



## Hippie Vancouver: Activism in the 1960s & '70s



CVA 134-137 - Canadian Yippies – members of the “Northern Lunatic Fringe” of the Youth International Party – marching down the street in Blaine, Washington on May 12, 1970, in the wake of the Kent State shootings. PUGSTEM PUBLICATIONS, VANCOUVER EXPRESS, CVA 134-137

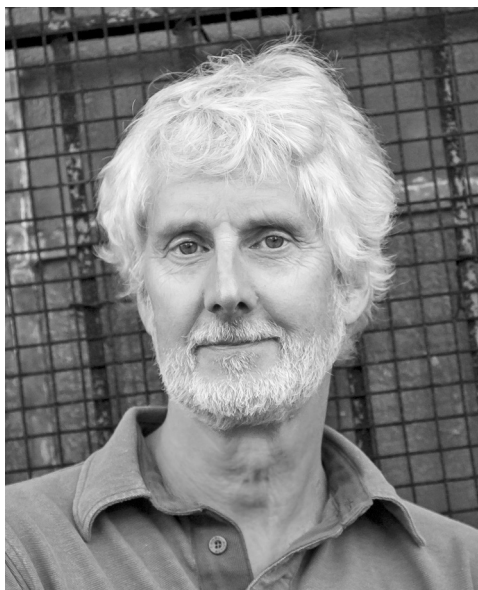
By Lynn Copeland

Was there more to the “hippie” era of the 1960s and ‘70s than the famous trio of “sex, drugs, and rock ‘n’ roll”? Our September lecture with author-artist Michael Kluckner explores that question and looks for legacies in the Vancouver of a half-century later.

That period remains in the memory for the Fourth Avenue scene of natural food stores and psychedelic shops, as well as events including the 1971 occupation of “All Seasons Park” (now Devonian Harbour Park) to stop the development of luxury highrises on the edge of Stanley Park, the Gastown Riot, and the anti-nuclear protest voyage of the “Greenpeace.” It was a period of restless travel and experimentation, of high unemployment and cheap rooming houses, set against the backdrop of America’s Vietnam War, Canada’s Pierre Trudeau, the dying years of W.A.C. Bennett’s So-

cred government, and the confrontational style of Vancouver’s Mayor Tom Campbell.

This richly illustrated presentation



This month’s speaker:  
**Michael Kluckner**

follows the publication of Michael’s illustrated novel *The Rooming House*, which explores the Vancouver of that period through the eyes of a group of young people sharing an old house in Kitsilano.

So who is Michael Kluckner, other than the president of the VHS? I subjected Michael to a version of the Proust Questionnaire:

“Some days I awaken as a writer and some days as an artist. If I could be another artist it would probably be Katsushika Hokusai with his *manga* (“brush gone wild”) work. Locally, I admire David Wong for his 2012 graphic novel *Escape to Gold Mountain* on the Chinese experience in North America.

“My favourite colour? Black, as in *sumi* (Japanese ink) – black contains all colours, though I suppose, *a propos* of the hippie era, that faded denim also ranks up there. My favourite fiction writer is Kurt Vonnegut; he is funny, deep and

CONTINUED INSIDE

## President's Note

We're back in the saddle for another year, hopefully one where our audience will return to the MoV and, in the Spring, where we can once again get together for our Incorporation Day Luncheon after three years of Covid absence. We will continue to live-stream the lectures on YouTube, and post finished copies of them on our YouTube site, for people who are unable to attend in person – this due to our tireless video expert Elwin Xie. We're looking forward to seeing you in-person and reconnecting with old friends!

On another note, we have received an extremely generous donation from the estate of Elizabeth Blyth Walker, a member of the society from 1953 till her death in 2019 and the author of the indispensable *Street Names of Vancouver*, published in 1999. Born in 1921, she passed away in 2019 a few months after we published a profile of her in that February's newsletter (which can be found on our website). *Vale Elizabeth!*



Michael Kluckner, presidentvhs@gmail.com

## Vancouver's Skid Row

CONTINUED FROM BACK PAGE

down, but by mid-century efforts to offset its morally objectionable features seemed an acceptable compromise. By the 1950s, "Skid Road" exclusively referred to the neighbourhood north of Hastings that now centred around Cordova Street.

