Nanaimo Historical Society

News and Views

NANAIMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Spring 2023

President's Report — Susan Garcia

Nanaimo is a diverse, evolving community, always has been, always will be. Is the NHS evolving with the rapidly changing times? Well, you now have a bit of gender balance, with a female NHS president and vice president. Your president has diverse ethnicity (European, Indigenous, Hawaiian) and is learning Hul'q'umi'num, the language of our original people, the Snuneymuxw. Indigenous history and knowledge keeper Dave Bodaly has become a regular member and contributor to the NHS.

Likewise, the Programmes Committee strives to be diverse with its offerings. In lieu of a general meeting in February, we encouraged members to attend two new National Film Board films premiering at Vancouver Island University. My thanks to those members who could attend. "***Incorrigible"*** was a dramatic look at the courageous journey of Velma Demerson, who was incarcerated under an oppressive Canadian law when she was pregnant and wanting to marry a Chinese man.

The second excellent film, the NFB's "***Unarchived"*** shown at VIU on February 14, 2023, delved into thought-provoking issue of whose history is kept, how and where, by British Columbia's archives and museums. VIU Anthropology professor Imogene Lim assembled archivists, Royal BC Museum representatives, and NFB film makers to speak to the urgent messages being communicated to the public: everyone's stories matter. We must preserve the history of every diverse group and it's up to everyone to make this happen.

Many Nanaimo residents know of the Paldi community near Duncan featured in the film. At the Duncan screening of "***Unarchived"***, history-maker and history-preserver Joan Mayo attended to the delight of the locals. Note that both of these National Film Board of Canada films will be available to the public online after their film touring dates finish later in 2023.

Outreach has always been my focus on the NHS Board. We have a mandate to educate the public; don't let us forget this. Hold us accountable to members by staying current and cooperative with others in our community. Please send us feedback. Think about being a director, or a committee member or tech help if you have those skills. See you at the March 9th AGM.

The March 9, 2023, AGM and the April 13, 2023, General meeting will be in-person at Bowen Centre. Due to NHS by-laws, voting members must have paid membership dues which we encourage all people to do if they wish to vote, and/or apply for election to the NHS Board of Directors.

The AGM will feature member Dalys Barney showcasing her research into soda-bottle production in Nanaimo and Vancouver Island areas. A specially arranged virtual tour of Cowichan's Old Hillcrest Chinese Cemetery, a Provincial Historic Site where 127 Chinese Canadians are interred, is our feature presentation on April 13, 2023, at Bowen Centre.

Questions or comments? Email us at nanaimohistoricalsociety@shaw.ca

“Name Our Newsletter” Contest!

We are looking for a catchy name for this newsletter. As part of our celebrations around the 70 year anniversary of the Nanaimo Historical Society in 2023, we are launching a contest to name this newsletter, with a prize for the contributor of the winning entry.

We also hope to feature articles about area history. Please consider submitting your story about Nanaimo’s history to our newsletter, and qualify for a prize.

Send your ideas to communications@nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca

Duncan Train Station Wins Canada’s Next Great Save!

Cowichan Valley residents secured a prize of $50,000 for renovations of the landmark Duncan Train Station in a landslide victory of National Trust for Canada’s Next Great Save competition, sponsored by Ecclesiastical Insurance. The funds will help restore the train station, which now hosts Cowichan Valley Museum & Archives, to its former glory and reduce its carbon footprint. The train station restoration was one of 10 finalists from across Canada and the only one on Vancouver Island. A public online vote took place between January 20 and February 22, and the winner was announced on February 23. The Duncan Train Station is a heritage building in downtown Duncan which attracts visitors locally and from around the world. Congratulations!

Watch Our Past Meetings and Tours Online

Did you know you can watch online presentations and field trips of the Nanaimo Historical Society on our YouTube channel @nanaimohistoricalsociety1953 ? Here is the lineup:

~ October 2020 - Christine Meutzner “Wellington Cemetery tour”

~ January 2021 - Annual Show and Share meeting and Tony Orchard “History of the Colliery dams”

~ April 2021 - Dave Bodaly on Sayshutsun (Newcastle) Island and family history

~ June 2021 - Virtual field trip to Mt. Benson site of October 1951 crash of Queen Charlotte Airlines Canso aircraft

~ **September 2021 - Hayley Healy “More Stories of Trailblazing Women of Vancouver Island”**

