



History, Heritage Buildings, and Murder

Eve Lazarus is a familiar name to Vancouver history readers. *Sensational Vancouver* (2014), *Cold Case Vancouver* (2015), *Blood, Sweat and Fear* (2017), *Murder by Milkshake* (2018) and *Vancouver Exposed* (2020) are among her many titles to have earned their place on the local history bookshelf. Eve is about to launch her new book, *Cold Case BC: The Stories Behind the Province's Most Sensational Murder and Missing Persons Cases*.

VHS: How did you start this storytelling journey?

Eve: I really just fell into it. I was working as a business reporter and freelance writer in the early 2000s. I read a story in the *Vancouver Sun* one Saturday about the work James Johnstone was doing researching home histories, and I thought this was fascinating. I called up James, wrote a few articles, and that led to my first book *At Home with History*. I loved that Vancouver, especially in the first half of last century, was a seething mass of corruption and there was a plethora of stories about bootleggers and madams and corrupt cops and murder. At some point I moved from writing about history with elements of true crime, to writing about true crime events that were informed by history.

VHS: How comfortable is it to write "true crime"?

Eve: It's never comfortable writing about true crime. I work with the families of dead and missing people, and I get to know the families and the victims quite well. If I ever became comfortable writing about true crime, then it would be time to stop.

VHS: *Vancouver Exposed* began as a series of posts for your blog Every Place Has a Story. Describe a couple of your favourite stories from it and the people you



met along the way.

Eve: One of the stories that I had the most fun writing was the one about the World Belly Flop and Cannonball Diving Championship. After I ran John Denniston's photo of a man belly flopping from a hot air balloon into a swimming pool on my blog, I received a note from Trevor Rowe. He told me that the man was his father "Kamikaze Bill," a logger from Bellingham, and Trevor, who was four at the time, remembers his Dad stuffing weights in his shirt to meet the minimum 250-pound requirement for entry. After all that, poor Kamikaze Bill only came in second. Another that I loved writing about was Elza Mayhew's two-ton bronze sculpture, currently sitting behind a wall in the former Bank of Canada building at 900 West Hastings. Elza's daughter thinks that new landlords had the sculpture melted down, while Bart Slotman, property manager, says that's simply not true and he's got the pa-

**This month's speaker:
Eve Lazarus**

perwork to prove it. I guess we'll find out the next time the lobby gets a redo.

VHS: You've evolved from writing books into podcasts. Is there a different kind of storytelling going on in each medium, or are you speaking to two distinct audiences?

Eve: I have two podcasts out now. The 12-episode "Blood, Sweat, and Fear: The Story of Inspector Vance" that's based on my book, and "Cold Case Canada" which currently has 34 episodes. The podcast follows the chapters in *Cold Case Vancouver* and now *Cold Case BC*. It's a bit like listening to an audio book interspersed with interviews with family and friends of the victims and law enforcement who worked on the cases. I'm now at around 275,000 downloads, and while listeners are mostly local, the pod-

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President's Note

About 30 people came out on a ghastly night in late October to see and hear Dr. Gregory Betts speak on the avant-garde literary and music culture of a half-century ago. Another 40 watched the presentation live on YouTube and, as our experience indicates, many more will find it and watch it once Elwin Xie's completed video joins our archive of talks going back six years. For example, my talk in September had about 80 in-person and livestream, and I see that 340 people have watched all or part of it since, so the word is getting out there. And we have 20% more members than we did in 2019.

My question to you, dear members, is how you're feeling about the lectures which are, after all, our *raison d'être* as a society. Until we started posting video recordings on YouTube in 2016, you only had once choice – show up. Then came COVID in 2020, with no opportunity to get together but a fairly successful run on Zoom for two years, plus the video archive. Now there are three choices: in person at the Museum of Vancouver, the YouTube livestream, and the video archive.

We used to get 60 to 80 to a typical lecture, which was a good crowd for the Joyce Walley Room, and we're wondering whether those numbers will come back or whether we should begin to investigate different spaces elsewhere in the city, perhaps smaller but certainly more accessible by transit. We would not want to become an entirely virtual presenter; some speakers (Eve Lazarus, for example), want a live audience and have not adapted to Zoom-type presentations. That said, we took advantage of COVID and featured several speakers who lived outside Metro Vancouver: Lee Maracle, Colin Stein, Nancy Turner, and Wendy Wickwire.

