



Mission District Historical Society Timeline

Highlights of the Society's 50 Year History

PRE-HISTORY

1969: A "Historical Group" comprised of five citizens lead by Ethel Ogle, the founding president of the Mission District Historical Society, commenced meeting on a regular basis "to plan for a Museum should the opportunity arrive." Members began to collect items of historical value to the community and store them at Ethel Ogle's home.

1971: During the Centennial year, the "Historical Group" successfully recruited new members and secured the historic 1907 former Bank of Commerce building for a community museum. Council agreed to pay the utilities and lease the building to the group for a \$1 a year.

1972: On March 22, the Mission District Historical Society was incorporated under the Societies Act of BC and elected Ethel Ogle as President, Dorothy Crosby as Secretary, Carmella Clark as Treasurer and George Jones, Amos Gibbard, Betty Weir, Guy Symonds, and Marion Sharpe as Directors.

Following incorporation, the Society raised funds to refurbish the building and develop displays from items previously collected, including the *Anthony Taulbut Collection* formerly managed by the Mission University Women's Club in cooperation with the Mission Board of Trade. On June 24, the Museum was officially opened, and by the end of October over 3500 visitors were recorded by the society.

1974-1976: Due to the growing collection and number of visitors to the Museum, a need developed for a curator. In 1974 Dorothy Crosby, a charter member of the Society, was appointed to the position. Through her keen interest and tireless efforts, she developed the archives as an auxiliary operation of the Museum. As a result, in 1976 the building became known within and outside the community as "Mission Museum and Archives".

1983-1989: Less than a decade later, the Society identified the need to secure additional space for housing the expanding archives. At a board meeting in January of 1983, a new trustee by the name of Carol Law introduced the idea to "allow space in a future library building to store the archives." This notion was supported and, when plans for a new library began to unfold in the succeeding years, the idea eventually became a reality.

1989: With the introduction of knowledge on standards for handling archives in the mid-1980s the Board established an Archives Advisory Committee to develop guidelines for the physical care and management of archival materials. Spear-headed by Val Billesberger, a graduate student in the Masters of Archival Studies Program at UBC, the committee forged ahead and established a separate administrative structure for the operation of the archives based upon internationally accepted archival principles and procedures. Among the major projects undertaken by the Committee was the construction of a storage room in the Museum for archival holdings. Although the area would not provide adequate space to support the operations of the archives, it



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would establish for the first time, a central, secure place to house the unique, irreplaceable archival holdings. Through a grant from the municipality, the assistance of local businesses and members of the Society, the room was built. On February 25th 1989 Mayor Sophie Weremchuk cut the ribbon to officially open the Mission Community Archives marking its transition to a distinct branch of the Society. This occasion was highlighted by a generous financial contribution by the Mission Foundation to acquire proper equipment and supplies to furnish the archives.

1992-1993: On May 9th, the largest cultural exhibition in the community's history was opened. It was organized and managed by Val Billesberger, volunteer Archivist, with the assistance of Frank Araki, Keith Billesberger, Koazi Fujikawa, Tomi Imakire, Mable McRae, Donna Rash, Vi Vachon, and Mary and Harry Vogel. The spacious six thousand square foot design included archways, walkways and alcoves that featured photographs, maps and manuscript material documenting the history of 80 families from Mission's Japanese Canadian community. Over 1300 people from across Canada, Europe, parts of the United States, Mexico, Japan and New Zealand attended the event. As a result of the project, one of the largest community-based archival collections on Japanese Canadians in British Columbia was established by the Society.

Under the leadership of Bill Kells (President 1991-1992), the Historical Society initiated a \$120,000 project to restore the exterior of the Museum & Archives building. Funds for the project were secured from the District of Mission, the British Columbia Heritage Trust, and the Canadian Job Strategy Program of Employment Canada. On December 5, 1992, the Society held a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the successful completion of restoring the building to what it looked like in circa 1910. Improvements made to the building included: the upgrading of the electrical and security systems; and the raising of the building two feet to provide more storage space in the basement and to rebuild the front steps as they were originally constructed in 1907. The following year, additional funds were secured by the Society to refurbish the space used by the Museum. New showcases, track lighting, carpeting, and storage shelving were installed and over 15,000 artifacts were entered into a new database program.

