

## The Lost Key

Please! Take some time out from reading this article and check your pockets, your purses, and under the flower pot on your front porch. Rummage through your jewelry box, or even shuffle through your junk drawer (no matter how distasteful that may seem).

The VHS Alumni Association is looking for a key. But not just any key. This key is more hallowed than the Harry Potter's key to the castle doors of Hogwarts. We're looking for the lost key to the front door entrance of Victoria High School.

This particular key was presented to the first principal of Vic High, Mr. S.J. Willis, on May 1, 1914, by school trustee Mr. George Jay, during the formal opening of the brand new Victoria High School, described in the next morning's *Daily Colonist* as "the finest educational institution of its kind west of the Great Lakes."



The *Colonist* report describes the key as "an handsome specimen of the jeweler's art, ... of gold in the exact shape of the customary key, [bearing] on one side the coat of arms of the high school and on the other the inscription: Presented to Mr. S.J. Willis B.A., Principal, May 1, 1914."

Anything resembling this artifact being kicked around at your place? We would like to know, as the Alumni's inquiries have all reached dead ends.

In his acceptance speech, Principal Willis was quoted thus: " Among the many departments to which full justice could now be done were the gymnasium [now the Roper Gym] without which a student's education was incomplete and the new library.... The magnificent auditorium could be used for public service," he continued, "to have noted visitors to the city to speak to the students on matters of moment."

British Columbia's Lieutenant Governor Paterson, upon formally declaring the building open, expressed his opinion that "everyone must be surprised at the magnificent structure and convinced that money expended had been spent to the best advantage."

Following the opening ceremonies, the *Daily Colonist* reported, "the high school girls gave an exhibition of Physical drill and a May Pole dance in the Gymnasium." What the newspaper couldn't report was that in less than four months Europe would be plunged into war; and Canada, including many students from Vic High, would be drawn into a global conflict of horrific consequence. Nor could it report that in less than 15 years, an unprecedented economic depression would grip the planet, and within 10 more years Europe and the rest of the world would go to war again.

In the past century, as the world roared and rumbled, the auditorium eventually tarnished; the gymnasium floor darkened with age and coats of varnish; and the faces of the staff and students changed over and over again. However, one constant remained: that "magnificent structure" still stands proudly at the corner of Fernwood Road and Grant Street, its very presence a basic element of neighbourhood and civic pride.



With the approach of the building's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Alumni Association would like to find the original presentation key and return it to the school. Can you help us out? Ask around, tell the story -- after all this school is part of your heritage. Let's all make an effort to help out.

Perhaps the key has vanished over time, but a photo or even a sketch of the original would help. Using that information, and with some fundraising perhaps, we may be able to create a replica and gift it to the school.

Could this be the key?

Come give a cheer – it's time to find a key!

-- Barrie Moen (VHS 1969)