



Looking at Metrotown from Deer Lake, 2016.

History of Burnaby

Resource Guide

Burnaby Village Museum

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Introduction

Burnaby Village Museum was never the site of a historical village. However, it is built on the stories of people that lived in what we now call the City of Burnaby. These stories come to us from records, objects, photographs, maps and oral histories. Sometimes these stories come to us from the silence between more well-known historical narratives.

We can recount many different histories or tell many different stories about the past. There is no one, correct understanding or explanation of what took place. The story we tell about the past depends on what we think is important today, and the evidence we use to construct historical narratives depends on the story we want to tell. Since the Museum opened to the public in 1971, our understanding of Burnaby's past has changed considerably as we have considered different perspectives and evidence.

Over the past few years, Museum researchers have looked into new areas. We have learned a great deal about the Indigenous peoples who lived in what became Burnaby and who remain connected to these lands and waters today. We have explored the lives of women and working people and have researched the contributions of Chinese Canadians. As we continue to conduct research into less-represented communities, this guide provides room for the diverse lives that shaped (and continue to shape) life in Burnaby.

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The Coast Salish World

Before Burnaby existed, its lands were home to the ancestors of several local Central Coast Salish Nations.

Today, the descendants of several local Central Coast Salish Nations continue to live in Burnaby and the adjacent municipalities that developed within their traditional territories. These are hənq̓əminə́m—speaking people, with the exception of the Skwxwú7mesh who speak Skwxwú7mesh sníchim and the Tsleil-Waututh who speak both. Since time immemorial, each of these Nations has celebrated its own unique culture and history, while remaining connected to the others by family, social life, traditions, protocols, and language. Each has oral traditions to explain their origins and ongoing connections to local lands. Indigenous history is invoked by features of the landscape such as Burnaby Mountain, Deer Lake and the Brunette River, and the resources belonging to those places.

Prior to contact, family, or lineage, was the most important aspect of hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh people's identity, as it determined where you could live, where you could hunt and fish, and what types of knowledge and special privileges you could inherit, like permission to perform a song or dance. Ancestral villages ranged in size, from dozens to hundreds of occupants. Some larger villages were home to over 1,000 residents. Visitors were usually welcomed, but they were told where they could go to fish, hunt and gather. Visitors were careful not to trespass on those places that were considered lineage property, and they knew that in return for access they might themselves become hosts at a future time.

As part of their seasonal round, families would travel to the Fraser River in the spring to fish for eulachon, and would return again in the late summer for the sockeye salmon runs. Many people travelled through Burnaby to reach the mouth of the Brunette River where it joined with the Fraser. Several winter villages, and many seasonal fishing camps, were located near this junction. Each year, the Fraser River brought together thousands of Central Coast Salish people at fishing sites along the length of the river. The places each family visited as part of their seasonal round were dependent upon many factors—family connections being prime among them.

Burnaby was host to many Indigenous village and resource harvesting sites. hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh oral history provides evidence of their long-term occupation of the area. There are dozens of known archaeological and heritage sites across the municipality of Burnaby. Some midden sites have been found along the northeast shoreline below Burnaby Mountain and near Deer Lake. However, this number vastly underrepresents past Indigenous presence here, reflecting only those sites that have been identified.

Chief Charlie qiyəplenəxʷ

hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh oral history documents the long history of Indigenous people in what would become Burnaby. xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam) knowledge holders recount how, in the 1800s, xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam) leader qiyəplenəxʷ gathered villages throughout the region together to defend against the Kwakwaka'wakw yəqʷəteʔχ (Lekwiltok) at what is now known as Second Narrows of Burrard Inlet. Several important village sites existed along the shores of Burrard Inlet in the precontact era, and the remains of ancestral villages, long-term campsites and other known heritage sites been found along the northern shoreline of Burnaby.

Cranberries grow in bog-like habitats, which were once prevalent in Burnaby's marshland areas.
Photography by Keith Weller, May 18, 2005.





This map helps us imagine what the lands now known as Burnaby would have looked like in the past. It shows known village sites, overland routes and cranberry harvesting areas. It also includes the locations of streams, lakes, rivers, inlets, and mountains today. *Burnaby Village Museum, 2017.*

Dispossession & Early Settlers, 1858-1880s

The arrival of settlers significantly changed the lives of Indigenous people.

Hundreds of years ago, there were more than 100,000 Coast Salish people living in British Columbia (BC), and adjacent Washington State. Usually, this type of population density is found in places where agriculture is practiced as it connects to the ability to store surplus food for winter months. Here, on the Northwest Coast, Indigenous people developed the technology to preserve salmon and other seafood, which sustained communities all year round. This changed drastically with the appearance of settlers* who had little regard for Indigenous ways of life.

Before the 1850s, there were but a few hundred Anglo-Canadian settlers residing in what would become BC. These early explorers and fur traders introduced disease that devastated the Indigenous population. Smaller communities affected by depopulation began to consolidate into larger villages with other survivors. These demographic changes only served to reinforce the belief of settlers that the Burnaby area was as a vast, empty wilderness. And since traditional Indigenous harvesting practices did not always lead to permanent alteration of the land, some settlers argued that such lands were “available” for settlement and “improvement,” which in their view meant clearing land for agriculture.

In 1858, the Fraser River gold rush prompted the British government to create the Colony of British Columbia. The British claimed control of the land and the people in it. Colonial officials and Royal Engineers soon arrived from England to establish New Westminster as the colony’s capital. Settlers were encouraged to claim title to land through a process called pre-emption. In colonial and later provincial law, pre-emption allowed people to claim a piece of land, and become the “owners” of that land by clearing trees and building homes.

Dispossession meant taking control of land and resources forcibly from Indigenous people. The Royal Engineers assisted this process as a military presence, and by surveying and building wagon roads and town sites that enabled newcomers to settle. North Road, Kingsway, Canada Way, and Marine Drive all began as overland routes that the



This ancestral knife may have been used to cut and prepare fish for drying racks. Found near the current site of Burnaby Village Museum, this knife is thousands of years old. Belongings like this tell us that the Deer Lake area was once an important village site for hənq̓́minə́m and Skwxwú7mesh people.

