Nanaimo Historical Society

News and Views

NANAIMO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Fall 2023

President's Report — Susan Garcia

Welcome all new and ongoing members. We acknowledge our gratitude to the Snuneymuxw people and the land (*huy'seep'q'a Snuneymuxw mustimuxw i tu tumuxw.*)

It seems like we're hopping through this Fall like the wild domestic bunnies all over our Nanaimo parks and the VIU campus. For example, we're seeing increased attendance at our Bowen Social Centre meetings and on our tours. On Sept 14, we learned of the rich history and presence of the Japanese Community in Nanaimo. Watch for more of the Japanese history in BC at the Nanaimo Museum in the Spring of 2024.

Our October 7 historic tour of Maffeo Sutton Park and Sway'a'Lana Lagoon was led by Director Ted Lord, member David Bodaly, with additional information by Director Gordon Miller. On November 9th, we cruised through the history of ships and ferries serving Nanaimo 1881-1961 with popular historian and photographer, Mike Bonkowski. The videos of these events are available on the NHS website to be enjoyed again or for the first time. Many thanks to the 2023 video producers and editors: Tony Orchard, Christine Muetzner, Ben Rosnau, and Paul Manly.

Most importantly, please consider being an active participant in the March 14, 2024 Annual General Meeting. We will need new members on the Board of Directors (BOD) to replace those who will, or have, retired. Thanks to all Committee and Board members, past and present who have graced Nanaimo Historical Society by being volunteers. With great commitment and despite small numbers, the BOD has expanded its outreach to the wider Nanaimo area, particularly in grant initiatives and website offerings that reach more members of the public. Our vision is to tell all histories through activities and education. Members can contribute in small ways or as part of a team. Use your skills to make Nanaimo's history memorable. Please contact me if even a little bit intrigued at: president@nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca

Read on about future NHS offerings, including the Show and Share meeting at Bowen Social Centre January 11, 2024, and guest speaker and author, Robert Jannings, on Febuary 8, 2024. I hope some members were able to attend our members brunch social on December 2.

Finally, in the spirit of fun, I sang a bit of the Black Ball Ferry Line song on November 9. Here's the link to the Bing Crosby version which even names some of the ferries we heard about from Mike Bonkowski: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tE8eSucAAEk

The Welsh Community in Nanaimo, circa 1860-1914

On **Thursday, December 14, 2023 11:30 - 12:45 PST**, the Glamorgan Family History Society will host an online presentation investigating the Welsh migration to Nanaimo which attracted hundreds of Welsh colliers as it grew as a mining town, especially in the 1880s and 1890s. Dr. Gethin Matthews is a senior lecturer in the History Department at Swansea University. 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 this talk he will be returning to a story that he began researching decades ago, for family history reasons. Nanaimo Historical Society hosted an event with him in July 2023. Follow Gethin on Twitter at @WelshMemorials

Pre-registration is required for this free session via Zoom. Pre-registration closes at 8 am PST on Thursday 14 December at the latest. Here is the link to pre-register: https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-welsh-community-in-nanaimo-vancouver-island-circa-1860-1914-tickets-707852675407

The Zoom link will be sent out after registration closes.

NHS January 11 Meeting: Show & Share

Join the members of the Nanaimo Historical Society and members of the public for our annual Show and Share meeting on Thursday, January 11, 2024, when they bring artifacts, stories, and memorabilia to share in a circle format. The meeting is at Bowen Park Centre, 500 Bowen Road, in Activity Room #1. Doors open at 6:30 pm and all are welcome. Always an interesting meeting!

Leynard Legacy Heritage Grants

The Nanaimo Historical Society is offering 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 were extended to November 30, 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 for next year, please visit

https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/get-involved/leynard-legacy-grant-program/

Wanted: Volunteers for our Meetings

We are seeking a member to coordinate taxi rides to our meetings, which involves contacting a few members, arranging their taxi rides and keeping a record of this information. We are also in need of volunteers to organize refreshments at our meetings. If you are interested in volunteering, 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, guest speaker Tami Hirasawa from the Central Vancouver Island Japanese Canadian Society (CVIJCS) outlined the history of Japanese settlement and industry in Nanaimo. 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.

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.

CVIJCS is a non-profit organization dedicated to celebrating Japanese heritage by providing social and cultural activities on Central Vancouver Island. Currently, the society is working with the City of Nanaimo to plant 100 Japanese Cherry Blossom Trees with signage. You may donate to this project online at https://sevenpotatoes.com/cherry-blossom-project/ or send a cheque to the 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.

