

REMARKABLE WOMEN

Honouring Women From Our Vancouver Communities



Photo courtesy City of Vancouver Archives, CVA 371-1643

Barbara Howard

Barbara Howard grew up in Vancouver's Grandview neighbourhood during the 1920s when the area was still countryside. While participating in school sports days, Barbara discovered she had a talent for running and quickly became a favourite for relay teams. In Grade 8 at Laura Secord School, she won her school's senior championship. She attended Britannia High School where the track coach, Mr. Edwards, took her under his wing.

Track time trials for the 1938 British Empire Games, to be held in February in Sydney, Australia, took place in Vancouver in October of 1937. Barbara did very well at the western time trials, outrunning some stiff competition and equaling the Empire Games record of 11.2 seconds for the 100 yard sprint. Her performance earned her a spot on the Canadian track team and the community gave her a big send-off with many gifts and lots of good wishes. She was just 17 and still in Grade 11. Just before Christmas, she set sail for an incredible adventure and the 28-day journey from Vancouver to Sydney. She became the first black woman athlete to represent Canada in international competition.

Barbara ran well at the Games, coming in sixth in the 100-yard final against some very formidable opponents. She was a member of the relay team that won silver in the 440 yard relay and bronze in the 660-yard relay. Upon her return to Vancouver, Barbara went on to become a UBC graduate and the first person from a visible minority to be hired as a teacher by the Vancouver School Board.