



A Mad Moment in Vancouver's History

By Jurian ter Horst

“... Let me look away
Let me see the things I love
How wonderful!
How beautiful!
But it is still there!
I know it is still there!
When will I feel safe again?
Never?
Yes - never.”
- *Beyond Sound*, by Molly Dexall.

Before a shift towards community-based care of mental health services took place in the 1960s, people with mental illness had been abused for decades through treatments such as electroshock therapy, drug-therapy and sleep-therapy. They were hospitalized in large institutions and disengaged from their communities and family members. Decisions had been made for them, not by them.

In January 1971, a small group of mental patients came together in Vancouver to challenge and further deinstitutionalize the mental health system. They founded the Mental Patients Association (MPA). Based in Kitsilano and supported by predominantly young, progressive health-care professionals, the MPA put former patients in charge of a new and innovative peer-led community. They helped one another with medical treatments, drop-in services, free coffee and opportunities to build everyday life skills. MPA members allied themselves with other struggling communities, such as Mental Patients Liberation Groups, the Gay Liberation Movement, the Women's Movement and people from the working class.



The Mental Patients Association's March 31, 1973 protest at BC's Riverview Hospital, where a conference on “dangerous patients” was underway. Dubbed a “historic moment” by *Vancouver Sun* columnist and MPA supporter Bob Hunter, this was the first time in North America that a group of psychiatric patients had publicly protested against the psychiatric system.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVE HAMILTON

Within a couple of years the organization's membership grew to several hundreds of former mental patients.

The MPA's monthly and later bi-monthly newsletter, *In a Nutshell*, was published to keep members up to date with community events and volunteering opportunities, to create an opportunity to reflect on political and social developments in mental health care, and to encourage community participation. *In a Nutshell* practised a very open publishing policy (“The only things we won't print are pieces not submitted.”) and gave members the chance to share

articles or poems that unveiled a piece of their everyday lives. It was a way for MPA members to speak and to be heard for once – to not be silenced. For the August 1971 edition of *In a Nutshell*, MPA member Molly Dexall took the opportunity to share some of her deepest thoughts and emotions in a poem called “Beyond Sound,” of which a snippet was placed at the beginning of this article.

Although the MPA and like-minded organizations worked on many successful social, development and housing projects, their initiatives are part of a largely forgotten piece of Vancouver's radical 1970s history. In our upcoming May lecture, Megan J. Davies will focus

May Speaker:
Dr. Megan Davies

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President's Notes

Dr. Lara Campbell, our speaker in March, 2020, has won the prestigious Basil Stuart-Stubbs prize for her book *A Great Revolutionary Wave: Women and the Vote in British Columbia*. Congratulations! Her talk, and her earlier one from May, 2016, on "Local Protest and Transnational Politics," are both available for your Netflix-avoiding, pandemic-enduring pleasure on our YouTube channel.



Program Director John Belshaw will soon be confirming our lectures for October and November. They likely will still be virtual, which is both an advantage (speakers don't have to travel to Vancouver) and a disadvantage (some are reluctant to speak online – talking to a blank screen, as it were – as well as there being no opportunity to display and sell books).

The May lecture is the last one before our summer break. The day before, May 26th, as in the notice below, we will hold our Annual General Meeting. If you're happy with what we've been doing but don't want to attend – attending AGMs is a Society's equivalent of scrubbing floors, after all – please send a note to my email giving me your proxy vote.

And for the June newsletter, which in a normal year would feature our upcoming walking tours, we're working on ideas for exploring the City: heritage walking tour books you can take out from the library, historic beach photos, Maureen Charron's search for the oldest sidewalk stamps, uncrowded parks with interesting histories, ravines, Eve Lazarus's favourite murder sites ... Please stay tuned.

Michael Kluckner, President
presidentvhs@gmail.com

Notice of Annual General Meeting and Call for Nominations

The Vancouver Historical Society will hold its AGM by Zoom teleconference on **May 26th at 4 pm**. All members will receive by email an invitation to the event a few days before.

As was done last year, you may send your proxy vote to the President, Michael Kluckner, in advance of the meeting, at presidentvhs@gmail.com

Agenda:

1. Approval of 2020 AGM Minutes
2. President's Report
3. Treasurer's Report
4. Report of Nomination Committee

All nominations for board positions must be received in writing at presidentvhs@gmail.com 7 days before the meeting.

Upcoming Speakers

The VHS invites everyone to attend our monthly talks, which are being held online by Zoom during the pandemic. Members will receive complete information by email a few days before the lecture.

September 23, 2021

Landscapes of Injustice (the Nikkei Experience in Canada)

Speaker: Dr. Jordan Stanger-Ross (University of Victoria)

During the 1940s, Canada enacted mass displacement and dispossession of people on racial grounds, a collective moral failure that remains only partially addressed. Japanese Canadians lost their homes, farms, businesses, as well as personal, family, and communal possessions. The multi-year, multi-university project primarily focused on the forced sale of Japanese Canadian-owned property. Dr. Stanger-Ross last spoke to the VHS on this project in 2014.

