Nanaimo Historical Society

News and Views

NANAIMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Summer 2023

President's Report — Susan Garcia

Welcome all members and visitors to hot, historic Nanaimo. We acknowledge the Snuneymuxw peoples history on this unceded land, and we "honour the elders past, present and emerging," a phrase I borrowed from visiting musician, Steph Springs.

Besides the pavement, what topics are keeping the Nanaimo Historical Society Board of Directors hopping? First, at the March 2023 AGM we welcomed an eighth Director, Wanita Malkiewicz, who brings great research skills and enthusiasm to our midst. We virtually walked through the Old Chinese Cemetery April 13 at our Bowen Social Centre meeting, and physically walked the trails of Buttertubs Marsh May 13 with Bill Merrilees.

On April 22 the Board retreated to plan the coming year and to look at some hard topics like the pending retirement of several Board members, future spending and programming, and outreach to the community. On July 24 we greeted Swansea, Wales historian Dr. Gethin Matthews, during his less than 24-hour stay in Nanaimo, appreciating his presence and anticipating future contact (page 5). A memorial initiative for the victims of the 1951 airplane crash on Mount Benson is moving ahead, spearheaded by former NHS president Darrell Ohs.

In tiny steps this year we've made a new pattern of community service delivery, keeping January's Show and Share, adding films and walking tours in lieu of speakers, and offering in-person presentations about half as often. We have committed to financially supporting Nanaimo & area not-for-profit history groups over the next 16 months. Application instructions for the Leynard Grants are on the website (see page 2), and we have increased the dollar amount of the VIU awards that the NHS supports.

Our mission is to share Nanaimo's history. We want to be relevant and stay current. We can think big, but how do we do more? We may need to outsource some of administrative work, as we look to reach our goals for 2024. We always want to hear from and involve members, so please get in touch if you'd like to know more or join a committee.

I'm pleased to see NHS members presenting at our genealogical counterpart/sister society, the Nanaimo Family History Society (Mali Bains in June 2023, Dave Bodaly in September 2023 and Dalys Barney in October 2023.) Their Board members Sharon and Maureen also attended the meet-and-greet with Gethin Matthews.

I look forward to hearing Tami Hirasawa present Sept 14, 2023 at Bowen Social Centre. Tami is President of the 7 Potatoes, the Central Vancouver Island Japanese Canadian Society, which works to celebrate and commemorate the history of Nanaimo's historic and evolving Japanese community.

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. **Entries close on October 27, 2023.**

Send your ideas to communications@nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca

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, societies and community groups based in the Nanaimo area are eligible to apply. **Applications close October 31, 2023 for this year.**
- The project's objective must include creating awareness and understanding of persons, events (natural and human), structures or activities that occurred within the Nanaimo area.
- The value of a grant will depend on 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/

May 2023 Buttertubs Marsh Guided Tour

On May 13, Bill Merilees, a prominent BC naturalist, educator, and conservationist, led a tour around Buttertubs Marsh. He gave a comprehensive history of the development history of the now reclaimed wetland and sanctuary. The Hudson Bay Company purchased the marsh in the mid-1800s, draining it for vegetable and dairy farming. During wartime the reclaimed land served as a military camp. Threatened to be built over during a housing boom in the 1970s the Nature Trust of British Columbia purchased 50 acres in 1974 to form the Buttertubs Marsh Conservation Area. In 1990 Bill started the first ButterTubs Management Committee, known later as the Friends of Buttertubs. You can view the tour online at https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/2023/05/25/may-13-buttertubs-marsh-guided-tour/

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.

September Presentation: Japanese history in Nanaimo

At our first fall meeting on Thursday, September 14, we will be exploring the history of Japanese settlement and industry in Nanaimo with guest speaker Tami Hirasawa from the Central Vancouver Island Japanese Canadian Society (CVIJCS). The society is also known as the 7 Potatoes because in Japanese, Nana is the word for the number 7, and Imo is the word for Potato. CVIJCS is a non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating Japanese heritage by providing social and cultural activities on Central Vancouver Island.

Join us on Thursday, September 14 at 7:00 pm at Bowen Centre, Activity Room #1, 500 Bowen Road. and learn more about this important part of Nanaimo's history. Refreshments will follow the presentation.

