

Authentic Voices

Lately, I've been thinking a lot about authentic voices. I believe the narratives that can connect with readers most deeply come from those we trust to provide a genuine perspective. I recently read a book by Patty Krawec, an Anishinaabe and Ukrainian writer, that included a quote that touched on this concept: "We understand each other best when we know each other's stories and allow our interpretations of those stories to be guided by the people from the community where they were written rather than our own beliefs about that community."*

A video series from an avid transportation historian about a railway line he's walked for years and personal accounts from three authors—a politician, a wildfire evacuee, and a fisherman—are some of the stories featured in this issue. By sharing about their own lives, these creators allow us to gain insights into their first-hand experiences, which may be unfamiliar or entirely unknown to us as readers.

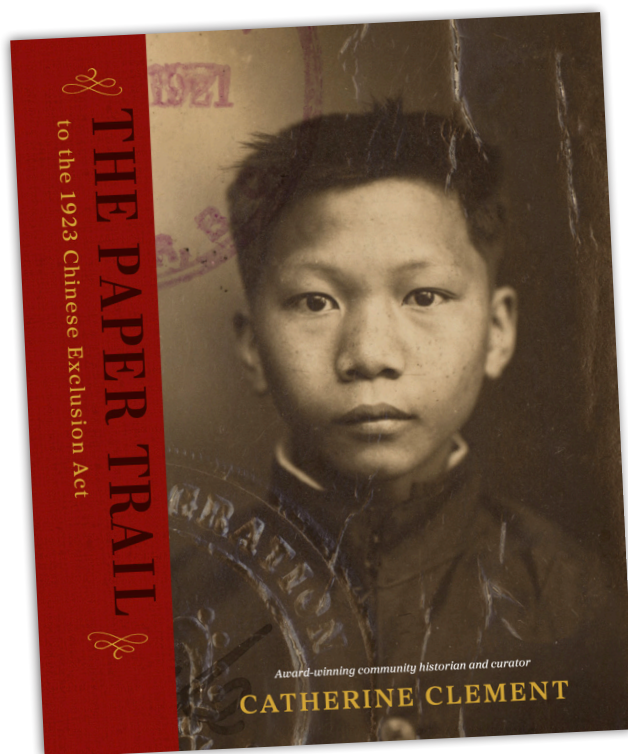
It's also critical for voices from historically excluded and oppressed communities to be heard. Krawec explains: "As marginalized people, we know that the stories being told about us are incomplete and unreliable."† The other two books featured in this issue, *The Paper Trail* and *Curve!*, are about Chinese Canadians and Indigenous women—ethno-cultural groups that have faced exclusion, discrimination, and racism in this province. These books are important for their efforts in both adding to and correcting the narratives of these communities, and for provoking further thought and reflection.

Good books challenge readers to broaden their understanding and to build empathy, and I hope that some of the titles featured here allow you to immerse yourself in experiences and communities that are different from your own.

*Patty Krawec, *Bad Indians Book Club: Reading at the Edge of a Thousand Worlds* (Goose Lane Editions, 2025), 157.

† Krawec, *Bad Indians Book Club*, 157.

Dalys Barney



The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act, by Catherine Clement (Oakville, ON: Plumleaf Press, 2025). \$59.95

On July 1, 1923, the Canadian government enacted the Chinese Immigration Act, which was to have a long, dark impact on this country. Also known as the Chinese Exclusion Act, the discriminatory law served to severely restrict Chinese immigration to Canada and was not repealed until May 14, 1947. "This unprecedented and draconian law would lock the Chinese community in a vice grip of repression and isolation for almost a quarter century" (p. 7).

Along with the restrictions on immigration came "oceans of ink, reams of paper, and armies of bureaucrats," and "an ever-expanding and dizzying array of Chinese immigration forms and colour-coded and numbered certificates (all referred to as C.I.s) were created in an effort to monitor, contain, discourage, intimidate, and ultimately exclude this one community" (p.7).