1994: In January of 1994, the Society received core funding from the District of Mission to hire the community's first paid Curator and Archivist. In April, Teresa Carlson, a post-graduate student in the Cultural Resource Management Program at UVIC, was hired as the part-time Curator of the Mission Museum. Valerie Billesberger, a long-time volunteer and graduate of the Masters of Archival Studies Program at UBC was hired as the part-time Archivist & Records Manager of the Mission Community Archives.

At the annual general meeting of the Society in May, the membership decided to establish a third branch that would be responsible for the preservation and protection of heritage buildings, sights, and features in the community. A Committee for the Heritage Buildings Branch was established and Bill Kells was appointed Chair.



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Members immediately commenced work on developing partnerships and soliciting support in the community to develop a Heritage Management Plan.

1994: The dream first envisioned by the Society in 1983 became a reality less than a decade later. Construction on a custom-designed 3,000 square ft. facility to house the Mission Community Archives was completed. The official opening on October 7th was attended by over 150 people including: John Bovey, Provincial Archivist and Carlene Whitney and Wendy Morris of Kamloops, the great grand-daughters of Anthony Taulbut, Mission's first curator and archivist. The first of its kind in the entire Fraser Valley, the new state of the art facility established optimal space to preserve and make accessible the documentary heritage of the community.

1995-96: In April of 1995, the Society undertook two initiatives to preserve the community's heritage. The Heritage Buildings Branch established a program "to identify buildings that are part of the community's heritage." Under the new program, signs were made available to the building owner or business operator. The Society also received funding through the Community Archives Assistance Program to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of implementing a coordinated, self-sustaining archives program for local public bodies within the community. As a result of these initiatives, the Society's constitution was amended in 1996 to formally establish the Heritage Buildings Branch and revise the mandate of the archives.

In July of 1996, the Mission Museum launched a new program called "Lemonade on the Porch". The weekly evening program featured living pioneers of the community telling their stories.

1998: On Saturday, February 28th, 1998 an official ceremony was held by the Historical Society to acknowledge all those who contributed to the state-of-the-art archival storage system installed in the records vault in the Mission Community Archives. In attendance were representatives from all three levels of government, including Mayor Randy Hawes, Grant McNally, MP, and Dennis Streifel, MLA. There were also individuals from numerous pioneer families, local businesses, and organizations, including Mission Historical Society lifetime members: Lorraine Bennett, Greta Brown and George Giles.

2000: The Archives commenced work on the *Mission 2000 Legacy* Project, aimed at acquiring and preserving a comprehensive record of Mission life from 1892 to 2000.

2001: Museum staff decided to revamp the main exhibit hall and develop a series of theme exhibits to showcase the collection. They also decided to use the majority of the hall space for an annual exhibit on a single theme.

The Mission Community Archives established a database to compile information on local veterans, including their birthdates, next of kin, enlistment year, military number, regiment or branch, and honors.

2002: Museum staff decided to revamp the main exhibit hall and develop a series of theme exhibits to showcase the collection. They also decided to use half of the hall space for an annual exhibit on a single theme.



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During Heritage Week 2002, the Museum officially reopened the main exhibit hall and new exhibit on the logging history of the Mission area: "Tackling the Timbers."

The Archives successfully established a *School Archives Program*, the first of its kind in the province. Every school in the district is participating in it.

2003: The District of Mission appointed the Society to serve as the community's Heritage Commission. The Society became responsible for providing advice and making recommendations to Municipal Council on issues associated with the protection and conservation of Mission's heritage resources.

A *Disaster Preparedness Mutual Aid Agreement*, the first of its kind in British Columbia, is signed by the Society in which the Mission Community Archives and nine other institutions in the Fraser Valley agree to pool their resources and physically aid one another in the event of an emergency threatening their archival resources.

During Heritage Week 2003, the Museum officially reopened the main exhibit hall and their first theme exhibit "Tackling the Timbers," on the logging history of the Mission area.

2004: The Museum launched its second theme exhibit "Mission Farms and Farmers" during Heritage Week 2003. "Mission Farms and Farmers" combines an exhibit and an extensive written history with photographs from the community and the Archives. The Museum also launched its first online Community Memories exhibit, a virtual format of "Tackling the Timbers."

At the second annual Abbotsford Community Services Cultural Diversity Award ceremony held in February, the Society won an award in the "innovative initiative" category for "promoting diversity in their community in a unique way." The award recognized the *Rites of Passage Project* by the Community Archives (1989-1992) which resulted in the establishment of one of the largest community-based archival collections on Japanese Canadian pioneers in British Columbia and the *Apni Kajani Project* undertaken by Mission Museum (1998-) "to develop understanding and to stress the importance of the Indo-Canadian community."