Upcoming Events

Registration is open for the annual **BC Historical Federation Conference** to be held virtually June 3–5. It is themed around Surrey, where it was to have been held. Boat-building, the RCMP, adventures in digital history, and Surrey's poet laureate are among the programs, and there will be virtual tours of the Peace Arch, the BCER railway, and the cemetery, as well as the AGM on the 5th. Details online – where else? – at <https://www.bchistory.ca/conference/>

Welcome to new VHS Members

Jim Burton
Gerald Christenson
Leith Davis

Hannah Desharnais
Robert Watt
Wendy Wickwire

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2020 - 2021

(ELECTED MAY 28, 2020)

PRESIDENT	Michael Kluckner
VICE PRESIDENT	Brenda Peterson
TREASURER	Tom Carter
RECORDING SECRETARY	Helen Van Wel
DIRECTOR (PROGRAMS)	John Belshaw
DIRECTOR (COMMUNICATIONS)	Lynn Copeland
DIRECTOR (NEWSLETTER)	Jessica Quan
DIRECTOR (INFOLINE)	Jan Fialkowski
DIRECTOR (YOUTH OUTREACH)	Jurian ter Horst

Appointed Positions

MEMBERSHIP	Mary Wallace Poole
VIDEOGRAPHY	Elwin Xie
NEWSLETTER MAILING	Jeannie Hounslow
NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE/LAYOUT	Kellan Higgins / MK

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Early members of Canada's first peer-led mental health organization meeting in the basement of their first location in a house at 10th Avenue and Trutch in Vancouver's Kitsilano neighbourhood. Photographer Eve Hamilton was born in 1949 and has spent her working life helping people. Starting as a secretary at Vancouver's MPA (Mental Patients Association) in the spring of 1973, Eve realized that she loved working directly with people and had a talent for it. She remained at MPA until 1986, serving as house coordinator and in the Phoenix Apartment program.

PHOTOGRAPH BY EVE HAMILTON

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on these mental health initiatives that inverted traditional psychiatric practices and power systems. She will address the work of the fledgling MPA and its various projects, the short-lived Vancouver Emotional Emergency Centre, and the promise of the Citizens Committees in the

new Greater Vancouver Mental Health Project.

Dr. Megan J. Davies is a Canadian health historian with research expertise in old age, madness, everyday health, and activist public history. She coordinates MadnessCanada.com – an exhibit, educational, and research space – and has

published on the history of residential care, home support, and dementia care. In September 2021, Megan will take up a Jack and Doris Shadbolt Fellowship in the Humanities at Simon Fraser University, undertaking an exhibit project tentatively titled, "Remembering COVID in Long Term Care."



Some readers may have seen media coverage of the "ghost sign" that emerged during a demolition on Hastings Street at Penticton, two blocks east of Nanaimo, near the end of April. A row of shops in the foreground had been demolished, exposing the sign on a 1915 apartment building which itself is slated for demolition. Patrick Gunn of Heritage Vancouver dated the sign to 1925–8, the period between W.C. Shelly's creation of Canadian Bakeries Ltd. and the erection of the shops next door. The VHS YouTube channel has Michael Kluckner's lecture from 2016 on Shelly's 4x Bakery.

PHOTO BY MK

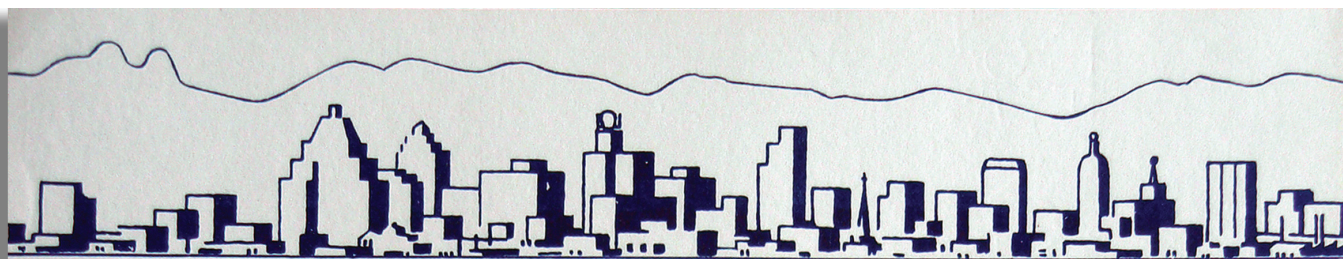
Our Latest Survey

We thank everyone who is responding to the brief surveys after the Zoom lectures. Twenty-four people out of about 70 sign-ins filled it out following Wendy Wickwire's lecture on April 22nd.

Many respondents also left comments, including: "What I appreciate about the Zoom lectures is the ability to listen to all of these fascinating speakers who are not in town." A silver lining to the dark pandemic, perhaps.

Other commenters mentioned the dialogue in the question period between Wendy and David Walkem, a former chief of the Cook's Ferry Band at Spences Bridge, which was very illuminating on the relationship of the Anglican Church with local Indigenous people among other matters.

And, Wendy donated a book. The winner of the random draw of survey participants was long-time VHS member Anne Mathisen.



VANCOUVER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May, 2021

Dear Historical Society Member,

This is what your Society's stationery looked like in the 1960s - the modern skyline above and a view of the Granville Townsite (Gastown) below, looking west toward Coal Harbour. The drawings were probably by Patricia Drucker Brammall, who created beautiful certificates for the Society in those years.

Around that time, if you were sending a postcard from Vancouver, you might have bought this one of Coal Harbour when it was still a place of tugs and fishboats, wharves and work...

This is a George Weinhaupl photo printed by Natural Colour Productions Ltd.