In 2020, the British Columbia Historical Federation supported community historian Catherine Clement and The Paper Trail project with funds from the Centennial Legacy Award to help find and digitize aging C.I. certificates. After countless hours collecting identity documents and researching the stories of Chinese Canadians, Clement went on to create an award-winning exhibition that opened at the Chinese Canadian Museum in Vancouver in 2023. The project is explained: "For this 100th-anniversary project, we collected from across

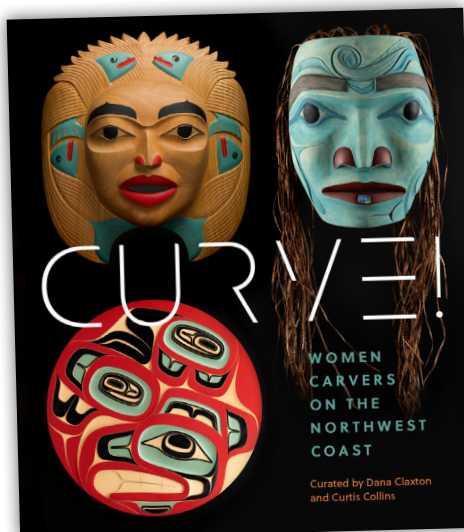
Canada hundreds of surviving C.I. certificates as well as the biographies of the individuals who once carried the burden of these identity documents. Their stories, shared by their descendants, often arrived like parts of a puzzle with key pieces missing. Yet, collectively, the stories offered us a glimpse into the world between 1923 and 1947” (p. 69).

To further expand on the stories told in the exhibition, Clement has now released a book, *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*, which is an invitation for readers to consider and to reflect on the long-lasting impacts of exclusion on Chinese Canadian families. Clement explains: “The stories we collected for this book remind us that the 1923 Exclusion Act cast a long shadow over the Chinese community in Canada decades after the law was repealed” (p. 201).

“Unfortunately, Canada’s past cannot be changed. Only our present and our future can be shaped by the lessons we glean from the mistakes we made as a country and as a community. After all we have learned, we must not go back to being silent. It is now the duty of a new generation to pass on to future generations all that we have discovered and felt ... and remembered” (p. 237).

For those interested in learning more about the historical racism faced by Chinese people in Canada, the UBC Library Rare Books & Special Collections hosts an online archive of documents, oral history interviews, and project files, which can be found at rbscarchives.library.ubc.ca/paper-trail-collection.

Excerpts from *The Paper Trail to the 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act*, by Catherine Clement (Oakville, ON: Plumleaf Press, 2025). Reprinted with permission of the publisher.



Curve!: Women Carvers on the Northwest Coast, curated by Dana Claxton and Curtis Collins (Whistler: Audain Art Museum; Vancouver: Figure 1 Publishing, 2024). \$45

Curve!: Women Carvers on the Northwest Coast is a beautiful celebration of the contributions of Indigenous women carvers on the Northwest Coast. The book is a companion to an exhibition of the same name, both of which were co-curated by Dana Claxton (artist, filmmaker, and faculty member of the University of British Columbia’s Department of Art History, Visual Art and Theory) and Dr. Curtis Collins (director and chief curator at the Audain Art Museum). The exhibition ran from November 2024 to May 2025 at the Audain Art Museum in Whistler and will also travel to Ottawa in 2026 to be shown at the National Gallery of Canada.

In the book’s afterword, Dr. Collins explains some of the motivations for putting the exhibition together: “This exhibition addresses the lack of a substantive perspective on the practice of carving among Indigenous women and its increasing importance with regard

to new artistic traditions on the Northwest Coast” (p. 123).

The book’s striking images highlight the work of 14 artists: Ellen Neel, Freda Diesing, Doreen Jensen, Susan A. Point, Dale Marie Campbell, Marianne Nicolson, Arlene Ness, Melanie Russ, Marika Echachis Swan, Morgan Asoyuf, Cori Savard, Cherish Alexander, Stephanie Anderson, and Veronica Waechter.

