



# Victoria Historical Society Quarterly

Formerly the VHS Newsletter  
Volume 72, Winter 2025

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## VHS Meetings

September 26, 2024  
4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month  
(September-May) 7:15 pm.  
Presentations begin at 7:30 pm.  
James Bay New Horizons, 234  
Menzies Street, Victoria.

Website:

[www.victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca](http://www.victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca)

[a](#)

Or visit us on Facebook.  
Or find Victoria Historical Society  
BC at youtube.com

## Up-Coming Presentations

February 27, 2025

### **Dr Victoria Chung: The Exile of Canada's first Asian Canadian M.D.**

John Price

Dr. Victoria Chung's story – growing up in Victoria, graduating from U of T's medical school, and going to China in 1923 as a medical missionary is fascinating in its own right. What is intriguing, however, is her decision to stay after the 1949 revolution, never to return to Canada. Was this a self-imposed exile? Or was Canada's refusal to recognize the new government a factor in preventing her return?

John Price (photo right) is professor emeritus in history at the University of Victoria, where he taught for 21 years before retiring in 2018.



Continued on p. 2.

## About this Issue

VHS members will note a new name for the newsletter as well as a new masthead.

The new name, “Victoria Historical Society Quarterly” (which is likely to be called the “VHS Quarterly”) is an aspirational commitment to continue provided members with four issues a year, Autumn, Winter, Spring and Summer, as has been the case since the fall of 2019. The name change may also encourage additional contributors to submit articles. History students, in particular, and those in history-related careers may be more inclined to contribute to a quarterly than to a mere newsletter.

The new masthead features the focal elements of a new VHS logo, designed by member Denton Pendergast.

Pages 1-3 preview the VHS program for February, March and April.

Page 4 – February is Black History Month, the perfect time to learn more about Mifflin W. Gibbs.

Pages 5-6 – Tariffs are top of mind these days. Jack Bryden writes about Canada-U.S. tariff tussles in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Pages 7-11 Pia Russel updates members on the history of the VHS.

Once again, Thank You to our eagle-eyed copy editors, members Ada Robinson and Frances Aknai.

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John Price’s early research focused on Japan, Canada-East Asian relations, and transpacific migration. He is the author of *Japan Works: Power and Paradox in Postwar Industrial Relations* (Cornell, 1997), *Orienting Canada: Race, Empire and the Transpacific* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2011), and, with Ningping Yu, the biography *A Woman in Between: Searching for Dr. Victoria Chung* (CCHS/INSTRCC, 2019), cover below.



More recently his work has focused on settler colonialism and anti-racism, co-editing with Christine O’Bonsawin a special volume of *BC Studies* (204), *Unsettling the Islands: Race, Indigeneity, and the Transpacific* (Winter 2019/20). He is a co-author of the recent *Challenging Racist “British Columbia”: 150 Years and Counting* available as a free download: <https://challengeracistbc.ca>. His opinion pieces are published regularly in the *Times Colonist*, the *Tyee*, the *Georgia Straight*, and *Canadian Dimension*. His recent eight-part series Decolonizing Canadian Foreign Policy is available at <https://canadiandimension.com/series/decolonizing-canadian-foreign-policy>

March 27, 2025

**Dragged from the Surf: Shipwrecks and Rescues on Vancouver Island's Indigenous Shores, 1859-1906**

Jesse Robertson

In 1877, the Member of Parliament for Victoria raised a motion to establish lifesaving stations “to succour shipwrecked mariners” and protect them from “murderous attacks” on the Pacific coast. Stories of Indigenous “murder” and “plunder” continued to circulate long after their actual occurrence, but the reality quite different by the late nineteenth century. In fact, Indigenous seafarers were the colonial castaway’s best hope. In the absence of an organized coast guard, Canadian officials relied on Indigenous rescuers to drag mariners from the surf in what became known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific.” This presentation examines the history of shipwrecks on Vancouver Island, showing how Indigenous first responders saved lives and reaffirmed ancient “drift rights” when sailors washed ashore and local communities were called to their aid.

