



Chris Chang-Yen Phillips
Edmonton's Historian Laureate
Report to City Council
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A Year of Exploring Together

The role of Edmonton's Historian Laureate changes with each person who takes it on. I've mainly interpreted my role as chief cheerleader for locals who are curious about Edmonton's past. With the increasingly fraught atmosphere in the US around truth and "fake news" bleeding north, my enthusiasm for encouraging Edmontonians in developing research and fact-checking skills took on a new urgency.

So if there was a pattern to my second and final year of my term as Edmonton's fourth Historian Laureate, it must be a theme of exploring and researching together. I found partners in history projects about Chinatown, climate change, queer history, and was able to expand the team on my history podcast, Let's Find Out.

Thematically, in my second year I chose to pursue opportunities to explore Edmonton's queer history, how humans interact with our landscape (especially through climate change), and how we remember our past. It's been an honour and a privilege to serve as one of the city's historians laureate.

Let's Find Out



Let's Find Out is a monthly podcast, and each month I take questions from curious Edmontonians about local history. Then we find out the answers together. It's a research methodology podcast dressed up as a podcast about history and detective work.

Over the past year, I've found ways to bring the public along on live recordings of Let's Find Out, and joined the Alberta Podcast Network.

Through the generous support of the Edmonton Heritage Council and the Edmonton Historical Board, I was able to hire Samantha Power as an assistant producer for Season 2 of the podcast. She later moved on, and Oumar Salifou took over as assistant producer for the end of the season.

So far, audience members have listened to the episodes over 12,000 times. I was invited to speak to the University of Alberta's CSL 100 class about public history research on Let's Find Out, the podcast has been cited in materials for AfroQuiz, and it's been included in course materials for several other classes at the University of Alberta and MacEwan University.

- **The Absent Gravestone**

In this episode, Sheila Thomas asked me to help her find out why Frank Beevers doesn't seem to have a marker on his grave. He was the first police officer killed in the line of duty in Edmonton.



- **How We Know What's True**

We hosted a live panel at the Needle Vinyl Tavern for this episode. Dr. Kisha Supernant, Sarah Hoyles, and Dave Cournoyer spoke about how they know what's true in their field. The audience got a chance to ask questions of the panelists as well. The Strathcona Archaeological Society tabled at the event, and Shaw TV filmed and broadcast the panel as well.



- **A Lesson in Protocol**

Nathan Smith asked what food plants have been important to Indigenous peoples in the Edmonton area. That simple question opened up a deep process of learning from Jodi Stonehouse and Elder Jim O’Chiese about how to ask questions across cultures, and who knowledge belongs to. I’ve since learned that at least one team of archaeologists in the province found this episode helpful in learning about the process of offering protocol.



- **The Dinosaurs at Danek**

In this episode, I gathered kids’ questions about paleontology, mainly from participants at the Edmonton Regional Heritage Fair. Then I brought those questions to the paleontologists and students digging up Albertosaurus and Edmontosaurus bones at the Danek Bonebed site in Edmonton.



- **About Ritchie**

In collaboration with the Ritchie Community League, I hosted a history walk around the neighbourhood answering people’s questions about the area. We explored what’s going to happen to the Ritchie School, whether cattle really escaped from the Gainers’ meatpacking plant, and when a certain row of street trees was planted.



- **A Rather Queer Roadtrip**

Kory DeGroot had been exploring queer history in Edmonton through Instagram stories, so we teamed up for a roadtrip around the city exploring where you can learn about these stories. Author Laurel Deedrick-Mayne took us through a file of gay love letters from the 1950s in the University of Alberta Archives, Fort Edmonton Park's Tom Long told us about their queer history initiatives, and Carmen-Lida Ordoñez told us about immigrating from Ecuador and coming out later in life.



- **The Multiplication of Evil**

Tess Dehoog asked whether representatives of the German Nazi party really came to Edmonton to learn about Alberta's eugenics program.

- **The Land at Hand**

Lauren Crazybull asked what parallels we can see between broken treaties and gentrification in Edmonton. We talked to Papaschase First Nation's Chief Calvin Bruneau, as well as Sandy Pon, a member of the Chinatown Economic Development Task Force.



- **The Sign of the Ferry**

Raymond Matthias asked if he'd found the remains of John Walter's ferry in the river valley. We took a live history walk into the river valley to examine the debris he found and get to the bottom of his question.



