



CENTRAL OKANAGAN HERITAGE SOCIETY

HERITAGE NEWS

**SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE; then and now
Spring/Summer 2023**





Beautiful Benvoulin Church – a favourite subject of numerous painters – this one by Julia Hargreaves

The founding of the Central Okanagan Heritage Society (COHS) was sparked by the pending fiery destruction of the Benvoulin Church. In 1982, the City of Kelowna gave the fire department permission to burn the iconic, but abandoned, building for fire practice. Dr. Walter Anderson was horrified that this was being considered and so brought together a group of dedicated individuals in order to save the 90-year-old structure; thus the COHS was born. Over the next four years the society worked diligently to restore the church, reopening it to the public in 1986. It is 131 years old this year, still much-loved and used, and we are celebrating!



Guisachan House today

Guisachan House. In partnership with the City of Kelowna, COHS next undertook the restoration of Guisachan House within the newly created Guisachan Heritage Park, including the restoration of the Elaine Cameron Gardens, several outbuildings and the third McDougall House. Originally built in 1891 by Lord and Lady Aberdeen, the property was later purchased by the Cameron family in 1905. After the death of Paddy Cameron the COHS, together with the City of Kelowna, restored the buildings and the extensive gardens. This major undertaking was completed in 1990 and the grand opening was presided over by the grandson of Lady and Lord Aberdeen. The Aberdeens also provided funds for the original Benvoulin Church which ties the two locations together. This site is now one of the most iconic spots in Kelowna; much loved and well used by residents and visitors alike.

McDougall House

Built by John McDougall in 1886 this house is a unique squared-log building. In the 1980's Gordon Drive was being extended through the Guisachan property and would have run right through McDougall House. To avoid its destruction it was taken apart log by log and reassembled on the Guisachan Park site where it has been lovingly cared for by the Central Okanagan Heritage Society since 1984. It is still lived in full-time!



Mclver House

An offer of a heritage farmhouse by the Mclver family provided another undertaking for the Society. Built in the early 1900's, it was a disappearing example of the early farmhouses found in eastern Canada. The move from 1954 KLO Road and restoration on the Benvoulin site was completed in the mid 1990's. Its life continues as the caretaker's residence for the Benvoulin Heritage Park.



Mclver House - home to our building and property caretaker



Fleming House and Brent's Mill. 1999 also saw the beginning of another major partnership with the City of Kelowna. This was the move and stabilization of the Fleming house (built in the early 1900's), adjacent grist mill and milk house from the original Brent Mill site. The buildings were saved by moving them to their new home on Mill Creek near Dilworth Drive. Although owned by the City of Kelowna the COHS raised \$55,000 in 2007 and replaced the roof in anticipation of working with the City and returning the house to it's original design. Unfortunately there was no progress on this despite a comprehensive plan prepared by Don Luxton, a recognized heritage consultant from Vancouver. Left unprotected the house was destroyed by two subsequent fires; the hard work, money, vision and goodwill of concerned citizens came to naught and a valuable piece of Kelowna history was trucked to the landfill.





2022 Winners of the Continued Conservation of a Residential Building; Leckie House, 781 Bernard Ave - Moya and Dave Webb

While our origin was tied to the preservation and restoration of some of Kelowna's most iconic heritage buildings, the COHS has worked hard to promote the conservation and appreciation of heritage throughout the Central Okanagan. In 1984 the society began the **Annual Heritage Awards** to recognize individuals and groups for their efforts to maintain and enhance the important physical elements of Kelowna's past. Individuals, residences, commercial buildings, community groups and natural spaces are some of the categories for awards. The latest winners can be viewed on our website (okheritagesociety.com).

In 1991 the City initiated the Kelowna Heritage Foundation whose mandate included awarding grants to help heritage homeowners maintain and conserve their buildings. COHS took over the administration of the program in 2008 under the new name of the **City of Kelowna Heritage Grants Program**. COHS staff work with the City of Kelowna to provide financial support to buildings on the Kelowna Heritage Register using recognised heritage standards and guidelines for the conservation of historic places in Canada.

Truth and Reconciliation. Currently the COHS is working to implement the Calls to Action put forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Considering that the vast majority of the history of the valley is the history of the first nation people who live here, this is long overdue. We appreciate the fact that we inhabit the traditional and unceded lands of the syilx people and have embraced this process as we move towards a future as better partners and better hearers of *their* heritage.

Twenty-two years ago, with Lorainne McLarty at the helm, COHS organized the first **Heritage Week** activities in Kelowna; since then we have been leading the team of heritage groups every February to offer entertaining and educational activities that connect our citizens to their past.

We are also celebrating the first phase of the reconstruction of our gardens at Benvoulin Heritage Park. Thanks to our Garden Committee and the **Okanagan Master Gardeners** the irrigation, lighting and gardens are taking on a whole new look!



Benvoulin Heritage Park

The Heritage Society also partners with a number of other groups who work to preserve and promote the story of Kelowna's development. Our physical past prompts the stories from our past: who were the builders? leaders? visionaries? entrepreneurs? innovators? As our built-heritage slowly disappears, so do the tangible reminders of those stories. This is our community's loss since to fully understand where we are, we need to understand how we got here, who got us here. Heritage looks back, to help point the way forward.

This year the COHS celebrates its 41st anniversary! And the beautiful Benvoulin Heritage Church celebrates its 131st; a long and loving service to our community!

But we're not finished yet; the work goes on! Some highlights that reflects some of the ongoing work and activity of the COHS....



Kelowna Christian School student volunteers –

A new generation carrying on the tradition of maintaining our heritage!



*Celebrating our newly renovated gardens –
Thank you Okanagan Master Gardeners!*





Heritage Picnic - Don Knox with Dan and Cheryl Spelliscy's 1937 Packard



Picnic in the park with art and music by 'October Sky'



Heritage Week at Stuart Park

Proud heritage homeowner!

The Anna Jacyszyn Trio – celebrating our 40th!





Beautiful night photograph by Percy Lujan, our building and park caretaker

‘The greenest building is the one that already exists’

HeritageBC



Thank you City of Kelowna (Arts & Culture); BC Community Gaming Branch and the Central Okanagan Foundation
Your support means a LOT!

**We acknowledge that the Central Okanagan Heritage Society operates on the ancestral, unceded territory
of the syilx/Okanagan People.**

OKHeritagesociety.com