Jesse Robertson is a historical consultant and PhD candidate at the University of Victoria. His dissertation examines histories of marine navigation and colonialism in the Pacific Northwest, showing how voyages of exploration, marine charts, and lighthouses transformed the coast by permitting newcomers to transit its waves without Indigenous consent or assistance. Jesse’s professional background has included dozens of oral history, Traditional Knowledge and Land Use, and archival research projects for government, religious groups, legal teams, and Indigenous clients. When he’s not in the archives, Jesse can be found playing guitar from his porch or hiking the coastal landscapes he loves to research and write about.

April 24, 2025

**A Victoria Hospital Goes to War — Canadian General Hospital No. 5**

Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

When World War I began in 1914, the Canadian Army Medical Corps had just 127 members, including doctors, nursing sisters and non-commissioned personnel. From 1914 through 1918, it expanded dramatically—over half of Canadian doctors served overseas in the CAMC. This talk will focus on the experiences of one group of Canadians who served in an active war zone far from the Western Front. It will describe how Canadian General Hospital No. 5 was “raised” in Victoria in 1915 and followed a trajectory shared by few other Canadian medical facilities in the Great War.

**Yvonne Van Ruskenveld** (photo below) is a long-time member and current president of the Old Cemeteries Society, leading cemetery walking tours on a wide range of topics, including women’s history, gold rushes, symbolism, and epitaphs, among others. As a member of the World War I historical organization, the Western Front Association—Pacific Coast Branch, she has given many presentations on various aspects of military history, including military nurses, animals, balloonists and Canadian General Hospital No. 5. She is also a member of the Victoria Historical Society and the Victoria Genealogical Society.



# Black History Month

As Black History Month 2025 draws to a close, VHS members may wish to reflect on the many Black people who settled in Victoria and the broader region in years past. Some, like Mifflin Wistar Gibbs made a lasting impact, despite having stayed for a relatively short time. Others settled permanently, making contributions across generations.



The historical marker (left) honours Mifflin Wistar Gibbs, a member of Victoria's City Council in 1866-69. He was the first Black politician elected in British Columbia.

Mifflin Gibbs came to Victoria in 1858, when the United States was on the brink of Civil War. He stayed until 1870. His home was in James Bay, near the site of the marker, in Irving Park.

More about Mifflin Gibbs may be found at:  
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/mifflin-gibbs>  
<https://bcblackhistory.ca/mifflin-wistar-gibbs/>



Above left: an engraving of Gibbs as a young man // Credit Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. Gibbs came to Victoria when he was thirty-five years old; the engraving may be a reasonable representation of the entrepreneur, businessman and civic leader when he lived in Victoria.

Above right: Gibbs in his later years. He made significant contributions to the fight for civil rights in the United States. Photo: U.S. Library of Congress.

# Tariff Troubles – Reciprocity Treaty 1854-1866: North-South American Tariff Troubles as British Columbia considers joining an East-West Canadian Confederation

by Jack Bryden

From the *Pioneer and Democrat*, Olympia, Washington Territory, December 28, 1860.

“The Victorians are desirous of obtaining a reciprocity treaty from the United States. We would have everything to lose and nothing to gain from such a measure. That immense monopoly, the Hudson Bay Company, with their great accumulation of capital, aided by the concentrated legislative power that they hold, would soon control the lumber, coal, and fish trade of our water....

...We have not the capital nor will nor the strength to compete with our neighbours. Under a reciprocity treaty, being the weaker party, we would suffer its disadvantages.”



Above: Lord Elgin photo: Canadian Encyclopedia of Biographies

The Canadian - American Reciprocity Treaty had been signed in 1854 and the economies of what are now Ontario and Quebec were doing well. Canadian confederation had yet to happen, but many on Vancouver Island saw free trade with the US as an important reason to consider joining a future Canadian Confederation with access to the trade privileges of that treaty.

The treaty survived until 1866 when it was repealed by the United States. Angered by perceived pro-south behaviour within Britain and eastern Canada during the American civil war, free trade with Canada lost support in the US Senate. Loss of free trade with the growing US market, combined with the recent loss of preferential treatment from Britain for Canadian grain, encouraged many to look at east-west free trade within British North America.

