



## The Queer Frontier

By Tom Carter

Many would think the history of MLGBT people started with New York City's Stonewall riots in 1969 and that's understandable. Before Stonewall and the Gay Liberation movement that followed, the queer community was in the shadows and was only known to the general public through raids and the firing of public officials in "shameful" scandals. Glenn Tkach is working to uncover an exciting history that was so deeply submerged that, until recently, even the gay community had no idea of its existence.

Glenn will be sharing some of this saga on Thursday May 23rd at the MOV. "The Queer Frontier" recalls a very active gay world that existed in this area long before Vancouver itself.

Glenn Tkach conducts the 'Really Gay History Tour' for Forbidden Vancouver (ranked by TripAdvisor as one of the top ten tourism experiences in all of Canada). He started at Forbidden Van-



COLLECTION OF GLENN TKACH

couver guiding tours of Gastown and Stanley Park, as he would say not as a guide but rather as a storyteller. Glenn is quick to point out he is not an academic historian, but rather a narrator who loves history, does meticulous research, finds the hidden truths, and then works hard to get this knowledge out to people who need to be in the know.

Telling Vancouver's stories to groups led Glenn to propose the idea of a gay history tour to Forbidden Vancouver's head, Will Woods, who embraced the idea. After all, the gay world was one of the most forbidden histories in old Vancouver! While researching for the tour Glenn realized the challenge he faced. While other histories can be found in well-maintained archives, docu-

mentary evidence of gay historical experiences was scarce. The history of gay people was almost invisible. The reason, of course, was decades of widespread discrimination against LGBT people. This included criminalization, ostracism, and every incentive for gay people to hide or deny their existence, and certainly not leave a trail of records. Diaries and photo albums were routinely destroyed as to not incriminate friends, and families would often discard such things from the estates of "confirmed bachelor" relatives to try to erase uncomfortable truths. Thankfully there were a few who started to collect these artifacts and stories. The outstanding work of Ron Dutton of the BC Gay & Lesbian Archives is probably the

CONTINUED INSIDE



This month's speaker:  
**Glenn Tkach**

## President's Message

A very quick note this month to say how good it was to see so many members at the Incorporation Day luncheon on April 7th, and at the April lecture on the 25th with our visitor from Western Washington University, Dr. Madison Heslop.

As our financial year has wrapped up on May 1st, we're having our annual general meeting, details below, by Zoom on the 16th. Please tune in if you can, or send me your proxy vote so we know you support our programming and the other work we're doing. Our volunteer board has been very busy this year – including administrative work on our archives and payment systems. Everyone's done a superb job and I'm delighted the entire board is staying on for another year. – *Michael Kluckner*

## NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 16TH, 7 PM ON ZOOM

and call for nominations for new directors

Please note: the entire existing Executive Board is standing for office again.

Our AGM will be held virtually, as has been our recent practice. Presentations include the president's report, treasurer's report, and the annual financial statements.

There are no special motions, and no changes in membership fees or services are proposed.

If you are unable to attend and are happy with the management of your society, please consider sending your voting proxy to the president, Michael Kluckner, at [presidentvhs@gmail.com](mailto:presidentvhs@gmail.com).

All members will receive an invitation with the meeting's Zoom link in advance.

### Watch the Incorporation Day Talk & Other Lectures

Search for "Vancouver Historical Society on YouTube" for our channel or use [this hyperlink](#) in the e-version of the newsletter.



YOU GOT TROUBLE! POLICING THE VANCOUVER WATERFRONT IN THE 1940s  
7:11 video • 5 days ago



CITY OF VANCOUVER & THE VANCOUVER CLUB...  
3:41 video • 3 weeks ago



LITTLE OTHLOA MEGAN J. DAVIES & TAMARA G. MYERS  
22 video • 3 weeks ago



HERITAGE GEMS OF RUPERT-RENFREW HEIGHTS-LAURA...  
8:54 video • 2 months ago

## The Queer Frontier . . .

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

most notable. Thanks to Ron's foresight much of Vancouver's Gay & Lesbian history has been preserved and is now safely in the City of Vancouver Archives. Through the preservation of these archives and the ongoing research and storytelling that Glenn Tkach does, we're finding that Queer people have always been part of Vancouver and they have contributed to making it the city it is today.