Burnaby Village Museum BV002.57.26

* For the purposes of this Resource Guide, the term "settler" is used for those who settled the land as a means of "improving" it and were mostly of British origin.

Royal Engineers built up as roads. The Engineers' surveys determined property lines to permit settlers to claim land as private property. The colonial government purposely excluded Indigenous people from the pre-emption process. The hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh speaking people of Burnaby never ceded title to their ancestral lands.

After BC joined Canada in 1871, the federal government enacted the Indian Act to further restrict the lives of Indigenous people and assimilate them into settler culture. The colonial government also issued logging permits to settlers. Through the 1870s and 1880s, much of Burnaby's southern side was logged. Logging disrupted the local plant and animal populations on which Indigenous people depended. The logged land was then ready for farming. Over a relatively short period of time, hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh peoples access to their traditional territories was restricted.

Renaming a Lake

Settlers' knowledge of local geography came directly from the deep knowledge of the land held by hənq̓əminə́m and Skwxwú7mesh people. In March of 1859, Indigenous guides helped Robert Burnaby, Colonel Moody's personal secretary, and several Royal Engineers up the Brunette River and into the forest to investigate a lake. Although Indigenous people had used the lake for thousands of years, Colonel Moody named the lake "Burnaby" after the man he believed discovered it. Robert Burnaby soon moved away, leaving a colonial legacy on a small lake.

Burnaby Lake, ca. 1900
Burnaby Village Museum BV003.61.3



Burnaby Beginnings, 1892-1913

Burnaby took shape as a network of small neighbourhoods, often around transportation routes.

Before 1892, settlers viewed Burnaby as simply the land between New Westminster and the new but rapidly growing City of Vancouver. Although a few men acquired property in the 1860s and 1870s, the extension of the Canadian Pacific Railway from Port Moody to Vancouver along Burrard Inlet in the 1880s made the land more accessible. Land speculators and businessmen bought property near the railway, establishing a small resort town on the Inlet near North Road. A few settlers established family farms on the outskirts of New Westminster.

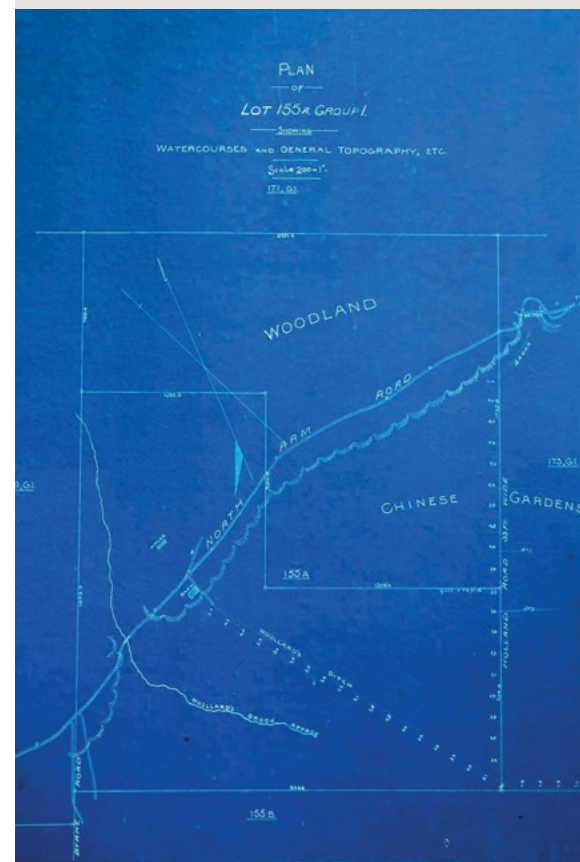
The municipality of Burnaby was established in 1891. In that year, Vancouver and New Westminster businessmen began building an interurban tram between their cities. They planned to charge passengers a fee to ride the electric train, but they also owned property along the route which they hoped to sell at a profit. Construction of the tram encouraged property sales, especially near Deer Lake. The tram owners encouraged resident landowners to form a local government so their property taxes would pay for local roads, bridges, and other improvements. A handful of British men set about to satisfy new provincial legal requirements to incorporate their new town. The provincial government officially recognized Burnaby in September 1892. Soon, large landowners began to subdivide and sell their property. Burnaby's new council encouraged additional settlement by persuading the province to sell government reserve land for a low price, thereby continuing the process of excluding Indigenous peoples from land acquisition. By 1900, about 500 people lived in Burnaby, many operating small but productive farms.

Indigenous families returned each year to campsites in Burnaby's Central Valley area where they gathered cranberries, hunted game birds, and fished for trout and salmon in local creeks and lakes. hənqəminəŋ and Skwxwú7mesh people often travelled back and forth through Burnaby between reserves or on their way to fishing and gathering sites near New Westminster.

Chinese Newcomers to Burnaby

Burnaby attracted many British newcomers, but also newcomers of other nationalities. Many tram construction workers had migrated from China and lived in Burnaby. Chinese Canadian Lee Dean was one of the few Chinese newcomers who owned property in Burnaby and managed a crew to cut firewood for the electric railway company. Other newcomers from China operated market gardens in the Big Bend area along the Fraser River in the early 1890s. The ability of Asian Canadians to purchase land was limited by discriminatory legal and social restrictions until after the Second World War.

