

Sewing Club, Pep Meetings and Noon Dances One Girl's Senior Matric Year in 1940-41

by Stephanie Warner

Ethel Rowe graduated from Vic High in 1941. Her granddaughter Stephanie Warner recently uncovered Ethel's high-school pictures and 1940-1941 *Camosun* yearbook. She came to the Vic High Archives to learn more about Ethel's Grade 12 year and about school culture at that time.

A school year begins

In September 1940 Ethel Charlotte Rowe started her Grade 12 year at Victoria High School. She lived on Robertson Street near Gonzales Bay and rode her bicycle to school – a tough climb up St. Charles Street! Ethel got her books from Locker 158 on the main floor and registered in Division 3. First class of the day was Social Studies – her favourite class. This was followed by English, French, Health, Home Ec, Math, and Typing. Ethel liked school and had good attendance. Her *Camosun* yearbook description reads: "She is a learner and a lady, a combination bound to make her a success."

In the same homeroom was her close friend, Ruth Rushton, the 1940-41 House IV badminton champion. According to the *Camosun*, Ruth was "one of the livelier members of the class and quite openly admits she and her algebra book aren't on speaking terms."

	MON.	TUES.	WED.	THUR.	FRI.
1	Social Studies	S.S. 10	S.S. 10	S.S. 10	S.S. 10
2	ENG. 26	ENG. 26	ENG. 26	ENG. 26	ENG. 26
3	FRE. 16	FRE. 16	FRE. 16	FRE. 16	FRE. 16
4	HEALTH 45	Study 45	MATH 4	Guid. 19	P.T.
5	HOME EC.	HOME EC.	HOME EC.	P.T.	HOME EC.
6	MATH 4	MATH 4	MATH 4	MATH 4	HOME EC.
7	Typ. 39	Typ. 39	Typ. 39	Typ. 39	Typ. 39





Pep Meetings

On October 2, 1940 school year's social activities kicked off with a pep meeting. When Ethel was in Grade 9, two male cheerleaders, David Monk and Ray Whitehouse, introduced the new idea of pep meetings to Vic High. "Why Pep Meetings?" asked Ray Whitehouse in the December 1937 *Camosunet*. The answer: "It is a let up from the strenuous school work." By November 1938, pep meetings were clicking in a big way. At one such meeting, the Hothouse Quartette "swung out several swingaroos."

Dances

On Friday November 22, 1940, Ethel and other students turned out to the gym for the noon dance. *Camosunet* reporter Ruby-Jean McLuhan enthused about the dance: "Everyone, in the best of spirits, seemed to have enjoyed himself immensely, and no wonder, when we had that harmonious and very popular school orchestra – the Collegians.... It is hoped that the good behavior of the students will assure them similar privileges in the future and that they will realize that these noon fun-sessions will be an important factor in making the regular dances more popular. So come on 'chilluns' let's dance."

Ethel remembers that she went to the dances and "sort of" knew how to dance. The October 1938 *Camosunet* had lamented: "The most pitiful thing in the world is a line of girls on one side of the gym and boys on the other." Dave Monk cajoled the students "I mean yea man! In this school we might get the whole school feeling the Lambeth way..." The paper helpfully included line drawings of how to do the Lambeth Walk.

In November 1938 the *Camosunet* reported that ballroom dancing was being taught four days a week in Miss Doull's [P.E. teacher's] room. The paper also printed "Dancing Tips for Teens": "Boys ... hold her gently, after all is she a small young thing. Girls ... do not hang onto your partner as if he were a piece of salvage from a ship."

Students clearly got the hang of it and enjoyed several dances. In Ethel's grade 12 year, the 1940 Christmas dance was postponed by an outbreak of rubella but was "more than offset by a very successful Valentine dance." The spring dance on April 25, 1941, was "held in the gym which was artistically decorated with yellow, mauve and green streamers. The three and one-half hours of dancing was swirled away to music rendered by Bert Zala and his four-piece orchestra."