The last controversy involving Skid Road and the PNE was in 1957. City Council had the PNE opening parade re-routed from Hastings Street to Cordova to minimize traffic disruption. After the parade, PNE President Borrie vowed "Never again!" It seems the sight of Skid Road "rubby-dubs" and "derelicts" didn't fit with his desired parade aesthetic, and he threatened to cancel the 1958 parade if the old route wasn't restored.

The parallels between the Skid Road neighbourhood and the one at the PNE are likely coincidental, but interesting. Both were considered morally suspect, but unavoidable. They couldn't just be banned out of existence, so officials adopted a strategy of curbing the most egregious offences through policing and surveillance, and by geographically containing Skid Road to minimize its alleged corrupting influence.

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*Lani Russwurm is a Vancouver historian. He blogs as Past Tense Vancouver and is the in-house historian for Forbidden Vancouver Walking Tours.*

**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

The screenshot shows four video thumbnails with titles and view counts: 'FRANCOPHONE PIONEERS OF VANCOUVER- MAURIC...' (354 views), 'UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS HISTORY-LEE...' (437 views), 'A GREAT REVOLUTIONARY WAVE-WOMEN AND THE...' (339 views), and 'LEN NORRIS & THE VANCOUVER IMAGINATIO...' (672 views).

## 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.

October 27, 2022, 7 pm

Gregory Betts

### Between the Dawn & the Dark of Night: Avant-Garde Hippies & the Grateful Dead in Vancouver

Dr. Betts, a professor of English language and literature at Brock University, is a poet and essayist. His new book, which won the 2022 Basil Stuart-Stubbs Prize, is an engaging look at Vancouver's cultural life in the Beat-Hippie era.

November 24, 2022, 7pm

### History, Heritage Buildings and Murder

Best-selling author **Eve Lazarus** will tell stories from her books *Vancouver Exposed* and *Cold Case BC*, including an update on the infamous Babes in the Woods case.

The Vancouver Heritage Foundation invites you to attend Places That Matters' 93rd plaque presentation for

### Seraphim "Joe" Fortes

Saturday October 1st, 12 pm

Meet on the beach at English Bay (across from Cactus Club at 1790 Beach Avenue). For more details, please visit [www.vancouver-heritagefoundation.org](http://www.vancouver-heritagefoundation.org).

### Welcome New Members

Jennifer & Patrick Audley	Carol Emma Logan
Donna Brendon	Sandra MacPherson
Ann Brocato	Matt Mayers
Warren Caragata	Alma McDonald
Wendy Kesselring	Loire McLaren

### Vancouver Historical Society Executive Board:

2022 - 2023

(ELECTED MAY 24, 2022)

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VIDEOGRAPHY	Elwin Xie
NEWSLETTER MAILING	Jeannie Hounslow
NEWSLETTER TEMPLATE/LAYOUT	Kellan Higgins/MK

### CONTACT

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# Activism in the Vancouver of a half-century ago and its legacy

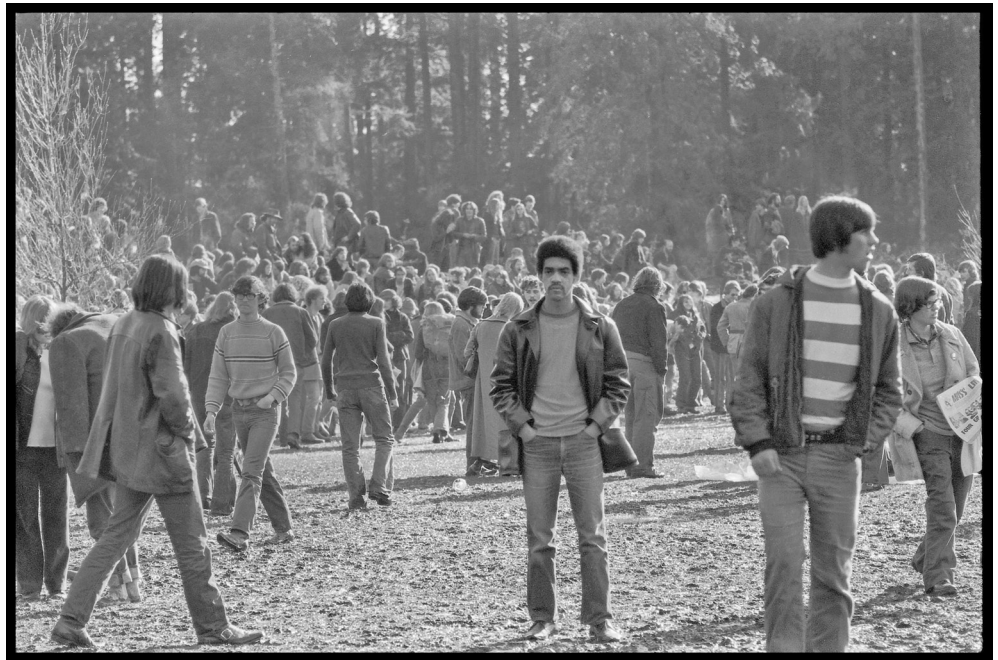
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sarcastic. I have many favourite non-fiction writers, though I especially like Jean Barman, who has a new book *BC in the Balance* coming out in the fall. She is constantly exploring new angles on the historical record, writes with empathy and doesn't tell the reader what to think.