An early 1900s survey map shows the presence of Chinese farms south of Marine Drive (North Arm Road) in Burnaby.
Burnaby Village Museum HV977.93.8



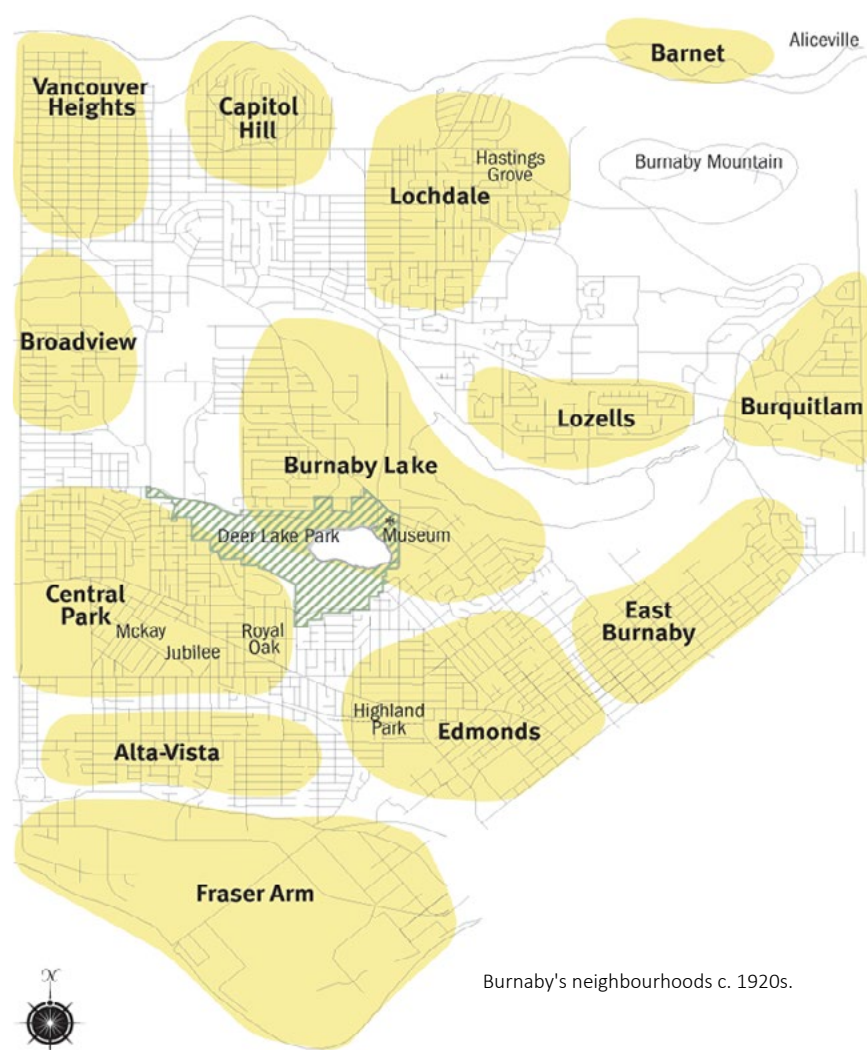
Burnaby started booming during the economic prosperity of 1900 – 1913, when a suburban real estate boom brought an estimated 14,000 residents to Burnaby. As before, early landowners subdivided and sold their property for good profits.

Burnaby soon took shape as a network of small neighbourhoods, often around transportation routes. South Burnaby neighbourhoods developed along the interurban tram and Kingsway, originally the New Westminster-Vancouver Road. Similarly, the north Burnaby neighbourhoods developed along Hastings Street. Burquitlam grew along North Road while Burnaby and Deer Lake residents built their homes near Canada Way, originally Douglas Road. The sawmills of Lozells depended on the railway built along the north shore of Burnaby Lake in 1904, and Fraser Arm (Big Bend) was well served by Marine Drive (originally North Arm Road), an interurban railway line, and the Fraser River itself.



Indian Agents

Burnaby's Peter Byrne was the region's Indian Agent from 1911-1921. Byrne farmed near the Fraser River in the early 1890s and later served as a municipal Councillor and Reeve (Mayor) of Burnaby. During this time period, the Canadian government adopted countless measures to control the daily lives of Indigenous peoples through the Indian Act. Still in effect today, the Indian Act was responsible for the creation of "Indian Bands" to manage the affairs of Indigenous people, and for forcing them onto small Indian reserves away from their traditional territories in places like Burnaby. Indian Agents like Byrne were charged with controlling many aspects of Indigenous people's lives in Canada, and had a devastating effect on Indigenous communities.



Burnaby's neighbourhoods c. 1920s.

City of Burnaby Archives 316-007

A few residents could afford small country estates, but most were not wealthy and bought inexpensive lots on which to build modest homes and plant large subsistence gardens. However, land ownership was largely restricted to European residents through a series of discriminatory laws and social practices. Residents travelled to work in the nearby cities using the trams, trains, and roadways. As a bonus, domestic electricity was available near the electric tram lines. Others came to work in Burnaby industries, including the railways, light manufacturing plants, and sawmills. Some operated large fruit and vegetable gardens. A few opened small shops in the business districts along Kingsway, Hastings, and Edmonds/6th Street.

Many of these early residents purchased undeveloped land and improved them through their own labour. Most plots were full of large stumps and overgrown brush. Salvage loggers, often men of Chinese, Japanese, South Asian, or Indigenous origin (who were largely restricted to working in very low-paying industries), sometimes cut the stumps into bolts for local shingle mills. Landowners had to remove the last remains of the stump, sometimes blasting them out with “stumping powder” or dynamite. Once land was cleared, homes could be built and gardens planted. Families often built a rough foundation, raised a tent over it, and lived there until they had enough money to buy materials to complete their home.

Chinese, Japanese and South Asian newcomers worked in mills, such as the North Pacific Lumber Company mill at Barnet, which operated from 1899 to 1929 and completely closed in 1931. *Vancouver Public Library S 7642*



Working Class Suburb, 1914-1929

Burnaby's post war boom saw an influx of working people of modest means.

Burnaby became well established in the early 1900s. Real estate developers had initially promoted the new community as a place for small farms, but it soon grew into a suburb of Vancouver and New Westminster. Although new residents were diverse in some ways, most of them were working people with European roots.

Burnaby's early boom years ended during the First World War. The population declined by some 2,000 as men enlisted in large numbers to serve overseas; not all returned home. The local economy slumped, although a few war industries set up in Burnaby. Chemical and munitions factories and even a top-secret submarine construction plant operated along the Burrard waterfront.

