



## From Hastings Mill School to wekʷaṅəs tə syaqʷəm: The Naming and Renaming of Vancouver Schools, 1872-2022

By John Belshaw

The last decade has seen increased interest in renaming streets and institutions. In some instances, this has provoked a sense of discomfort, particularly for alumni from schools whose monikers are under scrutiny. As an organization with a historical focus, the VHS membership will no doubt be aware of some of these discussions and debates.

It's an interesting and very public exercise in historical thinking: who gets a memorial, statue, or namesake school and why? It's safe to say that no one today would advocate that a new school be named for a brutal ship's captain or a blatantly corrupt politician, but it is harder for some to accept that laurels handed out a century ago may need to be taken back.



Edith Cavell Elementary School at 500 West 20th in what was (until 1929) the Municipality of Point Grey, named in 1920 for a British army nurse executed by the Germans in 1915 in Belgium – an early example of a school not named for male royalty or an Imperial figure. PHOTO COURTESY OF LINDSAY GORDON.



This month's speaker:  
**Lindsay Gibson**

The politics of renaming is one of the things that propelled UBC assistant professor Lindsay Gibson into a study of the naming of Vancouver schools in the past. Along with graduate student Mal-lory Davies, Gibson picked apart the threads of school naming and found it to be far from a simple business.

“A school name is a narrative, it's a story being told,” according to Professor Gibson.

“The school names reveal more about the people who name them than the people for whom they are named.”

As Vancouver once consisted of four separate municipalities – Vancouver, South Vancouver, Point Grey, and Hastings Townsite – each area developed

its own twist on the process and its own preferences. These are visible legacies of the period before amalgamation in the 1920s. Each generation produced its own preferences too. Imperialist figures were once favourite choices, then provincial and national figures gained sway. Two world wars provided still more worthy names. Beginning in the 1960s, VSB school names became both more local and equitable: women and Indigenous people began to be referenced.

More recently, several school names arrived at their best-before dates. Gibson notes that “Our values and beliefs change. We're stuck with these names that were valued at a time that was in many ways different from our own. We're

CONTINUED INSIDE

## President's Note

Hold the date, please. On April 2nd in the afternoon we're hoping to host a social event at the Sylvia Hotel in its dining room.

This event would replace, at least for this year, our traditional Incorporation Day luncheon which we held at the UBC Golf Course until Covid began in 2020. It would be a wine and snacks party, complimentary for members, without the formal ticketing and seating we used to have.

In terms of a program for the day, we're thinking just of a welcome and possibly the presentation of our Award of Merit, but no lengthy speeches. We might have a book draw like the one Alan Sung ran at our luncheon events.

The idea is to have the kind of social get-together that's been missing from our society. The BC Entertainment Hall of Fame has held events there very successfully, and we think we could too. And the Sylvia would be a good venue: a historic building near transit routes with parking available in its basement lot.

The March newsletter will have complete details.

And also, please note our proposed May 25th event, not far away from the MoV at the City Archives – a chance for VHS members to look at their collections and hear about possible collaborations to digitize and publicize their holdings.

**Michael Kluckner**  
president vhs@gmail.com

## 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.

March 23, 2023

**Kevin Dale McKeown**

### The People of the Post: Gay Vancouver in the 1970s

Beginning with his time authoring "QQ Writes" for the *Georgia Straight* in 1970, Kevin Dale McKeown will describe the evolution of the city's first openly gay communities in the West End and elsewhere.

April 27, 2023

**Tom Carter**

### Collecting and Painting Vancouver's History

Artist (and VHS Treasurer) Tom Carter creates stunning large-scale paintings of Vancouver set mainly in the 1940s and '50s, and is an avid collector and authority on the city's entertainment history. He will speak on some of his wonderful "finds" as well as his search for authenticity as he crafts his paintings, many of which are bird's-eye views of the city a lifetime ago.

May 25, 2023

### An Event With the City of Vancouver Archives

We are tentatively scheduling an event to take place at the Archives, together with the Friends of the Archives.

## VOLUNTEER NEEDED!

Your society is looking for a volunteer who will pick up the 130 printed newsletters from a shop on 4th Avenue, fold them, stuff them into preprinted envelopes, adding membership renewal forms as required, and mail them.

The time commitment is 3-4 hours on one day early in each month, 9 months of the year (excluding July, August and December).

