

This recording is an interview with Barry Buckland, the current owner of the Columbia Theatre in New Westminster and of Lafflines Comedy Club. The main topics discussed in the interview are his connections to New Westminster, the operations of the Columbia Theatre, and his view of the development of the city.

Interviewer: Jackie Gootee

Interview Date: 19 February 2014

Date Range: 1970s – present

Recording length: 33:43

The Columbia Theatre on 530 Columbia St. in New Westminster was built in 1927 as a 900-seat movie theatre. Until the mid-1980s, the building housed a cinema, and was the first cinema in Canada with air conditioning. After being closed for many years, the city of New Westminster sold the building to Barry Buckland in 2011, and he took on the task of restoring the theatre. Buckland is an Ottawa native, but came to New Westminster in 1985. Since then he has operated a number of businesses. His goal is to revitalize the entertainment scene of the city by operating a comedy school, managing the Lafflines Comedy Club that occupies the theatre today, and providing a performance venue for up-and-coming local artists. He predicts that within 20 years, Columbia St. will again be a centre for entertainment in the region.

The interview was conducted as part of History 461 – Oral History Practicum at Simon Fraser University.

Section 00:00 – 07:04

In this portion of the interview, Buckland describes the first company he started in 1986, Midland Liquidators, located at the corner of Columbia St. and 4<sup>th</sup> St. in New Westminster. The company would buy up companies that were “going under,” and resell their assets. Buckland came to British Columbia for the first time in 1979 with the Coast Guard in Victoria. He liked BC and moved here permanently in 1985. Buckland talks about the start of Lafflines Comedy Club and the building where the Columbia Theatre is located. He describes how the theatre was first a cinema, then a gathering place for the Fraternal Order of Eagles, before it was bought by the city of New Westminster in 2000, and renamed Burr Theatre after the actor Raymond Burr, a New Westminster native. He describes meeting elderly couples who had their first date at the Columbia Theatre.

Section 07:05 – 08:56

In this portion of the interview, Buckland explains his attraction to New Westminster. He likes the city, and the fact that it is central and quiet. Buckland talks about how New Westminster used to be the hub of the Lower Mainland, and how Columbia St. was “The Golden Mile” that served as a commercial hub prior to the construction of Highway 1. He states that the residential development and the creation of the Pier Park during the last years is generating activity in the city, and that the city is becoming busier.

Section 08:57 – 18:03

In this portion of the interview, Buckland describes the current daily operations of the Columbia Theatre. The Lafflines Comedy Club has their performances in the Baby Grand Room upstairs in

the theatre, and different events take place in the Grand Room downstairs. He describes the clientel, the comic school he operates, his employees, and states that his employees are not involved in any union, nor have had any accidents since he took over.

#### Section 18:04 – 21:20

In this portion of the interview, Buckland talks about the technology changes that concern him as a manager of a theatre. He also provides a bit of personal history; he lives in Surrey, and prefers to spend his limited leisure time close to the water or the mountains.

#### Section 21:21 – 26:05

In this portion of the interview, Buckland talks about growing up in Ottawa and his first impression of BC's natural beauty. Buckland reports that he has good relationships with the downtown restaurant and pub owners, in part, because the theatre brings people into the city core. He is impressed with how Wayne Wright (Mayor of New Westminster) continues to have a vision and drive for the city, and states that progress is good for the city. He thinks the city will have more condos along the waterfront, improved community gathering spaces and a vibrant city core in 20 years, which will attract more people.

#### Section 26:06 – 33:43

In this portion of the interview, Buckland describes ethnic diversity in the city. He states that in the entertainment environment, the jokes are now "cleaner" to accommodate this. Buckland explains how it is hard for women to be "dirty" in the industry and what it takes to be a good comic. The interviewer and Buckland discuss comics he likes, and Buckland discusses how it is harder to be a comic than that of a musician. He closes the interview by suggesting other people the project should interview, and upcoming events at the theatre.