

A Sign for the City is a public art project by Sabine Bitter & Helmut Weber that reassigns the meaning of Vancouver's Nine O'clock Gun. The twelve-pound canon in Stanley Park is now fired nightly to mark the time. Previously it was fired to signal the close of the fishing day and as a navigational aid. For this project, each daily canon blast is symbolically dedicated to a cultural, social, or political figure or event in Vancouver or B.C.'s history relevant to that date. The project acoustically memorializes the culture and politics that ground this history, towards imagining Vancouver as a socially and spatially just city.

A Sign for the City

01

May 1, 1909: A free speech rally, part of the great free speech battles in Vancouver and across North America, is organized by The International Workers of the World ("Wobblies") in front of City Hall. The free speech movement, stretching from San Diego northward, was particularly intense in Vancouver and, over the next three years, the right to stand on a soapbox and proclaim workers' rights, usually at Carrall Street and Hastings Street, would ignite riots and altercations with the police.

02

May 2, 1986: Expo 1986, Vancouver's first global mega-event, opens. The world's fair, organized around the theme of transportation, not only brings rapid transit to the city, it also marks a shift in the urban development of Vancouver. Following Expo, the redevelopment of False Creek, one of the largest waterfront developments in the world, would pressure development in the DTES and surrounding areas. The Festival of Independent Recording Artists at Expo saw performances by bands as varied as Vancouver's Slow to German noise-meisters, Einstürzende Neubauten.

03

May 3, 1872: A large potlatch is held at First Narrows at the village of Klwiykwway. The event, attended by thousands of First Nations from around the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island, is held in the 1,100 square meter old plank house called *Tayhay*.

04

May 4, 1932: The Vancouver Unemployed Workers Association organizes one of the largest Depression-era demonstrations at City Hall.

05

May 5, 1911: The province's first Womens' Suffrage convention is held in Vancouver. From 1902 to 1913, the suffrage movement was defeated, but following the enfranchisement of women in the prairie provinces, women get the vote in B.C. in 1917.

06

May 6, 2010: The City of Vancouver passes an endorsement for an application for fair-trade certification: this will mark Vancouver as a Fair Trade Town.

07

May 7, 2010: Vancouver City Council opts for the third bike lane on the Burrard Street Bridge as part of its sustainable city philosophy.

08

May 8, 1912: George Woodcock, one of B.C.'s most influential writers, is born. Covering a broad scope of social and cultural topics, Woodcock would write and edit over 150 books, including the classic *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (1962).

09

May 9, 1949: "Work for Higher Culture, Not War": The traditional May Day parade of May 1st is postponed in Vancouver until today. The delay is in solidarity with the strike by the Canadian Seamen's Union, which has tied up ports in Canada and around the world.

10

May 10, 1947: School children in Vancouver organize a petition to end the wartime taxes on candy: the price of chocolate bars was lowered from eight to seven cents.

11

May 11, 1959: The Salvation Army opens the Maywood Home for Unwed Mothers on Oak Street.

12

May 12, 1935: As part of the discontent that brewed due to high unemployment, three hundred women from The Mother's Day Committee led 1,500 relief camp workers from Cambie Street Grounds to Stanley Park. They carried a banner declaring, "We the Mothers of Today Demand Abolition of the Relief Camps."

13

May 13, 1904: Earle Birney, writer and teacher, is born. A Governor General Award winner, and a former Trotskyite organizer, Birney established the Creative Writing Program at UBC. Among Birney's books are *Down the Long Table* (1955), *Trial of a City* (1952), *Near False Creek Mouth* (1964) and *The Damnation of Vancouver* (1977).

14

May 14, 1942: Protesting their uprooting and internment during the Second World War, Japanese-Canadians cause a disturbance at the Immigration Building where they were being held. The majority of the men in the building were Canadian-born, yet they were portrayed as "suspect aliens" by the newspapers. In 1988, after years of seeking justice and redress, the National Association of Japanese Canadians signs an agreement with the Government of Canada that recognizes the dispossession of their land and the abrogation of their citizen rights.

15

May 15, 1923: Architect Ron Thom is born. A leading Canadian modernist architect, Thom's work on public buildings and private homes would help develop the west-coast variation of the International Style. As the lead architect of team from the architectural firm Thompson Berwick Pratt, Thom would also be responsible for one of Vancouver's most significant and elegant towers, the B.C. Hydro building (now The Electra).