British Columbia had missed the boat. The hope remained that the US would come to its senses and reinstate the Treaty or that BC could cut a deal of its own with the US.

On Tuesday, March 18, 1862, p.1 Victoria's *Weekly British Colonist* lamented that our legislature was not making it a priority to establish a reciprocity treaty with the United States.

"Any one may thus see what an important change would be brought about in the profits of a coal company were there a reciprocity treaty with the States were our coal admitted duty-free."

On Tuesday, February 16, 1864, p.3 the *Victoria Daily Chronicle* included a summary of US telegraph dispatches: "That there was little hope entertained for the Canadian Reciprocity Treaty." "That Congress will proceed with the steps for abrogation...impelled by the well-known secession proclivities of Canadians".

On Tuesday, Nov 7, 1865 the *Victoria Daily Chronicle* warned that "The Americans must learn in time that the outrageous tariff which now encircles their vigorous nation in its tyrannical compass is as great a violation of the natural laws of commercial health as that of tight lacing on physical health."

On Wednesday, March 7, 1866 the *Victoria Daily Chronicle* warned that the dream of saving the Canadian American Reciprocity Treaty was dead and that (eastern) "Canadian government organs pretend to find consolation in that the reciprocity failure will hasten the concept of Canadian Confederation".

Then, as is now, emotional reactions between some Canadians and Americans became toxic. The *Victoria Daily Chronicle* reported that the Reciprocity Treaty was officially terminated on March 17, 1866 (St. Patrick's Day). At the same time American newspapers suggested that the Fenians in the US continued to excite Canadians and that Toronto and Montreal newspapers were full of news about Fenian troop movements along the border. According to the *Chronicle*, the same American newspapers reported that the Fenians alleged that Canadian confederation was a scheme "to place a British Prince on an American Throne."

A year later on Saturday, Nov. 9, 1867 p.7 a writer in the *Washington Standard*, Olympia, Washington Territory, thought that it was humorous that many on Vancouver Island were considering joining the newly created Canadian Confederation far to the east. Why bother going through all that if you are gambling on a reinstated North American Free Trade Agreement? It probably won't happen and asking for annexation would be faster.

So far so good; more than 150 years have gone by and BC has not been annexed.



# Driven by People with a Passion: VHS Moves into the Twenty-first Century

by Pia Russell

The early history of the Victoria Historical Society (VHS) and related organizations has been recently outlined in important detail by previous VHS President (2017-2021), Jack Bryden. In the VHS' Spring 2024 newsletter, Jack discussed a likely precursor to the VHS when he described the British Columbia (BC) Pioneer Society's formation in 1871—the same year the province joined the Confederation of Canada. In the Summer 2024 VHS newsletter, Jack continued his intriguing historical society histories by outlining the Victoria-based activities of both the Native Sons of BC and the Native Sons of Canada in the late nineteenth century. VHS members learned how historically-focused organizations in Victoria developed collective self-conceptions through shared events such as tours, guest speakers, and social gatherings like picnics and Christmas dinners. This issue focuses on the more recent histories of the VHS.

*(Editor's note: The B.C. Historical Association (BCHA) was formed in 1922. The Victoria Historical Society was formed soon after as Branch #1 of the BCHA. The BCHA became the British Columbia History Federation in the 1970s, to reflect the growth in the number and roles of local and regional historical societies. At this point Branch #1 formally adopted the name "Victoria Historical Society.")*

The VHS mission is currently stated as follows: "It is open to anyone interested in learning, promoting and preserving the history of Victoria and British Columbia. We belong to the society of the BC Historical Federation. Everyone is welcome! Learn more about all the different ways in which you can take part."<sup>1</sup> However, according to the research of previous President, Pat Roy, this was not always the case. During the 1920s, VHS membership was often by invitation only. The organization ran out of the archives, being organized by its bookkeeper.

For many years the VHS held evening monthly meetings in the Douglas Building cafeteria until the Newcombe Theatre (now conference centre) in the downtown BC Archives building was completed in 1970. Since 2000, the VHS's regular meeting place has been the James Bay New Horizons Seniors Centre. Pat provided important background to the previous development of related initiatives such as the VHS's constitutional debates in the 1970s and the founding of *BC Historical News*, which was the precursor to the current BCHF publication, *BC History*.

