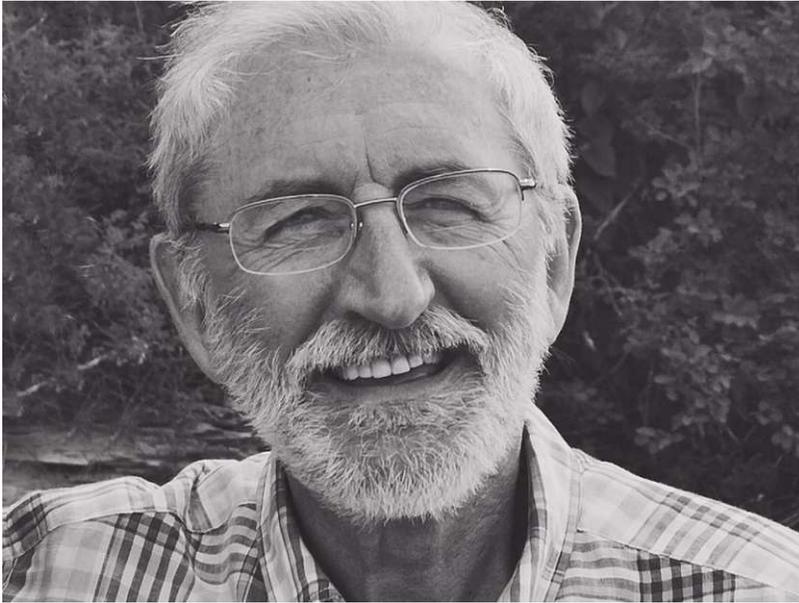


Q and A: Daniel Francis pens history of North Vancouver

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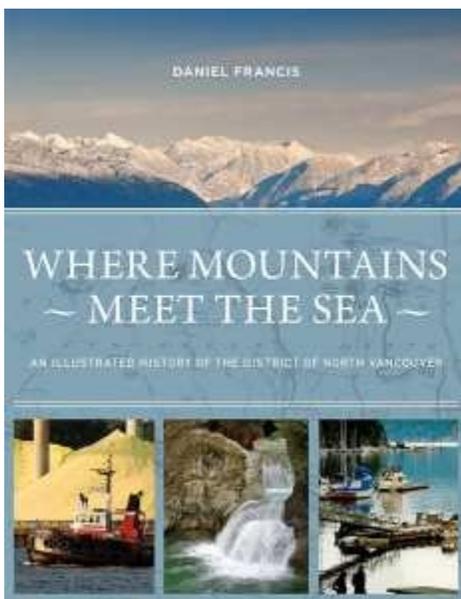
2016 Handout: Photo of Daniel Francis, author of *Where Mountains Meet the Sea*. [PNG Merlin Archive]

Where Mountains Meet the Sea

by *Daniel Francis*

Harbour Publishing

North Vancouverite Daniel Francis is a historian and the author of more than 20 books, mostly about British Columbia and its history. Here he tells readers about his most recent book, *Where Mountains Meet the Sea*, a narrative account of the history of North Vancouver, illustrated with hundreds of archival photos, maps and other images.



Q. Tell us about your book.

A. This year, 2016, is the District's quasiquicentennial — that's the 125th anniversary for readers who are as Latin-challenged as I am — so the North Vancouver Museum thought it would be a good time to produce an updated community history and I was offered the opportunity to take on the job.

Q. What was it like to collaborate with the North Vancouver Museum and Archives and others involved during the making of the book?

A. The project would have been impossible with the museum. It was carrying on its own oral history project at the same time and I was able to access those interviews along with the photographs that were collected for that project. The museum also made a summer student available to dig through its photo archives and do a preliminary cull of the thousands of images in its collection so that I could make the final choice of the hundreds that are in the book. And the staff at the archives went out of their way to point me in the right direction when it came to navigating through their vast collection. The archives really is a marvelous community resource.

Q. What surprised you the most?

A. What surprised me most was how surprised I was. You think living in a community for 30 years that I would know its story. But I didn't. Every day working on the book I would discover something new, and something within just a few minutes from my own house. I learned about the development of Edgemont Village, for example, where I had become used to having coffee once or twice a week but had no idea that it was originally designed by the architect Fred Hollingsworth and was a small enclave of West Coast Modernist architecture. Or that there was an abandoned military shooting range out Seymour Parkway which during the Depression was the site of a relief camp for unemployed men, some of whom would have taken part in the famous On-To-Ottawa Trek.

Q. What strikes you as the most pivotal moments in the District's 125-year history?

A. I suppose one turning point would be 1907 when the centre of the district broke away and formed its own separate community, North Vancouver City. That left the district without a central commercial core. Then I would say the post-Second World War period was a very important period. With the end of the Depression and the construction of the Lions Gate Bridge, the district was poised to take off once the war ended. Population increased rapidly as more convenient commuter access led to the development of residential neighbourhoods all across the North Shore. It is really during this period that the district becomes a coherent community rather than a collection of separate, stand-alone neighbourhoods.

Q. The book contains many exciting stories from early settlers. What is your favourite anecdote in the book, and why does it stand out for you?

A. One story I recall was told by Phyllis Munday. She and her husband Don were legendary mountaineers who climbed many coastal peaks for the first time. She was the first woman to climb Mt. Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies. Anyway, she told of setting off to hike Grouse Mountain – this would be during the First World War era – and leaving her Vancouver home dressed in a skirt and a blouse as if going on a shopping trip because as a woman she could not be seen in public wearing trousers. The minute she got to the trail she hid the skirt under a log and changed into boots and a pair of pants. Of course she always had to return the same way to reclaim the skirt and

get dressed again for the ferry and streetcar trip home. This story says so much about the role of women at the time and also the enthusiasm the early mountaineers had for the North Shore Mountains.

Q. Reflecting back in the year of the 125 anniversary, what do you think the past can teach us about the future? What changes or new developments do you hope to see for the region?

A. One thing we can learn is how easy it is to spoil our most valuable assets. A lot of damage has been done to the environment over the past 125 years. Uncontrolled logging led to flooding, soil erosion and deforestation. The development of port facilities along the waterfront completely transformed the waterfront. Most of the shoreline is now man-made, destroying the tidal flats and estuaries that sustained the shellfish and waterfowl, which the First Nations had harvested for generations. Obviously our attitudes toward the environment have changed profoundly; we now think more in terms of stewardship than exploitation. But the challenge remains to find ways to manage growth while protecting the district's privileged location at the edge of an unspoiled wilderness.

Q. What do you hope readers will take away from your book?

A. An appreciation for the district's unique history. During my research I discovered the term "wilderburb" which seems to fit the district quite precisely. A wilderburb is a community situated at the interface between urban and wilderness, a community that combines the density of city living with direct access to the outdoors. The idea of a bear in your backyard, a very familiar phenomenon in North Vancouver, very much encapsulates the District's identity. An identification with the natural environment has been part of the community's DNA from the beginning.