~ October 2021 - Greg Fraser “Joseph McKay biography “

~ November 2021 - Brian McFadden “Dam Busters, Nanaimo connection”

~ January 2022 - Annual Show and Share Meeting

~ February 2022 - Catherine Marie Gilbert “The history of Strathcona Provincial Park ”

~ March 2022 - Susan Garcia “Murder on Mayne Island“

~ April 2022 - Sean Enns “Charlie Abbott, the Chemainus Hermit”

~ June 2022 - Liam Hall “Morden Mine Restoration” and Welcome Back picnic

~ September 2022 - Dave Flawse “Nanaimo’s last hanging & Jack the Flying Dutchman”

~ October 2022 - Ted Lord and Dave Bodaly “Departure Bay Historical Stroll”

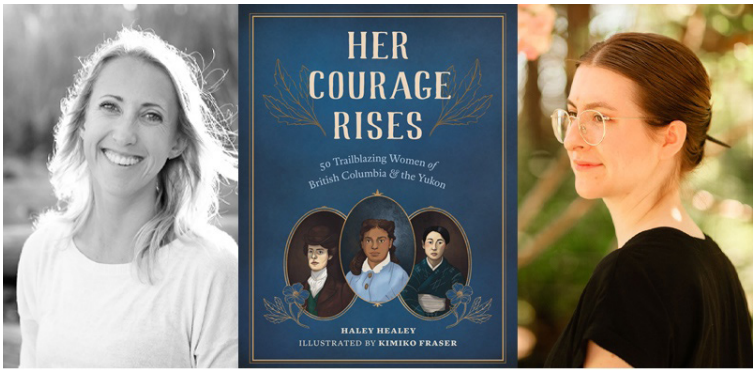
~ November 2022 - The E&N Railroad: Obstacles & Challenges Still Visible Today

~ January 2023 - Nanaimo Historical Society Annual Show and Share

Two new historical non-fiction books for kids this spring

Members may remember Haley Healey's Zoom presentation in September, 2021 about her recently released book ***Flourishing and Free: More Stories of Trailblazing Women of Vancouver Island.***

In November, 2022, at the Black Bear Pub here in Nanaimo, Haley held the launch of ***Her Courage Rises: 50 Trailblazing Women of British Columbia and the Yukon.*** The book's illustrations were done by Kimiko Fraser.



Haley and Kimiko continue their collaboration with two nonfiction picture books published by Heritage House in the Trailblazing Canadians Series of children's picture books.

Kimiko Murakami: A Japanese-Canadian Pioneer
Haley Healey (Nanaimo, BC) illustrations by Kimiko Fraser (Victoria, BC)
Kimiko Murakami was imprisoned during Canada's forced internment of Japanese Canadians, made to live with her five children in unheated livestock buildings, and later to labour on a beet farm. The land her family had bought was stolen from them and never returned, but she rebuilt the family farming business on Rainbow Road in Salt Spring, BC, following the war. Contains historical timeline. 9781772034318 $19.95 HC
JUVENILE NONFICTION / AGES 4–8
Available: May 09, 2023

Lilian Bland: An Amazing Aviatrix
Haley Healey (Nanaimo, BC) illustrations by Kimiko Fraser (Victoria, BC)
Lilian Bland was the first women in the British Isles, and maybe even in the world, to design, build, and fly an aircraft. She began building the *Mayfly*, a full-scale glider built from spruce, bamboo and canvas, in 1909. The first successful flight was made in late August in 1910. She lived in BC between 1911 and 1935. Contains historical timeline
9781772034332 $19.95 HC
JUVENILE NONFICTION / AGES 4–8
Available: May 09, 2023

Haley Healey is a high school counsellor and the bestselling author of *On Their Own Terms: True Stories of Trailblazing Women of Vancouver Island, Flourishing and Free: More Stories of Trailblazing Women of Vancouver Island, Her Courage Rises: 50 Trailblazing Women of British Columbia and the Yukon*, and *Immortal Grit,* a historical fiction.

Kimiko Fraser is an illustrator and historian-in-training. Her heritage is Japanese-Canadian (fourth generation/Yonsei). She holds a BA (honours History, major Visual Arts) from the University of Victoria. She works with many mediums to create her illustrations Most of her work is inspired by her interest in plants, history, and folktales.