Many current VHS members have a long history of involvement with the society. Over the years, other members have volunteered by making presentations, writing for or editing the newsletter, organizing the monthly book raffles, managing the website and social media, providing refreshments and welcoming visitors and new members. Legions of volunteers have served on the board (known as the Council).

Initially joining the VHS as a regular member in 1966, Pat Roy (now professor emeritus of history, University of Victoria) went on to serve the VHS in various board capacities including Vice President, President, and Past President. Since leaving the board, she has volunteered in various capacities since.

Michael Layland began serving as VHS President after Arnold Ranneris in 2005. Pendrell Brown, Pam Odgen, Shirley Cuthbert and Ruth Rolston served as board members with him. A

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<sup>1</sup> Victoria Historical Society homepage: <https://victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca/#mission>. January 2, 2025.

highlight of the VHS during this period was co-hosting the BC Historical Federation (BCHF) Annual Conference; a third conference partner was the Old Cemeteries Society. This three-day event, held May 10-13, 2007 at the Harbour Towers Hotel, included a full-day symposium on heritage and tourism on Thursday. Symposia, presentations, and field trips were held on Friday with the annual history book gala held at Government House that evening. Society AGMs and more local tours followed on Saturday. In addition to a highly successful 2007 joint conference, Michael was pleased for the board at the time to have completed the streamlining of committee reporting procedures, advocacy work such as related to heritage building preservation, and sponsoring a page of the Saanich Centenary Booklet titled *Saanich Centennial, 1906-2006: 100 Years, 100 Stories*.



Photo above: Pat Roy, Jane Watt, Lt. Governor Iona Campagnolo, and Russ Fuller (left to right) at the presentation of the 2007 BC Lieutenant Governor’s Medal for Historical Writing, Government House, May 11, 2007. Image credit: VHS Newsletter, No. 12. A number of VHS Presidents and members have won significant book awards.

Russ Fuller was VHS President from 2008 to 2010 and then Past President until 2012. An active member for over 20 years, Russ served on the board in various roles for over thirteen years between 2003 and 2016. Russ was involved in the 2007 joint conference, worked closely with colleagues like Arnold Ranneris and Pam Odgers to determine programming such as organizing approximately nine speakers a year. Russ steered the ship as President before passing the baton to Ron Green, who then passed it to Sylvia Van Kirk, who served as VHS President from 2013 to 2016.



Left: Michael Leyland, Munro’s Bookstore 2020 (photo provided by M. Leyland); Centre: Russ Fuller, BCHF field trip, Cumberland, B.C., June 2019; Right, Sylvia Van Kirk, Bay Street Armoury, April 2017 (photographer unknown)



It was also during this time that VHS board member John Whittaker began conducting his many eagerly-anticipated tours. Amongst the many fond memories of VHS, it is Whittaker's tours, without question, that are the highlight for most members. A retired land surveyor and self-taught local historian, John Whittaker and his wife Sandra began organizing many tours around the South Island and well beyond. Starting in 2009 and concluding in 2019, the Whittakers organized extensive field trips to such locations as: San Juan Island, Steveston, Shawnigan Lake, Saturna Island, Hedley and Princeton, Port Douglas and Harrison Lake, Race Rocks and Pearson College, Cumberland, Cole Island, D'Arcy Island, Yale, and Fort Nisqually and Olympia, Washington State. Conducting thorough advanced historical and geographical research in preparation for these trips, Whittakers' tours were remarkable, immersive experiences for all who participated.



Left, Sandra and John Whittaker, Mayne Island field trip, 2019. Right: Hedley bus tour, June 23-26, 2013. Image credit: VHS Publication, No. 37. Autumn 2013.



Harrison Lake and Fort Douglas field trip, June, 16-17, 2014. Participants will recall the boat slowing pushing its way through the logs.



Jack Bryden, D'Arcy Island field trip, Gulf Islands National Park Reserve, June 2016.



