



Street Stories

Kenney Avenue: Part 1

GPS: [49.1510595,-122.3468464](#)



The late Norma Kenney was a driving force behind the establishment of the Fraser River Heritage Park.

Mission Community Archives 0025 Norma-Kenney

Although they did not come to Mission until 1969, Norma and Mart Kenney had a significant impact on the well-being of this community. We have so much to say about the Kenneys that we have decided to write about Norma and Mart in two separate parts.

In this first article, we will introduce you to Norma Kenney, the “Velvet Steamroller.” Big band fans knew Norma best by her maiden name, Norma Locke. Born in Montreal in 1925 and raised in Ontario, Kenney enjoyed singing from an early age. She had her own radio show at the age of 16 and enrolled in the Toronto Conservatory of Music when she was 18. According to Kenney, being a musician was “the greatest joy I have ever had.”

Norma was referred to as a ‘musician’s singer’ who, according to Mart Kenney, “approached each song with careful attention to diction and... sang with flawless intonation and much feeling.” After being a writer, narrator, and solo singer on many CBC series, Norma was noticed by Kenney, Canada’s famous big band leader of the ‘40s and ‘50s. In 1943, Norma joined Mart Kenney and His Western Gentlemen, which was in the process of doing 200 broadcasts at Canadian armed forces bases across Canada.

After working closely for many years, Mart and Norma married in 1952. In 1969, the

Kenneys went into semi-retirement and moved to Mission, where Norma became a piano tuner. She also became widely involved in the community. During her time in Mission, Norma received many awards including Freeman status—the District of Mission’s highest distinction. She was also named Citizen of the Year in 1981.

Kenney was largely responsible for creating the Mission Heritage Association and Heritage Park. She received a Friends of Heritage certificate in 1985. Kenney was charter president of the Mission Heritage Association, president of the Canadian Arthritis Society, and worked for Mission’s Chamber of Commerce. You can see evidence of her work in the community when you visit Fraser River Heritage park, which she helped create.

Norma died of cancer in 1990. Her legacy to the community she called home is a park she worked hard for, one that “will help us and the world learn about the mighty Fraser River and the people who have come to live by its shores.”

Street Stories is provided by the Mission Community Archives, which is operated by the Mission Historical Society. If you have any questions or further information on Norma Kenney, please call us at 604-820-2621.

Laura Barth