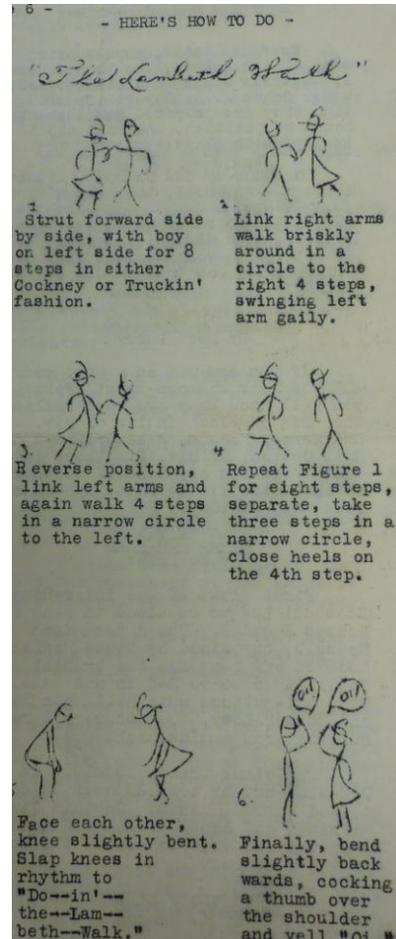
Sewing club and war effort

Ethel's grade 11 and 12 years were ones of war in Europe. Vic High students embraced the war effort whole-heartedly. The 1940-41 *Camosun* reported that "the Junior Red Cross had over a thousand members in its first year at Victoria High School who helped according to their abilities, which were varied. Some examples of Red Cross fundraising were dances, paper drives, a Boy's Hi-Y showing of "Where the Buffalo Roam" (evidently a 1938 western movie starring Tex Ritter.)

On Wednesdays after school, Ethel attended the sewing club. In the fall of 1940, Home Ec classes were sewing for the war effort. "Miss Eaton's class has completed three blankets and four dozen handkerchiefs for the soldiers. Miss Tervo's class has also completed the same amount of blankets and three dozen handkerchiefs. It is hoped that they will be able as their next accomplishment to outfit completely six refugee children."

The London Blitz

These refugee children may have been victims of bombed-out London. The 1940-41 school year coincided with the months of the London Blitz. In February 1941, a Dr. Cullis of England visited the school and gave "a stirring account of the heroism of the British air raid victims." Newsreels and newspapers of the time would have made a strong impression on the students. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the *Camosun's* prize-winning story, "Compensation" by Gloria Kendall. A family loses a baby to an air raid but gains another orphaned child. The hero is Robert Morley, a RAF squadron leader, who had "just returned from a dog-fight with the Nazis over the channel."



Yearbook, sports day and dance

The school year was almost at an end. At one o'clock on May 30, 1941 Ethel returned to her Division 3 classroom and received her *Camosun* yearbook. She and her classmates spent half an hour obtaining the signatures. At one thirty they dashed off to get signatures of everyone in the school. "The main hall was packed but finally Mr. Smith managed to persuade the galloping throng outside where the sports were being held." (June *Camosunet*)

The annual matriculation dinner and dance was held on the evening of May 30, 1941. Students went to the auditorium to draw names of partners, then took their seats in the cafeteria. The tables were decorated with California poppies in black vases. Rose corsages were at each place. Waiters were picked from Grade 11.



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MATRIC BANQUET HUGE SUCCESS

STUDENTS DINE AND DANCE
AT GRAD. SUPPER

By Albert McMinn

The graduating students of Vic. High enjoyed the annual Matriculation Banquet and Dance held on the evening of May 30. Possibly the most exciting thing was the drawing of partners in the auditorium after which the couples took their seats in the cafeteria. The tables were decorated with California Poppies in black vases. Rose corsages were at each place. Waiters were picked from Grade Eleven.

Before Alan Roper proposed a toast to the King, Captain Elmore Philpott, organizer of the Federal Union movement, delivered a vigorous and inspiring address, telling of his boyhood days and of his experiences and philosophy since. Captain Philpott believes that we are on the eve of the best era ever known to mankind. He expressed a wish that in the future there would be less racial differences and more of the Four Freedoms refer-

A prophecy of 1958

The most amusing event of the matriculation banquet was Jim McKeachie's prophecy for Victoria in 1958 – a modern city with fast-moving elevators and robot secretaries. What would happen for Ethel in the years leading to this modern time?

After graduation, Ethel trained as a hairdresser but left that because she hated the woman who ran the shop. She then worked as a cashier at Spencer's department store. Ethel sat in a chair most of the working day so most days after work she walked home to Gonzales Bay to get some exercise. In 1943, Ethel married Dick Warner, who was in the R.C.A.F. and later became a fireman with Victoria Fire Department. By 1958 Ethel was living in Vic West and raising two sons, Barry and Ken, who both became teachers.

In 1974 Ethel and Dick moved to the Comox Valley. As of this writing (February 2016), Ethel lives in Comox. She's enjoyed seeing the photos and newspaper articles and is amazed at what the Vic High Archives contains. She marvels: "They know more about me than even I do."



Stephanie Warner, Ethel Rowe's granddaughter, doing research for this story at the Vic High Archives