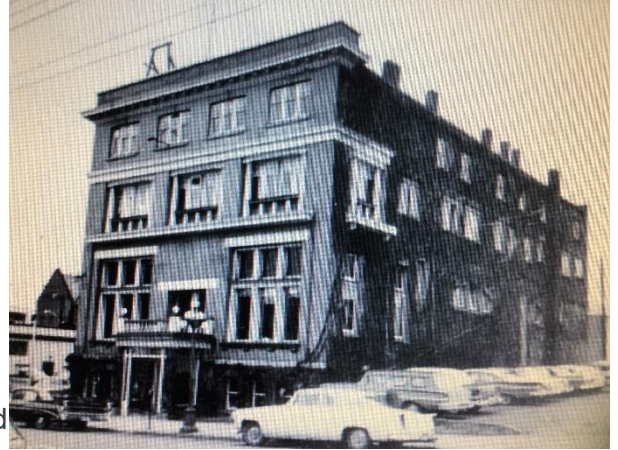


The enforced postponement of our 2020 Annual Exhibition at Glenlyon-Norfolk School in the light of the Coronavirus (COVID19) pandemic, despite its inevitability, nonetheless came as a shock and a disappointment. This has happened on previous occasions, albeit with relative infrequency, over the 111 years of Club history.

From the first exhibition of the Island Arts Club, held at the newly-built Alexandra Club (the ladies' answer to the men-only Union Club!), the chain of these events remained unbroken until 1939, even managing to survive the years of the Spanish Flu pandemic, 1918 - '20, despite a succession of provincial bans on public assemblies during that period.

The year 1939 proved to be pivotal, and not only because of the imminence of World War II. The Island Arts and Crafts Society was in a state of gradual decline due in part to a loss of some key stalwart members and to a serious lack of funds. Two years previously a motion to continue its existence had only passed on a split vote. Following a decision not to suspend its activities for the year 1939, the Society opted to curtail them. The major casualty of this decision was what would have been the thirtieth annual exhibition which was to be postponed until the following year, ostensibly due to difficulties over accommodation. A rather modified show of Island artists was held at the Vancouver Art Gallery under the Society's auspices, and the Sketch Club, still a vibrant component of the Society, held its own show at the Windermere Hotel in October 1939.



At this stage the Society was fortunate to find a savior in the person of John Kyle, just retired from a twenty-five year stint as the provincial Director of Technical Education. A longtime Society member and a fine artist, Kyle was elected Society President in 1939, and succeeded in keeping the torch of art burning throughout and beyond the war years. Annual exhibitions were held regularly up to and including the Society's swansong event in 1950 at the Hudson's Bay building.

After an outstanding tenure of 12 years, Kyle resigned as Society president in 1951 at the age of eighty. That year, as the old Society faded away, what would have been the fortieth annual show did not happen. Although the indefatigable Sketch Club was soon to pick up the torch, it needed time to get fully established. In 1954 the first annual exhibition under its banner took place at the Dominion Hotel, beginning an unbroken run until 2020.

In the worst case scenario, this year's postponement would be only the fifth in our Club's 111 years. Considering that this period includes two World Wars and two serious pandemics, this record represents a remarkable achievement.

*By John Lover*