



Thursday February 27th, 7pm, at the Museum of Vancouver and on YouTube

Voices Through Time: Correspondence of the First World War

The art of letter-writing had a brief life. Literacy was a scarce thing until the nineteenth century and that – along with affordable paper, a reasonable pen, and bottle of ink – was a requirement for the ‘epistolary’ explosion.

Letter writing also required the means of moving letters from place to place: a post office would help a lot. Add in steamships and railways and the ability to put pen to paper in one place and have it read very far away in another place was a miraculous accomplishment. British Columbia and Vancouver came into being in the letter-writing age. Formally educated officials and missionaries, of course, spent a lot of their time reporting back to employers, governments, and archbishops, not to mention family. Working people too wrote home from early settler communities, to attract other settlers or to warn them off!



Today, of course, letter writing is a dying art. We have among us people who have never received, let alone written an entire letter. A thoughtful txt typically does the trick now. But letters ... written correspondence was always more than just the words. .

The emotions of the writer could come through in the slightest or most violent change in penmanship. The quality of the paper and the extent to which it was smudged or stained with tears, whisky, tea, or grit also carried a message.



An example of cross-writing from the Brock Library in 1837-38.

<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2024/01/brock-library-expands-local-history-collections/>

When paper and postage was expensive, writers would ‘cross-write,’ a style that no doubt proved hard to read by kerosene lamp then just as certainly as it is fiendishly difficult to decipher now. Imagine, then, putting pen to paper in the trenches of World War I. In an age of correspondence, armies everywhere realized the importance to morale of sending and receiving news. Millions of letters found their way to and from the western, eastern, and home fronts.

Dr. Stephen Davies, a History professor at Vancouver Island University, founded the Canadian Letters and Images Project twenty-five years ago. What started as a way to help his undergraduate students connect with the two World Wars has since grown to a website containing close to 40,000 letters, images, and diaries.

Voices Through Time (continued)

This online archive has not drawn on existing collections: it is comprised of items voluntarily and sometimes spontaneously sent to Davies by families across Canada. The Project team scans – digitizes – the material and then returns it to the owners.

Over a century since the end of the Great War, its toll still resonates with Canadians. Poppies appear annually and in 2022 the Home Equity Bank decided to make innovative use of Davies' Canadian Letters.

The HEB identified home addresses connected to a great swath of the archived letters. These homes were marked on [an online interactive map](#) with a 'digital poppy' and the letters were linked to that site. For example, Mr. F. Smith of 1613 West 3rd Avenue, received two postcards from his friend Sam who was training in the summer heat in Vernon and innocently glad to be heading overseas soon ... in 1915.

A full house of children at the Orpheum Theatre in February 1918. Many no doubt had fathers serving abroad. Many were no doubt orphans too. Stuart Thompson. CVA 99-5150



A crowd on Granville Street in 1918, as a wartime fundraising carnival takes shape. The old Hudson's Bay store sports a banner promoting the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). James Crookall CVA 260-1113.07.

Other letters have been used on the stage and as part of a musical radio program and play. And while historians in Canada and abroad have made use of these sometimes heart-breaking collections, so too have elementary and secondary school students. Davies has said that this is what gratifies him most: the breadth of use and the personal impact these archives can have on the twenty-first century reader. –John Belshaw

On February 27th, join us at the Museum of Vancouver, when Dr. Stephen Davies will introduce you to his staggering online collection and present some of the stories of Vancouverites in their own words.



Historical West End Artists by Gary Sim

Many visual artists have lived and worked in the West End residential neighbourhood of Vancouver, and artists who lived elsewhere came to paint local scenes. The 1930s were an artistically important time for the West End. The following is a brief summary.

The Vancouver Art Gallery opened in 1931 at 1145 West Georgia Street, and in 1932 began the annual B.C. Artists' exhibitions that continued to 1968. In 1933 the B.C.

College of Arts Ltd. was opened at 1233 W. Georgia by Frederick Horsman Varley (1881 - 1969, Group of Seven), J.W.G. (Jock) Macdonald (1897 - 1960, Canadian Group of Painters), and Harold Tauber (1900 - 1975), a Viennese architect and stage designer. Assistant Instructors were Vera Weatherbie (1909 - 1977), Beatrice Lennie (1904 - 1987), and Margaret Williams (1902 - 1981). The three women were founding students at the Vancouver art school in 1925, and in the first graduating class.

