

Uncovering the Past: Novice Researcher Seeks Miss PNE Winners

By Susan Pegram.

"You'll pop the buttons right off your chest when you view this year's gleaming testimony to Western prowess!" – (Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections Reference, North West History, "The PNE: Your Big Date in '48". Promotional pamphlet)

There are more than a few golden nuggets in the many meters of the Pacific National Exhibition's record group at the Vancouver Archives and in the PNE material in the Vancouver Public Library's Special Collections, which I'd consulted last summer in order to find something to write about to celebrate the PNE's 100th anniversary. I have always been interested in the cultural phenomena of beauty pageants and country fairs and I wanted to discover the list of the girls who won the title of "Miss PNE" from 1948-1991.

The search begins

Not having found a complete list of the winners in the books and pamphlets written about the PNE, and being daunted by the thought of the many hours I would spend looking at the primary material at the archives in order to find it, I contacted the PNE office again, where I'd first got permission to view the records.

I asked if the PNE office had themselves compiled a complete list of Miss PNE winners. If they did, they didn't have it handy, so I considered consulting InfoAction, the fee-based research service at the VPL. InfoAction would have been quick – two days wait for an estimated two to three hour search – but I decided on a non-fee based approach after all.

A more seasoned researcher, whirring through the reels of microfilm recording the society pages of The Vancouver Sun some fifty years ago, might not have noted what I, searching at a comparative snail's pace, would note as great material for future stories. By doing the work myself, I encountered many interesting headlines as well as amusing ads and pictures, including that of a former fellow Vancouverite, Hollywood's "Most Beautiful Women" of 1948, Yvonne De Carlo.

The search is successful

But, as luck would have it, I was saved by one of the Special Collections staff at the library through a suggestion to contact the PNE office again, this time targeting the Community Relations Department. I got a prompt response, and a list generated from recent documents was emailed to me for free! Thus, I was able to abandon a dalliance down memory lane that might have been too many pleasant hours long, looking through the VPL microfilm. Many thanks to the Central Library and the PNE office!

This time I was lucky because the information I wanted was already compiled and available directly through the still-existing company that produced it, but I concluded that even an answer to what seems like a simple question often cannot be found online and in books.

The preservation of such primary research material as microfilm of daily newspapers, old letters and photos is important, as it can sometimes be the only source of needed information. Research using this hard copy is free, but its digitized counterpart might in the future be subject to fee-based use. As well, computer literacy may not be for everyone; older researchers, who make the most use of historical materials, often prefer the real thing – handling the very letters, photos and ephemera touched by the history-makers themselves. Some are critical of the digital access experience, saying that what we will gain in quantity of access we will lose in quality. Let's hope that print advocacy remains relevant for more than children's literature and art books.

The winners

Below is the list of the forty-three Miss PNEs (presented by year, name, and district represented), hometown queens who competed in a contest that went out with the demise of BC's rural-based economy. Maybe you'll find the name of your mother, sister or daughter here and recall her happiest day!

1948	Margie Brain	Prince Rupert
1949	Marjorie Hildebrand	Vancouver
1950	Del Cahoun	Burnaby

1951	Inez McLeod	Victoria	1974	Brenda Hinds	Squamish
1952	Joan Nagle	Pentiction		Cheryl MacKinnon	Vancouver
1953	Lynn Adcock	Vernon	1975	Leanne Moore	Abbotsford
1954	Nancy Hansen	Burnaby	1976	Anne Grimm	Pentiction
1955	Glenda Sjoberg	Nanaimo	1977	Sandy Blackburn	Kamloops
1956	Joan Greenwood	Langley	1978	Gloria Macarenko	Prince Rupert
1957	Carol Lucas	Burnaby	1979	Kathryn Kokoszka	Mission
1958	Sharon Durham	Port Moody	1980	Tracy Wheeler	North Vancouver
1959	Anna Finlayson	Vancouver	1981	Devi Brar	Langley
1960	Barbara Wolsey	Vernon	1982	Sandi Friesen	Abbotsford-Matsqui
1961	Carol Kish	Abbotsford	1983	Janine Norgaard	Victoria
1962	Diane Davidson	Vernon	1984	Laura Leard	Delta
1963	Linda Douma	Sidney	1985	Jacqueline Plouffe	Vancouver
1964	Fyfe Rutherford	Pentiction	1986	Donna Furlani	White Rock
1965	Lene Graaten	Parksville	1987	Laura Phelps	Kelowna
1966	Judy Collyer	New Westminster	1988	Beatrice Jones	Revelstoke
1967	Nina Hamilton	Cariboo	1989	Christine Weber	Delta
1968	Janet Bowes	Powell River	1990	Tanya Bittner	Abbotsford-Matsqui
1969	Patsy McPhee	New Westminster	1991	Kim Van De Perre	Coquitlam
1970	Heather Kettleison	Nelson			
1971	Judy Stewart	Pentiction			
1972	Regina Helgason	Surrey			
1973	Jeanette Warmerdam	Abbotsford			

Susan Pegram received her Master of Archival Science from UBC in 2002 and has been a contributor to the Archives Association of BC newsletter.