Take a moment, please, and write me an email (or phone me at 604-251-3353) to say yes I'll be back at the MoV or not, I love or hate the MoV venue, I like staying home and will watch the livestream on YouTube or will catch up with it later once it's posted as a recording, and anything else that's on your mind. We don't want to do a survey or poll – the recent Vancouver election proved how inaccurate polls can be, as if anyone needed proof.

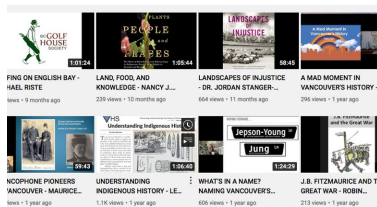
I used to see so many of you at the lectures and always had a sense of how we were doing as an organization. I'd appreciate getting that back.

Michael Kluckner, presidentvhs@gmail.com

Don't miss a lecture!

Visit our archive online: search "Vancouver Historical Society on YouTube" to find our lectures going back to 2016

Elwin Xie, videographer



Upcoming Events

Our lectures take place at the Museum of Vancouver. For those not wishing to attend in person, the lectures will be broadcast live on the Vancouver Historical Society's YouTube channel, subject to technical difficulties.

There is no lecture or newsletter in December!

January 26, 2023, 7 pm

Lisa Anne Smith

Hastings Mill:

The Historic Times of a Vancouver Community

VHS member Lisa Anne Smith has added to her series of books on Vancouver history with this newly published volume on the Burrard Inlet waterfront and its first factory.

Lectures in February and later months will include topics of school-naming and the Gay history of Vancouver. Stay tuned!

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Welcome New Members

Roland Derksen
Michael Diack
Patricia Hanna
Blair Redlin
Heather Wilson

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2022 - 2023

(ELECTED MAY 24, 2022)

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cast reaches a much wider and younger audience. At various times it's ranked high in the charts on Apple Podcasts in Canada, but strangely it's also done well in countries like Thailand, Romania, Denmark, Vietnam, Iceland and Singapore.

VHS: What new directions do you see in research and publishing of history for Vancouver and elsewhere? Whose stories haven't been told yet?

Eve: When John Belshaw put *Vancouver Confidential* together (2014) it was a real game-changer. Essentially John put together a group of 14 people – “the Belshaw Gang” as we're happily known – a mix of writers, bloggers, artists, reporters, tour guides, musicians, filmmakers, academics and collectors, and let us go to work on Vancouver's murky underbelly. Several years later we still share information, perform together, write together, drink together and help each other out. In my opinion, Vancouver's history legacy will only be stronger as this group continues to publish, blog, podcast, teach and hopefully inspire new generations to love history.

VHS: Will your future focus continue to be Cold Case stories?

Eve: I'm working on season four of my Cold Case Canada podcast which will launch in the spring. I'll also continue administering the Facebook group page that grew out of Cold Case Vancouver and now has several thousand members. I'm currently working on a book about the sinking of the “Empress of Ireland” in the St. Lawrence River near Rimouski in 1914. Many Canadians have never heard of it, and this is amazing because the shipwreck took the lives of more than a thousand people. More passengers died that night than on either the Titanic or the Lusitania, and many of them came from Western Canada.

VHS: Everybody knows the story of Joe Fortes. Why did you include him in *Vancouver Exposed*—a book about “hidden history?”

Eve: Surprisingly, not everyone has heard of Joe Fortes and I know this from



the comments I receive when I write about him on social media. But even for those people who do know the stories of icons like Joe Fortes, there are always different ways to write about them. For example, in *Vancouver Exposed* I wrote about Joe's sweet little cabin at English Bay, which also gave a great lead in to the next story about the missing houses along Beach Avenue.

(With a file from Robert Sanzalone.)

Above: The World Belly Flop and Cannonball Diving Championship at the Coach House Inn in North Vancouver, 1979. JOHN DENNISTON PHOTO.

The Speech on the Beach – Joe Fortes and the Vancouver Historical Society

[On October 1st, the Vancouver Heritage Foundation's Places That Matter program dedicated a plaque to Joe Fortes. The VHS participated in the ceremony, and program director John Belshaw gave these remarks.]

