



# Victoria Historical Society Publication

Spring, 2007

In some copies of the last newsletter the authorship of the article on Fall Fairs was wrongly attributed. The author was Liesel Jakeman, to whom I offer my apologies for the error.

The annual Christmas dinner was held in December last at the Gorge Vale Golf Club where, in addition to the excellent food, we were entertained by the Reverend Sel Caradus who gave a humorous and fascinating talk on the history of Christ Church Cathedral and those persons associated with it. We heard of the early establishment of the Anglican church in British Columbia and its development from the early wooden structure to the present day edifice. The Rev. Caradus is the author of *A Temple Not Made With Hands: A History of Christ Church Cathedral*, and a co-author of *Calkin Algebras and Algebras of Operators on Banach Spaces, Vol. 9.*, a volume no bookshelf should be without.



Also at this meeting the Society acknowledged several of its long-time members who, over the years, have made significant contributions of their time and knowledge to the Society and have played a major roll in its success. The increase in membership over the years has been in no small measure due to their hard work and diligence. Those honoured were Liesel Jakeman, Shirley Cuthbertson, Pamela Odgers and Pen Brown. The

three ladies were presented with certificates and bouquets honouring their achievements. Pen Brown was unable to be present and his certificate was forwarded to him.

## SPEAKERS FOR 2006 ~ 2007 SEASON

22 February, 2007

Susan Wood & Ken Roueche ~ *Exploring Fairfield's Past*

Ms. Wood, editor of Moss Rock Review and CFA radio host of the Local History Hour (Sundays 2 pm), and Mr. Roueche, author of *A Fairfield History*, will speak about the people and events that shaped the Fairfield area of Victoria.

22 March, 2007

Jean Barman ~ *Stanley Park's Secret*

Ms. Barman, prominent BC historian, will share insights and events described in her recent book, *Stanley Park's Secret*, the Forgotten Families of Whoi-Who, Kanaka Ranch, and Brockton Point. Stanley Park has recently noted its centennial in Vancouver.

26 April, 2007

Helen Edwards and John Edwards ~ *Preserving Victoria's Heritage*

The speakers have been active in the Hallmark Society, which is dedicated to the preservation efforts by citizens and local government of heritage buildings. They will give an illustrated lecture on aspects of this program which has achieved much.

24 May, 2007

Arnold Ranneris ~ *Victoria's YMCA and YWCA*

Arnold is volunteer archivist for the YM/YWCA. He has become fascinated with the social history of the "Y" which has been active in Victoria since 1875 (YMCA) and 1892 (YWCA). He will be assisted by Lori Hewitt, staff member of the YM/YWCA

## INTERESTING BITS AND PIECES

### Grants for Local History Projects

We have been advised by Canada's National History Society that grants of up to \$1,000 are available to individuals as well as organizations. The application deadline is April 27th, 2007

Details and application format can be found at:

<http://www.hbc.com/hbc/socialresponsibility/grant/>

### *The Beaver Magazine*

Many of us who value *BC History* magazine would like the bi-monthly periodical *The Beaver* which is published by Canada's National History Society, which is based in Winnipeg. Formerly a publication of the Hudson's Bay Company, it has expanded its mandate and writes about many aspects of Canada's history — people, explorations, customs, book reviews and more.

Subscriptions are \$29.95 to

*The Beaver* Subscriptions  
478 — 167 Lombard Ave  
Winnipeg, MB R3B 9Z

The motto of the CNHS is "Give Our Past a Future".

If you wish to peruse a copy, check the Central Library, or telephone Arnold Ranneris, 598-3035.

### Captain George Vancouver

Kings Lynn, Norfolk, UK, birthplace of Captain George Vancouver, is celebrating GV's 250th birthday this June.

Details can be found at:  
<http://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk>

Click on 'visitors' and follow the link to 'Captain Vancouver Festival 2007'

### Presidential Pyrotechnics

Michael Layland, our president, was recently invited to present an illustrated talk to the Gabriola Museum & Historical Society. The notice sent to their membership read, in part, "There'll also be slide show of the blowing up of Ripple Rock by the President of the Victoria Historical Society".

Michael emphatically disclaims any such culpability!



(Photo courtesy Liesel Jakeman)

## BOOKS & BOOK NEWS

The following books written by some of our past and forthcoming speakers this season will serve to amplify the author's presentations.

Daryl Ashby: *John Muir, West Coast Pioneer*.  
Published in 2006

Ken Roueche, *A Fairfield History*. Published in 2005

Jean Barman, *Stanley Park's Secret*. Published in 2006.