Recognized as a "model in the province," the Community Archives celebrated two anniversaries on October 7: its 10th year in the building on Second Avenue and the 15th year of its founding.

On November 1, 2004 the Archivist presented to Council a commemorative book entitled *Chieftains, Whistlestoppers, & Pacesetters Politicians of Mission 1892-1970* in recognition of the 35th anniversary of the amalgamation of the former Town of Mission City and the District of Mission.



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2005: During Heritage Week, the Mission Community Archives opened a 24 panel exhibit entitled *Sacred Places of Mission*. Featuring photographs and information on local churches, congregations, and religious orders, it was the first exhibit of its kind in the community.

The Society adopted its first motto: *Researching our History, Educating Our Community, and Preserving Our Heritage*

Abe Neufeld, Mayor of Mission presented the Archivist with a special award for the book on local politicians produced by the Archives to commemorate the 35th anniversary of the amalgamation of the Corporation of the District of Mission and the Corporation of the Town of Mission City.

In June, the Mission Community Archives was awarded a generous grant from the Mission Foundation to undertake its first digitization project.

The third theme exhibit “School Tales and Lunch Pails” about the first century of schools in Mission was launched during Heritage Week and in December 2005 the second Community Memories exhibit went online, a virtual format of Mission Farms and Farmers. The Museum’s first custom made display cabinet was completed and installed in the front room.

In December, a steering committee, including members of the Heritage Places Branch, in conjunction with the District of Mission, began working with a heritage consultant to complete a strategic plan for heritage conservation. This activity was a continuation of foundation work, including conducting community forums, coordinated by community facilitator Sharon Syrette.

2006: Heritage Week in Mission, February 20 to 26, again featured events throughout the District including an exhibit by both the Museum and Archives.

On Monday, March 20, the District of Mission Council received the District of Mission Strategic Plan and approved the creation of stand-alone Heritage Commission that would advise the District on heritage conservation matters. Val Billesberger was appointed a three year term to the Commission by Council and elected chair.

2007 The Mission Museum building (originally the Bank of Commerce) celebrated its 100th birthday. A special centennial quilt was created and put on display. Visitors were invited to the museum for tours, heritage games and crafts, face painting, storytelling, cake, and music broadcast by the SPARC Antique Radio Museum.

The Mission Community Archives staged a 20 panel exhibit featuring a remarkable collection of historic postcards donated by local resident Carl Klenk containing “never before seen images” of Mission & District, including: civic buildings, local



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- businesses, and early citizens of the community. It was held at the Mission Leisure Centre from February 18th to 24th and viewed by over 1,000 people.
- 2007** On November 9th the Mission Community Archives held a special event to honour the veterans of our community. A beautiful, locally hand-crafted commemorative case, designed and constructed by Mo Fossum was unveiled and Mission's own *Book of Remembrance* was ceremoniously placed in it through the participation of Mission Branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, local veterans and the Air Cadets. The two year project was made possible through the support of the Southwest Ratepayers Association.
- The Mission Museum and Mission Community Archives organized the first *Annual Winter Heritage Fair* which was attended by more than 100 visitors. The Museum had Christmas crafts, a special Christmas display in the parlour room and served hot apple cider outside on the porch while the Archives set up a Victorian parlour scene where families got their photos taken with Father Christmas; scrapbooked their photo; and obtained tips on how to care for photos from the Archivist.
- 2008** The Mission Museum held its first Annual Summer Kid's Club throughout July and August. Over 40 children between the ages of 5 and 12 attended. Held each Friday from 1:00-3:00PM, the kid's did crafts, engaged in group activities and played games all while learning about Mission's history.
- On August 1st, three students from Mission's Sister City Oyama, Japan visited the Archives where they viewed some of the Oyama Sister City Art Collection as well as the extensive materials on Mission Japanese pioneers housed in the Community Archives. The Archivist also obtained invaluable information from the students about some of the objects in the Collection, including their usage and purpose.
- A team of volunteers from Heritage Places Branch began work on compiling an Inventory of Historic Resources. Information obtained from the Archives and Museum, is being entered into a searchable database to make it accessible to people looking for details about the houses and the people who lived in them.
- The Museum staged its first Annual *Halloween after School Special* for kids that included a scavenger hunt and treats for all participants.
- The Archives assisted the Mission City Record with their centennial celebrations (1908-2008) by providing content for a full page weekly history column featuring "news from the past" and a 12 panel exhibit about the newspaper and news stories over the past 100 years. At the opening, the Archivist was presented with a certificate of appreciation "in recognition of exemplary service to the citizens of Mission."
- 2009** The Museum held its ever-popular 12th Annual Antiques Appraisal at which members of the public brought in heirlooms and curiosities to be analyzed by a professional appraiser for their historical and monetary value.



