



“Little Othoa”: The Gleam O’Hope Princess and the founding of the Vancouver Crippled Children’s Hospital

By John Belshaw

Othoa Scott got a rough start in life. An accidental fall and spinal tuberculosis left her bed-ridden and isolated at the age of eight years. Relentless advocating by her stepmother mobilized the Women’s Institutes of BC and thus sowed the seeds of the Crippled Children’s Hospital in Vancouver and the Queen Alexandra Solarium for Crippled Children on Vancouver Island. This month’s presentation tells the tale of Othoa’s voyage from Hornby Island shut-in to the cheerful face of disability: the “Gleam O’ Hope Princess.”

Othoa Scott took a tumble or two. The result was a permanently damaged spine and a diagnosis of spinal tuberculosis. At eight years old, she was bed-ridden and isolated in her home on Hornby Island.

As the 1920s opened medical science was entering a period of renewed confidence and ambition. A few years earlier and there would have been little for Othoa to look forward to except a body-cast and misery. Instead, she became an inspiration at the right moment in time, stimulating the kind of medical and public mobilization that we more readily associate with another inspirational British Columbian, Terry Fox.

This month’s presentation marks Tamara Myers’ first visit to the VHS and the return of Megan Davies. Historians at UBC and York University, respectively, the two were drawn to Othoa’s story because of the many insights it provides. A peek into rural life, a well-documented childhood, the spectacular growth of institutions and public health, and the uses of celebrity are all part of Othoa’s legacy.



This is a story which brings together the BC Women’s Institutes, the Pacific National Exhibition, Vancouver’s Crippled Children’s Hospital and the Queen Alexandra Solarium for Crippled Children on Vancouver Island. Othoa, the “Gleam O’ Hope Princess,” connects them all.

The two presenters bring their combined expertise to bear on Othoa’s story. Tamara Myers specializes in histories of childhood. She has published extensively on the historic plight of children

Othoa Scott’s arrival at English Bay from Hornby Island in 1920 on a Curtis HS2L flying boat owned by Major J.H. Thudhope, the man in uniform. She is the little girl in white seated in the cockpit.

ATTRIBUTED TO STUART THOMSON CVA AM54-S4-: AIR P75



This month’s speakers
Megan Davis & Tamara Myers

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Incorporation Day Luncheon

at the

Vancouver Club

April 7th, 12:00 pm



The current (1914) Vancouver Club at 915 West Hastings on the left, and the original 1891 building on the right, shortly before the latter's demolition in February 1930.

LEONARD FRANK PHOTO AM336-S3-2-: CVA 677-67

This unique opportunity is made possible by the Vancouver Club, whose members will also attend.

There will be an illustrated talk on the Club and its neighbourhood by Michael Kluckner after the luncheon.

Details for online registration, food options, and payment will be sent to members by email as soon as they are finalized.

MARK THE DATE! DON'T BE LATE!

Watch our past lectures on YouTube

Search for "Vancouver Historical Society on YouTube" for our channel.



YOUTH HOSTELS AND HOSTLE LOCALS: VANCOUVER'S BATTLE...
58 views · 2 days ago



DEFYING CONVENTION- HELEN GREGORY MCGILL(1864-1947)...
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226 views · 5 months ago



COLLECTING AND PRINTING VANCOUVER'S HISTORY- TOM...
440 views · 5 months ago

Upcoming Events

Our lectures always take place on the 4th Thursday of the month at 7 pm and are livestreamed on our YouTube channel.

Thursday April 25, 2024

You Got Trouble! Policing the Vancouver Waterfront in the Early Twentieth Century

Madison Heslop

Using police records, maps, and newspapers of the era, this talk pictures the life in Vancouver's urban waterfront at the start of the 20th century, and the people and institutions who shaped it.

Thursday May 23, 2024

The Queer Frontier: The untold story of Canada's queer Wild West

Glenn Tkach

Glenn created the Really Gay History Tour in 2018. He has continued his research on the erased history of queer people in the nation's development.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Vancouver Historical Society is at Italian Cultural Centre.
February 23 at 3:02 PM · Vancouver · 🌐

Last night's event at the Italian Cultural Centre had an outstanding turnout! Over 100 people showed up to watch Laura's Saitomo's wonderful presentation on the history of the Rupert-Renfrew neighbourhood or "Diaper Hill".



Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2023 - 2024

(ELECTED MAY 23, 2023)

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in vulnerable circumstances. Her output includes two books on ‘delinquent’ children, including 2019’s *Youth Squad: Policing Children in the Twentieth Century*. Another focus of her research will resonate with Vancouverites of a certain age. Remember the ‘Miles For Millions Walkathons’? Tamara does and she dove into photographs from those events in a study she calls “Blistered and Bleeding, Tired and Determined.” (As one of that army of elementary school children who set out to march twenty-five miles – more than 40kms – through the centre of Vancouver, I can personally attest to the accuracy of that title.)

Megan Davies last presented to the VHS in May 2021. Her topic “A Mad Moment in Vancouver’s History” was one of the first delivered via Zoom in the midst of the Covid pandemic. It was around that time that Megan launched an exploration into Covid’s impact on the elderly, specifically those in long-term care. “COVID in the House of Old” became a touring exhibition – what Megan calls ‘the Kleenex Project’ – that featured intimate audio accounts of LTC residents in BC and Ontario. The exhibition can be found online now at <https://covidinthehouseofold.ca/>

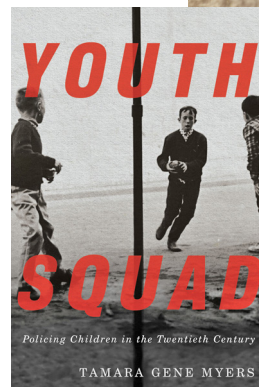
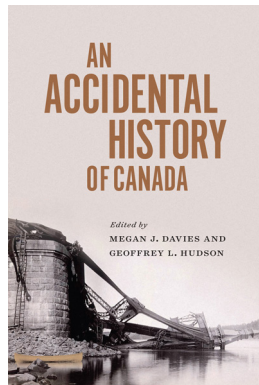
As for Othoa, she continues to contribute to Canadian history. Her story was behind the creation of a new collection of studies, coming out this year from McGill-Queens University Press: *An Accidental History of Canada*. Focussing mostly on banal and everyday mishaps that nevertheless shape Canadian life and culture,



Two photos featuring Othoa Scott from the Hornby Island Archives. Above: Othoa, standing fifth from right, at the Pacific National Exhibition in the 1920s.

the collection explores everything from household to industrial to recreational accidents. Whether it is a bridge collapse (like the Second Narrows) or a little girl’s misfortune, the collection shows how accidents shape public memory and create stories that we tell ourselves about risk and recovery. Megan is, along with Geoffrey Hudson at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, the co-editor of the collection.

Join us on the 28th of March at 7pm in the Museum of Vancouver to learn more about how a devastating blow became an engine for change across BC.



The arrangement of chairs on the far left is from Megan Davies’s project “COVID in the House of Old.” In the electronic version of this newsletter, click on the photo to be taken to the project’s website.

A Memorable Evening at the Italian Cultural Centre

Laura Saimoto's talk on Heritage Gems in the Rupert-Renfrew neighbourhood drew the biggest crowd we've had in years, about 110 people, to the Italian Cultural Centre on February 22nd.

The highlight was the "Project Kids" sitting in the front row – mainly women born in the 1940s in what we had been calling "Diaper Hill," the Renfrew Heights housing project built by federal government agency Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation southwest of the corner of Boundary and Grandview Highway in 1947–8 during the severe wartime housing shortage that continued after 1945.

They knew their home as "The Project" and they were the Project Kids. Their pride in their old neighbourhood and the life-long friendships they'd forged there was very notable, a contrast with the rather rootless anomie of many city neighbourhoods in the 21st century.

On display at the front of the room was a very charming felted quilt done as part of the Rupert-Renfrew heritage project: daycare centres, playgrounds, and the headwaters of Still Creek were stitched on in a playful fashion.

Bev is the woman holding the key; it is from the old Hotel Vancouver at the corner of Georgia and Granville, which had been closed and abandoned by the CPR in 1938 when the CNR's new hotel opened two blocks to the west. It was taken over by homeless returned servicemen and their families, a squat called the Citizens Rehabilitation Hostel, until the government came through with housing (the small City of Vancouver Archives photo by Don Coltman shows Renfrew Heights under construction in November 1948). She lived at the old hotel for two years. There were also people in the audience who had grown up in Fraserview, a slightly later CMHC project for veterans.

Truly it was an evening of "living history," and we are contemplating other lectures, perhaps later this year or in 2025, where we would go to a neighbourhood, hear its stories and meet its people. We would appreciate hearing *your* thoughts on this. Although there are technical challenges with live-streaming the lecture from a new spot, the video of the talk is always recorded by Elwin Xie and his crew and posted on YouTube. At this writing, a week after the lecture, the video already has 400 views. And the parking was free.

–Michael Kluckner