If you think you can help, please contact Jan at [vanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com](mailto:vanhistoricalsociety@gmail.com)



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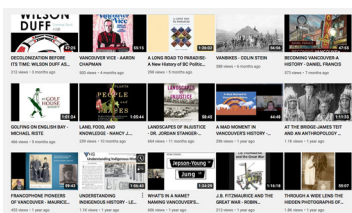
### CONTACT

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## 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



# What's in a (school) name?

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telling different stories ... different stories about, say, Cecil Rhodes.” The problem exists in part because 75% of the schools in Vancouver were built and named before WWII. “They’re like old history textbooks in the storage room.”

Historians of memorials make this point repeatedly: monuments and the names applied to schools, bridges, and streets nod to the past, but they seek to establish values that are carried forward. As one study of Jacques Cartier observes, whatever the French navigator might have been in the 1500s, in the twentieth century he was meant to stand for the legitimacy and primacy of European culture and Christianity in Canada. Cartier was, in this sense, “used” by Canadian elites to validate their claims to authority.

That’s not to say that re-evaluation of names is uncomplicated. Take Lord Strathcona School (which was renamed in 1900 from the “East End School”). What was His Lordship’s legacy? The nineteenth century MP and Canadian High Commissioner was a leading imperialist who campaigned energetically in London for political and financial support for the Second Boer War, a conflict in which concentration camps and scorched earth tactics were infamously deployed. But he was also a leading philanthropist who established Royal Victoria College in Mon-

real, which opened educational opportunities for women. Measure that against the replacement proposed recently by the elementary school’s students: Barbara Howard, who was an East Vancouverite, a former teacher and track athlete and the first Black woman to represent Canada in an international competition; as well, she was the first member of a visible minority to be hired as a teacher by the Vancouver School Board.

It was only in 1982 that the VSB developed an actual, official policy on naming. By that time Vancouver had established a pattern – unique in BC – of naming far more schools after people. Long-range planning for new school construction and seismic upgrades means that new or revised naming processes can now be rolled out over years. Gibson sees this as an unparalleled teachable moment on why and how names mattered then, and what they might mean now. As he proposes to students, “You’re going to be surrounded by history for the rest of your life and we’re hoping to give you the tools to critically engage with history. What other possibilities existed then? What did people think about them at the time? Was there opposition?”

On February 23<sup>rd</sup> we’ll have a chance to learn more about the practices of naming over more than a century and across the cityscape, and an introduction to the history of re-naming as well.

Lindsay Gibson is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at the University of British Columbia. His research focuses on various aspects of history education including historical thinking, history teacher education, commemoration controversies and the ethical aspects of history. Lindsay has worked on K-12 social studies curriculum writing teams in B.C. and Alberta, organizes annual Historical Thinking Summer Institutes in partnership with Canada’s National History Society, and regularly works with history-focused organizations and projects to develop learning resources for K-12 schools.



Mallory Davies is a PhD Candidate in the Department of History at the University of Waterloo and completed her MA in Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia in 2020.

On the border: the Sir William Van Horne Public School at Ontario and West 44th, built in 1911 with a 1927 addition by Bowman & Cullerne. Although it was built on the CPR’s land grant that extended from Ontario Street to Trafalgar Street (appropriately as Van Horne was builder and president of the CPR), it was actually in the Municipality of South Vancouver, just east of the Cambie Street boundary between South Van and the Municipality of Point Grey.

COLLECTION OF LINDSAY GIBSON



# MAILBAG



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Some of our more interesting bits of history come from the snail mail, which Treasurer Tom Carter picks up and sorts, and the email "Info Line" which Vice-President Jan Fialkowski monitors. Alvin Schaut, a postcard collector who lives in Plainfield, Wisconsin, has been one of our regular correspondents, sending many cards including the postman, published by the European Import Company of Vancouver, and this splendid Gowen, Sutton Company auto court card probably from the '30s.



An interesting recent inquiry came from a historian in Melbourne, Australia who wrote: "I've been doing some research over the past year or so in regard to J.D. Williams, an American picture show operator who came to Vancouver prior to 1910 where he established nickelodeons. From there, he moved to Australia where he built a number of major picture theatres in Melbourne and Sydney as well as across the Tasman in New Zealand. After several years in this

country, he went back to the States where he started First National Pictures in Hollywood." (For further information, there is a Wikipedia page.) Tom Carter was able to provide him a photograph of the New Novelty Theatre (4 buildings along on the right-hand side) from a private collection. The theatre was located at 150 West Cordova Street. - Jan Fialkowski.

**PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY THE NEIL WHALEY COLLECTION.**