Prior to 1942, when people of Japanese descent were forcibly removed from Vancouver Island and relocated to the B.C. interior, there was a thriving Japanese Canadian Community on Vancouver Island. Fishermen, loggers, boat builders, miners, shop owners lived and thrived on Vancouver Island. Nanaimo was known as the Herring Capital of the World as they exported salted herring and herring roe to many parts of Asia. There was a large Japanese Language School at the corner of Juniper Street and Stewart Avenue in Nanaimo prior to 1942. Despite the huge economic boost to the community, there are no heritage markers or signs informing the public of their history. **

Tami Hirasawa is Nikkei Sansei (3rd Generation Japanese Canadian). She is pleased to be the President of the 7 Potatoes which she was appointed in May 2021. Originally from Hamilton Ontario, she currently studies Classical Japanese Dance (Nihon Buyo) with her teacher, Mari Kaneta of Suzuyuki-Kai in Arizona. Tami and her husband Dave practice the art of Iaido (Japanese Swordsmanship) with Todo-kai in Nanaimo.

** Currently, 7 Potatoes are working with the City of Nanaimo to plant 100 Japanese Cherry Blossom Trees. Cherry Trees hold great significance to our Japanese Community and signage will be added about the importance of the Japanese Canadian community. If you wish to donate to the Cherry Blossom Trees project, you can do so online at https://sevenpotatoes.com/cherry-blossom-project/. Cheques can be sent directly to City of Nanaimo, 455 Wallace Street, Nanaimo, BC V9R 5J6. Write Code 446986 on your cheque along with your name and address to get a tax receipt.

Japanese Settlement and History in Nanaimo

We are very fortunate to have access to the only written article about the History of the Japanese Canadians in Nanaimo, written by Masako Fukawa. Masako received an Honorary Doctorate of Law from Vancouver Island University on June 22, 2023 and gave the keynote address to the education graduates about Japanese Canadians in Nanaimo. What follows are excerpts from her 2020 article

Lifting the Veil on Nanaimo's Nikkei Community: From Settlement to Return

" Nikkei (members of the Japanese diaspora) settled in three distinct locations in the Nanaimo area. North of Departure Bay, in Hammond Bay, also known as Kujira (Whale) Bay for the whaling station on its north shore, a transient commune appeared on Shack Island, *(continued on page 4)*

Japanese Settlement and History in Nanaimo (cntd.)

which was reachable by foot at low tide. It was a way station for salmon and cod fishers travelling north. The fishers who stopped here shared ancestral and occupational connections to the Nikkei of Nanaimo. A second seasonal site was the herring camps, and salteries could be found clustered on islands around Departure Bay and on Newcastle Island. The largest and permanent settlement, "Japan Town," was on the foreshore of Nanaimo in the Brechin area, with Stewart Avenue at its centre."

" The Issei [first generation of Japanese migrants] who inhabited the Departure Bay area were entrepreneurs who came from Japan with knowledge of shipbuilding, fishing, and curing methods. They established herring salteries, opened international markets, and made Nanaimo a "herring capital" ... Arichika Ikeda was one of the first to see potential in the herring industry. ... he added a reduction plant to the saltery he had bought from three Japanese partners. The reduction plant manufactured fish meal for the local fertilizer market and extracted fish oil for export to Japan. Rikimatsu Tabata built his saltery on Jessie Island. In 1907, five more plants (four Japanese, one Chinese) were established on Newcastle Island. A further five were added on nearby Protection Island. In 1909, fourteen salteries operated along the waterfront on Stewart Avenue from just north of Townsite Road to just south of St. George Street. In 1923, forty-three camps were in operation, with a total investment of $215,000."

" Though not proven, arson was suspected when fire destroyed [Ikeda's] year-old plant. Ikeda rebuilt a larger factory. Fires, their origin unproven, continued to ravage the salteries. In 1910, six canneries "mysteriously" burned to the ground, and in 1912 four plants on Newcastle Island suffered the same fate.The fires occurred in summer when only watchmen remained in the camps."

" Within twenty-four hours of the outbreak of the Pacific War on 7 December 1941, all fishing boats owned by Japanese Canadians were ordered into the nearest port, where they were impounded, searched, and escorted to assembly points at Prince Rupert, Nanaimo, and New Westminster. Of the 1,137 vessels confiscated, at least sixty-six were owned by Japanese Canadian fishers living in Nanaimo. Deprived of their boats and licences, Nikkei men were unable to support their families. ...Despite the advice of the RCMP and the Department of National Defence, both of whom argued that mass removal was unnecessary, the federal cabinet decided on 24 February 1942 that, whether or not they were Canadian nationals, all Nikkei men, women, and children had to leave the "protected area," which stretched one hundred miles (160 kilometres) from the coast. Nanaimo, already the hub of transportation and distribution of goods on central and northern Vancouver Island, became the hub for the removal of thirty-three hundred Nikkei from Vancouver Island."

