

Lily Laverock, reporter, suffragette, influencer

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Little-known Vic High alumna is remembered through a delicate 1898 medal awarded before attending Vic High.

By Linda Baker, Class of 1969

Born in Edinburgh c. 1880, Lily Laverock came to Vancouver as child with her parents. Her father worked for the CPR, and later opened a grocery store where the family likely lived as well.

According to her brother, who donated this medal to the Vic High Archives & Museum, Lily received it in 1898 as a result of her excellent marks in the high school entrance examinations. He says she attended Vic High after this, likely boarding with a local family. It wasn't unusual for students from around BC at the time to attend Victoria High School. He says she attended McGill University after leaving Vic High.



The inscription reads: "Lily J. Laverock, Special Prize Awarded for Reading, 1st Div Publ Schls, Dr. Lewis Hall, June 1898." Dr. Hall was a Victoria dentist, a member of the School Board 1896 – 1904, an Alderman 1906-07, and Mayor 1908-09.

Research about Lily is scant, but we do know this Vic High grad spent her life making a difference. Here's just a few of her early activities:

- 1907: founding member of the University Women's Club
- 1908: became the first woman employed as a general reporter by a Vancouver newspaper (*The World*)
- 1909: chief organizer and first secretary-treasurer of the first Vancouver branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club.

- 1910: moved to the *News-Advertiser* as editor of the women's page, "her pen ever ready in the cause of women's suffrage"
- 1918: elected to the management board of Vancouver's Carnegie Library and its branch.

Of the latter, the January 29, 1918 Vancouver Daily World said this:

Miss Annie B. Jamieson and Miss Lily Laverock, two well-known university women of this city, were elected last evening to this year's board of management of the Carnegie library and its branch library. The other members of the board are Mr. R.R. Maitland, Mr. W.C. Brown, and Mr. A.M. Pound. Miss Laverock and Mr. Maitland headed the polls with seven votes each on the first ballot. Miss Laverock, the new woman member of the board, is well-fitted for the office, having a wide knowledge of books and all that pertains to the best literature, both of the past and present day. Miss Jamieson has served on the library board before and has provided herself a valuable member.

Ethereally shy and a lifelong spinster, Laverock was also an avid supporter of the arts. She promoted her first Celebrity Concert in 1921, which then led to many years as a noted Vancouver impresario. The list of performers she brought to Vancouver reads like a Who's Who of the performing arts world at the time: composer and pianist Jan Paderewski, composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff, actress and opera singer Lily Pons, violinist Jascha Heifetz, opera singer Dame Nellie Melba, cellist and composer Pablo Casals, composer and pianist Maurice Ravel, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, the Belgian Royal Symphonic Band, and many more.

Although World War II brought her concert sponsorship to a halt, Lily's passion for the arts had already made a profound contribution to the musical life of Vancouver. She retired in the early 1950s, and died December 2, 1969 in Duncan, an almost-forgotten but hugely influential Vic High alumna.

Postscript: My dad was a Vic High Class of 1945 alumnus, and as his family was heavily into the arts in Victoria at the time, he might have heard them speak about Lily's concerts. His aunt, well-known local pianist Maquinna Daniels, might even have travelled to Vancouver for one of them.

People like Lily Laverock seem so far in the past. But consider these events of 1969, the year that Lily Laverock died. In December Vancouver got its NHL franchise and the Canucks' first game was in 1970. And on September 2, 1969 the phenomenon that would become the internet was first activated, thus allowing us to post and share information about little-known folks, specially Vic High alumni like Lily Laverock.