Fort Nisqually and state capitol grounds and state senate chamber, Olympia, Washington field trip, 2017



John Whittaker pauses for a moment and VHS members visit the local history museum, Mayne Island tour, 2019.

Ron Greene is not only a highly involved VHS and BCHF board member, most notably serving as Treasurer for both organizations for many years, he is also recognized as an Honorary VHS Life Member, like Barry Gough before him.

Ron's first VHS meeting was in 1963 when he was taken by a friend and original colonial character of Victoria, Hamilton "Hammy" Smith of the M. R. Smith and Co. biscuit company in Victoria. From then Ron was hooked. His sustained involvement would last decades and would often overlap with the BCHF roles. The majority of Ron's board membership service was in the 2010s and early 2020s.



Left, Life Member, Barry Gough (photo provided by B. Gough);  
Right: Life Member Ron Greene, (named Honorary Life Member BCHF at Courtenay conference, 2019)

As previously mentioned, Jack Bryden followed Pat Roy and served as VHS President from 2017 until 2020. Paul Ferguson was President for a short time. John Lutz took on the role in mid-2021. He remains President in 2025.

Jack and John had the unenviable responsibility of leading the VHS through COVID. The formats for board and membership meetings changed dramatically. With lengthy social distancing restrictions, the VHS went digital when possible, switching to remote meetings. Supplemental issues of the newsletter helped keep members engaged.



Ron Greene (left) and Pat Roy (right) in Fan Tan Alley for the opening of Victoria's Chinatown Museum, July 24, 2020. Not even a pandemic could keep historians away from celebrating milestones.

As the impacts of COVID became more normalized and in-person gatherings resumed, John Lutz and board members brought back regular VHS monthly presentations offered at the New Horizons Centre. Many were hybrid meetings; members could sign in on Zoom if they couldn't attend in person. These have been enormously successful, often with a full house of attendees at talks provided by exceptional speakers such as Sylvia Olsen, Brian Thom, Robert Fung, and Daniel Lapp.

Today, email newsletters and social media platforms like Facebook are the society's leading communication methods for members. Keeping the VHS active in the community, advocating for building and memorial heritage spaces and organizing scholarships for youth. The VHS has even recently restored regular field trips. John Lutz organized a special tour of the legislative grounds, led by Martin Segger and many members enjoy a trip focussing on the historic Japanese presence on Mayne Island, organized by board member, Jennifer Iredale.



B.C. Parliament rotunda, March 1, 2024



John Lutz, current VHS President (UVic photo)



Mayne Island field trip May 5, 2024  
Jennifer Iredale in red jacket; John Lutz in orange jacket.

In a recent conversation, Pat Roy noted how “The VHS now is as good or better as it’s ever been—John Lutz as President is great.”<sup>2</sup> With over 150 years of VHS history, there are surely many stories worth telling about it. In so many compelling ways, the history of the VHS is deeply embedded in the histories of the City of Victoria itself—the two are so entwined that the pages of the shared histories sit amiably alongside one another. The leading aspect of the VHS’s enduring success is its people. Whether they be impactful VHS Presidents or memorable tour organizers, the VHS is meaningful because of the hard work of many passionate historians of all varieties. Our VHS has an important local legacy and an equally-promising future. How the VHS continues to grow over the next 150 years will be exciting to observe.



My name is Pia Russell (photo left provided by author) and I am a librarian in Special Collections and University Archives at UVic Libraries and am also a doctoral student in UVic’s Department of History. Between 2021 and 2024, both Jack and I served as members of the VHS board under the board leadership of current VHS President and UVic History Professor, John Lutz. Through our shared time as board members, Jack and I discussed our mutual enjoyment of serving the VHS, our shared interests in how the board developed, and our common ancestral roots in the Scottish Lowlands. The piece above was inspired by these fulfilling conversations. To further understand recent VHS activities, key previous board members were also consulted. These participants included: Pat Roy, Ron Greene, Russ Fuller, Michael Layland, and John Lutz. The sharing of their time and expertise is most appreciated.

(Unless otherwise noted, photos in this article were taken by B. Gundersen-Bryden.)

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<sup>2</sup> Meeting with Pat Roy at UVic Libraries on May 7, 2024.



