



Not Just Another Grocery Store



A Q&A with our January speaker, Lisa Anne Smith, author and Corresponding Secretary of Friends of Old Hastings Mill Store Museum, located at the foot of Alma Street.

You've written several books. How did you get involved in historical writing, and describe a favourite part of your work.

I've always enjoyed writing, initially as a hobby. It evolved into more of a career path as my kids grew older and I had more time to spend at City Archives and VPL Special Collections. My love of history seems to be a family trait. My mum and brother, both passed, were very much into digging up information on enumerable historical subjects and getting the info down on paper. We have a family archives busting at the seams!

As for a favourite part of my work, it has

The Hastings Mill Store in its original location at the foot of Dunlevy Street on the Vancouver waterfront, about 1888. The group portrait includes Calvert Simson.

PHOTOGRAPH BY C.S. BAILEY AND CO. COLLECTION OF CITY OF VANCOUVER ARCHIVES AM54-54-: MI P14

to be making contact with descendants of individuals named in my books. Through the magic of social media and sometimes even uncanny coincidence, I've managed to get in touch with descendants of early Hastings Mill Store manager Calvert Simson, founding member of the Native Daughters of BC Jessie Greer Hall, Nurse Emily Patterson, and quite a few others. They're rock stars as far as I'm concerned and I've been honoured to host some of them at my book launches. I also love visiting and researching sites

associated with my books, like Liverpool England where Joe Fortes learned to swim, Champoeg Oregon where Emily Patterson homesteaded with her family, and South Thormanby Island, the retirement home of Calvert Simson.

Tell us about your "pre-author" life.

Truthfully, there's nothing much to tell about my educational background—no doctorates, no majors, no bachelors. In a nutshell, I worked for a number of years at BCIT Library, travelled extensively, earned a Business Certificate in Travel and Tourism at night school with a vague idea of becoming a travel agent,

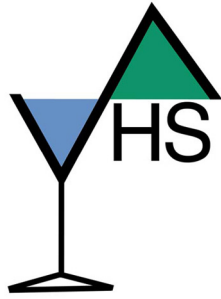
**This month's speaker:
Lisa Anne Smith**

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President's Note

Happy 2023 to all members and readers of this newsletter. As we look ahead to another year of lectures and events, we will continue to present in the hybrid format of in-person and live-streamed, and will possibly try some new formats or venues to see how they work both with our dedicated attendees as well as the new audience we're always trying to attract. We want to resume our April Incorporation Day event this year, having cancelled the last three years, although it may become a stand-up cocktail party rather than the buffet luncheon of the past, depending on the feedback we get and our ability to organize an event. Stay tuned.

I'm immensely grateful to our Executive Board and our volunteers – videographer Elwin Xie and membership secretary Mary Wallace Poole – for their hard work, which makes it easy for me to be president. And a special thanks to Jeannie Hounslow, who has mailed the newsletter the last few years but is unable to continue.



Michael Kluckner
president vhs@gmail.com

The Better Vancouver League

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Vancouver Leaguers, including McGeer.

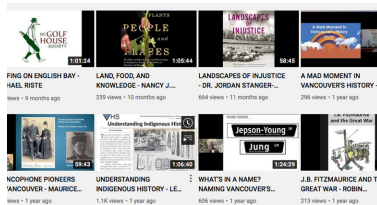
Issues of morality animated many BVL activists, and after McGeer was elected the group lobbied for things like regulating the design of restaurant booths so that they couldn't conceal unseemly behaviour. But moral reformers such as Reverend RJ McIntyre and Lyle Telford ultimately became adversaries of McGeer and later, the NPA. In a curious twist, the NPA refused to endorse Nelson Spencer in the 1939 election. He ran anyway, split the vote, and so paved the way for Lyle Telford to take the mayor's office as an independent.

Telford was a one-term mayor, and in 1941, Vancouver elected the NPA's Jack Cornett, beginning the party's decades-long domination of City Hall. The party was decimated in the recent municipal election, but with several ex-NPA members and an indistinguishable political orientation, it appears the new ABC Vancouver party (with ABC standing for "A Better City") will continue the tradition that began with the Better Vancouver League in 1934.

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.

