

## Duncan Stacey, Public Historian: 1945-2012

### Recollections

Tomorrow we will be opening a big display here at the Museum. The subject matter concerns the sinking of a ship in 1914.

The sea was a favourite subject of my former colleague Duncan Stacey (1945-2012). Duncan was a consummate museum historian, specializing in field work on the west coast of Canada. He did research on all facets of history of the west coast. Trained as a Parks Canada historian he was through much of his life a staunch supporter of the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society. He was a specialist in fishing history, never more at home than in walking up and down a dock in Vancouver, commenting, not always politely, about this fishing boat or another. Duncan worked on various fisheries cases as an expert witness. He was first class digger for information in the B.C. provincial archives and especially on his own turf, the Special Collections of UBC Library. He was not on staff there, but he managed to use the Special Collections facility for his applied research. He even had his own office, the door adorned by a pithy cartoon. On a visit to special collections in the fall of 2012 I was informed that he was a well-known and liked fixture there.

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He always came up with the “darndest” morsels of archival information. One of his collecting enthusiasms consisted of pamphlets on sexually transmitted diseases in wartime (Second World War), harbour-front Vancouver. The imagery invariably featured an alluring lady of the night, the painted lips, cigarette in hand. Duncan was a strong smoker himself. I still have a charming greeting card he sent me with the inscription: F-off I’m smoking.



*Photo: Duncan Stacey in his element, with friends beside a dock in B.C., probably in, around or after 2005. (Private Collection) / Duncan Stacey avec des amis sur un quai en Colombie-Britannique vers 2005. (Collection privée).*

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His explanation for the riot was the provocative behaviour of the RCMP (the E-division). They cleared out the building the same way certain hockey teams go into a corner, with no holds barred. The intemperate behaviour of the Mounties, he felt, contrasted with the more restrained and respectful behaviour of the Vancouver city police who at the same time were charged with putting an end to the occupation of the city’s Woodward’s store by the same crowds of organized left-wing unemployed workers. His view: this was a case not of men standing in awe of a leader or a leader in awe of them. It was a case of men in awe of themselves, a sort of basic solidarity *sur le plancher des vaches*, not unlike that depicted in Christian Carion’s film of the First World War (*Joyeux Noël*); a solidarity that reached across political and occupational barriers.



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Duncan did research contracts and found work in a print shop, the contracts were not always forthcoming. He wrote about fisherman, fisheries and Chinese workers, miners and Japanese internees. He was in every respect a B.C. man, unrepentant in his westward loyalties and in his contempt for the political killing fields of the east; unrestrained when taking aim at political correctness, an eastern disease in his opinion.

I first met Duncan in 1988. We were a small community of six consulting historians working on a new kind of historical exhibition, a streetscape. One was from Manitoba (he became an archaeologist); another from B.C., she had an Alberta Museum's handbook and later became a lawyer; a third was from Nova Scotia (he was an expert on and lover of ships); another was from Hull (she introduced us to the tender mercies of the terrace at *Les quatre jeudis*). There was Duncan, and then there was me, fresh from a sessional position at Laval and previously laid off by Parks Canada. I met with four of the colleagues upon arrival, whom I found to be an energetic action-focused group, we thought we knew everything. We settled into our work, we were three to an office, located in the far end of a building that was a converted high school at Cité des Jeunes. I found them to be friendly and intelligent. I had never truly met colleagues from elsewhere in the country. So I was impressed. Oh but wait until you meet Duncan! I was told. He eventually showed up. There had been some thought to having him move east but it never materialized. He would blow into town for a week or two at a time and make the rounds of the various establishments of the NCR, including the NAC. The extended team meetings including ourselves, colleagues from the division and other outside contractors would at times give rise to battle royals: between Duncan and perhaps another colleague representing the Eastern conference or the Central Canadian point of view.

The compressed nature of the job, we were working to a tight deadline, the novelty of the work, we used such new kinds of things as p.c.'s and fax machines, the whole setting, including an intense camaraderie, provided memorable moments for young consultants such as ourselves. The result, for us, was an apprenticeship of a distinct way of conducting our craft. Had we been familiar with the term at the time, we would have recognized ourselves as public historians. We eventually, all six of us, lost or left our consulting "jobs," heading in various directions. I ended up back here in a round-about way. He continued doing research for various clients, arriving in town on occasion. On a trip to Vancouver in 2004 I met up with him and visited some of his favorite haunts: the Chinese restaurant, UBC Special Collections, the docks behind his mother's place, the bar in the basement of the Legion. He drove me around in a pick-up truck for which the locks didn't work. He never bothered fixing the locks, because, he said, the junkies would only break the lock anyway. I met his mother, (Joyce) a first-class lady from London and Antwerp.