Following the war, Burnaby settlement resumed; some 12,000 people moved to Burnaby before the end of the 1920s, doubling the pre-war population. As earlier, many were working people seeking inexpensive property on which to build small homes and large gardens. 65% of Burnaby men worked as labourers, teamsters, carpenters, printers, longshoremen, or in other manual trades. Some worked right in Burnaby, which had a couple of large shingle mills, a handful of small shingle mills, the Barnet Sawmill (after 1925), a foundry, a chemical plant, electrical sub-stations, and several railway systems. Others commuted to Vancouver and New Westminster, or worked even further away.

Women in working-class Burnaby also participated in the job market. Some worked as sales clerks, secretaries, or bank tellers. A few operated their own shops, and a small number could be considered professionals. Those without paid jobs usually worked hard to maintain a home, including child rearing and housekeeping. They tended backyard fruit and vegetable gardens, and raised chickens or other small livestock. Although men's farming organizations in Burnaby had declined by the 1920s, Women's Institutes—a popular organization for rural women—thrived in several neighbourhoods to provide social and practical support, and to provide some community leadership.

An Early Female Entrepreneur

Mabel Hawkshaw was Canada's first woman bank teller as well as former editor and managing director of the "Burnaby Post" newspaper in the 1920s and 1930s and wrote articles for city dailies under the pen name of "Percy Egerton Sterling". Mabel was also a member of the Juvenile Court in Burnaby.

Burnaby Village Museum BV996.6.289



Burnaby had low property taxes, but did not provide many local services. Although Burnaby began providing municipal water service in 1912, from water piped from the Seymour River Valley across Burrard Inlet, property owners had to pay for their own hook-ups. Most residents had to install their own sewage facilities, which generally meant septic fields or, not uncommonly, outhouses. Neighbourhood ditches often filled with sewage. Other than main thoroughfares like Kingsway and Hastings, most roads remained unpaved despite increased automobile traffic. However, Burnaby did provide a growing number of schools to accommodate families with children.

Shop keepers and business owners along Hastings Street and Kingsway promoted their respective neighbourhoods, dividing the municipality into distinct north and south identities; no driveable roads joined north and south Burnaby directly. After 1923, vehicle traffic jumped considerably in south Burnaby when Kingsway joined the American Pacific Highway network, increasing traffic flow and supporting

garages and gas stations. In the more affluent north Burnaby neighbourhood of Vancouver (Burnaby) Heights, residents sponsored tennis and lawn bowling clubs. Deer Lake remained an élite mostly British neighbourhood whose residents enjoyed automobiles, radio, telephones, central heating, and hobby farms.

As neighbourhoods expanded, federal policies increasingly restricted the movement of Indigenous people, cut them off from their traditional resources, and sent their children away to residential schools. Despite the resistance of Indigenous leaders, hənq̓əminəm and Skwxwú7mesh people were effectively isolated from their Burnaby resource and heritage sites, many of which were being overrun by expanding farmland, industry and urban development. Taken together, decades of assimilationist policies fundamentally disrupted the transmission of cultural knowledge, including knowledge about Burnaby lands and resources, for generations. This loss still profoundly affects communities today.



Oakalla Prison Farm

In 1912, the provincial government opened a prison on crown land adjacent to Deer Lake. Men (and later women) convicted of crimes worked on the farm as a form of rehabilitation. Although hailed as a modern and progressive institution when first opened, the prison later developed a reputation as a particularly rough prison, where some prisoners endured isolation and forced labour. Up until 1959, executions took place at the prison. Among the many people who served time at Oakalla were political prisoners, including labour activists, religious minority groups, and Indigenous people who refused to obey discriminatory laws.

City of Burnaby Archives 370-720

Throughout the 1920s, newcomers continued to arrive from across Canada, the United States, other parts of Europe (particularly northern Europe), and Asia. Europeans fluent in English worked almost everywhere, but often lived close to others who shared a similar cultural background. For example, Scandinavian fishermen and fisherwomen lived along the Fraser River while Ukrainians formed a pocket near the west end of Burnaby Lake. Immigration from South Asia had declined considerably, partly because of restrictive Canadian immigration laws and partly because many South Asians had returned to India during the First World War to oppose British rule. However, a few South Asian Canadians lived in the outskirts of north Burnaby, close to small sawmills and other industries that hired them as poorly-paid labour. They could not, however, work for the new Barnet Lumber Company because of its new policy of “white labour only.” Japanese Canadians worked in Burnaby’s small sawmills and industrial sites such as the Nichols Chemical Plant. However, diplomatic arrangements between Canada and Japan kept immigration low.

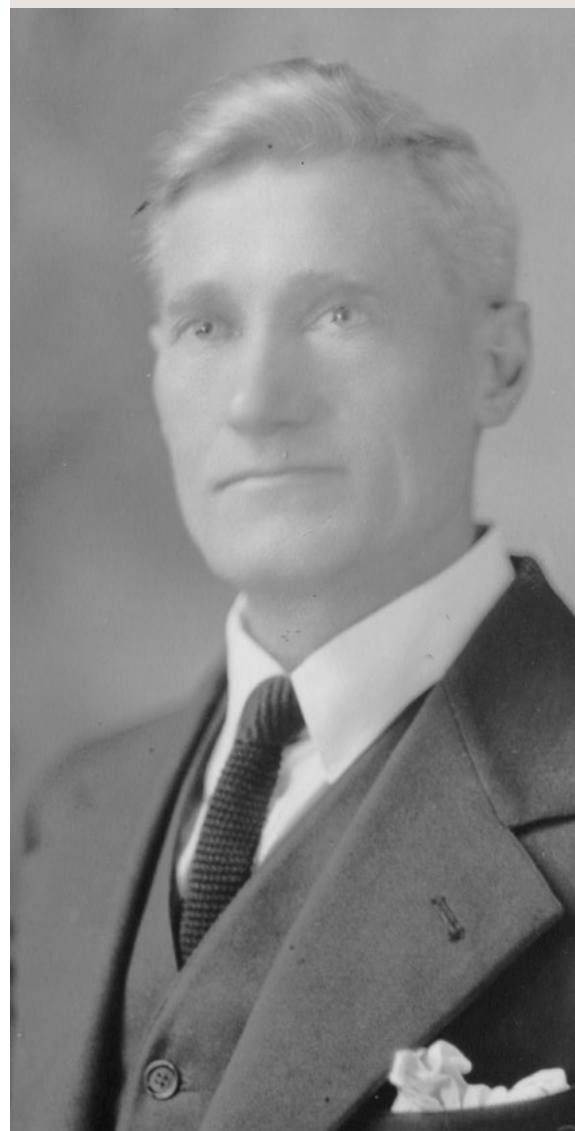
Chinese immigration had also slowed because of a prohibitive tax on those entering the country (a “head tax”), and, after 1923, federal laws that banned most Chinese immigration. Nonetheless, Chinese Canadian market gardeners, mostly men, persisted and helped populate the Fraser Arm (Big Bend) neighbourhood and other parts of Burnaby. Farmers sold their produce door-to-door, while a few merchants opened successful green grocery stores in north Burnaby. By the 1920s, Chinese Canadians dominated the vegetable trade, despite punitive trade licence fees intended to reduce their prosperity.