Good afternoon everyone. I'm here with my friend and colleague Jan Fialkowski, representing the Vancouver Historical Society. Aaaand, *we brought chocolates!* Apparently when folks visited Joe Fortes, it was customary to bring him chocolates. Ours come from Purdy's, which was established on Robson in 1907, so the timing works. Please enjoy. If you're planning on heckling me, please enjoy the ones with the chewy caramel filling.

I am an historian and I am very much interested in how generations and their stories connect. Like a baton being passed forward in a relay race, a personality or an event or even a feeling can persist for decades. Joe Fortes is, in this sense, more than a man: he is an idea and an icon, a feeling whose persistence tells us a lot about who we are.

Vancouver is different from other cities. We don't raise statues to generals or politicians or monarchs, or triumph, liberty, or freedom. I think it is significant that two of the most beloved figures in the city's history earned their memorials by being physically active in the pursuit of the wellness of others. We like a one-legged runner and a racialized lifeguard.

Others have spoken to Mr. Fortes' experiences as a racialized person and to that I can add little. So let me tell you a bit about the Vancouver Historical Society's relationship with Mr. Fortes.

The VHS was established in 1936. Then as now, its purpose is to support explorations of the many histories of this place and its peoples. We spotlight new accounts by hosting public lectures (Lisa-Anne Smith will be giving one in January 2023!). And we work on projects with like-minded organizations like the Heritage Foundation (and our pal Jess Quan).

Now, many of the original members of the VHS – or their children – would have known Joe Fortes. Some may have witnessed his funeral procession. The first president of the VHS, Walter Sage, was an establishment historian who mostly wrote about establish-



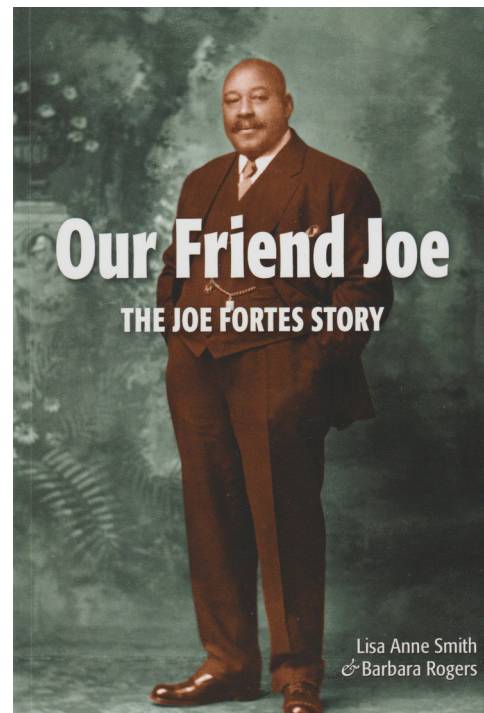
Historian and VHS program manager Dr. John Belshaw speaking at the Places That Matter event for Joe Fortes at English Bay on October 1st. PHOTO BY ROB ATKINS.

ment figures in colonial society, but he distinguished himself in 1942 as an opponent of the internment of Japanese-Canadians. That is, to my mind, his finest hour, perhaps setting in motion a long struggle within the VHS between the white settler narrative and something more broad and inclusive.

We can see this in 1985-86 when the VHS Board put forward a list of candidates for the title of Vancouver's "Citizen of the Century." The nominees included two controversial mayors, the first city archivist, the founder of a department store chain, and Gassy Jack Deighton (we dodged a bullet there), along with three Indigenous men and ... Joe Fortes. (Please note that no women were nominated. Boo.) When the dust settled, Mr. Fortes emerged the winner.

Forty years later, he's still a winner. Why is that? Vancouver is often accused of being a city without a soul, a claim I've never liked. The soul of a city is in its fibre, its muscle memory. And Mr. Fortes persists. I believe he does so because as one generation passes along the baton of Joe Fortes, the next generation receives it in its own context. At one time his was a story of service, at another it was a story of nostalgia, still later per-

haps an illumination of the lives of Black Vancouverites. Today, in a city that has made a cult of physical fitness, perhaps we can now see Mr. Fortes as he might have liked: as a man who was at home in his body and who did great and worthy things with it.



VHS member Lisa Anne Smith's book on Joe Fortes. The centenary of his death was celebrated this past year.