

# Bringing Presence to the Past

By Pamela Fairfield.



## At BCLA...

Arilea Sill, Municipal Archivist for the City of Burnaby, and Barbara Jo May, Branch Manager for McGill Library (Burnaby Public Library), gave a compelling presentation called, "Heritage Burnaby – Sharing Memories and Exploring Community History," at the British Columbia Library Association Conference on Saturday, April 18, 2009.

## A Collaborative Effort...

Heritage Burnaby is a collaborative online project that builds on the dynamic relationship between the City of Burnaby's Community Heritage Commission and a civic partnership representing the Heritage and Planning Program, the Burnaby City Archives, Burnaby Village Museum and the Burnaby Public Library. It also further fosters the existing relationship between the city archives and the public library, having shared space together in the McGill Branch since 2001.



Website masthead image courtesy of Heritage Burnaby

## The Birth...

The donation of the Burnaby Historical Society's entire community archives collection to the City of Burnaby Archives on February 14, 2007 was the catalyst for the birth of an online collaboration involving multiple partnerships that would help give visibility and accessibility to the early lives of Burnaby's citizens. This event coincided nicely with the hiring of a UBC School of Library, Archival and Information Studies

graduate—Arilea Sill—to the appointment of the first municipal archivist for Burnaby. It was clear that this captivating assembly of photographs and manuscripts, which had been meticulously collected since the 1950's by the members of the Historical Society, needed to not only be preserved but also showcased as a critical representation of Burnaby's heritage. And so, Heritage Burnaby—an on-line portal featuring the cultural history of Burnaby—was launched in 2008.

## The Website...

The colorful slogan, "Personal History-Collective Memory," of the handsomely designed website found at <http://www.heritageburnaby.ca/> speaks volumes of the goal of this innovative project. It is a site that dedicates itself to the shared stories of the first citizens of Burnaby, preserving the collective memory of a colourful community history. For example, the photograph of Annie Sara Hill and her daughter Kitty ca 1900 tells the story of a quiet moment in the life of a mother and daughter, captured in black & white and now available to the public. This critical type of historical documentation, at times lost in the process of classic city record keeping, is the soul of the Heritage Burnaby project.



Annie Sarah Hill and her daughter Kitty boating on Burnaby Lake ca 1900 (City of Burnaby Archives # BHS477-006)

### Research...

The audience for the portal is definitely the citizens of Burnaby; but Heritage Burnaby also appeals to the broader arena of: artists, historicists, genealogists, students, teachers and researchers of all kinds. The three catch phrases on the website: "Experience, Learn and Research," not only capture the essence of the project but they lead users into specific searchable areas. By clicking on the research button, a user can do a simple search for photographs, artifacts, textual records and heritage landmarks; in addition, they can explore the library collections. There is an advance search option where researchers can search by date, subject, fond, photographer, item number, address or organization. The cross-searching ability of the portal is one of the elements that makes the site so successful and is resultant of the collaborative efforts of the archives staff, Andornot Consulting (a local information management applications design team) and Atomic Crayon (a local web design team). The portal encourages input from its audience by creating a space to leave comments below the item searched. This participatory feature ties in nicely with public programming Heritage Burnaby hosts, such as afternoon teas where local citizens share photographs and stories of their family history.



Website masthead image courtesy of Heritage Burnaby

### An Anthology of Diversity...

From the roots of the careful collecting of the Burnaby Historical Society members to the diligent work of Arilea Sill, her staff and volunteers, this unique effort involving the collaboration of many hands has resulted in an anthology of diversity that describes the people of Burnaby. Heritage Burnaby highlights personal moments that add intrigue, value and a deeper dimension to the history of the people of this diverse community.

*Pamela Fairfield is a forthcoming Librarian at Large and a June 2009 graduate of the MLIS degree program at the School for Library, Archival and Information Studies at the University of British Columbia.*