Not surprisingly, Burnaby’s working-class residents influenced the local political climate. By the 1920s, voters were beginning to elect socialist and labour politicians to the Burnaby council and in 1924 they elected a labour candidate to the provincial legislature. In 1927, supporters built the Jubilee Labour Hall in south Burnaby as a rallying centre for labour education and political organization.

Left-Wing Roots

Ernest Winch came to BC in 1909 as a brick-layer, settling in south Burnaby with his family. He tried unsuccessfully to win a seat on Burnaby’s council as a socialist candidate and soon began working to organize trade unions. He played an important role in creating the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation Party in 1932 (the forerunner to the New Democratic Party). Burnaby residents re-elected Winch as their CCF member of the provincial legislature for twenty years.

City of Burnaby Archives 514-018



From Bust to Boom, 1930-1945

The Great Depression hit Burnaby hard, but residents found creative ways to survive.

The prosperity that Burnaby saw during the 1920s was fragile and crumbled during the 1930s. Land speculators failed in their development projects and defaulted on taxes. Burnaby's council saw tax revenue decline even before the crash of the New York Stock Market in October 1929. When boom economies world-wide felt the impact of the crash, businesses collapsed, workers lost jobs, and cities lost tax revenue. Burnaby was hit hard by the Great Depression, but responded in unique ways.

Burnaby's Reeve, William Pritchard, and the municipal council worked to help Burnaby's growing unemployed. Council raised money to finance local projects (including the future Lougheed Highway) and insisted on paying workers a fair wage. Councillors ensured that local industries employed local men (albeit still only those of European backgrounds). Legally, towns and cities were responsible for welfare payments, but Burnaby's relief fund dwindled as homeowners defaulted on their property taxes. Little of the federal

emergency relief money made it to Burnaby despite Pritchard's efforts. As Burnaby's unemployed grew desperate, council illegally used reserve funds to pay relief. Council began to issue credit notes instead of cash, hoping to prevent a crisis. Then, in the autumn of 1932, council purposely defaulted on a loan payment to protest inaction by other levels of government. Burnaby's affairs were taken over by the Province of BC, who ran the municipality through an appointed commissioner until 1943.

Pritchard and his supporters also encouraged the self-sufficiency of Burnaby residents. Pritchard negotiated with unemployed men and let them meet in the municipal hall. Homeowners who lost their homes because they couldn't pay their taxes could rent their homes and gardens back. Council tolerated squatters along Burrard Inlet. Council also supported the Army of Common Good, a local self-help organization that proved remarkably successful.



The First Credit Union

The Army of Common Good formed in 1931 in Burnaby to support its members through exchange of goods and services. Inspired by similar groups formed elsewhere, the Army had over 700 members within the first few months. Members pooled their personal resources to grow food, cut firewood, exchange services, and distribute relief payments. Council lent the group public lands for gardens and the use of municipal equipment. Buoyed by initial success, the Army opened co-operative stores and then credit unions. BC's first operating credit union was in south Burnaby.

Burnaby Village Museum HV976.46.1

Many Burnaby residents also took up the cooperative spirit independently. Those who remained economically stable opened back-door soup kitchens to feed the hungry, or distributed excess seed for gardens. Fishermen and fisherwomen gave away fish. Churches increased their charity work. Some merchants, like green-grocer Y. Hoy on Hastings Street, extended credit or accepted credit notes. People fished in Burrard Inlet and the Fraser River, or hunted and collected food in the large undeveloped areas of Burnaby. Although a few workers conducted strikes against their employers for better pay, they were not always successful.

Burnaby's appointed commissioners tried to attract new industry to Burnaby. Between 1934 and 1939, Burnaby acquired another petroleum refinery, a brick and glass company, and a Ford assembly plant on Kingsway. In 1938, Burnaby sold the Barnet Mill (expropriated through tax default) to businessman Kapoor Singh Siddoo, who used a Caucasian agent to overcome restrictions against sale of property to immigrants from India. To save money and suppress unemployed protestors, Burnaby replaced its municipal police force with the BC Provincial Police in 1935.

Full recovery from the Depression came only in late 1939 with Canada's entry into the Second World War. Industrial production in Burnaby and across the region jumped, creating high levels of employment and a new mood of optimism, despite the crisis in Europe. Many Burnaby residents enlisted in the armed forces and went overseas, leaving women to fill jobs vacated by men. Women also helped by purchasing government bonds, raising donations through dances and card tournaments, and by growing victory gardens to reduce demand on the national food supply. Luxury items like sugar and gasoline were strictly rationed.

When Japanese naval aircraft bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941, the war suddenly felt closer to home. Burnaby neighbourhoods formed Air Raid Precaution groups to watch for enemy activity and prepare for an air attack. School children collected valuable recyclables and practiced first-aid and air raid drills. The Canadian government forced the few Japanese Canadian families living quietly in Burnaby to leave the coast, with many sent to internment camps. In contrast, some young Chinese Canadian men from the region found their way into the Canadian military, including some who eventually worked undercover in Asia.