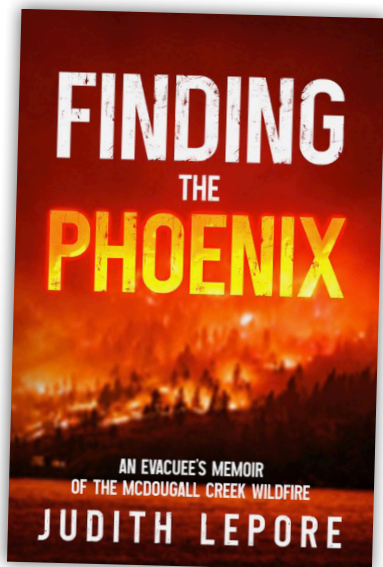
Winner of the 2025 BC and Yukon Book Prize’s Bill Duthie Booksellers’ Choice Award, *Curve!* also features commentaries by Marika Echachis Swan, Skeena Reece, and Dana Claxton, as well as interviews with artists Mary Anne Barkhouse and Dale Marie Campbell commenting on Ellen Neel and Freda Diesing respectively.

Curve! helps readers to build a deeper appreciation of Indigenous women carvers of the Northwest Coast not just through the past-based lens of historical pieces, but also through exposure to the work of contemporary artists who are both actively developing their craft and carrying on cultural traditions.



Shark Woman Mask by Freda Diesing.

Photo: Kenji Nagai



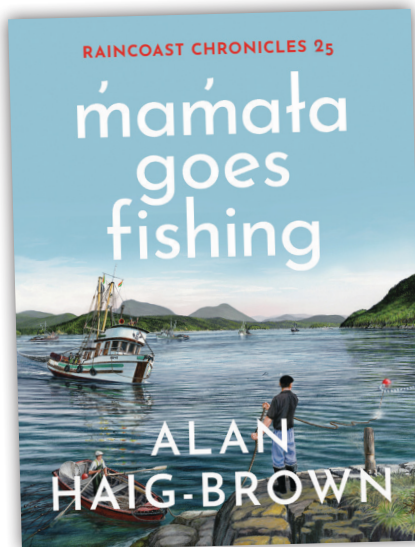
Finding the Phoenix: An Evacuee's Memoir of the McDougall Creek Wildfire, by Judith Lepore (Kelowna: Orion Press, 2025). \$19.99

With wildfires becoming both more intense and increasingly frequent in British Columbia, there are also more fire-related narratives than ever before. *Finding the Phoenix* chronicles the experience of author Judith Lepore during the McDougall Creek wildfire in the summer of 2023. Like thousands of other West Kelowna residents, Lepore and her husband, Lorenzo, and their dog, Oliver, were forced from their home, and it would end up being a month-long evacuation.

Lepore quickly went from being skeptical about the evacuation alert for her neighbourhood to being on the road, glancing back over her shoulder for what might be the last look at her home. Writing with emotional honesty, she takes readers through an intense journey marked by anxiety, vulnerability, frustration, and dread. Yet woven into that turmoil are also more positive feelings: gratitude for the kindness of strangers and the generosity of friends, appreciation for the efforts of firefighters, and

hope that the homes in her community might somehow be spared. And ultimately, there is the relief of returning, even cautiously, to a neighbourhood forever altered.

The phoenix, often depicted as a powerful bird rising from fire and ashes, is frequently used as a symbol of rebirth, representing a comeback from adversity or destruction. An experienced writer known for her fantasy novels, it's fitting that Lepore has chosen the phoenix metaphor for the title of this book. Despite what Lepore calls their "shared calamity," the neighbourhood not only endured, but its bonds also emerged stronger than before, resulting in lasting friendships and deeper connections.



