



## Defying Convention

### Helen Gregory MacGill: unruly Ontario debutante, University of Toronto 'Pocket Venus,' and BC's 'Little Judge'

Helen Gregory MacGill (1864-1947) helped spread feminism throughout North America. In Ontario in the 1880s, California and Minnesota in the 1890s, and British Columbia in the twentieth century, she strove to improve the lives of women and children.

In Helen Gregory, Ontario's elite produced a New Woman. She was aided and abetted by her suffragist mother, Emma O'Reilly Gregory (1834-1907), a feminist in her own right. Helen repeatedly startled and scandalized contemporaries. Beginning as a pioneering co-ed at the University of Toronto, she made forays into journalism and soon took a younger man as a husband after a week's courtship. As a trail-blazing woman in journalism, she reported on the Canadian Northwest and then toured Japan, demonstrating sympathy for the people she met. She contributed to the American and BC suffrage movement and feminist press and dramatized the need for a revolution in the legal rights of women and children. She earned enough political respect to win appointment as BC's first female juvenile court judge, a position that allowed her to explore and comment on children and mother's rights. She also led the crusade for the Vancouver Women's Building and, for good measure, swam naked in Indian Arm. Over the course of a long and memorable life Helen challenged expectations for her gender and class.

In the 21st century, Helen Gregory MacGill is largely remembered as a judge. She also resurfaces in public memory as



Helen Gregory MacGill CVA R.H. MARLOW PICTURE AM54-54-: PORT P1140.1

the mother of two outstanding feminists: American sociologist, Helen MacGill Hughes (1903-1992) and aeronautical engineer and member of the Canadian Royal Commission on the Status of Women, Elsie Gregory MacGill, the "Queen of the Hurricanes" (1905-1980).

The details of a passionate, sometimes scandalous, early life and her efforts as a Vancouver feminist activist and feminist judge are, however, largely forgotten. September's speaker – Veronica (Nikki) Strong-Boag – is on a crusade to recover from obscurity the suffrage generation. No one is better suited to the task.

Part of a groundbreaking generation of feminist historians, Nikki Strong-Boag has influenced scholars, readers, and policy makers. She has written or edited twenty-two books. One early contribution, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of*

*Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Penguin, 1988), remains a classic in the field. Since then, she has written on Tekahionwake (Pauline Johnson), the Aberdeens, Nellie McClung, and foster care and adoption in Canada. Her two latest books are *The Last Suffragist Standing: The Life and Times of Laura Emma Marshall Jamieson, 1882-1964* (UBC Press 2018) and *Liberal-Labour Lady: The Times and Life of Mary Ellen Smith* (UBC Press 2021).

Nikki's work has been widely recognized by a long list of honours and tributes. She is now Professor Emerita in Social Justice at UBC, and Adjunct Professor in the Departments of History and Gender Studies at the University of Victoria.

Join us on the 28th to rediscover Helen Gregory MacGill and remember the audacity of Canadian suffragists.

This month's speaker:  
**Veronica (Nikki) Strong-Boag**

# President's Message

Our program for this new season is slowly coming together under John Belshaw's direction. We're sorry that we are unable to present the lecture on the UBC Botanical Garden, as we advertised last spring.

Other projects for the year include participation in Dr. Nicholas Kenny's SFU class on Vancouver history and an exhibition next spring on our Award of Merit recipients at the University Women's Club, which received our first award in 1974. Both are organized by our director Jurian ter Horst.

And we've begun a monumental effort, led by director Anne Wyness, to get our own records in order. Some are held at the City of Vancouver Archives, others on our website, still more in private email accounts and in folders in homes of people like me. The irony of a historical society being unclear on its own history is not lost on us.

In tandem with the records update, we're upgrading our website, [vancouver-historical-society.ca](http://vancouver-historical-society.ca), for the first time in several years, using as a banner a line drawing of the city skyline that was once on the VHS's stationery. I believe the



black-and-white original was by Patricia Drucker Brammall, who also illustrated the Award of Merit certificate we used in the 1970s. The new design will have a sort of blog on the front page – the kind of small stories and pictures that get put in the “Mailbag” section on the back page of this newsletter from time to time as well as on our social media posts. We guess that there are many members who don't use social media, and others, including myself, who don't get the historical society page due to the infuriating Meta algorithms, so perhaps more of you will click on the website from time to time to see what interesting tidbits have come to our attention.

As it has been since we started our website in 2005, its design and maintenance is by Ariba Dalal of Quasar Design & Data Management, who worked on Chuck Davis's site [vancouverhistory.ca](http://vancouverhistory.ca) (below) from early in 2004. Chuck introduced her to Paul Flucke and Bruce Watson in 2005. Since Chuck passed away in 2010, she has continued to maintain it – it's worth a visit for its wonderful anecdotes and timelines. And please check out our website as it evolves.