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Close to 60 new acquisitions were added to the Community Archives, including: the records of the Mission District Board of Trade (Chamber of Commerce), private archives of Olympian Eden Donatelli Green, the records of the Mission Downtown Business Association, and images by local photographer William “Bill” Matthews. Funds were received from the Mission Community Foundation and the Midday Rotary Club of Mission to assist with the purchase of equipment for digitizing, storing and making accessible the Archives holdings.

The Society's Heritage Week Committee organized the 8th annual week of celebrations in the community that included the 5th Annual Pioneer Social attended by approximately 100 people, a Heritage Tea held at Fraser River Heritage Park, and a display of student artwork based upon historic images from the Archives.

2010

The Mission Community Archives officially launched its redesigned website featuring on-line descriptions of the archival holdings and new content, including: *Street Stories* – the storied history behind those who have streets named after them.

On March 12th, Heritage Places staged a special event at Mission Library for the public to get their first view of the branch's new website and information on 30 important Historic Sites covering the area from Silverdale in the west to Lake Errock in the east featuring an attractive and easy-to-use format with new layout, new information, and new photographs.

The Mission Museum established a Facebook page to promote its program, services and collections.

2011

Through a donation from the Midday Rotary Club of Mission, the Museum's computer systems were completely upgraded and a new work station was established in the exhibit development office. These technological advances coincided with the completion of a multi-year project to inventory, re-house and catalogue 20,000 objects. The Museum also established its own YouTube channel.

Heritage Places Branch commenced exploring the history of sites remembered in the community for religious, educational, transportation and commercial activities. The website was further modified where visitors could view profiles of sites received updated.

Fifty biographies and photographs of Mission women were contributed for a Mission-Abbotsford celebration titled *100 Years, 100 Local Inspiring Women* to mark the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day.

2012

The Society celebrated the 40th anniversary of its incorporation. In February the Mission Community Heritage Commission honoured the Society with an award for its dedication to preserve, promote and educate others about the community's heritage since 1972.



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For the first time, the grounds surrounding the Museum were professionally landscaped and transformed into an Edwardian Garden which was officially opened on April 14th.

The Society received a District of Mission 120 anniversary grant to create online searchable databases of heritage resources housed in the Museum, Archives and Heritage Places Branch

2013 The Society partnered with the Mission & District Soap Box Derby Association to create an historic mural on the west side of the Community Archives building commemorating the 120th anniversary of the municipality. Designed by artists Dean and Christina Lauze, the mural design was based upon historical images housed in the Archives, drawing together the unique, multi-cultural legacy of Mission.

The Museum officially launched its new online searchable database featuring over 1,000 artifacts and the Community Archives launched its first social media account: a Facebook page.

2014: New acquisitions received by the archives included records of the Mission Regional Chamber of Commerce compiled to commemorate their 120th anniversary and over 300 original images from the Morton | Jones family of Deroche, documenting community life between c1900 and the 1950s.

Mission Museum held its first Historical Fashion Show fundraiser titled: “1920s Night: Fun, Fashion and Flappers! at the Mission Springs.

The Coordinator for Heritage Places Branch established standardized procedures for documenting and tracking the research steps for potential sites with heritage value.

2015: The Museum and Community Archives partnered to create a new interactive exhibit titled: *Picture Yourself on Main Street*, featuring a green screen on which visitors had their photo taken superimposed on an archival photograph of their choice. The exhibit won the 2015 Heritage BC contest!

Extensive research was undertaken by the Heritage Places Branch to document the schools in the Steelhead area, including how many existed, their names, and where they were located.

