A Trek Through UBC Student History

Pre-History
1899-1900: Vancouver College, primarily a high school, begins offering post-secondary courses accredited by Montreal’s McGill University. Six students enroll in the post-secondary program (enrollment reaches 30 in 1905-06).

Fall 1906: McGill University College of British Columbia (McGill BC) opens, replacing the post-secondary program at Vancouver College and offering university-level instruction to 48 students (enrollment in later years rises to about 300).

Fall 1907: McGill BC’s students organize a student society known as the Alma Mater Society. First president: F.J. Shearer.

Early Days, Fairview Campus
September 27-30, 1915: Opening of UBC, first true university in the province, temporarily housed in McGill BC’s old buildings (called the “Fairview Shacks”) at 12th and Oak. McGill BC closes; many of its professors and students continue at UBC (though some go overseas to fight in World War I). Registration and meeting of faculty members: September 27. First lectures: September 30.

October 15, 1915: Birthday of the Alma Mater Society (AMS) of UBC; students meet and adopt constitution for new student society; Sherwood Lett elected first AMS President later that month.

1915-16: First student clubs at UBC: two debating clubs (the Men’s Literary Society and the Women’s Literary Society); the Players’ Club (putting on theatrical productions); the Glee Club (later the Musical Club, then the Musical Society or Mussoc).

December 1916: First UBC student publication, a monthly magazine called the Anonymous (later renamed Ubicee).

1916-17: Mountaineering Club formed (later renamed the Varsity Outdoors Club).

1916-17: Predecessor of SAC formed to oversee the clubs: first called the Literary Department, then the Literary and Scientific Department (LSD), 1917-27; then the Literary and Scientific
Executive (LSE), 1927-54; then the University Clubs Committee (UCC), 1954-72. It became SAC in 1975.

October 17, 1918: First issue of new student newspaper called the *Ubyssey*.

October 28, 1922: The Great Trek. All 1200 UBC students march from the Fairview campus to the site of the still unbuilt campus in Point Grey (the current campus), demanding that the government provide the money needed for construction. (The government agrees.)

**Point Grey: The First 40 Years**

**September 1925**: First classes at the new Point Grey campus.

**April 27, 1928**: The students incorporate their Alma Mater Society as an independent non-profit society in order to raise money for campus building.

**November 9, 1929**: Official opening of UBC’s first gymnasium, built with money raised by the AMS: first of many campus building projects initiated by students through the AMS.

**1936-37**: Film Society founded; first year’s film presentations include *Thunder over Mexico*, *Fra Diavolo*, and *Ali Baba*.

**September 1937**: Distant origin of CiTR. AMS begins weekly half-hour radio broadcasts on local radio station (directed by a new club, the Radio Society).

**January 31, 1940**: Official opening of Brock Hall, the first UBC student union building, paid for largely by funds raised by the AMS.

**January 1949**: The Dance Club (constituted the previous year) begins functioning, advertising classes in the tango, the rumba, and the fox trot.

**October 25, 1954**: Fire at Brock Hall; roof falls in; students launch fund-raising campaign to pay for restoration.

**December 1956**: The Second Trek. A student petition campaign convinces the government to increase funding for the University.

**March 1963**: The Third Trek (the “Back Mac” Campaign). Students march, boycott classes, and petition in support of UBC President John B. Macdonald’s request for increased funding and greater access to higher education.
**Point Grey: Since 1965**

**October 18, 1967:** Students elected to the University Senate for the first time.

**September 26, 1968:** Opening of current Student Union Building (the SUB), paid for largely by AMS funds.

**October 24, 1968:** Urged on by U.S. hippie leader Jerry Rubin, thousands of UBC students occupy the Faculty Club. The AMS Student Council condemns the occupation, but helps organize a teach-in the following week on university reform.

**November 28, 1968:** Opening of The Pit, the first student pub on campus, temporarily located on the second floor of the SUB until a permanent home could be made for it in the SUB basement. The Pit’s name was suggested by David Suzuki, the noted environmentalist and at the time a UBC faculty member.

**January 1969:** The Radio Society begins broadcasting as CYVR (becomes CITR in 1974; begins broadcasting off-campus on cable in 1975 and on FM in 1982).

**November 19, 1973:** The Pit opens in its new location, in the SUB basement. Beer goes on sale for 40 cents a bottle.

**December 1974:** Students elected to the University Board of Governors for the first time (one is Svend Robinson, later an NDP MP).

**November 1975:** Referendum revamps AMS structure, creating the Student Administrative Commission (SAC), the body responsible for overseeing clubs.

**April 1, 1977:** AMS Student Court orders the AMS to pay compensation to the Varsity Outdoors Club (VOC) in a dispute over ownership of the Whistler cabin (built by the VOC, with the assistance of the AMS, in 1965). AMS Student Council refuses to approve the Court ruling. A compromise is later reached.

**February 4, 1986:** Bowing to protests, the Engineers replace their annual Lady Godiva ride with a mock funeral procession, but then stage a strip show in the Hebb Theatre. (The rides subsequently resumed for a few more years, but were discontinued after 1989.)
September 1989: Students vote against paying a $30 AMS fee to build the Student Recreation Centre, reversing a vote from the year before. (The Administration then introduces its own $40 student fee to pay for the Centre.)

1994-95: The Ubyssey, until then an AMS publication, does not publish all year, following conflicts with the AMS Executive sparked by controversial articles in 1993-94. In 1995-96, the Ubyssey is reborn as an independent publication (no longer published by the AMS).

February 14, 1996: The AMS officially announces its new Child Care Bursary Fund, named after Mrs. Evelyn Lett, a member of the first AMS Student Council in 1915-16. Mrs. Lett, aged 99, attends the ceremony and makes a short speech.

November 25, 1997: The summit of leaders from member nations of APEC (the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation organization) turns violent as protesters on campus are sprayed by police with pepper spray. The incident leads to widespread condemnation of the police, lawsuits, and a public inquiry.

January 22, 1998: A successful lawsuit by four UBC students forces UBC to refund $1 million in fees that it collected in violation of a provincial tuition freeze.

March 26, 1999: Death at the age of 102 of Mrs. Evelyn Lett, member of UBC’s first Student Council in 1915-16; co-author of the first AMS constitution; widow of Sherwood Lett, the first AMS President.

February-March 2002: BC Liberal government lifts six-year-old tuition freeze; UBC raises fees for first time since mid-1990’s.

February 2003: In the largest turnout ever for a referendum, students vote to introduce the U-Pass, an inexpensive bus pass for students.

February-March 2003: UBC teaching assistants go on strike until legislated back to work.

February 2004: Council bans slates in AMS elections.

March 2004: UBC and the provincial government announce the creation of a new UBC campus in the Okanagan, to open in 2005 on the grounds of the old Okanagan University College.
**December 2004:** AMS Executive fires the General Manager, Bernie Peets, but Council overturns the dismissal, brings back the General Manager, and votes to censure the Executive.

**March 2008:** Referendum approves spending on a new Student Union Building. Also the bylaws are amended for the first time in decades, and the AMS name is changed to AMS Vancouver.

Compiled by AMS Archivist, Sheldon Goldfarb, PhD.