16

May 16-18, 1981: The Fifth Bi-national Lesbian Conference is held in Vancouver. Women from across Canada participate and organize the first documented lesbian pride march in the world.

17

May 17, 1994: C. Gray's *State of Social Housing in Vancouver - Report to Council* informs the City of the unaffordability of housing. He reports that, "in metropolitan Vancouver, approximately 20 percent of households are defined as in 'core need', that is, as having to pay 30 percent or more of their gross income to obtain suitable and adequate housing."

18

May 18, 1925: Poet and teacher Robin Blaser is born. Arriving in Vancouver from San Francisco in the mid-sixties to teach at Simon Fraser University, Blaser would become one of the most influential and illuminating poets in Canadian literature. His *The Holy Forest* is a landmark work of poetry.

19

May 19, 1968: Jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald plays Vancouver's legendary The Cave Supper Club.

20

May 20, 1938: The Vancouver Post Office, the Hotel Georgia, and the Vancouver Art Gallery are occupied by some 1,200 people protesting cuts to relief programs. They hold the buildings until they are evicted on what is called "Bloody Sunday", June 19, 1938.

21

May 21, 1917: The birth date of actor Raymond Burr. Along with appearing in Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window*, Burr was famous as the lead character in two TV crime shows, *Perry Mason* and *Ironside*.

22

May 22, 1945: A veteran's family moved into the first home, at 5249 Elgin Street, built through the crown corporation War-time Housing Limited, a program that ran from 1941 to 1947 in order to supply housing for returning veterans and war workers.

23

May 23, 1914: The ship *Komagata Maru* arrives in Vancouver: the passengers, who are predominantly Punjabi Sikhs, are refused entry on the grounds that the ship did not have a direct passage from India. After months of negotiations and eventually bowing to state pressure, the *Komagata Maru* departs on July 23rd. On their return to India, 20 passengers are killed and others are imprisoned. In 2008, Prime Minister Harper apologizes, outside of Parliament, to the Indo-Canadian community for the *Komagata Maru* incident.

24

May 24, 1962: Poet, curator, and critic Nancy Shaw is born. Shaw was a key figure with the Kootenay School of Writing, the Or Gallery, and later, the Vancouver New Music Society. Shaw's work deeply shaped the writing and visual art scene. Her books of poetry include *Affordable Tedium*, *Scopotocritic*, and her collaborations with Catriona Strang, such as *Busted*.



25

May 25, 2006: Twenty-four people are arrested at the Eagleridge Bluff blockade and protest that aimed to save this ecologically sensitive area in West Vancouver from damage by the expansion of the Sea to Sky Highway. Among those arrested is Harriet Nahanee, a Squamish First Nations elder, who would serve a two-week sentence and later died of pneumonia.

26

May 26, 1995: The opening of the main branch of the Vancouver Public Library, designed by architect Moshe Safdie. Safdie's coliseum-like design draws criticism but gains popular support. As urbanist Lance Berelowitz notes, the building is evidence of "Vancouver's insouciant willingness to embrace architectural styles from anytime..."

27

May 27, 1976: Habitat Forum, which coincided with the UN Conference on Human Settlements, opens in the hangers of the former Jericho Air Base. A brief utopian space, the buildings are later torn down, destroying a Bill Reid mural that was painted in one of the hangars.

28

May 28, 1989: The controlled explosion that demolishes the Georgia Medical and Dental Building, built in 1929, marks the end of a campaign to save the beloved structure.

29

May 29, 1971: Squatters occupy the site of the Fours Seasons Hotel near the entrance to Stanley Park. The squat is renamed "All Seasons Park."

30

May 30, 1982: Members of the Direct Action group engage in "ecolage" and blow up the Cheekeye-Dunsmuir B.C. Hydro substation. Known as The Squamish Five, or The Vancouver Five, they were arrested in early 1983.

31

May 31, 1997: Painter Jock MacDonald is born. MacDonald would become head of the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts (which is now Emily Carr University of Art and Design). During the Depression he would also co-found, with Fred Varley, the short-lived B.C. College of Arts. MacDonald was influenced by The Group of Seven and later by abstract painting. His works are in the Vancouver Art Gallery's collection.