

## MEMORY LANE: Local history buff keeps travelling through time

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DECEMBER 14, 2018 07:13 AM



Marine biologist turned historian Sharon Proctor holds out a revised copy of her book, *Time Travel in North Vancouver*, that contains feature stories she used to write for the North Vancouver Museum and Archives newsletter. photo Paul McGrath, North Shore News

This year has been a good one for Sharon Proctor, and consequently for local history in North Vancouver.

Sharon received the 2018 Museum Volunteer Award from the Canadian Federation of Friends of Museums and the Canadian Museums Association for her contributions as a Friend of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives Society.

Her book, *Time Travel in North Vancouver*, was reissued by the Friends of the Society. Curiosity about Sharon's vocation as a local historian raised some questions.

Why does a woman born and raised in the Arizona desert study at a marine research station for a doctorate in biology? Why switch from science to local history? The answers lie in that one word: curiosity.

Let us travel back in time to the Dental Arts Laboratory, the Proctor family business in Phoenix, Ariz.

“My father is working at his bench and talking with visitors. I am there too, playing at making dentures, and listening to every word. I have always been intensely curious, just like my mother. My parents encouraged my interests and included me in theirs. It was a richly textured childhood,” explains Sharon.

During the summers, the three would roam the desert, on assignment to photograph flowering cacti for Arizona Highways magazine, or exploring ghost towns and cliff dwellings.

Sharon taught a mockingbird chick to wolf whistle. She knows the Latin terminology for the desert plants and animals, and the correct way to hold a Gila monster. School included field trips to citrus orchards and farms, to Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West and the homes of Indigenous artisans.

Sharon’s interest in animals led to her undertaking a PhD from Stanford University, followed by a career at the Vancouver Aquarium as curator of education and interpretation and a subsequent career as a science and technology writer.

If curiosity is Sharon’s guiding principle, the question “What used to be here?” inspires her as a local historian.

“I’ll be walking in a park and wonder what was here before the park? I look at a block of condominiums and ask what had been there before? Then I go and find out,” she says.

Sharon documents the transformation of North Vancouver’s landscape and buildings in a feature called Then and Now for Express, the newsletter of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives. In 2010, the feature pieces were collected in Time Travel in North Vancouver.

The book grew out of her interest in “The little stories, too minor to warrant a chapter in a book.” Collected together, these vignettes reveal the character of North Vancouver as it was.

The concept is simple and effective. Early photographs (the earliest is Moodyville, 1898) of a local site or landmark are juxtaposed with contemporary images.

In some cases, a building has been repurposed. In others, a site continues in its original purpose. Horticultural Hall was the community centre in 1908. Today, the location is home to Harry Jerome rec centre. When the centre is eventually replaced, it will join Horticultural Hall in the historic record.

Since 2010, many sites profiled in Time Travel have changed significantly. Sharon has re-photographed those sites and updated the text for the new edition.

“We’re finding that owners of the 2010 book are purchasing the 2018 version because it documents the community through a period of extraordinary change,” says Nancy Kirkpatrick, executive director of the North Vancouver Museum and Archives.

The purpose of Time Travel in North Vancouver is unchanged and is reflected in the introduction: “There are several excellent books that describe the main aspects of our history. This book is different! ... It takes you to individual locations. At each place, you’re transported back in forth in time so you can see for yourself how the site has changed.”

Time Travel in North Vancouver can be appreciated as its subtitle indicates: A Peek into the Past. It is more than that. The first edition of Time Travel was an innovative visual document of the community’s changing landscape, much of it occurring within living memory. This new edition is equally compelling as a record of the accelerated pace of change transforming North Vancouver.

There is no place in the North Vancouver of today and tomorrow for relics of its industrial past, for wartime housing or for “fantastic” architecture like the Old Dutch Mill service station, replaced by a fast food outlet.

The buildings and landscapes that contributed to the community’s character are disappearing. Soon North Vancouver as it was will exist only in memory and then only in the historic record. The book, therefore, is a gift to the community – and one that will keep on giving.

Proceeds from sales of Time Travel in North Vancouver support the museum’s educational programs, including the North Vancouver: Then and Now school kit. As part of their social studies, student “photo detectives” work with historic and modern images to analyze and report on changes to their community.

The 2018 edition of Time Travel in North Vancouver is available at the North Vancouver Museum and Archives’ Community History Centre and online at [nvma.ca/about/publications](http://nvma.ca/about/publications).

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