

Keeping local history alive

by Sabine Eiche

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Last summer I heard a lecture at the University of B.C. about the importance of preserving family records and the increasing difficulty of doing so, since most informal records are now created electronically and quickly deleted. Future social historians will be deprived of a rich source.

There's a little lesson in ancient philosophy to be had in the etymology of record. The word derives from the Latin verb "recordare," composed of "re" (back, again) and "cor" (heart), meaning to remember, think over, be mindful of. But what does heart have to do with all this? Well, in Aristotle's time, many believed the heart to be the seat not only of emotions but also of thought, equivalent to the mind.

In addition to family records, another kind of record is under threat – the visual record, by which I refer to the pictures stored in our mind, especially those of places. These mental pictures are invaluable, not least of all because they are often tinged with sensations that can't be captured by photographs.

Our surroundings are ephemeral, a word that comes from the Greek "ephemeros," which means lasting one day. The scene is continually changing. Houses are reduced to rubble in a matter of hours. Whole areas are being obliterated. And if we don't record them, also our mental pictures will eventually be lost.

I like to wander in my imagination along a route I often walked in the 1960s, when we lived on Leslie Road. To reach Brighthouse I'd head west and turn south on No. 3 Road. Bordering the east side of No. 3, past Alexandra Road, were

the reddish-brown ramshackle stables of Lansdowne racetrack. A wide ditch and a narrow dirt path riddled with holes ran along that side of No. 3. The other side had a broader dirt path for pedestrians and bikers. You saw a commercial building here and there along the west side of No. 3, but most of the land was given over to fields growing vegetables – picked by students during summer holidays.

The shopping district began at No. 3 Road and Westminster Highway. Safeway stood where London Drugs now stands. On the other side of No. 3 was the Shell gas station (currently the site of VanCity). Super-Valu was across Westminster Highway from Safeway – it's now the site of CIBC – and further down No. 3 were McCue's Drugs and a Five-and-Ten-Cents store. Mr. Gung, the tailor, had his premises at the corner of Saba Road.

Does anyone remember the Brighthouse Café (its former site now an empty lot behind Brighthouse Station), the Dairy Queen (banana split for 50¢) on what's now Richmond Centre's parking lot, and just north of the Dairy Queen the gigantic Skookum Slide?

What my visual memory hadn't recorded were all the car dealerships formerly along that stretch of No. 3 Road. I happened to see them in photographs from the 1950s displayed at Richmond City Archives. The Archives' extraordinarily helpful Dan Farrell told me the images are also available for viewing on www.historypin.com. Why not visit the site – or better yet, the Archives? You never know, it may arouse some of your own visual memories. And if it does, write them down. QUICKLY!