

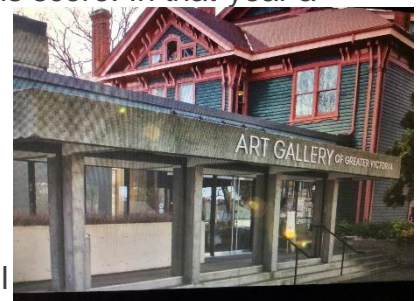
The establishment of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 1951 was the culmination of a long and frustrating struggle for over almost half a century in which our predecessors in the Island Arts and Crafts Society, and later the Victoria Sketch Club, played a vital role.

For a capital city, Victoria was painfully slow to mark its own cultural presence in the form of an art gallery. The need for such an institution had been implicit in the stated objectives of the Society, and as early as 1911, the Provincial Government had made a firm promise to provide for a permanent art gallery, with a view to “fostering the artistic spirit in the City and in the Province.”

In the event, it was left to the efforts of the Society’s Margaret Kitto to pursue the cause, and persuade the Canadian Pacific Railway to provide such a gallery as an attachment to the Crystal Garden in 1925. However, support for this venture was deemed to be a Society rather than a civic responsibility, and sadly, due to a reported lack of public interest and the inability to finance it, this facility was short-lived.

Opening the annual exhibition of 1930, B.C. Premier S. F. Tolmie mentioned the need to secure a permanent home and gallery for Victoria. However, the hollowness of such sentiments unmatched by any positive assistance were felt even more keenly here when in 1931 Vancouver acquired an art gallery to add to its art school. In 1932, a frustrated Emily Carr offered her home as a public gallery, but her pleas to government to provide financial support for the venture fell on deaf ears. Likewise in 1938 a proposal from prominent artist Kathleen Maltwood to build a small public gallery, contingent upon City funding for its upkeep, was rejected.

Victoria was left to wait until 1946 for any further progress on this score. In that year a group of sponsors, mobilized by Mark Kearly, son of an English earl, and Lawren Harris, and including Society members Ina Uhthoff, William Menelaws and Isabel Hobbs, succeeded in establishing the “Little Centre,” a small but welcome public gallery in Yates Street. Another who steered the way to this achievement was Sara Spenser of the well-known Victoria retail family, whose 1889 mansion in Moss Street, after the “holding operation” of the Little Centre, was eventually to become the home of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 1951. Ironically this was the year of the demise of the old Society which had long pursued this goal in the teeth of civic indifference,



With a site now secured, the newly established Gallery Board, on the recommendation of Ina Uhthoff, hired Colin Graham, a Cambridge and Berkeley educated Canadian working as an art educator in San Francisco, as its first Director. This proved to be an inspirational choice. During his tenure, 1951-'73, through exhibition, education and collection programs, he was able to enliven the rather static Victoria cultural scene by embracing modern art, and thence proceeding to lay the foundation for the gallery which has played such a key role in the art life of this community.



Graham looked kindly at the Sketch Club, the surviving and by now flourishing component of the former Society, and in 1956 suggested the insertion of the word “Victoria,” so gifting us our present title. He remained a good friend of our Club, and even in his declining years gave invaluable encouragement to our Centennial Year celebrations and contributed an elegant forward to our 2008 history book. Colin Graham died in Victoria in 2010 at the age of 94.