You can read Masako's complete article *"Lifting the Veil on Nanaimo's Nikkei Community: From Settlement to Return" BC Studies, No 204. Winter 2020* at https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/view/191517/189031 You can watch Masako's adrees at VIU's convocation of Education students at https://www.facebook.com/viuniversity/videos/790901025764847

In the 1980s, Stanley and Masako Fukawa spent a year teaching English and Canadian Studies at Obirin College (now J.F. Oberlin University), in a suburb of Tokyo. When they returned to Vancouver Island, Masako coordinated Asian Languages and International Exchange programs for the Ministry of Education, and Stanley was a faculty member at Malaspina College. Masako's vision for international education resulted in the development of the High School at VIU, serving as Founding Principal until her retirement in 1999. Masako and Stanley spent many years documenting the history of Japanese peoples in British Columbia. In 2010, the Canada Council for the Arts presented them with the 2010 Canada-Japan Literary Award for their book, *Spirit of the Nikkei Fleet*. Masako also developed resources for BC public schools. She co-authored a book for young readers, *Righting Canada's Wrongs: Japanese Canadian Internment in the Second World War*. For their work, Stanley and Masako received the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2013.

NHS October and November Presentations

Join us on **Saturday October 7 from 10 am until noon**, when we host another historical walking tour, this time along the waterfront walkway in **Maffeo-Sutton Park**. We will learn about the Snuneymuxw village from Dave Bodaly, Snuneymuxw Cultural Guide, and the industrial and marine history on this part of the waterfront from NHS Director Ted Lord. Watch our website for more details.

At our **Thursday, November 9** meeting starting at 7 pm at Bowen Centre Activity Room #1, Mike Bonkowski will lead us through the history of BC ferries and freighters. If you missed Mike's November, 2022 presentation on the E&N Railroad, you can view it at https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/2022/11/14/the-en-railroad-obstacles-challenges-still-visible-today/ Mike's presentation on ferries and freighters will be just as interesting and entertaining!

In our **November newsletter** we will feature some history of Nanaimo's firehalls, past and present, including the newest hall, officially opened in June of this year.

Stroll through history at Maffeo Sutton Park on October 7

Nanaimo's new Firehall

Welsh Historian Dr. Gethin Matthews visits Nanaimo

On July 24, 18 people gathered at an NHS director's home for a meet-and-greet hour with Dr. Gethin Matthews, visiting from Swansea, Wales. Dr. Matthews has been a senior lecturer in the History Department at Swansea University since 2011. His areas of expertise include Welsh migration and Welsh communities overseas, Gold Rushes, Wales and the British Empire, and the history of Welsh involvement in the American Civil War and the two World Wars.

In addition to Gethin's wife and son, 4 board members and 2 NHS members, there were two guests from the Nanaimo Family History Society, two guests from Ireland, and four other guests. A gift of the book, *British Columbia in the Balance*, by Jean Barman, was presented to Gethin. Unfortunately we were unable to help him locate the gravestones he wanted to view in Bowen Cemetery.

