



Victoria Historical Society Quarterly

Formerly the VHS Newsletter
Volume 76, Winter 2026

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VHS Meetings

4th 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

Or visit us on Facebook.

Or find Victoria Historical Society BC at youtube.com

Up-Coming Presentations

February 26, 2026

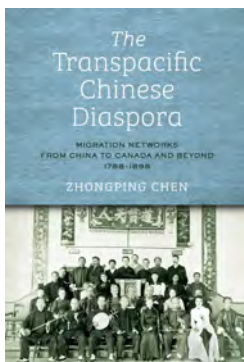
Toward a Transpacific Perspective on the Chinese Community in Victoria, 1788-1918

Dr. Zhongping Chen

Dr. Chen will take a transpacific approach to the 130- year long history of Victoria's Chinese community. He will trace the origins of the Victoria-based Chinese diaspora to the Cantonese engagement in the Anglo-American fur trade in the Pacific Northwest beginning in 1788, and examine the diasporic rise to the migration from southern China to the American West and Pacific Canada during BC's gold rushes and railway construction. The lecture also highlights the importance of Victoria's Chinatown as a central area for the political reform and revolutionary mobilization of China and the Chinese diaspora across the Pacific.

Dr. Chen teaches Chinese history and the history of the global Chinese diaspora at the University of Victoria. He has numerous works to his credit and has published on two local websites, *Victoria's Chinatown: A Gateway to the Past and Present of Chinese Canadians*

(<http://chinatown.library.uvic.ca/>)



and the *Chinese Canadian Artifacts Project* (<https://ccap.uvic.ca/>).

Dr. Chen's next book (image left), *The Transpacific Chinese Diaspora: Migration Networks from China to Canada and Beyond, 1788-1898*, will be published in June 2026 by Stanford University.

About This Issue

Upcoming presentations are highlighted on pages 1, 3 & 4.

February is Black History Month. March 8th is International Women's Day. And it's not too early to think about attending the Chinese Labour Corps Ching Ming Festival in May. Information about all of these events is in this issue of the *Quarterly*.

However, readers will not find one of the *Quarterly's* longer "feature" articles. Jenny Seeman's column on this page profiles the 2025/26 program but monthly presentations only cover nine topics each year. Along with field trips, the *Quarterly's* feature articles provide another way for VHS members to expand (and to share) their knowledge. Well-researched, original articles are welcome from VHS members and others interested in local, regional and BC history. Contact the Editor at bgbryden@gmail.com if you'd like to write an article for the April or the August issue.

Greetings from the President

We are well into our 2025-26 season now and I hope you have been enjoying the presentations so far. In September we began with an entertaining talk from Dr. Patricia Roy about John Hart: Canada's Almost Forgotten Premier. In October, Dr. Lorna Wánosts'a7 Williams spoke about her active participation in the Constitution Express. This was a fascinating personal account of the Indigenous action in the 1980s against the exclusion of Indigenous people from Canada's Constitution. It was the largest successful direct action in Canada's history, securing section 35, which recognizes Aboriginal title and rights in the Canadian Constitution. In November, John Azar spoke about the history of the Bay Street Armouries, which turned out to be a very timely topic, since the building has now been renamed The General Sir Arthur William Currie, GCMG, KCB, VD Armoury in honour of the World War I general on the occasion of his 150th birthday. Our ticketed holiday luncheon at the University Club was a delightful tale of archival discovery of the Coast Salish woolly dog, Mutton, whose pelt survives at the Smithsonian. This is the only known surviving specimen of a Coast Salish woolly dog! January's presentation by Gary Cohen and Amber Woods of KousKous took us on a musical tour of historic Victoria and was the perfect antidote to a cold, dark winter night.

The rest of our programme continues with the promise of highly informative presentations. Dr. Zhongping Chen in February on the Chinese Community in Victoria from a transpacific perspective, Naomi Duska in March on Queer History in Victoria, Tom Hawthorne in April on Vancouver Island baseball and Nora Butz in May will round out our season with a talk on Yen Wo Society's Tam Kung Temple. The May meeting will also be our Annual General Meeting, so please make every effort to attend.

Continuing the success of January's 'bring-a-friend' night, we will be repeating this activity in April. Invite a friend to enjoy our talk on baseball history without the \$5 door charge! Since I am talking about our offerings, I will also take a moment to highlight the upcoming gala event on March 1. A 'revivified' architect, Francis Rattenbury and first provincial archivist, Alma Russell will provide the entertainment throughout a silent auction to raise funds for our scholarships. Details may be found on page 12 of the *Quarterly*. It promises to be a fabulous and fun afternoon. Get your tickets from John Lutz (jlutz@uvic.ca).