With Duncan the exercise of the historian's craft was caught up in a larger way of being. The work and the personality are part and parcel of the ensemble. Not everyone operates this way, not everyone is willing to so put his or her soul on the table. Duncan was not afraid to give us the full Monty of his personality and research. It was easy to get attached to such a person, at least for this kindred spirit. And, by God, it is going to be difficult to live without him.

Dr. John Willis, Aylmer, Québec

*Photo / Photographie : Sockeye sein fishing, 1946. City of Vancouver Archives AM1545-S3-: CVA 586-4681*

## Myra Rutherford, 1961-2014

In May of this year CHA/SHC members were shocked and saddened to learn of the passing of a colleague, and for many members a friend. Myra Rutherford's career as an association member, from her graduate student days to her position on the CHA/SHC council until her death, was a busy one, deeply satisfying, and an important part of a career she cherished. It was a role she not only shared with so many association members, she shared it with her husband, Rob, and with her son, Andrew as he grew up.

Myra's career as an historian began at the University of New Brunswick in both Saint John and Fredericton, where she began taking history courses with Rob. When her partner in life moved on with her to complete an M.A. in history at McMaster, they got married, with Myra making a seamless transfer to Mac from UNB exactly half way through her Honours undergraduate degree in history. Myra graduated from McMaster, *summa cum laude*. She had acquired by then a love of "doing history," and wanted more. An M.A. in history at York was followed by her doctoral studies, also at York. By then, she had already begun teaching at what would become a series of new campuses for Myra, new friends, and new adventures. This began even before she had developed her thesis topic, first at the Memorial University of Newfoundland in St. John's followed by, then in the early 1990s, Canada's newest university, the University of Northern British Columbia in Prince George. It was in northern British Columbia where she began research for her innovative work on missionary women and First Nations peoples. Myra returned to York to meet with her committee members and, ultimately, to defend her dissertation. Guidance for her thesis came from her much-respected and admired mentor, Bill Westfall. Bill also became another friend until her passing. Myra was like that. Wherever she taught, studied, or worked, she made enduring friends as well as colleagues who respected her commitment to the profession.

Her return to York came after a one-year contractually limited position in Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, followed by sessional teaching in Women's Canadian, and British Columbia history at the University of British Columbia's main campus. A pivotal year occurred next at the University of Saskatchewan where she began a post-doctoral fellowship in 2003 under the direction of another senior guide, and another friend very soon, Jim Miller. Myra's road to her tenure-track appointment at York in 2004 was always rich, but part of a working life she had to balance with her family commitments,



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from the time she was advanced in pregnancy with Andrew and defending her comprehensive exams in Vanier Hall to her final years with Rob and Andrew in Toronto and Sault Ste. Marie. Throughout, she continued to enrich others in her decade at her graduate school *alma mater* until she succumbed to ovarian cancer. Just weeks before her death, she maintained a busy schedule as York's Director of Undergraduate Studies. By then, Myra's too-short career was marked by considerable output as an historian that embraced Native/Newcomer relations, Aboriginal health, gender and embodiment, the history of medicine, and religion and mission histories in northern Canada. Her dissertation led to *Women and the White Man's God: Gender and Race in the Canadian Mission Field* (University of British Columbia Press, 2002). Myra is also well known for *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women In Colonial Canada*, edited by Myra and Katie Pickles (University of British Columbia Press, 2005); and *Caregiving On The Periphery: Historical Perspectives on Nursing and Midwifery in Canada* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). Along with her journal articles, book chapters, and conference presentations, she recently presented a paper on the Idle No More movement at an international conference in Jerusalem last year. Myra Rutherford was always up-to-date, enthusiastic, thoughtful, loyal, and had a great smile. An inspiration to the many undergraduate students she taught at York and to the graduate students who were drawn to her, she will be sorely missed by her family, friends, and by many CHA/SHC members.