"My favourite among my own books is *Vanishing British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2005). It was a wonderful project over many years, involving a lot of travel, and it fed my love of rural BC landscapes. Mark Forsythe's CBC Radio program "BC Almanac" connected me with people all over the province, crucially important because there are few museums and archives outside the southwest corner, and coincidentally I started work on it just as the Internet was coming into general use. The web pages I put up in 2000 still regularly receive photos and information from individuals all over the world. I was sorry to hear that Jean Wilson, the book's editor, recently passed away. For my other projects, I can't say enough about the Vancouver Archives and its helpful staff.

"I feel fortunate in my writing career, especially to have begun it in the 1980s when you could actually make a living as an author. People bought more books even though they were, in today's terms, much more expensive. My first serious book, in 1984, was *Vancouver The Way it Was*. Although I followed it with books on Victoria and Toronto, I'm probably most identified with heritage activism and the 1990 book *Vanishing Vancouver*.

"Since then, a range of sympathetic publishers have left me free to follow my own path, to experiment and create rather than plod. With *The Rooming House*, for example, it has both illustrations and a classic rock sound track that can be downloaded. This kind of freedom, such as trying a few graphic novels, lets me keep creating. And then there's the feedback I get, for example from my first graphic novel, *Toshiko*, which has been used for the past several years in a Canadian history course at McGill by students studying the Japanese-Canadian intern-



The 1971 Stanley Park Easter Be-In, one of the indispensable trio of "sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll" that may have defined the era.  
PHOTO BY SVEND-ERIK ERIKSEN

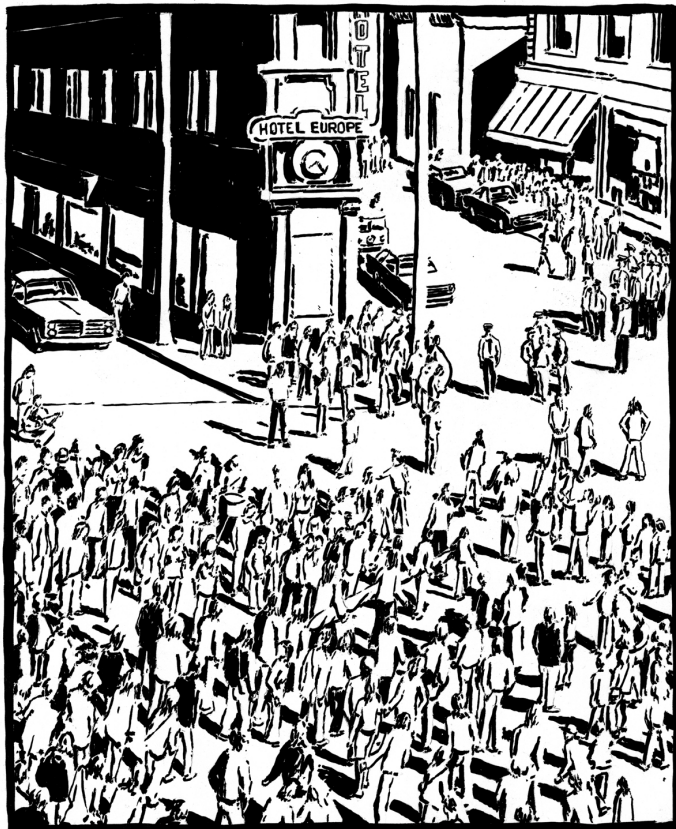
ment.

"What am I doing now? I recently signed a contract to illustrate a rather serious comic book on the Jewish Bund – the socialist cultural organization active in Ukraine, Poland and Russia a century ago. It is written by a woman in San Francisco, financed by a group of American

academics and labour organizations, and will be published in Toronto. To use a 20<sup>th</sup>-century expression, when the phone rings you never know who it will be!