Jenny Seeman, VHS President

Upcoming VHS Presentations

March 26, 2026

Queer History in Victoria

Naomi Duska



Naomi Duska

Photo: Discover the Past

Naomi Duska (she/her) is a writer, museum worker and tour guide who has lived in Victoria since 2017. She grew up in Calgary surrounded by a supportive community who encouraged her to be herself. Naomi has been emboldened by the stories of those from centuries past who fought for love and acceptance. She believes that everyone deserves the chance to express themselves authentically. Queer stories are human stories, and they must be shared.

Queer people have always existed. Too many of their stories have remained hidden. Naomi will delve into the colourful queer history that makes up the fabric of the city of Victoria. She will talk about the 1980s, when Victoria's gay community fought to launch the city's first pride parade and further back the 1860s, where an openly gay town crier causes a ruckus. Naomi will elaborate on how LGBTQ2S+ history, and the fight for love and acceptance, leaves a lasting mark today.

April 23, 2026

“Play Ball!” – A History of Baseball in Victoria & Beyond

Tom Hawthorne



Author and April presenter
Tom Hawthorne

Did you know that five Blue Jays stars in the 2025 World Series run-up once played here in BC? Trey Yesavage, Mason Fluharty, Addison Barger and Davis Schneider played for the Vancouver Canadians, while Nathan Lukes played for the Victoria Harbour Cats.

Victoria-based Tom Hawthorne is an award-winning journalist, a most engaging raconteur, and a major league fan of baseball. He's written a number of books, the most recent (2025) being the anecdotal history *Play Ball! The Amazing Stories and Captivating Characters Who Have Made Baseball a Winning Ticket in Vancouver for Over 100 Years*. Hawthorne will speak about baseball history from all over: in Canada, in BC, and right here in Victoria.

Hawthorne told CityNews: “I’ve spent my adult life with a partner who thinks baseball is too long by at least six innings. So, my thought was, how do we write a book for the non-baseball fan that also satisfies the baseball fan?” Hawthorne will bring entertaining, something-baseball-for-everyone approach to this VHS presentation.

Upcoming VHS presentations continued on p. 4

May 28, 2026

Celebrating Tam Kung Temple's 150 Year Anniversary

Nora Butz & Gayle Nye



Celebrate Asian Heritage Month by learning more about the oldest Chinese Temple in Canada and the people who started it.

The May program presenters will be Nora Butz, President of Yen Wo Society. Nora was one of the site hosts for the VHS historical tour of Chinatown in 2025. Gayle Nye, Tam Kung Temple Community Coordinator, is a descendent of the temple's original founder.

(Left) Nora Butz, Tam Kung Temple
Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC
Photo: B. Gundersen-Bryden

Another way to learn during Asian History Month:

*Chinese Labour Corps Ching Ming Festival
William Head Cemetery
Saturday, May 2, 2026*

- ▶ During World War I, the British recruited Chinese workers to serve in non-combatant roles at the Western Front. They became the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC).
- ▶ CLC workers were shipped across the Pacific to William Head (outside of Victoria), then transported across Canada to the Atlantic and onwards to Europe. At the time, William Head was the site of a quarantine station.
- ▶ Some CLC workers died in transit going to, or returning from Europe, and are buried in William Head Cemetery, now on the grounds of William Head Institution, a correctional facility.
- ▶ Ching Ming is a traditional Chinese celebration where ancestors' graves are tidied, and offerings of gratitude and reverence are made. CLC workers buried at William Head have no family to perform these gestures for identities were eroded and relationships lost.
- ▶ Ching Ming becomes an opportunity to acknowledge CLC ethnicity – the attribute that resulted in them being recruited in the first place and subsequently treated as *coolies*. The festival is a means by which **ALL** Canadians can come together to recognize inequities of the past and celebrate our resilience as a people.
- ▶ Sign up to be notified when registration opens at: AzimuthBooks@shaw.ca

February is Black History Month



The plaque (left) along Victoria's Upper Causeway marks the arrival of the group of 35 Black settlers who sailed into Victoria Harbour on April 25th, 1858 aboard the vessel *Commodore*. They had come at the invitation of the colony's governor, James Douglas. But life wasn't easy and many didn't stay.