All are available at local bookstores or through your libraries

Two new publications from Sono Nis Press are sure to be of interest to our members. The first particularly so in view of the forthcoming BCHF Conference here in Victoria, a component of which is a reception at Government House.

*Government House: The Ceremonial Home of all British Columbians* by Rosemary Neering, with photographs by Tony Owen. This book gives us an intimate look at the many and varied manifestations of Government House over the decades. Twice destroyed by fire, three times rebuilt, the present building dating to 1957 embodies the spirit, if not the architecture of its predecessors. Located on a prominence overlooking Fairfield and the Strait of Juan de Fuca, the house is a fitting residence for the Lieutenant Governor and temporary home to the many visiting dignitaries that have been hosted over the years. The constant in all this time has been the gardens, nurtured and improved decade by decade by skilled professionals and volunteers; they have now become pre-eminent among Canadian

gardens, their abundance and beauty enhanced by the long tradition of allowing almost unlimited access to members of the public. The book is embellished with many photographs, both contemporary and historic which, combined with the interesting text, will make the book a valuable addition to the library of British Columbians interested in their heritage, and a fine memento for friends and visitors.

978-1-55039-159-6 124 pages • 10 x 11 • hardcover • \$39.95

*Steam Along the Boundary: Canadian Pacific, Great Northern and the Great Boundary Copper Boom* by Robert Turner and J.S.David Wilkie.

Locally based transportation historian Robert Turner has produced another of his eminently readable transportation histories. His scholarship covers all aspects of the transportation history of the Province, and in this case he focusses on the history of those railroads which, in the early years of the twentieth century served the mining and smelting industry which flourished in the Border District of southern BC. These included the Canadian Pacific, Great Northern, and the fabled Kettle Valley Railroad. The rich strikes of ore, particularly copper, contributed to the mushrooming of towns and settlements both in southern BC and northern Washington. Although the intense mining activity did not last very long, the railroads remained, serving other industries and supporting agriculture throughout the region. Today many of the settlements have gone, remembered only as ghost towns; others remain, seemingly in a time warp, having changed little since their heyday. One such, Greenwood, together with its neighbouring ghost town Phoenix recently starred in an Oscar nominated movie, set in the 1940s, *Snow Falling on Cedars*. The text is complemented with many photographs by the late David Wilkie. A must for all transportation history enthusiasts.

978-1-55039-158-9 • 11 x 9 • 224 pages • 300 + photographs, 3 colour maps • hardcover • \$49.95



### **ROBERT JOHN PORTER JR. (1867 – 1922)**

Robert John Porter Jr. was born in Victoria in 1867, the son of Robert John and Alice Porter.

Robert Porter Sr. had travelled from England to Victoria on the barque *Tory* in 1851 at the age of 16. He was articled to the Hudson's Bay Company and lived at Fort Victoria for a while, then he went to

work as a brick maker in the Company's old yard, which was near the northern edge of Beacon Hill Park.

Robert Sr. and Alice had five sons and one daughter. Robert Sr. had acquired some farmland with a log cabin on Burnside Road in 1857. Additional land was added over time until there was about 1,000 acres. Robert Jr. and his siblings went to Craigflower Schoolhouse, which was a walk of about three miles from the family farm.

Robert Sr. became a successful cattle and sheep farmer, and a butcher. His shop, Island Meat Market; later called R. Porter and Sons, Butchers; was on Johnson Street near the northwest corner of Douglas. Later he had an additional shop on the west side of Government Street near the northwest corner of Courtney. When the business was sold to P. Burns and Company of Calgary in 1909, there were stores both in Victoria and Vancouver.

Robert Sr. died in Victoria on June 2, 1914 at the age of 79. Alice died on November 2, 1916 at age 77. Their Burnside Road property, known as Hayden Farm, was leased to E. and T. Raper, who used it as a dairy farm. The Porter family finally sold the farm to Jager S. Judge in 1950.

Robert Jr. followed in his father's footsteps and became a butcher, working in his father's shop at a young age and eventually becoming a partner. He was interested in all aspects of agriculture and became President of the B.C. Agricultural Association when W. F. Tolmie retired.

