

A history of: how “The Langham Cultural Society” was started, and the formation of the Board of Directors.

This story is based on my journal notes, press articles and public documents from The Provincial British Columbia Registry.

The time frame is from early July 1974-July 17, 1977, the time frame of which I first conceived of a society to purchase “The Langham”, my term as President of “The Langham Cultural Society” and the Grand Opening.

By; Michael Guthrie  
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“Burn it down, didn’t you hear me.” These were the words spray painted on the wall of the old Langham Hotel in Kaslo, BC. Like many of the old historic buildings in Kaslo that were previously burnt down by local residents, the Langham was facing this same fate.

The Village of Kaslo, in June of 1974, placed a notice on the bulletin board stating that; if the owner of the building didn’t restore the building, or sell it to someone who would, they would condemn it and have it torn down. Bill Mellus from South Fork told me about the notice one day at his house.

I always loved the old building, with its grey wood and especially the old lettering on the front, which simply said “The Langham.” Being a sign painter I was always looking at examples of lettering from the 19<sup>th</sup> century that were occasionally found in the area. I couldn’t bare the thought of this great example of architecture being torn down.

I had met the owner, Walter Schmidt, at a party in 1972 at Dick and Karen Lampson’s house, I remembered talking with him about how he wanted to come back to Kaslo and try to get something going in the building. He and a friend had just taken out the windows to protect them and boarded up the openings. Walter had a house moving business in Cape Cod, Mass. and didn’t think there was any problem leveling the building.

Eve Carney, the Village Clerk, used to come into "The Village Green Café" which my wife Darelyn and I owned and operated (Feb. 1973 – June 1979). She was a reasonable person and wasn't prejudice against "Hippies" so I went to her office and asked her if she thought the village would be OK with me organizing a group of people to buy the building and fix it up. She thought it would be OK and then she gave me Walter's address.

I wrote Walter a letter to make sure he knew about the notice, and to ask if he would be interested in forming a co-op with a few artists in Kaslo. I then talked it over with Ring Higgins and Rick Handbury, a couple local potters who also appreciated the local history. They thought it was a good idea but hey both pointed out that none of us had the funds to fix the building up. Walter was like us with no extra cash to use.

Darelyn and I had been producing live music shows at The Village Green Café and I tried to convince her that we should buy The Langham and move our café business over there, she didn't think it was a good idea.

One day I noticed the boards covering a window on the ground floor were loose so I crawled through and checked out the building on the inside. I noticed a hatch in the floor under the stairwell so I crawled down and looked at the floor joists and noticed what looked like a concrete foundation. I asked a friend, Roger Lucky to come over a check it out and also Fred Higgli. They both agreed it was a concrete foundation but all the joist on the west side had rotted on the ends because the village raised the street level and back filled up against the bottom of the building.

Several months before all this happened, I had been hitch hiking to Creston and was picked up by a guy who told me a story about he started The Creston Arts Council of Creston, BC. Being an artist, I found the story very interesting; he said to me "hey, you could start one in kaslo." I said I had never organized anything like that before and he said he hadn't either.

Being inspired by this meeting while hitch hiking I thought that maybe I could organize some people to form a society of some kind. I asked some friends Fred Higgli, Barbara Scrivens and Allen Davidson, to come to the café and discuss my idea with Darelyn and I. We had a good conversation about it and they liked the idea. Allen said his wife Gloria would want to join in, and he also thought Jim Van Horn would be interested. I thought Bart Darnell would also be interested, and Barb and Fred suggested Pat and Jackie Bowyer. We then all met at the Village Green Café for our first meeting to discuss my idea. Everyone was keen on it.

I wrote Walter again to see if he would sell the building to a society if we formed one. He agreed to sell the building for what he paid for it, which was \$3,500.00.

We asked the Kaslo Credit Union (it's name at the time) if they would loan our society this amount plus another \$1,500.00, they agreed to do so but said we would all have to sign for the loan so that each of us would be responsible for the debt should the society fail. The

building was purchased from Walter in the name of "The Langham Cultural Society" which would own it, not these ten individuals.

The additional \$1,500.00 we borrowed was used to pay for the change of title and to publish a pamphlet that was used to solicit membership and donations.

Bart Darnell knew a lawyer in Nelson, Mr. Kirby of "Hamilton, Kirby and Brown." We went to consult with him on the purchase of the building as a society and to discuss forming a society. Mr. Kirby was supportive but thought 10 members of the board was too many and that five would be enough, we left it at ten.