February 23, 2023, 7 pm

Lindsay Gordon

The Naming of Vancouver's Schools

A timely topic, given the controversy over the historical record of the namesakes of several schools.

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 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.

Welcome New Members

Barbara Kearney-Copan
Barry Tranquada
Elizabeth Wallace

Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board: 2022 - 2023

(ELECTED MAY 24, 2022)

PRESIDENT	Michael Kluckner
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TREASURER	Tom Carter
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Appointed Positions

MEMBERSHIP	Mary Wallace Poole
VIDEOGRAPHY	Elwin Xie
NEWSLETTER MAILING	Position vacant
NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE/LAYOUT	Kellan Higgins/MK

CONTACT

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

Saving The Old Hastings Mill Store Museum

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settled down in Upper Kitsilano with my husband Doug, made babies and became a very active volunteer with my kids' elementary school and the Museum of Vancouver education department. My involvement with Old Hastings Mill Store Museum began a little more recently, or at least it still seems that way after 12+ years!

The Hastings Mill dates to the beginning of settlement in what turned out to be a key location. Can you describe how it fitted in to the Indigenous world of the time? Pluses and minuses?

The minuses would be the ones that we have all become sadly familiar with – assimilation of Indigenous culture, disease, land takeover without compensation, natural resource exploitation, the transformation of a once-pristine wilderness into a heavily industrialized harbourfront. The Old Hastings Mill Store stood in the midst of it all.

As for pluses, Indigenous inhabitants of the region participated in trade and commerce at the Mill, both as employees and service providers. Members of the Khahtsahlano family living at Sch'ilhus ["high bluff," on the north shore of today's Stanley Park] paddled over with milk and butter for the mill store. According to the published recollections of Chief August Jack Khahtsahlano, structures there were rebuilt using Hastings Mill lumber. Calvert Simson supplied and attended a potlatch at the Squamish community of K'emk'emeláy just east of the Mill townsite. Chinook jargon was in active use, bridging communication barriers across the multi-racial community. Mill manager Richard Alexander was fascinated with dugout canoes and provided sponsorship for races on the inlet. Indigenous community members grew to trust and respect mill residents Emma Alexander and Emily Patterson for their expertise in medical care.

I don't mean to say that the pluses cancel out the minuses by any means, but it's important to know that there was a certain degree of camaraderie between



Lisa Anne Smith, and the Old Hastings Mill Store Museum happily ensconced for 90 years in leafy surroundings at the foot of Alma Street. PHOTOS VIA LISA ANNE SMITH

our cultures in those early years.

The Native Daughters of BC Post No. 1 was founded in 1919 with an original membership of born-in-BC women. How did you become involved with them?

I'm really in awe of what the Native Daughters of BC Post 1 managed to accomplish to save the store at their own expense after it was earmarked for demolition along with the Hastings Mill itself. I delve into this quite deeply in my book, but the key highlight is that the ladies divided into canvassing teams and went on a whirlwind, door-to-door fund-raising campaign. They managed to raise five thousand dollars in two weeks – quite an accomplishment, considering it was the summer of 1930 and Vancouver, like cities worldwide, was deep in the throes of the Depression. They also received many contributions in the form of supplies, time and effort. A prime example was Captain Charles Cates donating his services of barging the store from its former site to the north foot of Alma Road.

I became involved with the museum after attending a lecture there presented by Chuck Davis more than a decade ago. It just seemed like a good fit and I felt very attached to the place, like I was meant to be there. I like to say that "I didn't find the building, it found me!"

The museum has a very respectful reconciliation statement on its website. What are your thoughts on today's world, running a museum of

"colonial" objects and celebrating a critical time in the settlement-colonization of what had been an Indigenous world?

Old Hastings Mill Store Museum is a structure of colonial origins and is certainly representative of times we wish we could undo. We're taking active measures to publicly acknowledge past mistakes and improve interpretation of the museum's Indigenous collection. We hope to reach out to more Indigenous knowledge-keepers and facilitate them to share their skills and expertise. Much of our grant funding in recent years has been spent on badly needed restorations to the building's caretaker suite and exterior. With those problem areas almost resolved, we hope to devote more funding to care and interpretation of the collection itself.