To an outsider, the gay community might seem to have exploded into view suddenly with the start of pride parades and festivals in the 1970s. But the voyage from the shadows to parades has been a long and treacherous one, which helps explain the exuberance of Pride events even today. The Pride of today is a far cry from the Shame of yesterday – a world where being gay meant being fired from work, expelled from church and fraternal clubs, denied accommodation, and excluded from society in general.

In the years Glenn has given the Really Gay History Tour his research has never stopped. In fact, through the tour

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

## Upcoming Events

Our lectures take place on the 4th Thursday of the month at 7 pm at the Museum of Vancouver, except for June-August and December, and are livestreamed and recorded on our YouTube channel.

The May lecture is the last one until September. Director Denise Jacques is working on a program of field trips for the summer months. It will be published in the June newsletter.

### Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2023 - 2024

(ELECTED MAY 23, 2023)

PRESIDENT	Michael Kluckner
VICE PRESIDENT	Jan Fialkowski
TREASURER	Tom Carter
RECORDING SECRETARY	Anne Wyness
DIRECTOR (PROGRAMS)	John Belshaw
DIRECTOR (COMMUNICATIONS)	Robert Sanzalone
DIRECTOR (FIELD TRIPS)	Denise Jacques
DIRECTOR (YOUTH OUTREACH)	Jurian ter Horst
DIRECTOR (EDUCATION)	Lindsay Gibson

### Appointed Positions

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

### CONTACT

Vancouver Historical Society Email: [vanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:vanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)  
Mailing Address: P.O. Box 3071 Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6  
Website: [www.vancouver-historical-society.ca](http://www.vancouver-historical-society.ca)

# “Deciphering the Code” in early BC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

He regularly meets people who share more stories and lead him to uncover even more fascinating histories. While the tour, for logistical reasons, is confined to Vancouver’s West End where the history is more current (or at least post-WWII), Glenn has found a much earlier gay history that existed among the working men of Vancouver’s early industrial past which, of course, centered more around the waterfront, the hotels, bars, and baths of the East End (part of which we now call the DTES). It is astounding to think that homosexuality in such a “don’t ask, don’t tell” world was such an open secret. Indeed, popular folk songs from the time contain coded references to it. Glenn has deciphered this code, and now we can hear the lyrics as they were intended to

be heard by those “in the know”.

The Queer Frontier takes us into the queer world that was very much alive and well in early Vancouver’s Victorian and Edwardian rough-and-tumble world of lumber camps and residential hotels. A world of discretion and danger, but also one of companionship, solidarity, and love.



“MINER’S BALL,” ANDRE CASTAIGNE, 1891



PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN, COWBOY STAG DANCE, C. 1910, TRUE WEST MAGAZINE

# “The First 22”: Then and Now

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

the Club paid \$30,500 cash – it was difficult for women to obtain mortgages. Vacant for two years, Hycroft had no heat, no water, and no electricity. The lawns had not been mown. It took months and months of work to ready the house for use.”

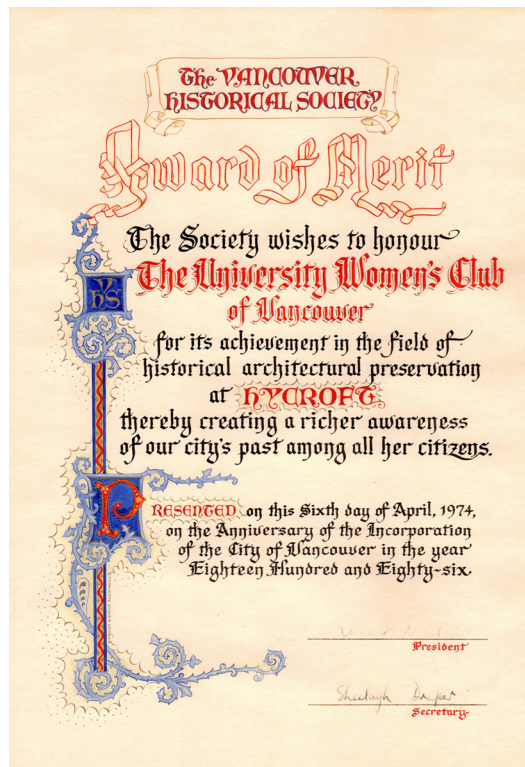
John Atkin: “The exhibition in the upstairs gallery at Hycroft takes a look at the first 22 buildings designated in 1974 by the City of Vancouver. The opportunity was prompted by a change in provincial legislation that gave cities and municipalities the power to protect heritage resources.