As Mifflin Gibbs wrote in his 1902 autobiography: *“Three or four hundred coloured men from California and other states, with their families, settled in Victoria drawn thither by the two-fold inducement – gold discovery and the assurance of enjoying impartially the benefits of constitutional liberty. They built or bought homes or other property; and by industry and character vastly improved their condition and were the recipients of respect and esteem from the community”*.

Learn more about the early arrivals at <https://bcblackhistory.ca/why-they-came-and-the-pioneer-committee/>

Black History Month is a perfect time to learn more about Black settlers who came to Vancouver Island. The events below are just a few of the many opportunities on offer.

[1858: Black Routes, Black Roots](#) | BC Maritime Museum | All month

Follow the journey of the first group of Black immigrants to Vancouver Island as they sailed from San Francisco in 1858. Now through April.

[Black Pioneers on the Saanich Peninsula](#) | Sidney Museum | All Month

Learn about one of Sidney's founding families and the rich Black history of the area at this month-long exhibit.

[Appreciation Tea](#) | Baumann Centre | Feb. 14

Celebrate Black elders and mentors who uphold culture, share history and help raise the next generation. Victoria music icon Louise Rose will perform. 2-4 pm.

[Ebony Roots Concert](#) | Club KWENCH | Feb. 15

A concert journey that musically narrates the evolving emancipation of the Black community. Celebrate African Descent/Black music, from 300-year-old spirituals to Motown and everything in between. 2-4 pm.

[Royal Roads Online Keynote Event](#) | Virtual | Feb. 18

Yabome Gilpin-Jackson, Vice-president, People, Equity and Inclusion at Simon Fraser University, will speak about Black history in Canada in this free virtual keynote event. 11.am.

[Guided Black History Cemetery Tour](#) | **Ross Bay Cemetery | **Feb. 22****

Learn about the 50+ influential Black pioneers and their descendants buried in Victoria's historic cemetery. Tickets can be purchased at the start of the tour. 2-4 pm.

[BC Black History Awareness Society Keynote](#) | **Baumann Centre | **Feb. 27****

Join revered writer and UVic professor Wayde Compton in conversation with graduate student Junie Désil at this free public event, featuring a musical performance by Caleb Hart. 7-9 pm.

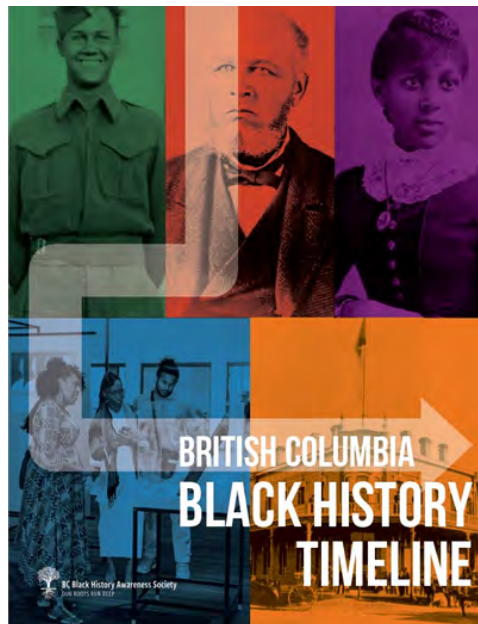
[String of Legacy: Black History Month Closing Night](#) | **Ambrosia Banquet | **Feb. 28****

Experience a vibrant fusion of music, culture, storytelling, and fine dining in the heart of downtown Victoria. 6-11:30 pm.

The BC Black History Awareness Society <https://bcblackhistory.ca> has a plethora of accessible and engaging information about Black history in British Columbia.

The society's digital BC Black History Timeline is an ideal place to begin: <https://bcblackhistory.ca/learning-centre/bc-black-history-timeline/>

The timeline is also available as a 52-page illustrated publication, to purchase by donation. Contact the BC Black History Awareness Society.



**An Invitation:
Celebrate International Women’s Day
at Ross Bay Cemetery**
by Yvonne Van Ruskenveld

International Women's Day is on Sunday, March 8, and the Old Cemeteries Society and Emily Carr Chronicles will hold a special event in Ross Bay Cemetery to celebrate the achievements of just some of the local women who have been part of Victoria’s history.

In 2024, Marilyn Jones of Emily Carr Chronicles organized a sold-out event in Ross Bay Cemetery for International Women’s Day, which visited the graves of “Ten Remarkable Women.” This year, the Old Cemeteries Society (OCS) and Marilyn Jones are co-presenting two tours featuring “Eight Remarkable Women.”