- **Keep Everything**

What should we keep, and what should we throw away? We used a case study of three boxes that my parents asked me to finally sort through. We spoke to two people with very different views on whether we should have publicized the love letters between JT Jones and Casimir Carter in the episode A Rather Queer Roadtrip.



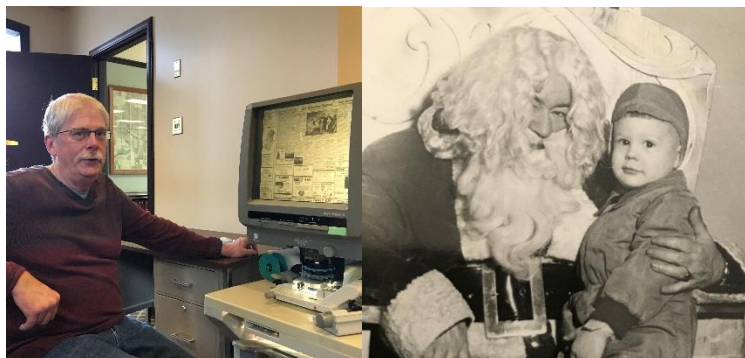
- **The Avalanche of Garbage**

Nicole and Jason Harcus asked us whether Gallagher Park really used to be a garbage dump. We explored the question with former Historian Laureate Ken Tingley and University of Alberta professor Russell Cobb.



- **The Case of the Christmas Train**

Glen Carlson asked us to help him figure out whether the Bay store downtown really used to have a Christmas train on the rooftop.



- **Climate Change Radio Camp**

A project that allowed me to combine my roles as Historian Laureate and News Coordinator at CJSR 88.5 FM. I worked with my CJSR colleagues and my Let's Find Out assistant producer to create a radio camp for Queen Elizabeth high school students in the Innovate program. The objective of the camp was to help them contextualize climate change as a way of understanding Edmonton's history, help them answer their questions about climate change, and teach them how to explore their questions through radio and podcasting.



We brainstormed questions about climate change together with the students at Queen Elizabeth, then brought their group of six to CJSR to let them interview researchers about their questions. We taught the students interviewing, editing, field recording, scripting, and hosting skills. The end product was a live hour of radio broadcast on CJSR. I will also be sharing their stories on the Let's Find Out podcast in February 2018.

Let's Find Out will continue after my term as Historian Laureate is over. Joining the Alberta Podcast Network was part of the infrastructure for that transition. My last Let's Find Out event before ending my term will be a live panel discussion about why **green onion cakes** got so popular in Edmonton in the early 1980s.

Speaking Events

- In May 2017, Reconciliation in Solidarity Edmonton (RISE) and the Edmonton Chinese Young Leaders Council (ECYLC) hosted a screening of the documentary **All Our Father's Relations** (祖根父脈). The movie follows the Grant family's attempt to connect with both their Chinese and Musqueam roots. I moderated a Q & A with the filmmakers at the screening.
- I spoke at a PechaKucha Night hosted by Edmonton's Next Gen. The theme of the evening was reconciliation, and looking ahead to Canada's next 150 years. My talk, **The Land We Stand On**, tried to persuade audience members that we can find a sense of belonging by learning to recognize history before colonization.



- I gave the keynote address at the NEOS Library Consortium's 2017 Miniconference. My talk was entitled **I Need Everything You Have on Harriet Brooks, By Tomorrow**. I spoke about the ways that researchers and librarians support each others' work.
- I gave a talk at the Ignite Change 2017 conference. My talk, **Yes, the Klan Had a Newspaper Here**, touched on Edmonton's history of white supremacy and black resistance.
- I was one of the speakers at the City of Edmonton's Change for Climate talks in December 2017. My talk, **The Next Story**, guided the audience through stories of Edmontonians adapting to extreme weather events in the past, and asked whether we can become "the next story" of mitigating disasters before they happen.
- In January 2018, I moderated a Q & A at an event called **A Brief and Unreliable History**. Authors Ted Kerr and Amy Fung shared stories about HIV activism, history, remembrance, and colonization.