“A committee was struck to select buildings they felt should be protected and their initial list was published in an illustrated booklet. The selected buildings are largely monumental in nature such as the Hudson’s Bay, the Post Office, the Bank of Commerce and the major churches. It’s interesting to see what was considered and what was not.

“Photos from the booklet are featured in the Hycroft exhibit paired with matching contemporary images along with text descriptions.”

The exhibition opens Sunday May 12th and closes Sunday, June 2nd. The Hycroft Gallery on the upper level of the building is open Monday to Friday 10

am to 4 pm, and on Sundays from 1 pm to 4 pm by appointment. Please call the Hycroft office for information (604) 731-4661.



The original 1974 VHS Award of Merit, with calligraphy by Robert and Irene Alexander, will be displayed at Hycroft. The exhibit shows then-and-now photographs of the city’s first designated buildings. VANCOUVER PLANNING DEPARTMENT PHOTO COV-S644-: CVA 1095-11469

# Fifty Years of Designating Heritage Buildings

*An Exhibition at Hycroft on “the first 22” and the VHS’s role*

By Jurian ter Horst

2024 marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first designated heritage buildings in Vancouver. The list of 22 historic places includes landmarks such as the Court House (currently Vancouver Art Gallery), Heritage Hall, Orpheum Theatre, Sun Tower, Hudson’s Bay and Hycroft. So as this significant moment would not go by unnoticed, Vancouver Historical Society co-curated an exhibit with Cathy Barford, the archivist of the University Women’s Club of Vancouver (UWCV) and civic historian John Atkin. **“The First 22: Then and Now”** exhibit will be on display at Hycroft, the home of the UWCV, starting May 12th.

The arrival of Modernism in Vancouver in the 1950s was met with both joy and angst. For some it was the answer to the decay in which some parts of the city found itself; to others, it meant a threat to their neighbourhood communities. New architecture was to replace the old, and the existing city’s built landscape was to make way for new concepts of urban

planning. The “urban renewal” plans in areas such as Strathcona and Chinatown (not to mention Hogan’s Alley) of the 1950s and 1960s were met with strong public resistance.

And as we all know, loss, or at least the fear of it, inevitably leads to a strong sense of protection over what one still has. In the case of Vancouver’s built environment, the preservation movement was born.

On a municipal level, this movement took shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1971, the Community Arts Council of Vancouver initiated a project that aimed to record buildings of historical and architectural importance, draw attention to the preservation of significant structures, and inform the local government about historic sites as an aid to aspects of urban planning, including roads, waterways and parks.

The Community Arts Council did not operate alone. It invited several architects, the City of Vancouver Planning Department, architectural historian and

consultant Harold Kalman, SFU’s professor Edward Gibson, City Archivist Robert Watt (who would later become VHS’s President, 1973-1978), and representatives of the Vancouver Garden Club, the Vancouver chapter of the Architectural Institute of British Columbia, the Native Daughters of B.C., Christ Church Cathedral, and, last but not least, VHS to participate in selecting a list of 22 predominantly pre-1911 buildings that were representative of the city’s history.

Before the existence of city-wide organizations such as Heritage Vancouver Society and Vancouver Heritage Foundation, VHS had tasked itself with generating awareness of heritage in the city. One of the organization’s objectives was “to promote the preservation and marking of historic sites, buildings, relics, natural features and other objects and places of historical interest.” VHS presidents occasionally used the monthly newsletter to share their thoughts on the status of building preservation and similar topics with the organization’s members.

VHS also celebrated significant achievements by others. In 1974, the organization’s first annual Award of Merit went to the UWCV for the restoration of Hycroft. The former McRae Family residence and military hospital was in disrepair when the UWCV purchased it in 1962. Yet, the Women’s Club members and friends, with their own hands, time and money, restored the building splendidly and made it their home.

Cathy Barford: “Founded in 1907, the University Women’s Club of Vancouver had, over the years, held its meetings in a variety of locations. In 1945, the Club set aside \$500 for a Building Fund and began fundraising in earnest for a permanent location.

By 1961, they had saved close to \$60,000 and were in a position to negotiate with Crown Assets Disposal when Hycroft was put up for sale. In July 1962,



Hycroft on McRae Avenue in Shaughnessy as it was in 1942 when it was a military hospital. The University Women’s Club took it over in 1962 and it was designated as a heritage building in 1974. PHOTO BY STEFFENS-COLMER STUDIOS LTD. AM1545-S3:: CVA 586-2053

CONTINUED INSIDE