# ANNUAL CONFERENCE & EVENTS

Williams Lake // May 1-4, 2025



## Welcome to the Cariboo

The British Columbia Historical Federation's annual conference is taking place this spring and we would love to see you there! You will meet people involved in BC history from around the province while attending presentations, a field trip, a film screening, and capping the event off by celebrating achievements in BC history at the Awards Gala.

The conference will be hosted by the [Museum of the Cariboo-Chilcotin and the BC Cowboy Hall of Fame Society](#) with support from the City of Williams Lake and the Cariboo Regional District.

Full program information is available on the [conference website](#). Some highlights include:

**Opening Reception:** at the [Museum of the Cariboo Chilcotin and BC Cowboy Hall of Fame](#)

- **Keynote speaker:** Phyllis Webstad, founder of the Orange Shirt Society.
- **Pre-conference workshop:** Heritage Collections Management.
- **Presentations:** Maurice Guibord, Williams Lake First Nation, Marion Crook, T̓silhqot̓'in National Government, Ken Favrholt, Chinese Canadian Museum.
- **Film screening:** [Sugarcane](#)
- **Gala awards banquet:** Featuring dinner, awards program and silent auction

We gratefully acknowledge that the conference will be held on the unceded ancestral and traditional lands of the Secwépemc Peoples neighbouring the T'exelceme (Williams Lake) and Xat'súll (Soda Creek) First Nations.

Visit our [conference website](#) to view other details of the conference and look for registration information and pricing.

<https://bchistory.ca/conference>



## Council Members 2023 – 2024

### Executive

President: John Lutz [jlutz@uvic.ca](mailto:jlutz@uvic.ca)

Vice-President: Jenny Seeman  
[jseeman@thecastle.ca](mailto:jseeman@thecastle.ca)

Treasurer: Dennis Flewelling  
[denjanf@shaw.ca](mailto:denjanf@shaw.ca)

Secretary: Kathryn McAllister  
Membership, Publicity & Distribution:  
Frances Aknai [faknai@shaw.ca](mailto:faknai@shaw.ca)

### Members-at-Large

Jack Bryden (Past-President)  
George Copley  
Jennifer Iredale  
Kent McNeil  
Julianna Nielson  
Wayne Norton  
Charlayne Thornton-Joe

VHS is a non-profit charitable organization and may issue tax receipts for donations.

### *VHS Quarterly Submissions*

Members may submit articles, photos and story ideas related to local, regional or provincial history to the *VHS Quarterly*.

Authors should credit sources and obtain any required permission for use of photographs and images. Authors retain copyright of submitted or published materials.

The editor, Britta Gundersen-Bryden, may be reached at [bbgryden@gmail.com](mailto:bbgryden@gmail.com)

(Please note that email addresses and urls [i.e., web site addresses or links] may not work directly from the pdf version of the *VHS Quarterly*. It may be necessary to key in the email address or url directly or to do a google search first.)

## Notes and News

Now is the time to think about contributing to the April issue of the VSH Quarterly. One item will be a review of what members have been learning over the past 20 years, with a look at past presentations and published articles. Stay tuned.

Thinking of news and articles published in the past, (and in keeping with the review of VHS' history, pp 7 – 12), society member Michael Harrison edited the VHS Newsletter for well over a decade. Archived newsletters may be found on the VHS website:  
<https://victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca/newsletters/>

They still make for interesting reading. Thank you, Michael.

Can you help? We received the following enquiry via the 'contact us' page on the Victoria Historical Society website. If you can help, please let Jenny Seeman know or send an email directly to [contactus@victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca](mailto:contactus@victoriahistoricalsociety.bc.ca) and Jenny will connect you with the writer.

Hello there!

I was hoping to ask a question about Victoria's brickyards in the late 1800s. Primarily I am looking into the bricks used in the old CPR Vancouver Granville Street Station, which were said to be ordered from Victoria (about 2 million of them), and of "Mottled Buff" in colour. Though I do not know which yard they came from, I was wondering if there were any surviving examples of the kind of brick (colour) that may have been used left in Victoria?

Many thanks...