Raincoast Chronicles 25: mamata Goes Fishing, by Alan Haig-Brown (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2025). \$24.95

In *mamata Goes Fishing*, the latest edition of Harbour Publishing's well-known Raincoast Chronicles series, award-winning author and experienced marine photographer and journalist Alan Haig-Brown gives readers an



Author Alan Haig-Brown.

Photo: Courtesy of Harbour Publishing

intimate look at the times he spent working on fishing boats in his late teens and early twenties.

When a seiner's set results in a catch that is too big to roll aboard in one move, the fish are sometimes scooped onto the boat in smaller quantities with a brailer. Haig-Brown's fishing stories are surely too many to include in a single book, but with *mamata Goes Fishing*, he has brailed out anecdotes that share a candid account of his own experiences as well as reflections on the history of the commercial fishing industry of coastal British Columbia.

From 1960 until 1973, Haig-Brown worked on boats run by Herb Assu of the We Wai Kai Nation. He explains: "Herb was both my skipper and my father-in-law. The two roles were inseparable, and the latter explained the former. At 18, I married Herb's daughter Vicki. Without a high-school diploma, even in those days my employment prospects were limited. I don't recall any discussion. Just as I became a part of the family, I became a part of the crew on the family boat" (p. 3).

Any family-run fishing operation likely has its interpersonal

conflicts, and working as both a greenhorn fisherman and a “gullible *mamata* (white man)” (p. 74) on an Indigenous-run boat undoubtedly had its moments, but Haig-Brown writes with humility and humour. He clearly saw himself as being in a position to learn, and his deep appreciation for his father-in-law’s knowledge, calm approach to life, and connection to generations of Indigenous fishers is evident.

Haig-Brown’s vivid storytelling is complimented by numerous photographs, many of them taken by Vicki Assu. *mamata Goes Fishing* is part adventure tale, reflecting Haig-Brown’s own coming-of-age story, but it also offers his respect and admiration for the fishing practices of the Assu family and their ancestors.

Cameron Lake Trestles – An online video series by Mike Bonkowski

During the summer of 2025, a wildfire that started at the edge of Cameron Lake on Vancouver Island burned a 588-hectare area. Some of the losses of the Wesley Ridge fire were several historic trestles on the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway.

The Port Alberni Subdivision, an approximately 61-kilometre (38-mile) section of the railway line running from Parksville to Port

Alberni, was completed in 1911 and used until 2002. The subdivision included many trestles, four of which were damaged during the blaze. After the fire, railway history enthusiast Mike Bonkowski put together a six-episode video series specifically about the four impacted Cameron Lake trestles.

As well as covering the history of the Port Alberni Subdivision, Bonkowski shares photos and video segments from 12 hiking visits he took along the railway line between 2019 and 2025. The pre-fire condition of the isolated section of railway and its trestles is clearly shown as well as some of the results of what Bonkowski calls “nature’s constant pushback.”

Bonkowski reflects on the fire’s impact: “Regardless of the specific condition of the various trestles or former trestles post-fire, the landscape along the railway has been significantly changed. And this wildfire is likely a significant mile post in the historical timeline of this railway route.”

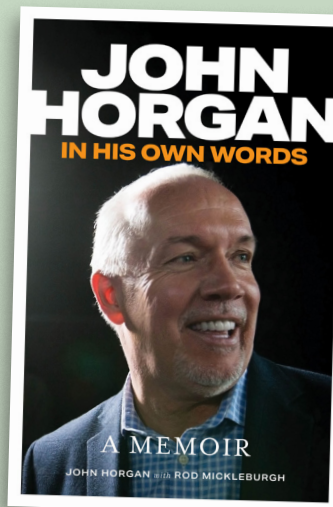
You can find this video series, as well as others on transportation history topics, on Bonkowski’s @LowLightMike YouTube channel at youtube.com/@LowLightMike/.



Thumbnail image from Cameron Lake Trestles series — Episode 1: History & Fire.

Photo: Screenshot

BOOK MARKED!