Over one hundred and eighty people attended the 20th anniversary celebrations of the Archives *Paths & Pathfinders: Women of Mission Program*, including: Chief Alice Thompson of the Leq'á:mel First Nation, MLAs Marc Dalton and Simon Gibson, Mayor Randy Hawes and Councilors: Pam Alexis, Carol Hamilton, Jim Hinds, Danny Plecas and Jenny Stevens. The event included special performances by the Mission Serenata Singers under the direction of Deborah Hanley and local musician Susan Dearing who composed and performed a song she wrote especially for the celebration.

2016: On October 22nd over 100 people, including dignitaries from all three levels of government, attended *Women of Style & Substance* – a joint event held to honour women in the community through the annual *Paths & Pathfinders: Women of*



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Mission Program by the Community Archives and to stage a *Then & Now* Fashion Show by the Museum.

Heritage Places Branch identified properties and structures for future inclusion in the Mission Community Heritage Register, including: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, St. Mary the Protectress.

- 2017:** Society was awarded a British Columbia Canada 150 Grant (2017-2018) to upgrade multimedia resources in the Museum gallery and to create an online archives digital repository. A new history of Mission book adapted by Daphne Sleight was published and both the Museum and Archives participated in Mission's 125th anniversary celebrations at Heritage Park. The Mission Community Archives received an award from the District of Mission Community Heritage Commission "*for their contribution to the promotion of Education and Promotion of Heritage.*"
- 2018:** Mission Community Archives completed Phase I of a multi-year project to digitize the Fraser Valley Record newspaper, created archives digital repository, digitized 10,828 pages, and had 400 students attended educational programs. Mission Museum staged 6 new mini exhibits and with the support of a BC-Canada 150 Grant installed 6 new interactive kiosks, a 55 inch video exhibit, additional gallery seating and two hands-on artifact stations for kids.
- Heritage Places conducted property searches and prepared a report for the 11 Wartime | Victory houses on 9th and 10th as well as prepared a Statement of Significance for St. Mary's the Protectress Ukrainian Orthodox Church to facilitate the work of the Mission Community Heritage Commission.
- 2019:** Impressive statistics compiled for the Historical Society at year end: Social Media Post Reach: 485,954; News Media Subscribers Reached: 201,991; Program Participants: 3,100; Items digitized: 1,000; and Volunteer hours contributed: 4,777. The Community Archives also celebrated its 30th anniversary with an OPEN HOUSE featuring the official opening of the first public kiosk in the Archives to access digital resources.
- 2020** The Society adapted to maintain its operations following the declaration of the pandemic and subsequent Health Orders by:
- adopting a COVID-19 Preventive Measures Policy to keep everyone safe
 - holding virtual meetings of the board to continue the Society's important work to collect, preserve and make accessible Mission's storied past
 - providing continued services remotely through the society's operations – Archives and Museum – to keep resources available to the public
 - launching the *Life at 2 Metres Project* by the Mission Museum and Community Archives to document local citizen's pandemic experiences.
 - staging a *Hybrid* (In-person & Virtual) Annual General Meeting to ensure members' ability to attend

The Mission Museum received the 2020 Celebration of the Arts Award in the category of Arts Advocacy as an organization.



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The Community Archives launched its own YouTube Channel to increase its social media presence and produced a series of videos including: *Meet me On Main Street*, *PASS IT ON: Caring for your Family Records* and *Our Schools Legacy: Mission, BC*.

During Culture Days, the Museum launched a 5 part video series on its YouTube Channel about *Using and Preserving Your Keepsakes* while the Archives officially launched its dedicated online searchable digital repository for the public along with two instructional videos about how to navigate the site as well as premiered on YouTube *HERSTORY: Extraordinary Women of Mission* to commemorate virtually the 25th anniversary of the Paths & Pathfinders Program.

2021

In addition to remote services, the Mission Museum and Community Archives reopened to the public by appointment on May 13th, 2021 in accordance with COVID-19 protocols to ensure the safest conditions for visitors, staff and volunteers.

The Community Archives further expanded its social media presence with the launch of an Instagram page to reach more people.

For the month long celebration of Culture Days, the Museum launched a new series of videos on Mission's health history while the Community Archives published online a collection of over 300 postcards acquired through the *Life at Two Metres Project* documenting the impact of COVID-19 on Mission residents; and premiered on YouTube a series of new videos including one to celebrate virtually the 2021 honourees of the *Paths & Pathfinders: Women of Mission Program*.

Prepared by Archivist, Val Billesberger
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