Working Hard in the Depression

During the Depression, many Burnaby workers lost their jobs and were unable to pay taxes on their homes. Burnaby Council made arrangements for the male property owners to work off their taxes. Some worked by cutting down the huge stumps left after logging. The men would split the stumps, cut them into 4 foot lengths and then take the wood to Burnaby schools for their wood furnaces. Burnaby Council provided raincoats to all workers to help support their new, physical work.

Frank Eshelby's raincoat, from the Burnaby Village Museum collection, BV998.57.1



Displacement and Dislocation

Nichols Chemical Plant at Barnet was one of the few Burnaby employers of Japanese Canadians. Sukegoro Yasui emigrated from Japan in 1919 and was hired by the Nichols Plant. The family moved to the small community of Barnet and shared a bunkhouse with five other Japanese families. Sukegoro was laid off from his job after the Nichols plant received an order from the Federal government to lay off all Japanese workers. The family was eventually displaced as part of the Federal government's removal of Japanese Canadians from the coast. After being placed to work on a sugar beet farm in Iron Spring, Alberta for three years, the family eventually settled permanently in Kingston, Ontario. Like many displaced Japanese Canadian families, they did not return to BC for many generations.

*Yasui family, 1918.
Courtesy of Yasui family.*

Burna-boom, 1946-1970

Following the Second World War, Burnaby became one of Canada's fastest growing suburbs.

All the activity in Burnaby during the Second World War heralded even greater changes. The economy remained strong following the war, so when military personnel began returning home, Canada—and Burnaby—was ready. Following the war, governments embraced a larger role in the economy, as the war necessitated strict government planning and controls. Canada was becoming a “welfare state.” Housing was an important new government policy, and Burnaby had land for houses. At the same time, Burnaby experienced economic prosperity and some began to adopt a more liberal attitude toward its diverse residents.

As the war drew to an end, military personnel returned to Canada looking for safe and comfortable homes. Burnaby activists had demanded affordable housing for veterans and working people, and Burnaby's reinstated council agreed. One of Canada's first post-war housing developments began in 1946 in north Burnaby. In eighteen months, Willingdon Heights had become a model subdivision comprising nearly 550 homes between Gilmore and Willingdon Avenue, and Parker and Gravelly Streets. The first veterans and their families took up residence in 1947.

Houses under construction at the intersection of Napier Street and Willingdon Avenue in the Willingdon Heights subdivision, 1947.

City of Burnaby Archives 010-032



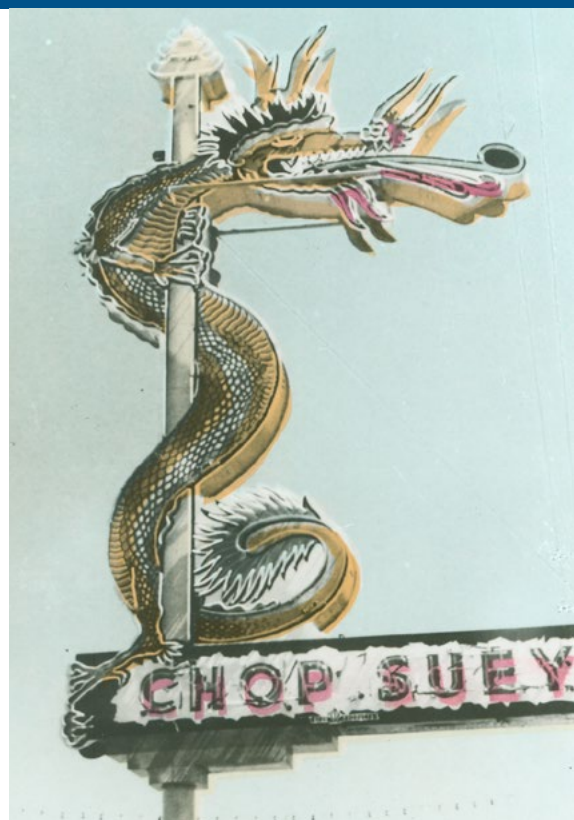
In 1943, Burnaby returned to elected government. The new council agreed that all municipal workers had to be members of the Civic Employees Union, creating the first “closed shop” for municipal workers in a western Canadian city. And council agreed to a referendum to abolish the system of electing councillors by ward, which was partly blamed for the earlier troubles.

Once wartime restrictions lifted, other new subdivisions followed. Many of them included large, multi-bedroom houses with the latest features, including electricity, plumbing, sanitary sewer service, telephones, refrigerators, central heating, and bus service on paved roads. However, the subdivisions were built to appeal to working people with cost-effective designs chosen from a national housing catalogue.

During the post-war boom, thousands of working people moved to the suburbs for the “good life.” Burnaby’s population tripled from 30,328 in 1941 to 100,157 in 1961. Many women left or lost their war-time jobs and some returned to working at home in domestic roles, particularly as mothers of the baby boom. These families demanded—and received—schools, parks, playgrounds, and Burnaby’s first hospital. By the time the baby boom began graduating from high school in the 1960s, Burnaby was home to the BC Institute of Technology and Simon Fraser University. As before, many fathers continued to commute into Vancouver or New Westminster, but now they rode busses and drove cars after the interurban trams stopped passenger service during the 1950s. Although car ownership grew slowly, nothing symbolized the new car culture more than the freeway that opened in 1964 and split Burnaby down the middle.

Burnaby’s post-war boom had another, more liberal face as the community seemed ready for more amusements. Thanks to increased personal income, residents flocked to bowling allies like the Westminster Rollerway on Edmonds Street, nightclubs like the Gai Paree on Kingsway or the Flame Supper Club on Grandview Highway, and drive-in theatres like the Cascade on Grandview Highway. The Astor Hotel on Kingsway became Burnaby’s first premises licensed to sell alcohol in 1955 and the Admiral Hotel on Hastings became Burnaby’s second a few years later.

The new, more liberal attitude was also apparent in the relations between people of diverse cultures. Immigrants from continental Europe increased, and quickly made their way to Burnaby. Chinese Canadian veterans were eligible for government loans to purchase farmland through the Veteran’s Land Act. Several bought land in the Fraser Arm/Big Bend neighbourhood.