"Where would I live? I love Vancouver's old neighbourhoods of wooden houses and tree-lined streets with the shops just a few blocks away. But maybe

Christine and I could find a rural place, like the sheep farm we had in the Fraser Valley from 1993 to 2006, my period of *The Pullet Surprise* and her book *A Year at Killara Farm*, but we were so much younger then."



A fake 10-foot joint is carried into Maple Tree Square during the demonstration that led to the Gastown Riot, August 7, 1971.

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL KLUCKNER  
FROM "THE ROOMING HOUSE"

# Vancouver's Skid Roads

By Lani Russwurm

Skid roads were originally logging roads made from greased logs for dragging timber out of the forest. After being denuded, some of these areas grew into cities and towns. Some old logging roads were transformed into city streets. The term “skid road” became a nickname for streets where active and retired loggers lived, often in single-room occupancy hotels, particularly Yesler Way in Seattle and Vancouver’s Carrall Street.

“Skid Road” and its variants “Skid Row” and “the Skids” eventually came to delineate the entire neighbourhood and was used across North America for impoverished urban areas. They came to be seen as the natural home for dive bars, cheap diners, illicit drugs, homelessness, and other expressions of poverty and vice.

Another, mostly forgotten, Skid Road existed for decades in Vancouver. This was the amusement area of the Vancouver Exhibition, now called the Pacific National Exhibition. The name was chosen by a “little Vancouver girl” and was perfect for its local specificity, evoking the “sylvan environment of the forest close at hand,” according to the *Daily World*.

The Skid Road at the first Vancouver Exhibition in 1910 didn’t garner many complaints, but nor did its questionable elements go unnoticed. One exhibit was shut down for being objectionable, and another for gambling. The *Saturday Sunset* assured readers that experience would allow fair directors to “eliminate the fakery and vicious concessionaires on the Skid Road and to curb the rapacity of others” in subsequent years. Criticisms of the Skid Road nevertheless continued to trickle into news articles and letters-to-the-editor.

It’s tempting to snicker at early Vancouverite’s moral indignation, but it should be noted that many Skid Road attractions of yore would be not tolerated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The display partially



visible in the 1919 photo above, for example, is for Dolletta, a 28-inch, 37-pound woman with dwarfism and her children being exhibited like zoo animals. Or the 1918 “See Chinatown” exhibit protested by the Chinese Consul because it depicted Chinese people as “piteous specimens of humanity” degraded by opium use.

But it wasn’t freak show exploitation or racism that drew ire over Skid Road in the 1910s. Most complaints had to do with vulgar carnival barkers, hucksters, and gambling, all of which threatened to corrupt the city’s youth. One letter to the editor in 1910, for example, claimed that a Spanish dance performance wasn’t itself objectionable, but the “disgustingly suggestive and immoral language” used by the barker to entice male customers was far worse than anything the writer had witnessed on New York’s Coney Island or in the Bowery.

Like the Skid Road neighbourhood, a common belief was that the underlying problem was that the exhibits catered to, and therefore encouraged, base male appetites. The Women’s Christian Temperance Union entertained a resolution in 1919 calling for local women’s groups to supply entertainment on the Skid Road such as singing school children, elocutionary contests, and physical drills, all designed to “elevate rather

Skid Road at the 1919 Vancouver Exhibition.  
CITY OF VANCOUVER ARCHIVES 180-0006 (CROPPED)

than lower moral standards,” but which were unlikely to attract necessarily large crowds to the fair.

By 1920, the WCTU, the Friends of BC, and the Child Welfare Association were calling for the outright elimination of the Skid Road. Instead, the mayor sent Deputy Police Chief Leatherdale to identify Skid Road exhibits that were offensive, obscene, or that could be considered gambling to be shut down. Leatherdale found five or six exhibits that fell into that category and they were shut down.

The *Province* newspaper reported that there was little to criticize in the remaining exhibits. A high school student the paper interviewed complained that the Skid Road was “really quite dull” that year. The president of the local WCTU agreed it was better than other years, though she continued to oppose the Skid Road “on principle.”

The term “Skid Road” was used for PNE amusements into the 1940s despite being renamed “Happyland” in the 1920s. It was also moved to the northwest corner of Hastings Park, away from the main entrance and out of the sight of those it might offend. The Skid Road was too lucrative and popular to shut

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2