There were no realtors involved. Walter Schmidt came to Kaslo to sign the papers and accept his payment that was in Canadian dollars. The exchange rate at the time was in favor of the Canadian dollar so Walter actually lost money on the deal. He asked me if we could make up the difference but a vote was held and the majority voted not to make up the difference saying "a deals a deal" I felt we should have and still do. Walter was so good about it, and his generosity should be noted for without it there would be no LCS. Not having a realtor involved also kept the price down.

Jim van Horn, who was familiar with government affairs, suggested I go to the Provincial Government Building in Kaslo and get a copy of The Societies Act of British Columbia. I went over and picked up a copy and started reading it.

We then had our first formal meeting using the societies act as a guideline. Votes for officers were held, I was unanimously elected President, Jim van Horn was elected Vice-President, Gloria Davidson was elected Secretary and Darelyn Guthrie was elected Treasurer. The other six members were elected as board members at large. I proposed that, aside from restoration of the building being the main reason for the society, we have a performance space, art gallery and rent the upstairs out as studios. Jackie Bowyer made a motion to accept my idea and the vote was unanimous in favor of it.

The first six to eight meetings, to draft the constitution and by-laws, were held at "The Village Green Café" sitting around the big oval table, in the corner, upfront. Pat and Jackie later hosted some meetings at their house and of course Jackie, being the fabulous cook/hostess she was, served us amazing Chinese Food! The original constitution and by-laws, drafted by this group, were; democratic, open for participation to the community at large, and drafted in such a way that the society would continue on into the future without the presence of the original board.

When the incorporation documents were finished, we all met at "The Village Green Café" to sign them and Murray and Ruth Ford signed them as witnesses. The documents were then sent off to "The Register of Societies" in Victoria, BC, on November 17th of 1974. The minimum time for processing at that time was six months. The society was officially registered on June 16<sup>th</sup>, 1975.

I think a lot of the success of The Langham Cultural Society (hereafter referred to as LCS) is due to the broad diversity of this group. Although we have since been called “Hippies”, this term hardly describes who we were at the time. Darelyn and I were business owners who, like anyone with a small café business, worked very hard to keep the doors open while raising our daughter Joli, and building our own home to live in. Barbara Scrivens was a teacher and a strong advocate for women’s rights. Fred Higgli worked hard at one of the local sawmills before getting a job in construction working for Jack Hale. Bart Darnell owned and operated Kaslo Insurance, had a family (wife Deloris and daughter Mandy), and was a strong activist for political and social awareness in the area. Jim Van Horn was a professional plumber, had a family (wife Fern and kids Jim, John, Elisabeth and Sara), and he also served on the council of The Village of Kaslo. Allen Davidson worked for T&H Sawmill as a carpenter, had a family (wife Gloria and daughter Andrea), and built domes for local residents. Allen’s wife Gloria had the hardest job on the planet, motherhood, and also contributed to her local community. Pat and Jackie Bowyer owned and operated the Red and White Grocery in Kaslo, BC, Pat was the local coroner, and they were raising three kids; Susan, David and Nicola. Not only was the group diverse in their occupations, they varied in age, I was only 25 years old when I started organizing this group, Pat and Jackie were the elders.

Shortly after we had sent our documents off to the registry, Bart Darnell decided to resign. Murray Ford, who had recently moved to Kaslo with his wife Ruth and had been coming to the board meetings, was keen on the project and so he stepped up to the plate and was elected to replace Bart.

Ford was a brilliant photographer and took a lot of black and white, high-resolution photos of the building while it was in disrepair. Thanks to this, LCS has some wonderful photos documenting the building. He also helped write the Recreational Facilities Fund Grant that we received for capital expenses to go along with our second LIP Grant that was for labor.

We started having work parties at The Langham, clearing out junk and wondering what we had gotten ourselves into. We were determined to start off doing everything volunteer to show our intent was worthy. Some people in Kaslo thought we were “Hippies” and the “Hippies” in the Kootenay Region had a bad reputation for their use of grant money, which of course was blown out of proportion. All the physical work done on the building in the first year was done with volunteer labor.

In February of 1975, Gloria Davidson resigned. Allen Dobie had just come to town, a friend of the Davidson’s. Dobie was keen on the project and offered to take Gloria’s place. He was elected and went on to become the 3<sup>rd</sup> president and to oversee the finishing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors.

