

Researching a site history in the City of Vancouver Archives: contaminated sites and preliminary site assessments. AKA your “house history”.

UBC History 490R: The Environmental History of British Columbia.

David Brownstein

Due Date: before class starts the week of January 30th, 2017.

This assignment is worth 10% of your final grade.

Target length, 1250 words, not including captions or citations. Do not spend more than six hours on this assignment. **Late submissions will be penalized by -10% per day.**

Please cite all sources using appropriate footnotes. Published, secondary sources should be self evident, but references for primary sources need to include the name of the repository, and whatever info from the binder/fiche/map/etc that anybody else would need, to get their hands on it as quickly as possible.

Background:

At the City of Vancouver Archives, you will be introduced to tools that can provide insight into historic land uses. Being able to compile such histories is a practical skill. Often this information is desired by people who wish to protect themselves against inheriting somebody else’s toxic hazards. Individuals considering purchasing or developing a property, or lending money to a business, want to make sure that there are no hidden ‘surprises’ buried beneath the soil or leaching through the grass from a neighbouring parcel of land. These individuals do not want to be liable for the cost of cleaning up a mess created by others.

In these instances, a preliminary site investigation profile is compiled from readily available sources, including past and present uses. Interviews are also conducted with people who have been involved with the site, including neighbours. This ‘due diligence’ records search protects an individual from future claims. If the initial search turns up cause for concern, then physical testing of the site may be necessary.

The Assignment:

After our tour, your job is to make use of the city directories, fire insurance plans and other sources to construct a site-use history. If you live in Vancouver, please use your home address. If you live outside of Vancouver, you and I will agree on an address to research.

What activities took place on and around your site over time? Might they have produced any causes for concern?

During the week of **January 23rd** we will **visit the Geographic Information Centre**. Select a reasonably spaced sequence of air photos for your address. Do they confirm the information you have collected from other sources? Do they tell you anything new? Include copies of the air photos that you consulted with your report.

Over...

Structure

Begin with an argument, and then prove your case with evidence organized by a chronological narrative as informed by your secondary and archival sources. Include a site description, some commentary on the changes in the wider neighbourhood, and recommendations for a prospective buyer of the property, based on your reading of the archival record. Don't forget to include a brief outline of the sources that you would ideally consult if you had unlimited time for the project.

Marking Rubric:

	Sophisticated 80 - 100	Quite good 70 - 79	Sufficient 60 - 69	Inadequate < 60
Argument	Yes: clear, robust, direct, understandable. Logical, analytical, well explored.	Yes, present but could have stood another set of revisions to sharpen, missed important points	Yes, present but possibly weak. Vague, rambling, incoherent. Addressed, but spotty treatment and examined in patches while ignoring crucial aspects	No argument, or position is vague, illogical, poorly explored or no analysis. Woefully inadequate
Narrative	Synthesizes sources into a meaningful, fluid, articulate, chronological narrative; attentive to multiple temporal and geographical scales.	Generally in chronological order, though some jumping around, needs some work to make more smooth, perhaps weak attention to wider neighbourhood	Mirrors process of research, rather than events as they unfolded in time, or no attention to wider context	Scatter-shot and unstructured, no attention to temporal or geographic context
Appropriate length	Appropriate length, approx 1250 words	Perhaps slightly too long or too short,	Too much or too little material	Far too long or too short, for any number of reasons

Critical use of wide variety of Sources?	At least five unique primary sources (at minimum, the directories, fire insurance plans, water hook-up applications, photographs, and air photos), and five unique secondary sources. All used in an aware, self-reflexive and critical fashion.	Sufficient sources (say, four of each primary and secondary) but not critical, or critical of an insufficient number of sources	Over reliance on secondary sources. Insufficient quality, or weak sources. Critical of sources in a weak fashion, or here and there rather than throughout	Insufficient or inappropriate/wrong sources. Author uses all material in an uncritical, unreflective fashion
Analysis	Strong analytical skills evident, relevant info drawn from sources and linked to other info to maximize meaning	Good analysis, though perhaps missed important points here and there; some links not made explicit	Simply reporting data from documents rather than contextualizing info located, or wrong information	Incorrect analysis or mistakes, no or mistaken contextualization
Maps, figures, and photos	Clear, relevant and well-integrated	Minor issues, or not enlisted to tell your story as well as they could have	Present, but possibly unclear, of questionable relevance or not as well integrated into the narrative	Few, or no maps, figures or photos, or those present were not related, or not integrated into the narrative at all
Citations	Footnotes deployed appropriately in text and bibliography at end	Minor issues in either footnotes or bibliography	Significant issues in either footnotes or bibliography	Missing footnotes or bibliography