Burnaby’s Chinese Food Heritage

The Golden Dragon Restaurant on Kingsway, was a Chinese Canadian restaurant that opened in September 1950. The community staple was known for its neon dragon sign that advertised “Chop Suey”. One side of the kitchen served Chinese foods, while another served Canadian dishes. Chinese cuisine such as rice would be served with chopsticks, while steaks, a more western dish, would be served with knife and fork. Customers could receive lessons from the servers on how to use chopsticks.

The Golden Dragon symbolized a return to more disposable income, more leisure time, and more of the good life. It also brought more favourable attention to Burnaby residents with roots in China. By the 1950s, ethnic origin was no longer a formal barrier to becoming a Canadian citizen.

Burnaby Village Museum BV004.7.10

Chinese Canadian adults also won voting rights in 1947 when Canada repealed its laws prohibiting Chinese immigration. Kapoor Singh Siddoo, owner of the Kapoor Sawmill at Barnet, was one of many Sikh activists who successfully argued that South Asian people should receive full citizenship including voting rights. South Asian adults also won voting rights in 1947, first nationally and then provincially and municipally. Japanese Canadians were permitted to return to the coast in 1949, and obtained voting rights. However, many were slow to return as they had established new homes elsewhere. The Municipality of Burnaby repealed its racist bylaw in 1953 which restricted the hiring of Asian employees. Repealing the bylaw was prompted when the Municipality hired Richard S. Lee for work in the Clerk's Office. Lee was the first Chinese Canadian to work for Burnaby. It would take many more years, however, for Indigenous people to get better consideration by governments and the newcomer population more generally.

Industry also expanded during the 1950s and 1960s, confined to zones established well before the war. South Burnaby welcomed large distribution warehouses like Kelly Douglas wholesale foods, manufacturing plants like Dominion Glass, and retail outlets like Simpson Sears. Heavy industry along Still Creek in the Broadview area and petroleum refineries on Burnaby Mountain expanded; Trans Mountain Pipeline began receiving Alberta oil in 1953. Processing plants like Sidney Roofing and Paper opened along the Fraser River. Agriculture was in fast retreat, although new bylaws in the 1960s recognized and protected areas in Fraser Arm and east of Burnaby Lake for agricultural use. New shopping centres at Brentwood and Lougheed added to the prosperity of small businesses during the 1960s, creating a new sort of business class that sought international ties through the Kushiro (Japan) sister-city agreement.

Burnaby's political preferences became evident as voters frequently elected social democrats to provincial and federal office, although sometimes by slim margins. The same preference repeated at the municipal level. These elected politicians worked to provide residents with public services from street lights and sewers to skating rinks and libraries, but also advocated for universal health care, human rights, and economic reform.

Urban planners in the late 1960s suggested ways that Burnaby could manage growth and avoid urban sprawl, providing plans that guided future councils and developers. The City began an urban planning direction to focus density in several key areas, which would eventually spread out density over town centres across Burnaby. This plan has been a guiding principle of Burnaby's growth ever since.

The Boom Years

The Flame Supper Club opened in 1947 on Grandview Highway (now Canada Way) near Boundary Road. It provided dining and dancing, and hosted corporate parties. It became famous locally for its comic foreground novelty photographs. For many years it was a "bottle club," meaning that it sold soft drinks only—you had to bring your own alcohol. The Flame was sold in 1971.

Burnaby Village Museum BV019.1.1

A Souvenir Comic Photo



From the **FLAME SUPPER CLUB**

Cosmopolitan Burnaby, 1970s-1980s

During the 1970s and beyond, Burnaby transitioned away from resource processing and into a thriving metropolis.

Burnaby in the 1970s had a new identity. It had grown and prospered in the preceding decades, and had the trappings of a modern city: an active population of about 125,000, a robust system of schools, a university, a hospital, recreation centres, art and culture centres, and pockets of high-rise apartment buildings. Although not legally a city (this would come in 1992), it had a Mayor and Aldermen instead of a Reeve and Councillors. Metrotown was recognized not simply as a Burnaby shopping mall but as a regional urban centre midway between Vancouver and Surrey. Burnaby co-hosted the Canada Summer Games in 1973, which left a legacy of local recreation and serious amateur and professional competition. It opened a large, open-air museum called Heritage Village (later the Burnaby Village Museum) to commemorate BC's confederation with Canada. Burnaby was no longer simply a commuter suburb but an integral part of the Greater Vancouver Regional District.

At the same time, Burnaby had lost some of its earlier identity. The earlier, separate neighbourhoods had largely joined together during the 1960s, blurring their distinctive features. Some of the old "tram stop" neighbourhoods slipped into social and economic decline as new developments took precedence. The vacant lots of stumps, brush, and small trees largely disappeared; after 1980, children were more likely to play in groomed parks. Although homes still had large backyard gardens, the agricultural age had largely passed. However, the creation of the province's Agricultural Land Reserve in 1973 offered protection to the North Arm/Big Bend agricultural lands.

Burnaby also acquired a much more cosmopolitan population. Migration from Vancouver increased ethnic diversity, particularly as people of Italian and South Asian descent moved to Burnaby in larger numbers around 1980. New Canadian immigration and refugee policies made it easier for people of wide-ranging ethnic backgrounds to enter Canada or sponsor family members. People from all corners of Europe and Asia made it to Burnaby during the 1970s and 1980s and beyond. In 1979, Ismailis from East Africa established Canada's first Ismaili congregation in Burnaby, building a large jamatkhana (community centre) on Canada Way. Burnaby made itself more welcoming to less affluent newcomers through several low-cost housing projects, often in partnership with provincial and federal authorities.



Taking a Stand

Eileen Dailly is best remembered as the person who brought an end to corporal punishment in BC's public schools. In 1956, Eileen Dailly left her career as a Burnaby school teacher to seek election to the Burnaby school board. She handily won the election, and was re-elected to the board consistently until 1966 when she decided to run for the provincial legislature in the newly created riding of Burnaby North as a member of the New Democratic Party (NDP).