Robert married Flora Beaton in Victoria on January 10, 1898. The couple moved into an 1896 Samuel Maclure-designed house at 649 Superior Street. The couple had six children, all born at the Superior Street home. One of Maclure's earliest works in Victoria, the house is a combination classical cottage and colonial bungalow, with a symmetrical façade, a wide front gable and a central front porch. There are hipped roof bays on either side of the house and the rooms are arranged around a central passage and skylight. The house has tongue-and-groove horizontal siding and half-timbering in the gable, giving a hint of one of Maclure's future trademarks. The property included a tennis court, a large lawn, and a barn at the back to house the family's Shetland pony, which pulled the children in a two-wheeled cart to town and to Beacon Hill Park.

Robert entered politics in 1912 when he became an Alderman in Victoria's Ward Five. He served as Alderman through 1916, then again in 1918. In

1919, he was elected Mayor of Victoria, a post he would hold until 1921. As Mayor, Robert initiated the planning of the Johnson Street Bridge, which had been suggested by his predecessor, Bert Todd. He also worked on the “wooden ship delegation” of 1920 to persuade Ottawa to award ship building contracts to Victoria to create employment opportunities after the First World War. His administration also oversaw completion of the Sooke Waterworks.

Robert served as Honorary President of the Protestant Orphanage and the Children’s Aid Society. He also was on the Board of Directors for the Royal Jubilee Hospital.

Unfortunately, Robert Porter’s reputation as an upstanding, community-minded citizen was smeared and his political career was destroyed in 1921 by a fellow named Christopher Rowland North, better known as Joe North. North had arrived in Victoria around the turn of the century and had worked for the fire department initially. In 1921, he was elected to the Police Commission and went to work to “clean up the city”. North and his side-kick, Dr. Ernest Hall, were both pro-temperance, and they were waging a war on “vice and corruption”. They rented the Royal Victoria Theatre for a rally on December 8th and preached to a noisy, overflow crowd on their crusade against the “alcoholized forces of iniquity”. North accused Porter of collusion with gambling elements, detectives and the police; and warned the people not to vote for “the graft, corruption, bribery, and civic rotteness that are camouflaged under his candidature”. North also alleged that Mayor Porter was involved with rum-running to the United States and told this soon-to-be famous horse story:

“A horse had been seen to load an automobile with whiskey, take it to Sooke, and load it on a schooner which had then sailed across the Sound. There are two kinds of horse. There’s the mare, and there’s the horse. I leave it to you who drove that automobile.”

North’s grandstanding and allegations of wrong-doing by Robert Porter paid off, as Porter was defeated by prohibitionist William Marchant in the December 1921 civic election.

Porter, along with some detectives who North had accused of keeping girls in a hotel room on Burnside Road, filed lawsuits against Joe North following the election. Porter dropped his suit later that month, but the other suits were heard in the new year. Methodist minister Dr. Sipprell and his

pro-temperance followers held banquets to raise money for the Hall-North Defence Testimonial Fund. Despite these efforts, North lost on all counts and paid \$6,000 in fines to the detectives.

North continued his crusades against drinking and gambling. He exposed speakeasies and dance halls that were operating in contravention of the Province’s Liquor Act, and he accused police officers of protecting Chinese gambling houses while they drank and gambled in them. North was arrested for his slanderous remarks and forbidden from running for Police Commissioner again. He got his wife Dorothy to run for the job and she won, becoming Victoria’s first female Police Commissioner.

North’s antics amused and shocked the people of Victoria, but he also did some good work. He raised over \$50,000 for charity (mostly orphaned children) and was named Victoria’s best citizen in 1937. He also published the Christmas Herald newspaper once a year until 1960. He spent the rest of his life preaching against the evils of liquor and making headlines for doing it, which was curious as he also was known to imbibe to excess on occasion. He died on January 17, 1963.

Robert Porter Jr. never recovered from Joe North’s attacks. He died in Victoria just four months after the 1921 election on April 24, 1922 at the age of 55. His obituary said that his death from pneumonia was “an untimely end to a useful career”. Flags were flown at half-mast all over the city. He was survived by Flora and their six children.

Flora Porter lived the remainder of her life at 649 Superior Street. She died in Victoria on July 21, 1961 at the age of 85. Her daughters, Iona and Gertrude, continued to live in the house.

The Superior Street home remained in the family until the mid-1990s, when Gertrude’s name disappeared from the City Directory. The house was restored recently and is now the Robert Porter House B&B.

*Russ Fuller*



## MOUNT ST. ANGELA’S FUTURE UNCERTAIN

One of Victoria’s oldest, most venerable and well kept sites is facing an uncertain future. Mt. St. Angela (923 Burdett Ave.) is in the process of development along with other buildings around it.

