

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1932)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1931-1932.

*A Collection of Historical Data, Maps, and Plans Made with the Assistance of
Pioneers of Vancouver Between March and December 1931.*

About the 2011 Edition

The 2011 edition is a transcription of the original work collected and published by Major Matthews. Handwritten marginalia and corrections Matthews made to his text over the years have been incorporated and some typographical errors have been corrected, but no other editorial work has been undertaken. The edition and its online presentation was produced by the City of Vancouver Archives to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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"The Regina Hotel stood at the southwest corner of Cambie and Water streets. Some workmen were clearing land in the neighbourhood where the fire started;" (Ed Cosgrove had a contract for the clearing, he said.) "the wind was so strong that it drove the fire straight before it; that was how it left two wings untouched, the wing on the north with the Hastings Mill, and the wing on the south a small settlement over towards the south end of Westminster Avenue Bridge; the fire just cut straight through.

"Those houses which escaped destruction were in the Westminster Avenue direction; up near the bridge which at one time crossed False Creek on Westminster Avenue, now Main Street, near the Canadian National Railway station. One of the houses belonged to John Boulton, the police magistrate, another to A.R. Costrie, the butcher, a third to T.J. Janes, driver of the New Westminster stage line, who is still living. My lumber yard was saved, and there were three others in that section whose houses were saved.

"On approaching the Regina Hotel after the fire was seen to be no longer controllable, the workmen who had been clearing the land found that the occupants of the hotel had gone. They took nothing with them; they just *went*, and without much reflection either. The workmen noticed that it did not seem impossible to keep the fire away from the hotel building, so took shovels, covered up with earth what fires they could, put wet blankets on the roof, subdued the fire burning near the building, and so saved it. Then they entered the building, found it deserted; the bar was open and deserted, so they simply helped themselves. Some were not as moderate as they might have been, and had rather an enjoyable time.

"The Regina Hotel can be seen in the photograph "Vancouver after the fire," a solitary building in the far background.

"As the fire came nearer, I decided to move out, and took my trunk down to the wharf at the foot of Carrall Street where there was a shed on floats. I asked the man on the float if I may put my trunk on it; he replied, 'yes,' so I did. The floating shed stood on logs. I tried to drag my trunk around the corner of the shed, but there was insufficient room, so we tried to turn the float around for protection from the fire, but the wind was so strong we could not do it. Things were getting desperate, so I put my trunk in a canoe, but as I got in after it, the canoe turned over—the trunk was top-heavy cargo—and dumped trunk and me into water twenty feet deep.

"The trunk floated away, and then drifted onto the beach, where I secured it again.

"I think the shed shown in the background of the well-known picture of the City Hall, a tent, and four policemen in front—Vancouver's first force—is the same shed."

14 JULY 1931 - RESIDENTIAL AREAS OF VANCOUVER.

Prior to 1886, the residential area of, before April, Granville, after April, Vancouver, was simple. It had but one street, Water Street; all the remainder were woods and forest.

After 1886, after the railway came, the residential areas divided. The best residential area was probably, at first, and just after the fire, to the south of the Hastings Sawmill, centering around Cordova Street East, Dunlevy Avenue, etc., and then later, when the railway came, along the Bluff, upon the top of the cliff overlooking Burrard Inlet, from Granville Street to Burrard Street, gradually straggling along Seaton Street, Pender Street, etc., to the junction of Pender Street and Georgia Street. Here the C.P.R. Railway officials gathered, and their friends, though some went still farther westward to near Stanley Park. There were, strictly speaking, no houses east of Granville Street and north of Pender Street; that section developed into a business area from the start.

Gradually, the district surrounding St. James Church on Cordova Street became less popular for prominent families. One or two well-known names built beyond Denman Street, others selected points on Beach Avenue, then the only street running along the southern slope of Vancouver, from Granville to English Bay. A few gathered about the district near the corner of Burrard and Robson streets, some on Georgia Street, both west and east of Burrard. A poorer class of

residence spread south from Pender Street down Cambie, Hamilton, Homer, Richards and Seymour almost to Drake Street. In 1898, Richards and Seymour streets were fairly well filled with narrow houses, on 25-foot lots. Howe and Hornby streets, close in, were more pretentious, and there were some very nice homes on Robson Street.

As time went on, many splendid residences were built on that slope which looks westerly over English Bay. More of the best closed in about Stanley Park entrances, beyond Denman Street. This would be the period prior to about 1908. During this time, Robson, Georgia and Beach Avenue were considered most select districts. In the summer of 1900 or 1901, Davie Street was opened up, and a year or so later, the finest residence in Vancouver, that of B.T. Rogers of the Sugar Refinery, was built at the corner of Davie and Nicola streets—now the Angus Apartments. Robson Street and Georgia Street were lined with beautiful avenues of trees.

Then came the real estate “boom” days. Vancouver was growing; the slogan “100,000 men in 1910” was heard on all sides. Shaughnessy, Kitsilano were talked of, cheaper houses gradually closed the gaps, filled up the vacant lots in the West End; then came the apartment house, and the West End went down a strictly ultra-fashionable district.

About 1910, fine homes were built on the brow of the hill overlooking Kitsilano Beach, others spread along the waterfront along Point Grey Road; a section under building restrictions was placed on the market just west of the Indian Reserve, but it did not hold its superiority long. There were hundreds of vacant lots in all sections, many even in the older West End.

The throwing open for settlement of the first section of Shaughnessy Heights—reputed at the time to be the most wonderful residential section of Vancouver’s future—unsettled all previous ideas of where a fine home should be built. The buggy was disappearing, the motor car was coming; distances were a less formidable an obstacle than formerly. The verandah was still a necessity, but rapidly nearing its end, and soon to shrink into a mere porch. The broad verandah, the scene so long ago of evening parties, of Sunday afternoon gatherings, of sunshine and fresh air in the summer days, was about to disappear. The Ford motor car killed it.

A few isolated houses of excellence and much cost went down the Magee Road (Marine Drive), all on selected sites, large surrounding grounds, but they were comparatively few. Then the Great War came, and for a time building almost ceased, until at its conclusion there was almost a dearth of houses in Vancouver.

Despite the high cost of material following the war, building went on the rampage. Kerrisdale grew like a mushroom, high class houses soon filled up Quilchena, the territory contiguous to Fourth Avenue West grew apace with houses of a lesser pretence. From 1923 to 1928 there was a rush of building; whole streets were filled in a few months, especially down the slope from the crest of Granville Street South in all directions.

Then the stock market crashed. In 1930, carpenters and builders struggled on under much financial worry. In 1931, building very nearly ceased.

This sketchy resume is somewhat misleading, not altogether accurate; it gives but the roughest outline, misses more than it encloses, of a very interesting subject, the building of the splendid homes of our beautiful city.

J.S.M.

15 JULY 1931 - BICYCLES AND BICYCLE PATHS.

The bicycle “craze” was prevalent in Vancouver, as elsewhere, about 1900; almost every family had at least one, some had more; nearly all young men, and most young women, many elderly men and some elderly women rode. It was a convenient mode of travel in a city as yet unprovided with a full street car service; a growing city badly scattered, and among a people who, as yet, had acquired no individual wealth to speak of. Motor cars were still some years off, many had neither