On the personal side, I prefer to think of the human race as one big global community. In the words of Lee Maracle's mother (Lee presented to the Historical Society in February 2021), "the earth owns itself and we must respect the animals and we must respect all life." My belief is that rather than owners, we are apprentice caretakers of the planet for a Higher Power. We've made mistakes and will undoubtedly make many more, learning as we go. If we go back far enough, we are all family and it's critical that we find common ground.

The Better Vancouver League

By Lani Russwurm

From 1910 to 1932, LD Taylor was Vancouver's perennial mayor, having been elected to that position more times than anyone before or since. By the 1930s, many people felt he was a spent force, and that under his leadership, the city was faltering under both the crushing weight of the Depression and from the vice and corruption that seemed to flourish under Taylor. The problem for his opponents was that Taylor had a solid support base, while the anti-Taylor vote typically split amongst multiple candidates.

In the lead up to the 1934 election, names of potential challengers were being bandied about in the press, including Gerry McGeer, Victor Odum, and Nelson Spencer, among others. Spencer toyed with the idea of running, but realized that as he would be one of many challengers, Taylor would be a shoo-in for re-election once again.

Nelson Spencer owned a timber exporting business on the waterfront but was also a seasoned politician, having served as mayor of Medicine Hat and as a Conservative MLA in the BC Legislature. His goal was the defeat of LD Taylor rather than winning the mayor's office for himself. The way to do that, he reasoned, was to unite the anti-Taylor vote behind a single candidate. Others agreed with his proposal and the Better Vancouver League (BVL) was formed.

The BVL adopted a two-pronged strategy. It would recruit a "virile, hard-hitting, clear-thinking man" to support in the election. Secondly, it would "prevent any weaker third-party from confusing the issue and thus [permit] the Taylor machine to ride to victory as a minority vote."

The *Vancouver Sun* pointed out that the latter point "was obviously directed at Alderman JJ McRae," the only challenger to have officially declared his candidacy and the only one who still insisted on running. Eventually he did drop out, citing advice from his doctor. Now all the League needed was its virile mayoral candidate.

The BVL lobbied Gerry McGeer, a well known Vancouver lawyer and MLA, to be their candidate. Although his Liberal Party was in office provincially, McGeer was

upset that Premier Pattullo did not appoint him to cabinet, and he agreed to run for mayor. League spokesperson CE Thompson told the *Sun*: "We have obtained the answer we came for. It now rests with us to put the necessary machinery in motion."

The thrust of the anti-Taylor campaign came from the perception of crime and corruption being rampant in Vancouver. A major inquiry into policing in 1928 failed to establish that LD Taylor's City Hall or the police department were particularly corrupt. But as the lead attorney in the inquiry, Gerry McGeer proved himself a formidable foe to LD Taylor and his policy of focusing resources on major crime rather than vice.

McGeer's campaign attracted not just support from business, but also from moral reformers. Even Lyle Telford, a founder of the left-wing BC Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF, the precursor to the NDP), enthusiastically threw his support behind McGeer.

Gerry McGeer initially turned the Better Vancouver League down. He had spent much of the early 1930s studying economics and his ambition was to get elected federally so he could tackle the Great Depression with major monetary reforms. The League persuaded him by showing him intelligence reports suggesting that Communist labour organizers were planning to orchestrate a general strike in Vancouver in hopes of sparking



Waking up the civic electorate in 1934 with fireworks. In 2022, only one-third of eligible Vancouverites cast ballots. **CARTOON BY CALLAN, VANCOUVER SUN, NOVEMBER 8, 1934**

a revolution.

The BVL's anti-communist fears weren't just ideological abstractions. Communist-influenced unions succeeded in shutting down much of the American West Coast earlier that year, beginning with a general strike in San Francisco in May. None of this context or motivation was ever referenced on the campaign trail, however. McGeer swept to victory almost entirely on a platform of cleaning up vice crime in the city.

The BVL faded into the background after Gerry McGeer announced his candidacy, but it didn't fade away. McGeer's 1934 campaign was in a way a rehearsal for a new municipal party that launched in 1937, the Non-Partisan Association (NPA). The NPA was now the political home for many original Better

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