



## Through the Lens of Andy Digney

<https://search.heritageburnaby.ca/permalink/museumvideo10099>

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| Repository:               | <a href="#">Burnaby Village Museum</a>  |
| Date:                     | [between 1934 and 1964] (date of original film), edited and narrated in 2016  |
| Collection/Fonds:         | <a href="#">Digney Family fonds</a>   |
| Description Level:        | Item  |
| Accession Code:           | BV019.18.1  |
| Physical Description:     | 1 mp4 video file (12 min., 17 sec.) : digital, 23 fps, col., sd., stereo  |
| Material Details:         | 278 MB  |
| Media Type:               | Moving Images   |
| Access Restriction:       | No restrictions   |
| Reproduction Restriction: | No known restrictions   |
| Scope and Content:        | Burnaby resident Andy Digney captured footage of Burnaby and beyond from 1934 to 1964. This short, narrated film features a compilation of the Digney footage created and narrated by the Burnaby Village Museum. Highlights include the construction of the Oak Theatre, a Depression-era May Day workers' parade, and visits to locations throughout the Lower Mainland, including Grouse Mountain, Burnaby's Central Park, and the Capilano Suspension Bridge. |

History/Biography: Andy Digney was born in London, England on July 27, 1886. His given names were Andrew Charles and in 1905, he immigrated with his elder brother to Raymore Saskatchewan and worked on a farm. In 1914, he met and married Alice Swan and in 1920 they had their one and only child, Ernest ('Dig'). The young family lived in Beatty Saskatchewan where they ran a small general store with a pool hall over the top. Andy sold the store and they moved to Carberry Manitoba where Andy worked selling lightening rods and hanging wallpaper. At this time he met and formed a partnership with someone who owned a hand cranked movie projector and in the evenings, he and his wife, traveled to church halls in neighbouring towns showing movies. Eventually, he purchased his own movie projector and opened a small theatre in Carberry. He worked odd jobs during the daytime and projected movies in his small theatre at night. Eventually he made enough money to move to Brandon, Manitoba where he purchased a restaurant which he turned into a theatre with living quarters above. Andy called the theatre 'The Oak' since the mighty oak was strong and stood forever. After starting the first Oak Theatre in Brandon, Manitoba when talking pictures came along, Andy Digney, his wife Alice and son Ernest ('Dig') moved to Burnaby in 1935 and chose the site of their new theatre and home at the corner of Kingsway and Marlborough. The Oak Theatre - which opened on August 4, 1937 - was hailed as an artistic masterpiece for its ultra modern white stucco exterior, floodlights and pink-and-green neon marquee. The interior featured a mirrored ceiling, fireplace, and aquarium and had a colour scheme of orchid, royal blue, silver and black. Andy was a very involved member of the Burnaby community becoming the founding president of the Lion's club and the chairman of the committee raising money for war bonds during World War II. In 1944, Andy suffered a severe heart attack, forcing him to retire, so in 1945 he sold the theatre to Odeon Theatres of Canada who continued to operate at this location until 1968 when competition forced its closure and demolition. Andy and his family relocated to a home on Bonsor Avenue on 3/4 acres where he spent much of his time cultivating a lovely garden. In about 1946, Andy was approached by the B.C. Midget Auto Racing Association, who were looking for a good location to race the smaller, racing cars, popular at the time. Andy was interested and purchased 10 acres of property located near the corner of Irmin Street and MacPherson Avenue and built a race track. The Digney Speedway opened on July 8, 1948 with stands that had capacity of holding 4500 people. In 1949, when the popularity of midget racing declined, Digney started racing roadsters. However, he struggled to find local drivers, and it was expensive to bring in drivers from elsewhere. In 1951 Digney found a winner: jalopy racing. Local men would buy 1930s cars and strip them down, remove the glass, and weld the doors shut. By early 1952 over forty cars were showing up for jalopy races. By the early 1950s the Speedway was well established, with coverage in the sports pages and on radio. Andy's son Ernest Digney (also known as Dig) worked at the race track but moved away with his wife in 1951 to work in Seattle. Andy and his wife Joyce, along with their two young sons, Paul and Bruce returned to Burnaby in 1953 moving into a 550 square foot apartment located above the Digney Speedway restrooms. In 1954 Simpson Sears built a large store on Kingsway and their parking lot came up to the back garden of the family home on Bonsor Avenue. Andy thought of building small stores on his property but in the end decided to build a bowling alley, clearing out his beautiful garden. The Digney Bowl opened on August 19, 1955 and Andy Digney, his wife Alice, son 'Dig' and daughter in law Joyce all worked at both the Speedway and the bowling alley. In 1956 Andy decided to finally retire and sold the bowling alley and home to his son 'Dig' which he paid for over time. 'Dig' and his family moved into the house on Bonsor Avenue and ran the bowling alley until their son Bruce took over in 1980. Andy Digney died in 1964 while travelling with his wife in England. His wife Alice died on June 3, 1982 and their son, Ernest ('Dig') died November 27, 2009.

Notes: Title based on contents  
City of Burnaby Archives holds the original Digney film masters (562.003) that this narrated segment was disseminated from

Creator: Andy Digney

Names: [Digney, Andy](#)  
[Digney Bowling Alley](#)  
[Digney Speedway](#)

Geographic Access: [Burnaby - 6521 Bonsor Avenue](#)  
[Burnaby - Kingsway](#)

Video Tracks

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