The progressive B.C. College of Arts had an extensive range of courses, but only existed for two years. Special classes included instruction for children, landscape painting, stage craft, and choreographic dancing. Varley and Macdonald had been hired at the Vancouver art school in 1926, but left in June 1933, protesting perceived unjust pay cuts due to the depression.



Parakontas studio c1932; Maisie Robertson, Jessie Innes, Maud Sherman, Edith Carter, Norma Park
Emily Carr University Library & Archives



Nearby, a house at 1079 Bute Street was known as Parakontas, and had 7 or 8 studios in it. From 1929 to 1934 studios were rented by Varley, Macdonald, A.N. St. John Mildmay (1865 - 1955), Vera Weatherbie, Maud Sherman (1900 - 1976), Maisie Robertson (1910 - 1998), Norma Park (1908 - 2001), Lilia Farley (1907 - 1989), and Baron Plato Cornelius von Ustinov (1903 - 1990, actor Peter Ustinov's uncle).

The Sylvia Court (now Hotel Sylvia) held an exhibition of West End artists in February 1933 that included most of those named above plus Julius Griffiths Jr. (later a Canadian spy), H. Faulkner Smith, Statira Frame, and others.



Sculptor Charles Marega (1871 – 1939) won commissions for numerous public art projects in Downtown and the West End, including the Harding Memorial, Joe Fortes fountain, Oppenheimer Memorial, and the King George VII fountain at the courthouse on Georgia Street.

He also created the lions for the Lions Gate bridge, and Captains Burrard and Vancouver for the Burrard Street bridge. He was a founding instructor at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Art in 1925 (now Emily Carr University).

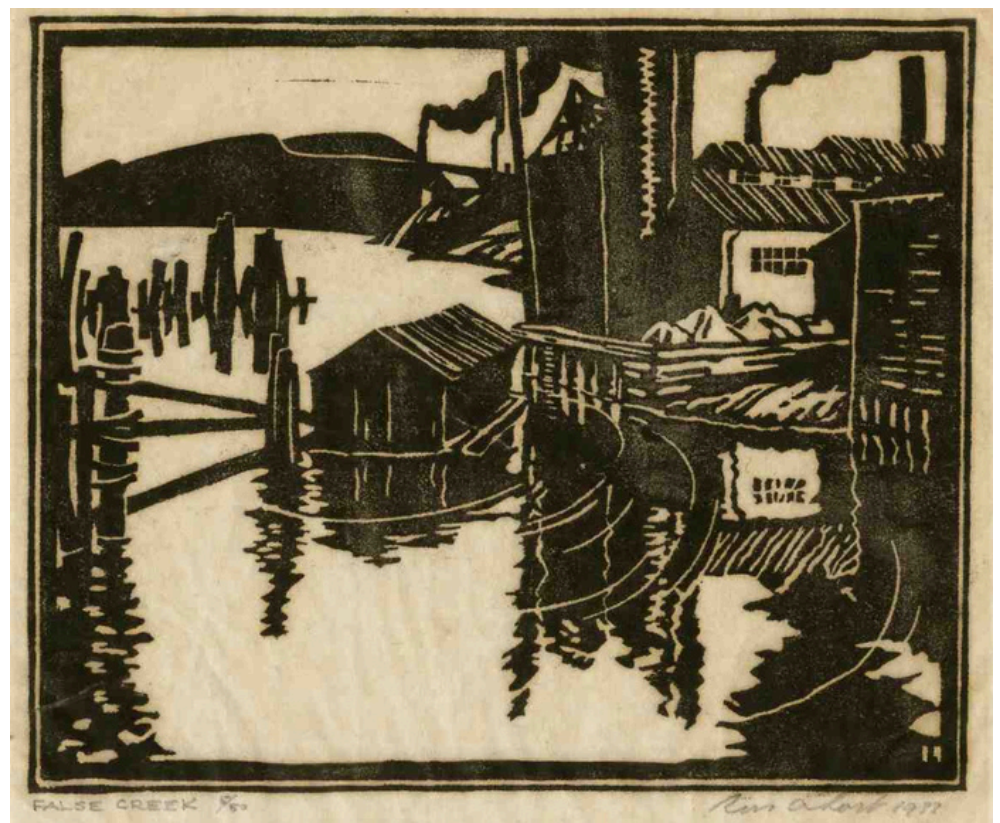
(untitled) Maud Rees Sherman pen & ink drawing c1920
GK Sim collection

Vanderpant Studios was opened by pictorial photographer John Vanderpant (1884 – 1939) at 1216 Robson Street, holding art exhibitions and hosting musicales.