When her party won the provincial election in 1972, she became the Minister of Education, and BC's first female Deputy Premier. Dailly successfully banned corporal punishment in 1973, which was a practice that permitted teachers to punish students by hitting them with straps, wooden paddles, and rods.

Royal BC Museum i-32450

Despite Burnaby's growing cosmopolitan and affluent appearance, locals frequently continued to elect social democrats to public office who championed the comfort of local working people and defended human rights. For example, North Burnaby elected Svend Robinson in 1979, who distinguished himself as a staunch supporter of human and environmental rights. Although politics was never without debate, Burnaby voters continued their earlier pattern of support for local governments who promised to balance economic security with social and environmental concerns. Many trade unions established or maintained offices in Burnaby.

The 1970s saw a "post-industrial" shift which resulted in a decline in resource processing facilities like sawmills and a rise in value-added and high-tech services. For example, the Dominion Bridge manufacturing plant on Still Creek closed its doors in the late 1970s only to re-open a few years later as Bridge Studios, one of North America's premier film production sites. Although elements of the earlier industries remained, much of it was displaced by skilled and professional services in trades, telecommunication, and business administration. Simon Fraser University and the BC Institute of Technology helped to boost research and development in new areas of high technology. Burnaby's retail sector also grew with shopping centres at Brentwood, Lougheed, and Metrotown. Metrotown in particular benefitted from the new regional transportation system Skytrain, opened in 1985 as a legacy of the world fair hosted in Vancouver the following year. Skytrain, which largely followed the route of the earlier interurban tram, connected Burnaby's retail services with shoppers across the region.

An Era of Environmental Protection

By the 1970s, Burnaby Lake had become a swampy, shallow lake with widespread invasive species. To save the lake, the Burnaby Lake Advisory Association built a system of trails around the lake to build community support for its clean up and advocated around the community about the natural values of the lake. The Association also began building nest boxes to replace the trees that the birds used to nest in in hopes that the birds would return to the lake. Today, Burnaby Lake has the highest population of wood ducks in the Lower Mainland. The City of Burnaby created the Burnaby Lake Regional Park in 1979 from land it had purchased over several decades.

City of Burnaby Archives 304-004



Burnaby has continued to grow since the 1980s and received its “city status” in 1992, one hundred years after incorporation. Today, Burnaby is the third-largest city in BC by population. The demographics of Burnaby are widely diverse, with visible minorities making up 63.6% of the total population, and European-Canadians making up 34.6%. The Indigenous population of Burnaby makes up 1.8% of the population from a diverse and vibrant urban Indigenous community with members originating from many different First Nations communities—often from outside of Metro Vancouver, and even the province.

Burnaby today is surrounded by several Indigenous communities, including the Katzie, Kwantlen, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, Semiahmoo, Skwxwú7mesh, Tsawwassen, Tsleil-Waututh, and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam). Burnaby is now a large, urban city. While urbanization largely prevents hənq̓əminəŋ and Skwxwú7mesh people from harvesting traditional resources from the land, ancestral ties to the land and its resources remain strong. Community members continue to demonstrate their ongoing stewardship over local lands and waters, while sharing their knowledge of traditional places and practices with younger generations.

Tsleil-Waututh community members
paddling Burrard Inlet, 2014.
Tsleil-Waututh Nation, Blake Evans, 2014



Where can you learn more?

The Burnaby Village Museum has many resources available through its resource library, in research files, and online at HeritageBurnaby.ca.

Books

Indigenous History in Burnaby Resource Guide available at burnabyvillagemuseum.ca

The Suburb of Happy Homes, Burnaby Centennial Themes.

Leonard J. Evenden (edited by). Burnaby: Burnaby Centennial Committee of Simon Fraser University, c1995.

Available at Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 EVE

Available at the City of Burnaby Archives: MSS187-012

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 Sub

Pioneer Tales of Burnaby. Michael Sone (edited by). Burnaby: Corporation of the District of Burnaby, c1987.

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 SON

Available as an eBook online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 Pio

In the Shadow by the Sea: Recollections of Burnaby's Barnet Village.

Harry Pride and Jim Wolf (edited by). Burnaby: City of Burnaby, c2004.

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 PRI

Available as an eBook online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 Int

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 Lux

Burnaby's Heritage: An Inventory of Buildings and Structures.

Donald Luxton and Jim Wolf. Burnaby: City of Burnaby, c2007.

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 LUX

Available as an eBook online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 McG

Burnaby: A Proud Century: A Historical Commemoration of Burnaby's Centennial.

Pixie McGeachie. Vancouver: Opus Productions, c1991.

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 MCG

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 McG

Bygones of Burnaby: An Anecdotal History.

Pixie McGeachie. Burnaby: Century Park Museum Association, 1976.

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 MCG

History of Burnaby and Vicinity. George Green.

Shoemaker, McLean & Veitch, 1947

Available at the Burnaby Village Museum, by appointment: 971.133 GRE

Available as an eBook online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Available at Burnaby Public Library: 971.133 Gre

Films

Eileen Dailly: Taking a Stand. Burnaby Community Heritage Commission 125 Video Collection, 2018.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Saving Burnaby Lake. Burnaby Community Heritage Commission 125 Video Collection, 2018.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Saving the Salmon: The Brunette River Story. Burnaby Community Heritage Commission 125 Video Collection, 2018.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Burnaby's Chinese Canadian Market Gardens. Burnaby Community Heritage Commission 125 Video Collection, 2018.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Troubled Times: Burnaby in the 1930s. Burnaby Community Heritage Commission 125 Video Collection, 2018.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Julie Lee, discussing family farm in the Douglas-Gilpin area, at the corner of Still Creek and Douglas Road in Burnaby.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Ken Yip, discussing family farm in the Big Bend area, on Byrne Road in Burnaby.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

100 Years of Gilmore School. Yunuen Perez Vertti, Heights Neighbourhood Association, 2017.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca

Through the Lens of Andy Digney. Digney Family fonds, Burnaby Village Museum, BV019.18.1.

Available online at HeritageBurnaby.ca