For 2026, Marilyn and I will give the same tour twice — once at 10 am and again at 2 pm. No reservations are needed, and the cost is the same as for our regular OCS Sunday tours — \$5 for non-members of the OCS and \$2 for members. Tickets are available inside the gate at the cemetery on Fairfield Road.

Both tours will follow the same route to visit the graves of eight women who led very different lives, all with fascinating stories to tell. They may be only a tiny number of the almost 30,000 people buried in Ross Bay Cemetery, but they stand out for their achievements.

Two, Emily Carr (below left) and Sophie Pemberton (below right), were born here in Victoria. As children, they took art lessons together and both grew to be accomplished artists with distinctive styles. Their lives diverged and expanded beyond Victoria but only one remains widely recognized today. Our stories will reveal their successes and their struggles.





Josephine Crease (left) and Hannah Maynard (right), were also artists but Josephine worked in the traditional medium of watercolour, while Hannah forged her own path in what was then the new medium of photography. She was also able to create a livelihood with her photography skills.



Like Hannah Maynard, Jane Anne Nesbitt (left) became a businesswoman, but that was later in her life in Victoria. She had arrived here on a Bride Ship, ready to work to support herself. She soon found employment as a domestic worker, and through that, met her husband. She eventually took over the business left to her by her husband and ran it successfully, in a time when few women had their own businesses.



In business in a very different field, Neshaki, also known as Martha McNeill (right), was a chief of the Nisga'a Wolf clan. She maintained her connections to her north coast Indigenous homeland throughout her time in Victoria. Already a successful fur trader at the time of her marriage to Captain William McNeill, she continued to travel back and forth to the Nass Valley, while being a stepmother to McNeill's children from his first marriage.



Nancy Lester, (left) like Martha McNeill, knew what it was like to be far from home in a culture very different from her own. Nancy Lester came with her family to Victoria as a member of the first group of Black pioneers who arrived here in 1858. Back home in Philadelphia and later in San Francisco, she had been active in the anti-slavery movement.

Rounding out the group of eight, we have Lottie Bowron, (right) born in the gold rush town of Barkerville. Later in life, she was instrumental in it becoming a provincial historic site. Earlier, she had the unique position of Rural Teachers Welfare Officer and was founder of the Kumtuks Club. The tour is an opportunity to find out more about Lottie Bowron and all of these remarkable women.



OCS and Emily Carr Chronicles invite Victoria Historical Society members and *Quarterly* readers to celebrate International Women's Day at Ross Bay Cemetery on Sunday, March 8, at either 10 am or 2 pm. For more information, go to <https://emilycarrchronicles.ca/event/8-remarkable-women-resting-in-ross-bay-cemetery-international-womens-day-march-8-2026/> or <https://oldcem.bc.ca/tours/tours-schedule/#2026-International-Women's-Day>.

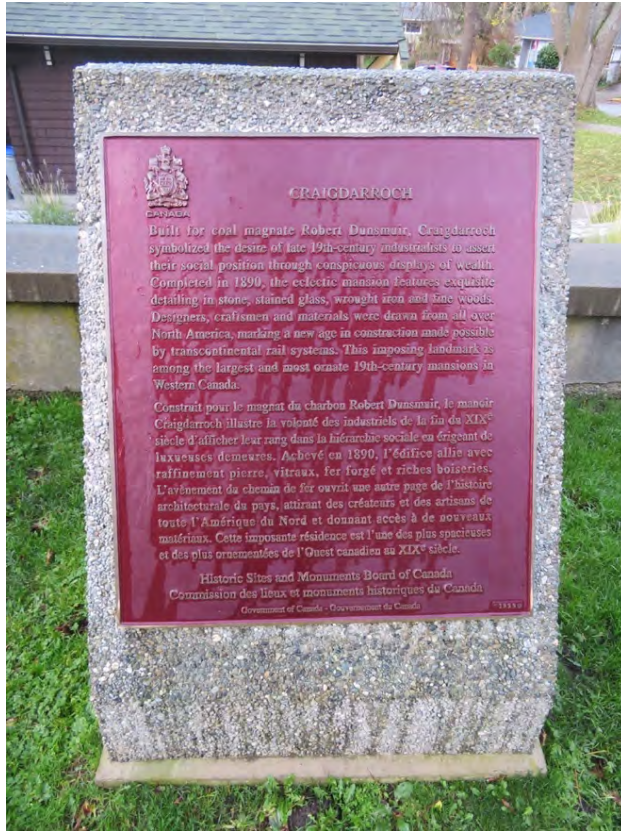
All photos: BC Archives

(Editor's Note: March 8 is International Women's Day, a time to recognize women's social, economic, cultural, and political achievements. International Women's Day was honoured for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland on March 19, 1911. March 8 became a more widely-recognized day in 1914. Women were advocating for better working conditions, including shorter hours, better pay and for suffrage.