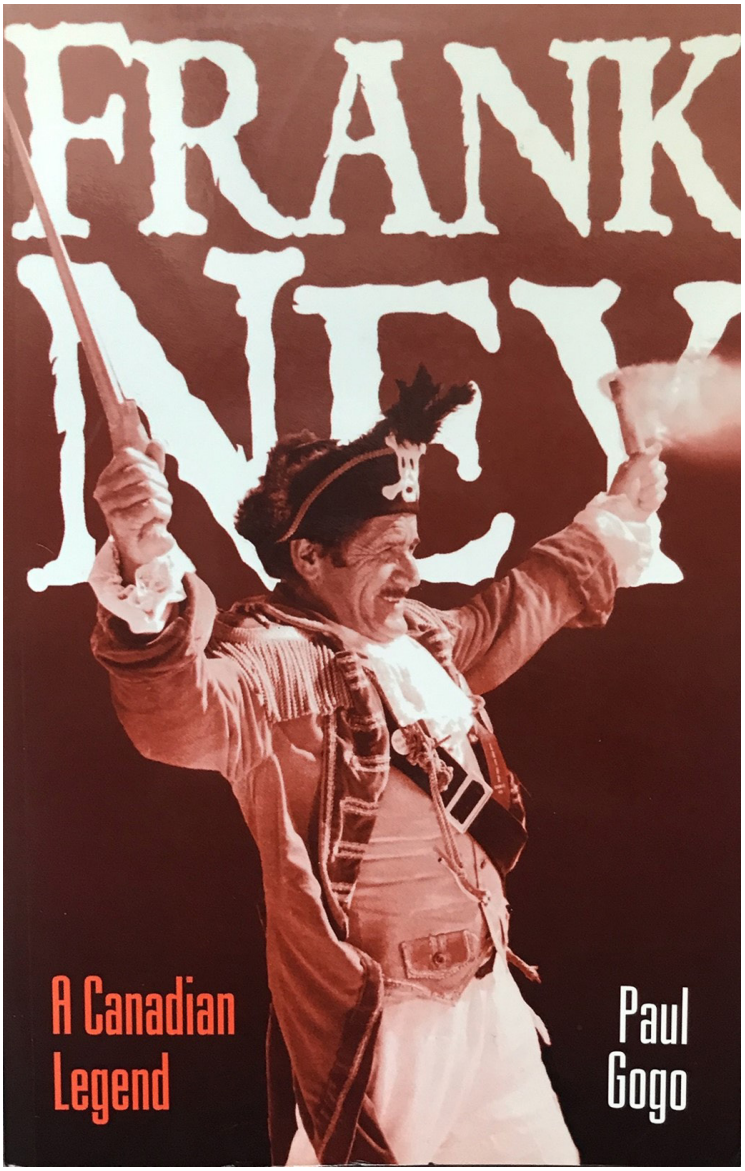
Local Musician and Author, Paul Gogo

Local musician, Paul Gogo, who goes by just “Gogo” in the band Trooper, made history as the band was welcomed into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame on May 21, 2023. Gogo put his small island home on the map, so to speak. (If you saw the ceremony, you might have caught the name of Gogo’s Gulf Island.) Trooper was well-represented at the ceremony with its two founding members Ra Maguire and Brian Smith telling the band’s history from before their first album in 1975 to 2023, and respectfully inviting members of each of the band’s iterations over its 48 years to take part. Gogo has been a member for 25 years and is currently the still-very-popular band’s keyboards “wizard.”

I’m sure every Canadian knows Trooper’s famous songs *“We’re Here For a Good Time”* and *“Raise A Little Hell”* to name just two unforgettable ones. Oh, and there’s also *“Two For The Show”*.

Paul Gogo hails from a huge extended family well known in the Nanaimo and Ladysmith, B.C. area since the late 1890’s. The entire clan is involved with music and the arts, including Paul’s talented older brother, John Gogo, his sister Marie, and his cousin, bluesman David Gogo.

Paul Gogo may be less known for writing the history of Nanaimo’s pirate-promoting long-term mayor, Frank Ney (1918-1992.) If you are lucky enough to have a copy of Paul Gogo’s 1995 book, *Frank Ney: A Canadian Legend*, you will learn that Paul Gogo is also a capable and talented history researcher. He describes Frank Ney’s many firsts in Nanaimo, including the creation of the “Great International World Champion Bathtub Race.” Ney developed multiple neighbourhoods all around the area and its Gulf Islands, donating parks and naming streets. Here is a sample Paul Gogo wrote about Nanaimo roads:



“Twiggly Wiggly Road was named in honour of a character in a children’s book Frank read to his kids. He took inspiration from honourable historic sources as well. Bergen-Op-Zoom Drive sounds like another wacky street name but is actually a dedication to a town in Holland where over one thousand Canadian boys died and were buried as a result of a big battle that was fought during World War II.” *Frank Ney: A Canadian Legend (p.110)*

For more information about the band, see Trooper’s official site: https://www.trooper.com

Submitted by Susan Garcia,
Nanaimo Historical Society President

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

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

~ March 2023 - Dalys Barney *Message on a Bottle: Nanaimo’s Soda History*

~ April 2023 - Cowichan’s Old Hillcrest Chinese Cemetery onsite interview with Neil Dirom

~ May 2023 - Walking Tour of Buttertubs Marsh with Bill Merrilees

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**		**Wanita Malkiewicz**

Find Us At:

nanaimohistoricalsociety@shaw.ca

https://www.nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca

facebook.com/NanaimoHistory/

YouTube @nanaimohistoricalsociety1953

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

NANAIMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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.