The original front section of this 1865 Picturesque Gothic building was designed by John Wright, the first architect in Victoria who designed several notable buildings, like the Richard Carr House. Mt. St. Angela's brick walls are three feet thick and the building is on rock. The first use was as an Anglican "Girls Collegiate School", established 1860-61 in a time when religious institutions provided education. The school, built on the Christ Church Cathedral Reserve, had some contribution from Angela Burdett Coutts, a famous philanthropist from whom the school and the street took their names. The building was used for girls until, early in the 1890s, the "Boys Collegiate School" occupied it. Architect J. C.M Keith, who designed the present Christ Church Cathedral, supervised improvements on the 3rd floor in 1897.

In 1903 the school left and the building was sold to later become a genteel boarding house, Angela Hotel. More bathrooms were put in by 1911. In 1912, the large addition to the back, designed by George Mesher, was built. (This section is presently not in good condition.) Soon after the porte cochere was added at the front. In 1959, the sisters of St. Ann acquired the edifice for retired nuns needing care, until their move to Queenswood. The Burdett St. edifice has been a residence since then. In 1994, the city and official heritage funding groups assisted the rebuilding of the tall chimneys which were in bad condition.

The Sisters of St. Anne also acquired three arts-and-crafts houses built in the early 1900s: the yellow columned house on the left (929 Burdett), the green Maclure designed house on the right (913 Burdett) and 924 McClure St on the back. With the reduction in number of nuns, they are leaving all the buildings presently occupied, except the green Maclura designed house (the Cecil Roberts house). The site is being redeveloped.

On Nov. 16, 2006 at Committee of the Whole, Roger Tinned representing Cielo Developments presented complex plans for the whole site. The concepts did not follow heritage principles and included: removing arts-and-crafts houses, building 94 condo units in brick to compete in impressiveness with the Gothic spire of Mt. St. Angela, and adding two two-storey glass "walkways". No heritage plan was given and the presenter did not even know what kind of housing could be in Mt. St. Angela, since it was configured as a residence with public rooms and dormitories.

City Council commented on problems and required the developer to consult a heritage expert. At present Don Luxton is the consultant. There are

many difficulties, one of which is that there is far less funding for heritage buildings now than in the 1990s. Even the former federal CHIP grants have been cut. Questions remain to be answered.

Mary Doody Jones

## SHIPS AND STREETS

HMS *Cormorant*, a paddle steamer, was laid down in Sheerness Dockyard 17 May 1841. She was launched 29 March 1842. After having her engines fitted at Limehouse and Deptford the *Cormorant* returned to Sheerness, her building port, to have her bottom coppered and to be fitted for sea.

Commander George T. Gordon was appointed in command 11 April 1843, and he commissioned her shortly afterward at Woolwich. She sailed from Sheerness on 28 June

During the early part of this commission the *Cormorant* seems to have been employed on the southern part of the Pacific station, but when the Oregon question warmed up she spent much of the summers of 1845 - 46 in the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound, acting as a tug and tender to the sailing ships in those waters.

Gordon was promoted to Captain 8 November 1846, and the C-in-C, Rear-Admiral Sir George Seymour, he promoted his flag lieutenant (and nephew) F.B.P. Seymour into the vacancy.

Seymour brought the *Cormorant* home and paid her off at Portsmouth late in 1847. In common with a number of other paddle wheel vessels, she cannot be said to have any one home port during her comparatively short life.

After being refitted and had her engines repaired, she was commissioned by Commander Herbert Schomberg in August 1849 for the South-East Coast of America station. In 1850 in Brazilian waters he captured and destroyed a noted slaver, the *Rival*, and soon afterwards cut out three more, some distance up the Paranagua River. Although this led to a brush with a fort at the entrance, with three casualties in the *Cormorant*, there was no objection from the Brazilian Government, and Schomberg was promoted to Captain, 8 January 1851.

An Admiralty Order of 23 November 1852 directed that she should be taken to pieces. This was completed 17 August 1853 at Deptford.



**Members of the Board for the Year  
2006 – 2007**

|                |                 |              |                     |
|----------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------|
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The Victoria Historical Society holds its meetings  
on the fourth Thursday of each month from September to May,  
at the James Bay New Horizons Centre, 234 Menzies Street, Victoria.

Meetings begin at 7:30 and comprise a short business meeting  
and a refreshment break followed by a talk or presentation by a guest speaker.

Visitors are always welcome and encouraged to become members of our Society.

This newsletter is published four times a year  
and distributed to members electronically or by mail.  
It is also available at our regular meetings at the door

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