon Fraser University. Two student projects are presented here and in our April newsletter. This month we read about Justin Devries' research project on gamelan.

By Justin Devries

Gamelan, the name for many kinds of music and musical ensembles from the Indonesian archipelago and beyond, has a perhaps surprising history in Vancouver.

The first gamelan ensemble to reside permanently in the city arrived as a gift 35 years ago when, at the close of Expo 86, over 60 handcrafted Javanese instruments later named Gamelan Madu Sari were transferred from the Indonesian Pavilion to Simon Fraser University. A vibrant and enduring community immediately formed around the instruments, growing over the ensuing decades to include (at least) six new ensembles and hundreds of community members.

The Indonesian Pavilion at Expo had featured over sixty highly respected musicians who showcased performing arts from across Indonesia on a near-daily basis. They mainly performed on three different sets of instruments brought from across the ocean: two from Bali and one from Java, each a large ensemble featuring an assortment of gongs, metallophones, stringed instruments, and flutes.

Upon hearing that the rather large and unwieldy gamelans would likely not be shipped back to Indonesia at the close of Expo, the composer, community organizer, and SFU Professor Martin Bartlett set about working to ensure that one of them would find a home in Vancouver. Though Bartlett had personally considered Expo a gaudy and tasteless affair, he understood and seized upon the unique opportunity it afforded by leveraging every connection he had within the University, his local and international arts communities, and the In-



Community members playing Simon Fraser University's then-new gamelan, Kyai Madu Sari.

PHOTO 50004 - COURTESY OF THE SFU ARCHIVES.

donesian Pavilion and consulate to secure the instruments.

Bartlett was not alone in his dislike of Expo, as many politically minded artists in Vancouver held serious apprehensions about participating in the event. Some, including local punk legends D.O.A., went so far as to organize a benefit concert protesting Expo and the harm it caused residents, particularly low-income and marginalized communities. Yet at the same time hundreds of performers participated, entertaining thousands of visitors over the summer of 1986.

My short podcast-style audio narrative uses Bartlett's efforts to acquire the gamelan as a way of exploring and adding nuance to the many ways artists interacted with that contentious event. His work behind the scenes at and around Expo indicates that we should look beyond the simple binary of protest or participation if we want to understand the breadth of opportunities and issues that the event created for Vancouver's creative community.

My interest in this subject comes in part from having been personally involved in the gamelan community in

Vancouver, playing with several different ensembles around town and assisting in organizing festivals highlighting the music's presence in Vancouver. Additionally, my work as a Masters student at SFU is centered around the main subject of this podcasts' narrative, Martin Bartlett.

Bartlett's beautiful music for electronic instruments and his enduring contributions to the cultural fabric of Vancouver have remained largely unexplored since his untimely passing in 1993. The starting point for my research will be examining his life and work with an eye for tracing the transformations of ideas and practices carried forward from the 1960s counterculture through to a rapidly changing Vancouver in the 1980s.

Many thanks to the Vancouver Historical Society for featuring this project, as well as Dr. Kenny and all my classmates in HIST 486 who every week worked together to create a fun and supportive environment. I also extend my gratitude to the composers Kenneth Newby, Michael O'Neill, and Mark Parlett who let me use their work for Gamelan Madu Sari in the podcast.