Media

- This year I found two opportunities to combine my roles as CJSR News Coordinator and Historian Laureate. The first, **Figure 一二三六八**, will explore the history of Edmonton's Chinatown. I am supervising a group of students from Shannon Stunden Bower's HIST 377 class at the University of Alberta, who are creating short audio documentaries about moments in Chinatown's past, like the early days of Cantonese opera here, and what it was like being on a Klondike Days parade float with the Chinese Benevolent Society. The students will get course credit for their work through the Community Service Learning program. Their stories will be shared on CJSR and online. Later, artist Cui Jinzhe will be creating a series of paintings partly inspired by this work as well as archival research on built heritage in the area, supervised by Lan Chan-Marple. Shawn Tse is creating a video documentary about the process. The project is supported by a grant from the Edmonton Heritage Council.
- The second CJSR collaboration is the **Climate Change Radio Camp** mentioned above, in partnership with students at Queen Elizabeth high school and Hazeldean Elementary who are part of the Innovate Program. Their stories aired on CJSR in February 2017, and I will be sharing the students' work on the Let's Find Out podcast.
- **CJSR** news shows **Word** and **GayWire** covered the reading event I moderated, **A Brief and Unreliable History**.
- I wrote a story for **CBC.ca** reflecting on the 100th anniversary of Vimy Ridge. I spoke to Edmonton's Peter Twiss about his friendship with Vimy veteran Frank Young.
- Dan Rose and I collaborated on an **Edmonton Heritage Council blog** story about 5 Things I've Learned as Edmonton's Historian Laureate.
- **Global TV** interviewed me about Frank Oliver's legacy, and the **Edmonton Journal** interviewed me about the default image that came up when searching for Edmonton on Google.
- **Shaw TV** broadcast a recording of the How We Know What's True live panel event, and shared it online.
- I spoke about growing the podcast listener pie at the Edmonton Podcast Meetup along with Katrina Ingram, and the recording was shared on the **Seen and Heard in Edmonton** podcast.
- Over my term, I more than doubled the followers on the Edmonton's Historian Laureate **Facebook** page. I've used it to share my own talks and podcasts as well as community events. One of my favourite projects was asking four other Edmontonians to collaborate on a Canada150 series. Ahmed "Knowmadic" Ali, Miranda Jimmy, Kathryn Ivany, and Dr. Kisha

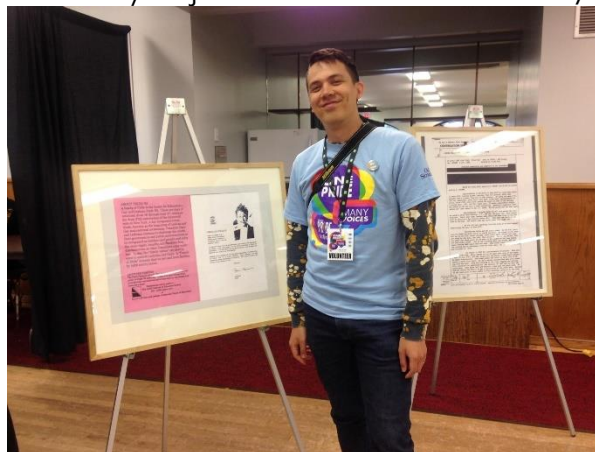
Supernant all shared their thoughts on the milestone, and gave readers a homework/service assignment. In total, these posts reached about 15,000 readers. I also documented the removal of the Harbin Gate through a series of photos.

In the Classroom

- I gave a class talk to the University of Alberta CSL 100 class on my role as historian laureate, and how I tell stories through the Let's Find Out podcast.
- MacEwan University student Brayden Morton interviewed me for a paper on becoming a public historian for his HIST 397 Public History class.
- Holyrood Elementary student Abigail Struthers interviewed me for a project for her grade 5 class. She was curious why some historical figures like Nellie McClung are more widely remembered and celebrated than others (like Thanadelthur).

Community Events

- Once again, I spoke at and helped judge presentations at the **Edmonton Regional Heritage Fair**.
- I MC'ed and hosted a live auction for the **Sombrilla International Development Society** annual fundraising dinner, raising money for their sustainable development projects throughout Latin America.
- I pitched in as a Safe and Secure Event volunteer at the **Queer Prom** in May 2017.
- I volunteered on Enoch Cree Nation at the **World Indigenous Nations Games**.
- I volunteered at the Queer History Project exhibit for Pride in June 2017.



- In December 2017 facilitated a workshop for the **Next Up** leadership program on storytelling, using examples from my own public talks as historian laureate.
- I also attended a Chinatown history tour, CariWest, Treaty Six Recognition Day, the Alberta Museums Association/Western Museums Association conference, and the Edmonton Historical Board's Plaques and Recognition ceremony.