“Looking Back At What the Wind Blew In”

At the date of writing (February 15, 2023) there is widespread media coverage of sightings and interceptions of Chinese spy balloons drifting eastward across the Pacific Ocean and transiting North American airspace.

Collected wreckage of one of the downed balloons allegedly represents an approximate 900 kilogram payload of intelligence and surveillance gear. Presently and significantly, it’s notable that the US and China are fraught with testy economic and defense issues arising between the two.

While there’s still been no official statement that the balloons are conclusively espionage weapons of a military nature, North America has previously contended with an aggressive balloon bombardment launched by Japan between November 3, 1944 and April 1945. These balloons carried across the Pacific a payload of incendiary bombs, anti-personel bombs, and a flash bomb for self destruction.

This balloon bomb offensive was one of the best kept secrets of the Second World War. What may be of interest to local historians is that one, of an untold number that drifted undetected across our sky, was intercepted and recovered over the north end of Vancouver Island.

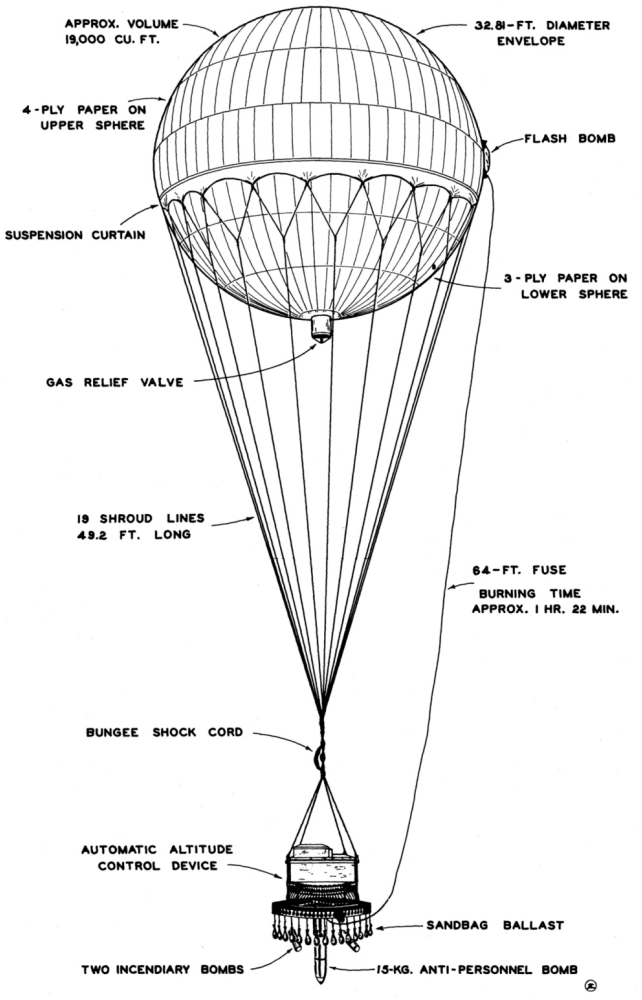


diagram: J. David Rogers, Missouri University of Science & Technology

In February 1945, spotters from RCAF No. 120 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron at Coal Harbour (RCAF hangar now home to Air Cab coastal air taxi fleet and a private museum) saw the greyish object drifting in from the ocean. The squadron’s Canso PBY-5A reconaissance bombers coul not gain the speed or altitude to shoot it down so two fighter planes were called in from RCAF Patricia Bay.

The fighter pilots succeeded in downing the balloon and pinpointed its location 1.2 kilometers from the shore on Quatsino Sound.

Under tight security at the Coal Harbour base officials selected an 11-man search party to recover the balloon. One of the searchers, wireless operator Ray Woolston later said that “we weren’t allowed to say anything to anybody about the recovery mission”.

It took the party four hours to carry the 400 kilograms of balloon and its payload through dense woods to the shore where a boat was waiting.

Back at the Coal Harbour hangar the balloon and its trappings were laid out on the floor. Under tight security the weapon was forbidden to be viewed by personel other than the search party.

(continued on page 5)

“Looking Back At What the Wind Blew In”

Sandbag ballast bags and incendiary bombs

(*continued from page 4)* Woolston added that “every bit of mail going out of the station was censored after the balloon was recovered.”

Within days the entire balloon and its gear was flown to the National Research Council in Ottawa to be tested for chemical or biological agents, such as anthrax. Tests were negative.