Bake sales were held to raise money, and we held dances at The Scout Hall and The Legion to raise money. Memberships were coming in and some folks gave donations. Councilwoman Peggy Buildstien and mural artist Doug Riseborough both contributed \$100.00 each and many others gave as well.

In The summer of 1975 we held a "Roof Raising Benefit" to raise money for materials to re-do the roof. We raise \$1,350.00 to buy new shingles, some local contractors, Paul Schipper and Don Dow donated all the nails and the first half of the roof was completed with all volunteer labor. I led a work crew of volunteers to restore the first half of the roof, facing the Legion Hall.

Jim Van Horn noticed an article in the paper advertising a workshop on restoring heritage buildings at Fort Steele. He showed it to me and I gave it to Fred. We thought it would be good to contact them and participate. Their response was very generous. There was some doubt arising that the building wasn't worth restoring. Fred's boss Jack Hale had convinced him the building was rotten to the core. I invited the Fort Steele folks to come have a look. They sent their Supervisor and their head on restoration over to look at the building. I invited Major Jack Humphries a member of council (Can't remember her name) to come meet with the Fort Steele representatives. The meeting went well and the Fort Steele reps. told council "the building would cost \$250,000.00 just to frame it up without any finishing." They said "all the framing and siding were cut from Yellow Pine, the most rot resistant wood out there." What would have happened if Jim hadn't seen this article?

After Jim Van Horn's first year as vice-president, he resigned and his wife Fern was elected to take his place. She then went on to replace me after I resigned shortly before my term was up.

We then received our first LIP Grant to finish the roof and gut the building, and repair the wall along the Legion side. I had appointed Fred Higgli to be in charge of the building renovations and to supervise work on our first grant. Fred did an amazing job of getting the most "bang for our buck." He led a small crew of workers through the dead of winter to finish the roof and do the tough job of gutting the building. He then went on to finish the ground floor with additional grants. The ground floor was completed with the aid of another LIP grant and a Recreational Facilities Fund Grant.

The second "Langham Benefit" was held again at the Kaslo Curling Rink in July of 1976 and was even more successful than the first. Future benefits were in the main skating rink and then moved to various farms and even on the street next to "The Langham."

"The Langham Centre" had it's "Grand Opening" July 17<sup>th</sup> 1977. I was very pleased to be asked to cut the ribbon at the opening, even though a "rift" had occurred within the board of directors prior to this event and I resigned as a result thereof.

The opening of "The Langham Centre" required the need for a full time administrator. Arletta Byers (formerly Arletta Stevens at that time) was hired to fill the position. She applied for and received a: Canada Council grant to pay her salary. Arletta also worked on the first LIP grants. With enthusiasm she contributed a great deal to getting The Langham Centre up and running. Her contacts she made through her job at The Langham Centre led to getting a job in Victoria, BC working for The Office of Grants Management where she

worked for many years. This is a great example of how LCS created jobs in the community and how those jobs sometimes led to other jobs elsewhere.

During my time as the first president, we received two LIP Grants and one Recreational Facilities Fund Grant totaling close to \$85,000.00. I spearheaded the first two Langham Benefits using musicians from “The Village Green Café” roster. I did my best to govern in a democratic way even though some on the board thought I was a dictator. I was never hired on any of the grants received.

I am overwhelmed at the success of LCS and forever grateful to all the people who have contributed to this success. Fred had once said to me “Mike, what would happen if you and I quit?” My reply was “if LCS doesn’t continue without us, then it wasn’t a good idea.”

Ideas are like doorways of opportunity, if we don’t open the door and walk through, we’ll never reach the other side. Thanks to all who walked through the LCS door of opportunity!

Michael Guthrie now lives in Seattle, WA. As a performing artist, he has performed all over the Pacific NW region of the United States and has done numerous performances in British Columbia as well as The Calgary Folk Festival. He still contributes to his community in Seattle as well as Kaslo, BC. He was given an honorary membership to The Board of Directors of History House of Greater Seattle for spearheading and producing their concert series “Music in the Sculpture Garden.” He also wrote a monthly column for Victory Review Magazine “The Ramblin’ ‘Mike” and volunteered for Victory Music for five years as a sound engineer.

Contact:

moorafa@mindspring.com