

# New Westminster May Day Community Association

May Day Backgrounder [www.nwmayday.com](http://www.nwmayday.com)

May Day in New Westminster is a cultural phenomenon. At 151 years old May Day is the longest running festivity of its kind in the British Commonwealth of Nations and likely in the world. The continuance of May Day in New Westminster is in jeopardy following the local school district's withdrawal of support for the event. Local volunteers are working hard to keep the festival going.

- May Day was originally organized by the Royal Engineers stationed in New Westminster in May of 1870. Their aim was to illicit good cheer and memories of home
- Held in Queen's Park Stadium on a day following Victoria Day, May Day, marked by much pomp and circumstance, involves the Crowning of a May Queen, traditional Maypole dancing, musical performances, sporting activities and speeches.
- Until the 1970s, festivities in Queens Park were preceded by a May Day Parade.
- The Queen's Park event has attracted as many 15,000 people.
- Her majesty the Queen and Prince Phillip have attended May Day at least four times.
- May Day evolved into a highly organized civic function managed jointly by the City, School Board, community volunteers and businesses.
- For 100 years, the New Westminster School District oversaw key elements of May Day including teaching the intricate May Pole and folk-dance steps performed by elementary school students.
- The Schools oversaw the selection and later election of elementary school student representatives, two from each of the eight elementary schools in New Westminster, who play a key role in the pomp and ceremony of May Day.
- To be a May Queen a school representative already elected by her peers must have her name drawn from a hat just as the role of Queen is drawn from yet another hat. The May Queen is supported by a royal Suite who also each have titles they win by draw. The boys are known as Royal Knights. The draw is a unique event held at City Hall ahead of May Day.
- In 2020 the New Westminster School District (SD40) withdrew its support for May Day.
- Initially formed as a May Day advocacy group, the New Westminster May Day Community Association pivoted to organizing the event.
- In 2019, SD40 reported that their support for May Day would end after the historic 150th May Day in Queens Park set for May 20th, 2020. Regrettably, the event was canceled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. SD40 indicated that they did not intend to

reschedule the event, effectively ending its participation on a permanent basis.

- The pandemic has shuttered the historic 150th celebration two years in a row.
- Supporters of New Westminster’s historic May Day Festival have a vision to maintain and grow the event, which is a challenging task.
- The May Day Association is committed to integrating local First Nations culture into May Day and is engaged with the leadership of New Westminster’s Qayqayt First Nation to build bridges of reconciliation.

### **May Day – A manifestation of Intangible Cultural Heritage:**

- May Day is a manifestation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) as defined by UNESCO’s Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention 2003  
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>
- Canada is not a signatory of the Convention (neither the US nor Australia)
- What is Intangible Heritage?  
<https://ich.unesco.org/en/what-is-intangible-heritage-00003>

### **Features of Intangible Cultural Heritage?**

- It takes infinite forms
- It’s considered the source of human creativity and cultural diversity
- ICH elements change over time, responding to new situations
- Another name for ICH is living heritage.

### **What does ICH do?**

- It brings human beings and communities closer together

### **ICH Resources**

- UNESCO unveils an interactive digital map inclusive of 500 cultural elements mapped against 1000 concepts and invites a deep dive into the rich connectivity we share with expressions peoples. May Day falls into several element categories – including dance, and festival.

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/dive>

- UNESCO 2-minute Introduction to Intangible Cultural Heritage called “Deep Dive into ICH”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuTSC9TB5Ds&t=13s>

- *Report: ICH Basics and History*  
[https://www.mun.ca/ich/resources/ICH\\_Report\\_Basics\\_and\\_History.pdf](https://www.mun.ca/ich/resources/ICH_Report_Basics_and_History.pdf)

### **May Day History Resources**

- *140 years of May Day* by Gerald Tompson  
<http://www.nwmayday.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/NWMayDay-Gerald-Tompson-Article-140-years-of-May-Day.pdf>

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:**

Lorraine Brett, Media Relations CELL: 604-351-8497 EMAIL: [Lorraine@lorrainebrett.com](mailto:Lorraine@lorrainebrett.com)

Nikki Binns, President, New Westminster May Day Community Association CELL:604-899-0044