The Art Emporium moved to 1103 Robson Street, where artist Harry Hood (1876 – 1956) was the Proprietor from 1926 to 1948. The gallery hosted art exhibitions, and Hood painted many scenes of the West End.

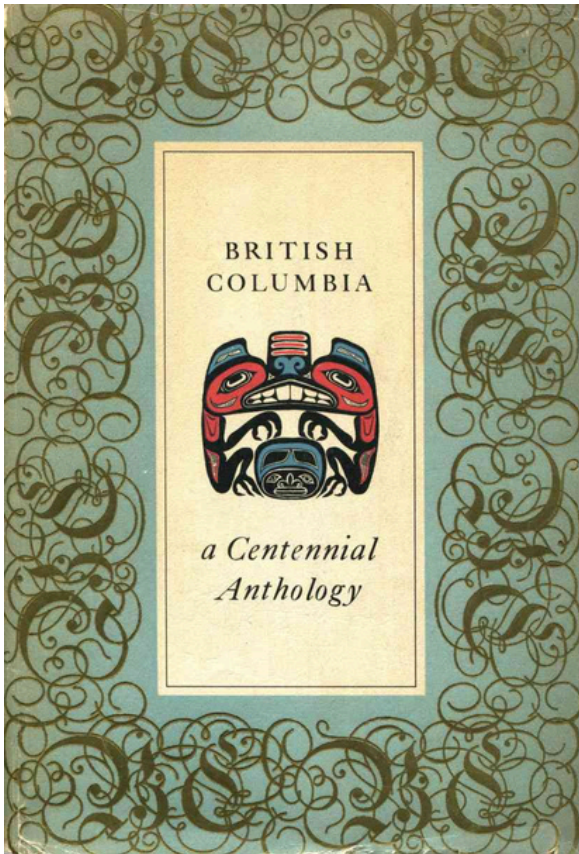
Ross Lort (1889 – 1968), an early B.C. architect and former partner of Samuel Maclure, lived at 911 Nicola Street from 1927 to 1942. He published *All Creatures Great and Small* in 1931. He was President of the B.C. Society of Fine Arts (BCSFA) from 1945 to 1948, and designed the art gallery expansion that opened in 1951.

Otto Schellenberger (1896 – 1970), later known as Paul Rand, lived at 1225 Barclay Street. He was President of the BCSFA from 1948 to 1950.



False Creek, limited edition relief print by Ross Lort 1933
City of Vancouver Archives

Margaret Wake (1867 – 1930) lived and worked at 1834 Barclay Street, one of the few artists to own her own home. Charles Henry Rawson (1870 – 1948) worked as a commercial artist and painted many scenes around Stanley Park, as well as making wood engravings.



Front cover, British Columbia – A Centennial Anthology 1958
GK Sim collection

Jackie Hooper Hugo (1927 -) helped with family finances during the depression by salvaging logs in False Creek with a rowboat and selling them to a man called Barnacle Bill, who lived on his boat called “The Hell You Say.” She graduated from King George High School in 1944, was a truck driver for the Canadian Women’s Army Corps in World War Two, then attended art school after the war. After recovering from mental illness she won the “Courage to Come Back” award in 2014. That included a \$1,000,000 prize which she donated to Coastal Health.

Robert Russell Reid (1927 – 2022) was from Medicine Hat AB, and moved to Vancouver in the 1940s. He was an incredibly talented book designer, graphic artist, and typographer. His first book was The Nineteenth Hole, issued by his own Mashie-Niblick Press in 1948. He worked with indigenous artist William (Bill) Reid on projects that included British Columbia – A Centennial Anthology in 1958. The book was illustrated throughout with work by B.C. artists. The Alcuin Society created the Robert R. Reid Award in his honor in 2007, given for Lifetime Achievement in the Book Arts in Canada, Robert himself receiving the first medal. He was living in Sunset Towers on Barclay Street, where he chose to die from MAID.

For links to artist biographies and exhibition histories see B.C. Artists:
sim-publishing.com/bca/westend.htm

Upcoming VHS Event

On February 27th, join us at the Museum of Vancouver. Dr. Stephen Davies, Director at The Canadian Letters and Images Project, will introduce you to his online collection and present some of the stories of Vancouverites in their own words.

Watch videos of our past lectures on our YouTube Channel

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