An indeterminate number of balloon bombs remain undiscovered in our remote forests and mountains – and if mishandled are potentially lethal remnants of the War in the Pacific. As strange and simple of a weapon design as it is they also carry the distinction of being the world’s first ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles). *Submitted by Darrell Ohs, Nanaimo Historical Society Director*

Left: RCAF No. 120 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron crest

Right: The search party from RCAF No. 120 Bomber Reconnaissance Squadron based in Coal Harbour which recovered the balloon from Quatsino Sound

Member Opportunities

The Nanaimo Historical Society is a volunteer-run society. As the society reorganizes and prepares for new programs and events, please consider joining us as a volunteer at the board or committee level. It is an opportunity to meet people who share your interest in history and is an opportunity to share skills or develop new ones. (Note: some Committees meet regularly, others 1-2 times per year)

Board of Directors: we welcome the addition of people with adult learning, project planning and communications experience and interest

Governance Committee: advises the board on policies and procedures

Programme Committee: speaker support (new!), developing learning programs, organizing refreshments, organizing rideshare

Communications Committee: website, Facebook, YouTube, newsletter, media promotion

Leynard Microgrant Program: developing our community grant program

Wanted: Ride Coordinator Volunteer

We are seeking a member to coordinate taxi rides to our meetings. The task is to telephone a small list of our members one week prior to the meeting or event. If a taxi is required, send the order details to AC Taxi, confirm any changes on the meeting day, and keep an updated record of this information. If you are interested in this volunteer position, email communications@nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca or call Sue Creba at 250-753-3371.

Leynard Legacy Heritage Grants

The Nanaimo Historical Society is offering micro-grants for projects that will improve our knowledge and understanding of the natural and cultural history of the Nanaimo area.

- Individuals and organizations based in the Nanaimo area are eligible to apply.
- In most cases, the Society will provide a one-time-only award to an individual or organization to encourage community engagement in our history and heritage.
- The value of a grant will not exceed $2,000 and is subject to available funds.
- The project's purpose must be connected to the natural or cultural history within the Nanaimo area.

For grant guidelines, parameters for activities and application process, please visit https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/get-involved/microgrants/

New Book about Frances Barkley

Frances Barkley: Eighteenth-century Seafarer Cathy Converse (Victoria, BC)
9781772034417 $12.95 PB BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY / WOMEN'S HISTORY
Available: Apr 04, 2023 Series: Amazing Stories Heritage House

Written in the form of a diary, a highly readable and engaging format, Converse is an expert on Frances Barkley, having revised, edited and extensively expanded a new edition of Beth Hill's seminal book ***The Remarkable World of Frances Barkley*** (Touchwood Editions, 2004). Frances Barkley was a unique trailblazer for her time and is still largely unknown outside of BC maritime history. (Many locations in the PNW still bear names from the Barkleys.)

About the Nanaimo Historical Society

Founded in 1953, the Nanaimo Historical Society has been an influential partner in advocating for the awareness, understanding and appreciation of our community's diverse heritage.

Nanaimo Historical Society Board

President:	**Susan Garcia**	**Past President:**	**David Hill-Turner**
Vice President:	**Sue Creba**	**Directors at large:**	**Darrell Ohs**
Treasurer:	**Tony Orchard**		**Ted Lord**
Secretary:	**Gordon Miller**		

Find Us At:

nanaimohistoricalsociety@shaw.ca

https://www.nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca

facebook.com/NanaimoHistory/

YouTube @nanaimohistoricalsociety1953

Mailing address: Box 933, Nanaimo, BC V9R 5N2

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Nanaimo Historical Society membership fees are:

- **personal membership - $10**
- **family membership (2 or more members at same address) - $15**
- **group membership (business or other organization) - $15**
- **student membership - $5**

Renewals are due in January of each year.
Please contact Gordon Miller at nanaimohistoricalsociety@shaw.ca to renew your membership, apply or renew at any in-person meeting, or sign up on our website.

Visit Our Website and Facebook

Our Nanaimo Historical Society website features upcoming and past events, news and resources and much more! We invite you to visit https://www.nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca
If you follow Facebook, visit facebook.com/NanaimoHistory to learn about events and news about local history.

We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional territory of the Snuneymuxw people from whom Nanaimo takes its name.