It wasn't until 1975 that the United Nations recognized the day; then in December 1977 the General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming a United Nations Day for Women's Rights and International Peace to be observed on any day of the year by Member States, in accordance with their historical and national traditions.)

A Curated Tour of Craigdarroch Castle

VHS members participated in a private tour of Craigdarroch Castle on November 20, 2025.



Craigdarroch Castle is a National Historic Site and one of Victoria's most widely-recognized landmarks. Built between 1887 and 1890, the massive building served as home to Joan Dunsmuir and a number of her daughters and grandchildren. Following Joan's death, the Castle had a number of lives of its own: a post-WWI military hospital; Victoria College, an affiliate of McGill University; offices for the Victoria School Board; the Victoria Conservatory of Music and finally, the Craigdarroch Castle Historical Museum.

Castle Curator Jenny Seeman, assisted by Registrar Echo Smith, recounted the stories behind artifacts that aren't always obvious to the many tourists and casual locals who visit the Castle each year.

More information about the Castle may be found at <http://www.THECASTLE.CA>



Echo Smith



The Castle



Jenny Seeman



The newly-restored kitchen is a “must-see” and the basement is a “seldom-seen.”



Of course, there were treats: pastries served with Murchie’s specially-blended “Hatley Park” and “Craigdarroch” teas.

More VHS field trips are planned for 2026. Members will receive more information once plans are finalized.

Annual General Meeting and Conference 2026 Announcement from BCHF



SAVE THE DATE! We're excited to announce that our annual conference will be held in Vancouver this year on Saturday, May 30th! Join us for a day of learning, connection, and celebration at the scenic Creekside Community Recreation Centre as we discuss the importance of telling layered histories and the tough conversations involved in this work.

Council Members 2025 – 2026

Executive

President: Jenny Seeman

jseeman@thecastle.ca

Vice-President: Moira Dann

Treasurer: Dennis Flewelling

denjanf@shaw.ca

Secretary: Kathryn McAllister

Membership, Publicity & Distribution:

Frances Aknai faknai@shaw.ca

Members-at-Large

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Kent McNeil

Julianna Nielson

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 gbryden@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

VHS Council member Frances Aknai received the following message, to share with the membership:

Dear Frances,

Please be advised my mother, CAROLE JOAN TODD, passed away last Thursday, December 4, 2025 at Glenwarren Lodge.

Carole took great joy in her membership and the opportunity to be involved in all things historical about James Bay, Victoria, British Columbia, and beyond.

Please may I ask that you share the news of her passing with your membership.

Thank you,

Dawn Svendsen (nee Todd)

Downsize, tidy up, and help VHS help history students ... all at the same time!

Join the revived Francis Rattenbury, architect of central Victoria, and Alma Russell, the first BC Archivist, for an afternoon of fun, food, enjoyment and a silent auction to raise money for UVic history scholarships!

March 1st, from 2-4 pm at Chartwell Victoria Harbour (formerly Tapestry) 777 Belleville Street. Tickets, which include snacks and refreshments, are \$20. For this exclusive event only 70 tickets will be sold.

To make this once in a lifetime event a success, we need your help! Please consider what you might offer to be part of the silent auction. We're looking for beautiful or useful, like-new items that cover a broad potential price range, so everyone can participate in the event and take home a memorable *objet* including vintage and small antiques in good condition, crystal, paintings, dishes, books etc... Our theme is British Columbia history so items that have a historical connection are especially welcome. Donations of services are also welcome. Tax receipts will be issued for the value the items sell for.

We also need volunteers to help on the day of the event and a place to store the treasures for the four days prior.

Email moiradanncreative@gmail.com to offer your donation and instructions on drop off or pick up.

Email jlutz@uvic.ca for tickets. Contact either Moira or John to volunteer.

There'll be something for everyone, bring a friend or a collector.

The Silent Auction team thanks you!

John Lutz, Bonnie Campbell, Moira Dann, Massimo Calabrese