You can watch Tami's September presentation on our website https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/2023/09/18/japanese-history-in-nanaimo/

October Stroll through Maffeo-Sutton Park

On the morning of Saturday October 7 we hosted a historical walking tour along the waterfront walkway in Maffeo-Sutton Park and Sway'a'Lana Lagoon. We learned 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. You can watch the tour on our website https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/events/bc-passenger-ships-and-ferries/

left: Snuneymuxw Cultural Guide Dave Bodaly. right: President Susan Garcia, Director Ted Lord, Dave Bodaly

November Presentation: Passenger Ships & Ferries

Remembering the Passenger Ships and Ferries that Served Nanaimo from 1881-1961

At our Thursday, November 9 meeting, Mike Bonkowski led us through the history of BC passenger ships and ferries. From paddle-wheelers on a route between Nanaimo and Victoria in the early 1880s, to the Black Ball Ferries Kahloke and Chinook about to be bought-out by BC Ferries in 1961, this 80 year period takes us from antiquated early passenger ships, through the rise, golden age and decline of the elegant Canadian Pacific steamships, to the new era of fast utilitarian drive-on / drive-off automobile ferries. This is an interesting transportation period, with various earlier companies morphing into what became the Canadian Pacific BC Coast Steamship Service. Also, the Black Ball Ferries story is compelling in how they set up shop in BC for only a brief 10 year period, but forever changed the game for ferry service in coastal BC.

You can now view Mike's November 9 presentation on our website at https://nanaimohistoricalsociety.ca/events/bc-passenger-ships-and-ferries/

Mike's presentation on ferries and freighters is part one of a series. We hope to host parts two and three at upcoming meetings.

HIstorical Recordings Transcribed to Digital Files

Transcripts of NHS recordings have recently been completed at Vancouver Island University. This work is ongoing and here are links to the most recent additions:

Nanaimo school board spending, 1880-1890 / Helen Brown https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/17109

Coal mine underground maps / Shari Lindsay https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/16261

Pacific home children / Syd Baker https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/14498

Honouring air crash sites / Paul Rankin https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/16264

Phyllis Munday: Mountaineer / Kathryn Bridge https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/23472

Nanaimo 1900: The Boer War captures our citizens' imagination / Anne Royle https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/15503

Cowichan Lake / Lynne Bowen https://viurrspace.ca/handle/10613/15872

Submitted by Dalys Barney, NHS member and Digital Collections Assistant, VIU Library

Thank you

We would like to thank Quality Foods on Bruce Street for providing a meeting room for our Nanaimo Historical Society Board of Directors' meetings, in particular, Sandra, who has coordinated our bookings.

Nanaimo's Firehalls: A brief history

The official opening of Nanaimo's new Fire Station #1 (right) was held on June 21, 2023. The event featured the unveiling of a welcoming pole carved from red cedar by Snuneymuxw First Nation artist Noel Brown. Home to Fire Rescue Operations, Emergency Operations Centre and Fire Rescue Command and Business Centre, the new building is built to post-disaster standards.

The former Fire Station #1 at 666 Fitzwilliam Street (below), built in 1966, remained in use during construction of the new building on the same property from October, 2020 until operations moved to the new building, beginning in July, 2022. The old building was demolished in September, 2022.

Nanaimo's former Fire Station #1 1966 - 2022

Image Credit Nanaimo Museum: F1-1 The hose team and silver cornet band (near Nanaimo's first Fire Station at Wharf and Front Streets, 1879-1894)

Nanaimo's new Fire Station #1

Long before these modern fire stations, Nanaimo had 2 predecessors.

In the city's early days, there was no formal fire fighting institution. Nanaimo relied on citizen volunteers to step up and do their best to quench fires (in flammable wooden buildings). By the mid 1800s, it became apparent that the old "Bucket Brigades" were no longer adequate fire protection.

At a public meeting on May 4,1878 the "Black Diamond Engine Company" was founded. The first fire station was built at the corner of Wharf and Front Streets in 1879 on donated land and with donated materials. The first fire engine was purchased from the City of Portland for $700. Also purchased was five hundred feet of hose for $250. The original personnel consisted of thirty volunteers who lived in the area of the fire station. This original fire station was destroyed by fire that started in the Royal Hotel in 1894.

Four years before that fire, in 1890, a subscription list was started to secure funds to construct a new modern brick fire station. The new station, at the foot of Nicol Street, was officially opened December 15, 1893. This building is still standing and is presently owned by private interests.

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Nanaimo's Firehalls: A brief history

At left: Image Credit Nanaimo Museum F1-2 Postcard of Firehall on Nicol St. with nine fireman and No.1 Firewagon in foreground 1890

Image Credit Nanaimo Museum F1-6 Nanaimo Fire Department 1910. H. Weeks, Chief J. Parkin, W. Cowie, H. Peters, A. Dixon, Tom Matheson, J. McGill, W. Ritchie, H.L. Horne, F. Robinson, J. Gordon, H. Freeman, T. Robinson. The horses are Tom and Jerry.