Michael Kluckner  
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## Upcoming Events

Thursday October 26, 2023, 7 pm

### Youth Hostels and Hostile Locals: Vancouver's “Battle of Jericho,” 1970

Linda Mahood, Professor of History, University of Guelph

Few motorists in the late 1960s could have escaped the sight of hundreds of scruffy young people hitchhiking and flipping peace signs along the Trans-Canada Highway on their way to Vancouver. To Mayor Tom Campbell's astonishment, the Trudeau government responded by setting up a national network of free youth hostels. Tourism, wanted and unwanted, has the capacity to cause conflict with locals. The talk explores the local reaction to hostels in the Beatty Street Drill Hall and Jericho Garrison, and one of the few riots of the hippie era.

Thursday November 23, 2023

### From “Killer” to “Orca”: A West Coast Story

Jason Colby, environmental historian, University of Victoria

Today, there is no more prominent symbol of the West Coast than the killer whale (*Orcinus orca*). Yet just a few decades ago, orcas were reviled and shot. Dr. Colby explores our transformed knowledge of and relationship with this apex marine predator.

## Welcome to new VHS Members

Catherine Bayly  
Gail Daldy  
Joseph Edmonds  
Craig Laronge  
Paul MacDonald

Denise McMartin  
Carol Plank  
Debra Rurak  
David Staley  
Valerie Whitehead

## Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2022 - 2023

(ELECTED MAY 23, 2023)

<b>PRESIDENT</b>	Michael Kluckner
<b>VICE PRESIDENT</b>	Jan Fialkowski
<b>TREASURER</b>	Tom Carter
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<b>DIRECTOR (YOUTH OUTREACH)</b>	Jurian ter Horst
<b>DIRECTOR (EDUCATION)</b>	Lindsay Gibson

## Appointed Positions

<b>MEMBERSHIP</b>	Mary Wallace Poole
<b>VIDEOGRAPHY</b>	Elwin Xie
<b>NEWSLETTER MAILING</b>	Michael O'Hagan
<b>NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE/LAYOUT</b>	Kellan Higgins/MK

## CONTACT

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# A summer of unique tours for VHS members



During this hottest summer in memory, our field trips were all indoors, thanks to suggestions from board members that were coordinated by Denise Jacques with assistance from Jan Fialkowski.

Above: on August 10th, about 40 VHS members toured the fabulous Orpheum Theatre. The photo on the left shows Shoeless Tom [Carter], our treasurer, at the 90-year-old Wurlitzer organ – he played a medley of silent movie themes, narrating as he went. On the right, BC Entertainment Hall of Fame president Bill Allman describes the silent movie projector displayed on a balcony of the foyer.



On July 16th, legendary curator-collector Ivan Sayers described the rare garments and fashions displayed at the Museum of Vancouver's "Dressed for History" exhibition, which included items from the Society for the Museum of Original Costume (SMOC). The exhibition continues through the fall, with clothing from the collections of Sayers, Claus Jahnke, and Melanie Talkington. "Why Costume Collections Matter" is asked and answered in this excellent show.



The City of Vancouver Archives staff put on wonderful show on June 14th for about 40 of us, including rare documents and a behind-the-walls look at its conservation and digitization facilities. In this photo, Digital Conservator Dorcas Tong demonstrates the tools of her trade.



# The Evolution of Vancouver's Port



**Gateway to the Pacific: Prominent Piers and Wharves in Vancouver,** by Floris van Weelderen

Vancouver Historical Society member Floris van Weelderen has made available a low-resolution digital copy of his new book on his website [www.hal-vas.com](http://www.hal-vas.com), along with other projects, many of which feature the photography of Walter Frost. An earlier display of Frost's photography curated by van Weelderen at the Maritime Museum was featured in our November 2020 newsletter.

In this summer of the port strike, crippling Vancouver's major raison d'être, it seemed appropriate to focus on the evolution of cargo-loading – two photos from the new book.

Above: Longshoremen loading sacks of "Renown" brand flour onto Western Canada Steamships' *SS Hastings Park* for export to China at the Terminal Dock, July 18, 1946. **PHOTO BY DON COLTMAN CVA AM1545-S3:- CVA 586-4558**

Massive metallic monster – the Port of Vancouver's new quay crane for containerized shipping nears completion at Centennial Pier on March 7, 1970. **PHOTO BY PUGSTEM PUBLICATIONS, CVA AM1667:- CVA 134-022**