John Horgan: In His Own Words, by John Horgan with Rod Mickleburgh (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2025). \$38.95

John Horgan, who served as British Columbia’s thirty-sixth premier, from 2017 to 2022, passed away on November 12, 2024. Prior to his death, Horgan participated in a series of interviews and Zoom sessions with journalist and labour historian Rod Mickleburgh, which form the basis of the posthumous memoir *John Horgan: In His Own Words*.

Horgan’s humour, candidness, and honesty shine through, and the book feels a lot like sitting down for a long chat with “John from Langford.” Horgan reflects: “People often ask me what I was most proud of as premier. I can’t really pick out one thing, but perhaps I’m proudest of the fact that I had the opportunity to be premier and I didn’t fall completely on my face” (p. 231).

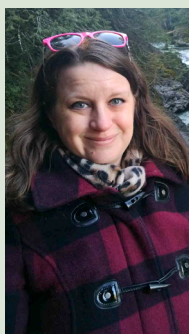
Read it for details on Horgan’s early life, anecdotes from his political career, insights on his relationships with colleagues, political allies, and adversaries, and for his reflections on key issues that arose during his time in office.

Recently Released

- Boom Times in Chilliwack: Memories from the Post-War Years*, by Merlin Bunt (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2025). \$38.95
- Coastal Connections: A History of British Columbia Ferries and Passenger Ships*, by Derek Hayes (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2025). \$50
- Decolonization and Me: Conversations About Healing a Nation and Ourselves*, by Kristy McLeod and Phyllis Webstad (Victoria: Medicine Wheel Publishing, 2025). \$30.99
- The King of Sandon: Murder, Myth, & the Man Behind B.C.'s Greatest Ghost Town*, by Greg Nesteroff (pub. by author, 2025). \$40
- Painting Victoria: Fifty Years of Memories from a City by the Sea*, by Robert Amos (Victoria: TouchWood Editions, 2025). \$30
- A Perfect Day for a Walk by the Water: Exploring Vancouver's Shores*, by Bill Arnott (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2025). \$24.95
- Reconciling: A Lifelong Struggle to Belong*, by Larry Grant in conversation with Scott Steedman (Toronto: ECW Press, 2025). \$26.95
- Separated from Santo: The True Story of an Italian-Canadian Internee During the Second World War* [a graphic novel], by Brian Barazzuol, illustrated by Cam Drysdale, coloured by Alex Doftoreanu, foreword by the Hon. Frank Iacobucci (Victoria: Heritage House, 2025). \$24.95
- Sound Like a Sailor: The Book of Nautical Expressions*, by R. Bruce Macdonald (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2025). \$24.95
- Till We Meet Again: A Canadian in the First World War*, by Brandon Marriott (Toronto: Simon & Schuster Canada, 2025). \$39.99
- Trading Fate: How a Little-Known Company Stopped British Columbia from Becoming an American State*, by Graeme Menzies (Victoria: Heritage House, 2025). \$29.95
- Turmoil: The Life & Times of Philip Hankin*, by Michael Layland (Victoria: TouchWood Editions, 2025). \$35
- The Vancouver Island Treaties and the Evolving Principles of Indigenous Title*, by Ted Binnema (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2025). \$44.95
- War Resisters: Standing Against the Vietnam War*, by Joline Martin (Qualicum Beach: Caitlin Press, 2025). \$26

Young Readers

- Hawaii Mars: Dreams as Big as the Sky*, by Jen Wright (pub. by author, 2025). \$20
- Reach for the Sky: How Two Brothers Built an Airplane in Chinatown*, by Evelyn Sue Wong, illustrated by Sarah Ang (Oakville, ON: Plumleaf Press, 2025). \$24.95
- Victoria Chung: A Doctor of Change*, by Haley Healey, illustrated by Kimiko Fraser (Victoria: Heritage House, 2025). \$19.95



BRITISH COLUMBIA HISTORY

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