

Hugh Norman Lidster - Pioneer Film Maker (1888-1967)

So much of New Westminster's history has been recorded in remarkable ways by the amateur photographers who were as fascinated with the technology as the subject matter. The widespread popularity of photography created many talented heroes who worked in obscurity, but who left a legacy of extraordinary images for our community archives to preserve and share. The Royal City owes so much to its honorary 'Native Son' Hugh Norman Lidster a talented community leader who loved making motion pictures.

Born in Barrow-in-Furness, Lancashire, England, Hugh Norman Lidster came with his family to British Columbia in 1902 as a lad of fourteen. He excelled at his early studies but was bored with school and began working at a variety of jobs. He found his place as an office boy in a legal firm and after passing his exams to article as a law student, he was admitted to the bar in 1913. Lidster soon made a special study of municipal law and moved to New Westminster to open his practice. It was not too long before he became involved in community affairs, being elected as a Councilor in 1925. He was appointed to the city's Library Board and made a huge contribution serving on the Provincial Library Board from 1929-1966. It was in 1946 that he was hired as the first City Solicitor a position he retained until his retirement in 1957.



Always interested in new technology, from how radios operated or the quest for the ultimate phonograph player, Lidster found a home hobby in his love of movies. As a child he was fascinated viewing his first movie in Sheffield England. In New Westminster he loved going to the movies at the old Edison Theatre at Begbie and Columbia, with its melodramatic pictures accompanied by the piano and violin. It was not until 1930 that he was able to purchase his own movie camera.

The first subjects were his children and home life, typical of any proud father. Always an extremely thorough and meticulous individual, he became a member of the Amateur Cinema League (ACL) to hone his movie making craft. In 1931 he turned his lens towards the civic May Day celebration and captured the singular event that defined his adopted city. What was more remarkable was that he kept filming this event every year until 1963, amassing a film archives that has no other rival. He adopted using colour film in 1938 adding a compelling immediacy to the images for modern viewers. The collection is not limited to May Day, as he trained his camera on the 1939 Royal Visit and the celebration of VE day on Columbia Street in 1945.

Lidster was keenly aware of the historic importance of documentation and preservation. He was one of the city staff that had been given the task of organizing the purchase of Irving House in 1950 and served proudly on its board until 1958. He would be especially pleased to learn of his family's preservation of his incredible photographic legacy after his death at age 78 in 1967.

In 1997, three cardboard boxes containing over 75 metal canisters were delivered to Mr. Lidster's daughter Freda Springate by her brother Wallace Lidster's son. The reels of film had not been seen in decades. Freda, who was a business computer pioneer in the 1970s, had a strong desire to watch the movies of her youth. She requested her son Nick Springate to explore the technologies involved to duplicate the films into a computer format so they could be shared with all who expressed interest.

The results of the transfer to digital media were outstanding, the images are flicker free and encoded in multiple formats. This offers broadcast quality viewing of the vintage footage on DVD, the Internet and in a high resolution archive files for editing and still image capture.

The family donated the Hugh Norman Lidster collection to the New Westminster Museum & Archives in 2005.

Visit www.GoSee.TV to view the History Channel and videos from the collection or contact nick@beachgroup.com for more information.

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