

The Legacy of Lives & Legends

The Ladysmith & District Historical Society

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– Shirley Blackstaff

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The Ladysmith & District Historical Society (LDHS) produced a series of heritage videos called *Lives and Legends* (L&L) thanks to the B.C. | Canada 150 grant. Professionally produced by TAKE 5 and uploaded to the LDHS YouTube channel for public access, L&L consists of 24 interviews conducted by five interviewers and dozens of volunteers. The videos incorporate historical research and archival photos alongside personal testimony in order to bring to life stories that were in danger of being forgotten. LDHS used the project as an opportunity to incorporate the use of social media as a tool to reach new groups such as youth and those with mobility issues, increasing the diversity of their visitors and stakeholders while also boosting heritage accessibility within a small town context.

“The heritage video series provides a living legacy for future generations while allowing the history to be built on moving forward each decade,” said Alex Stuart, former mayor of Ladysmith. Alex was chosen for the series because of his important contributions to the town's revitalization in the 1980s.

Shirley Blackstaff carried out interviews of Stz'uminus First Nations on the subjects of language, oyster farming, industry, and hunting for the L&L series. She feels that the oral histories captured by L&L are priceless for future generations, and may help promote recognition of local built heritage through increased recognition: “These stories may help politicians and others understand why certain buildings and artifacts are part of our communities' heritage and should be saved.”

In order to foster inclusion and increase the diversity of groups invested in the project, L&L took efforts to reach youth, people with mobility challenges, and those who were not regular visitors to the museum. L&L took advantage of social media as an outreach tool, using Facebook and YouTube alongside local news and media to connect with a broader audience. Posters were distributed in key areas that provided a QR code leading directly to the L&L YouTube playlist.

The project's volunteers – interviewers and interviewees alike – found deep meaning and personal development in their participation. Interviewer Rob Johnson gained insight into the lives and histories of his own family when he interviewed



a living relative: "... I found out interesting facts that I didn't know about my own history," says Johnson. The interviews he participated in profiled stories of War Years, the Great Depression, forestry and pioneer families. "It was interesting interacting with people and seeing them remembering things that they had forgotten because no one had ever asked them."

Young people in particular enjoyed the humorous stories and the colourful characters that L&L brought to life. "Students will discover how it was in the early days and begin to appreciate all the hard work that built our community," says Blackstaff.



The benefits of this project run deep for the small seaside community of Ladysmith. This project demonstrates how a little creativity and ingenuity can have a large impact on not only a museum and heritage organization, but also the community at large and the personal lives of its stakeholders. "The community as a whole benefits from a living legacy such as L&L. Future grant applications will benefit from it, as will those looking to share stories that were a part of our community history", says Stuart. In fact, the LDHS recently obtaining another grant to continue developing their video projects continuing to grow the legacy started by the B.C. | Canada 150 grant.



Top: Alex Stuart being interviewed by Rob Johnson. Photo credit: Ladysmith Archives

Middle: Ladysmith's historic downtown. Photo credit: Ladysmith Archives

Bottom: Marina Sacht, TAKE 5, Series Producer. Photo credit: Ladysmith Archives