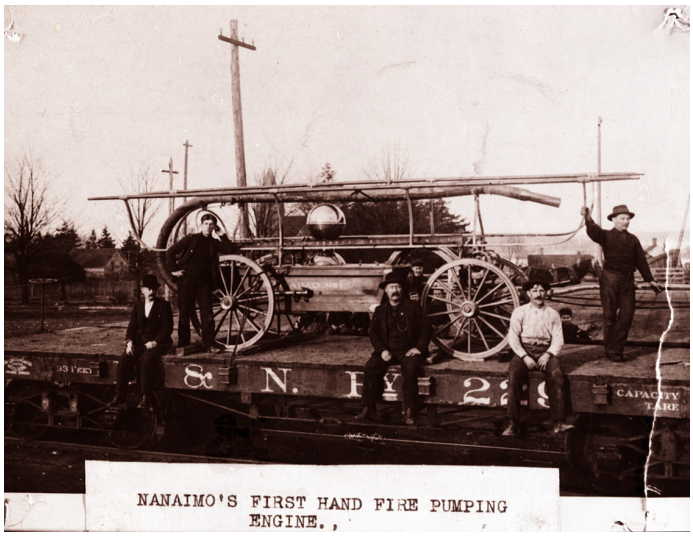

Image Credit Nanaimo Museum F1-24 Nanaimo's first hand fire pumping engine (date unknown)

Image Credit Nanaimo Museum F1-19 Nanaimo Fire department on 24th May Celebration, 1897. Members of the department pictured with the Ronald Steam fire engine. Driver - William (Bill) Ritchie, Hans Peters, Vernon Stewart, James Cowie, Bert Horne, Tom Porter.

With problems that developed over the years between the Fire Department, the Provincial Government and the City, it was decided that the City of Nanaimo would take over the fire department. John Parkin was appointed the first Fire Chief and two Firefighters were hired to drive the horses, "Tom and Jerry".

In 1951, the area served by the Brechin Volunteer Fire Department was annexed by the City of Nanaimo. That fire hall, at 598 Brechin Road, became a small satellite station that housed one of the 1913 engines.

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Nanaimo's Firehalls: A brief history

By the early 1960s, the fire station at Nicol Street was becoming too small and in 1967 the department was relocated to the new station at 666 Fitzwilliam Street. An addition was added in 1979, and an upgrade was done in 2000. As mentioned earlier it was replaced in 2022.

During the coal mining years, many small communities had sprung up around the original City of Nanaimo; Harewood, Northfield, Wellington, Chase River, Departure Bay, and Protection Island all had their own fire departments. In 1975 when the City of Nanaimo amalgamated, these individual fire departments all became part of the Nanaimo Fire Department.

Image Credit Nanaimo Museum F1-4 Firehall team Permanent personnel of Nanaimo Fire Department in front of No.1 firehall

The Fire Training Centre on Labieux Road (the first of its kind in B.C.) was opened in 1986 and provides training to Firefighters in Nanaimo. In 2009, Nanaimo Fire Administration took over the former branch of the Vancouver Island Regional Library at 580 Fitzwilliam Street, which was built in 1961.

Nanaimo's current main stations are Fire Station 1 - 618 Fitzwilliam Street (completed 2023), Fire Station 2 - 2499 Dorman Road, Fire Station 3 - 6230 Hammond Bay Road (built in 1992), Fire Station 4 - 1425 Cranberry Avenue (built in 2008), Fire Station 7 - 26 Pirates Lane, Protection Island (built in 1970) In addition, there are a number of volunteer fire departments within the boundaries of the Regional District of Nanaimo.

In a future newsletter we'll find out what happened to the buildings those volunteer fire departments (VFDs) occupied prior to amalgamation. If you have some history to share about these buildings, we would love to hear from you!

Information courtesy of Nanaimo Fire Rescue and Nanaimo Professional Firefighters Local 905. Photos courtesy of the Nanaimo Museum.

Member News

On November 7 2023, NHS member Tom Parkin gave a Zoom presentation to the Bytown Railway Society of Ottawa ***"So You Always Wanted To Know About Railway Stonemasonry (but were afraid to ask)"*** This presentation is on Youtube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HR113Pe5nCU

On November 18 2023, NHS member Roger Prior gave a live presentation ***"Gone, But Not Forgotten, the story of Stovely and neighbourhood (North Cedar area)"*** at the Ladysmith Museum as part of the Ladysmith Museum Historically Speaking series.

The Port Theatre Discovery Series presents: **Scenes from the Nanaimo Indian Hospital** Wednesday January 31, 2024 at 2:00 pm. Adults $25, Members $20, Students $10.
In this staged reading of a play by Dr. Laura Cranmer, an Indian hospital and residential school survivor, the Nanaimo Indian Hospital is re-imagined to be the confluence of the Island's great linguistic diversity embodied by three young girls. **Warning: Mature content**. Mental health support workers will be available for survivors & audience members.

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 taxi rides for members when required.

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

Leynard Legacy Heritage Grant Program: administering 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
~ September 2023 - Japanese history in Nanaimo with Tami Hirawasa
~ October 2023 - Stroll through Maffeo-Sutton Park with Dave Bodaly and Ted Lord
~ November 2023 - Passenger Ships and Ferries that Served Nanaimo from 1881-1961

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**	**Directors at large:**	**Darrell Ohs**
Vice President:	**Sue Creba**		**Ted Lord**
Treasurer:	**Tony Orchard**		**Clive Hadfield**
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

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.