

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume One**

**By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.**

**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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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The one at the top is on Davie Street; it is on the skyline. Today it is numbered 1112 and 1114 Davie Street, a three-storey building with balconies on the second and third floors, and stands on the south side of Davie Street, third building from the Capitola Apartments. Two large rowan or mountain ash trees, at least twelve inches through, which shows their age, stand on the lawn. It was built by Mr. Bouchier, who died in the spring of 1931. Walter Leek, president of the Vancouver Exhibition Association, once lived in it.

A Frenchman, Mr. Bouchier, later employed by the late Senator S.J. Crowe, built it. He died in the spring of 1931.

The assessment roll, at the City Hall, dated 1888 of this property:

F.D. Boucher, Lot 2, Block 25, D.L. 185, (assessed) \$275.00

Alfonse Moriw (?), Lot 3, Block 25, D.L. 185, (assessed) \$275.00

On 10 July 1931, whilst photographing this building with a photographer (photo in Archives) Major Matthews removed from the outside wall, by pulling it with his fingers, a "ten penny nail," about three inches long, of the old square cut type with oblong head, a type found in all early Vancouver buildings—used before the "wire" or round "drawn" nail was in common use. The nail is badly rusted, but quite strong, after forty-one years exposure to the weather. It is now in the Vancouver City Museum. The wood of the corner was rotted, but where protected from weather was as sound as the day put in.

The third house, lowest down the hill, is on Beach Avenue, still standing in 1931 (see photo in Archives) and is now the second home east from Bute Street—runs from Pacific to Beach—the back facing the Royal Mansions. It was built by (Captain) Lacy R. Johnson, master mechanic of the Canadian Pacific Railway, about 1890 or earlier. He was an officer of Vancouver's first militia unit, and afterwards moved to Montreal.

In the far distance, the forest runs along Nicola Street. The well-known pioneer, Mr. W.D. Burdis, built a small cottage with a steeple roof—now 1931 in the lane between Pendrell and Comox streets at Gilford Street. In this forest, the timber was all around, and when Gilford Street—stated by Mr. Burdis to be the first street opened up from Burrard Inlet to English Bay—was cleared, it was found that it was in the middle of the street and had to be moved. It was not the first house in the West End. It was afterwards moved again to its present location in the lane, and is still occupied.

JSM

### **15 JULY 1931 - TALTON PLACE.**

Talton Place, still so known to residents of the real estate boom days, was a loosely defined section bounded on the west by the Marpole Interurban car tracks, on the east by Cypress Street, and centred about 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> avenues west, but more especially 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> avenues. My recollection is that the first house built in this section, then a rough tract of semi-cleared land, was built in August 1910.

At the period the real estate boom was booming fiercely; the people were pouring into Vancouver; houses were going up in all directions, Kitsilano included.

A firm called the Prudential Builders Limited, closely allied to the old B.C. Permanent Loan Co. (Langlois, manager) "put on" Talton Place. It was not the first of their ventures. They had a factory on Dufferin or Lorne Street, built "ready made," or sectional houses—houses made to a standard, which could be put up in sections, each one capable of slight alteration as to exterior. Many were shipped to prairie provinces; many were erected in Vancouver.

The "Place" was intended to be a select district; everything was to be done for the purchaser before he walked in. There was to be no more of the endless work of making lawns, putting up fences, planting shrubs, etc. The lawns were to be levelled, the ornamental and useful trees

planted; everything was to be ready. Actually, it was the first thing of the sort in Vancouver to be attempted on anything like a pretentious scale. The Prudential Builders Ltd. was bankrupt some years later, and still later the B.C. Permanent Loan was absorbed by the Canada Permanent Loan Corporation.

All houses built about this period had wide verandahs—the motor car was rare, people spent their summer evenings on the cool, wide verandahs, content with the peaceful pleasure of watching passers-by, watering the lawn, and playing the gramophone in the open air. Then the motor car came, and verandahs shrunk to porches.

The houses of Talton Place were known as “California bungalows,” all two-storey, single exterior, wide verandah, massive steps and verandah pillars of manifold design of heavy appearance, actually mere boards, railings to match, angular roofs. Stucco was almost unknown. (The first stucco house in Kitsilano was Major Matthews’ little cottage on Kitsilano Beach, 1158 Arbutus Street.)

The interior was generally of “mission style,” with beam ceilings, panelled walls in the living rooms; the “den” with fireplace, was extremely popular. The rooms were large for at that time the “breakfast alcove” and the “dinette” had not been attempted; large houses of two storeys were in demand.

Electric fixtures did not include the floor plug, nor the wall light; the vacuum clearer was generally screwed into a light socket. The lights were of the central ceiling type, drop candelabra; electric bulbs were carbon bulbs, of 16, 32 or higher “candle power”; then came the tungsten bulb; finally the nitrogen bulb. Bathtubs still stood on feet; the Pembroke baths were available but being very expensive, reserved for hotels and the more expensive mansions, but the old galvanised bathtub of early Vancouver was no longer installed. The kitchen was large, usually in white enamel, the dining room large, the living room small, as compared with living rooms of the 1920 to 1930 period. The “cooler” was without refrigeration. It was not until 1925 that “Kelvinators,” and afterwards “Frigidaire,” etc., were timidly introduced, and buyers were shy. The post-war period developed a demand for a one-floor bungalow, with an enormous living room, a tiny dining room, and a cabinet kitchen. The old style house became a “drug upon the market”; the garage replaced the woodshed and chicken house of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as also the wide verandah of the early 20<sup>th</sup>.

“Talton Place” was very proud of itself at first, and very select; the novelty wore off, and it dropped to commonplace, still beautiful with its boulevard of graceful trees, planted by its creators.

J.S. Matthews

### **15 JULY 1931 - DEADMAN’S ISLAND. HOSPITALS. EARLY PEST HOUSE. SMALLPOX.**

“The first pest house,” said Mrs. J.Z. Hall, of “Killarney,” Point Grey Road, and a daughter of Sam Greer of Greer’s Beach (Kitsilano Beach), “was actually merely a pest shack. Deadman’s Island was put to good use in the early days as an isolation island for contagious diseases.

“I think it must have been in 1892 that we had the smallpox scare in Vancouver. It was supposed to have come in by the “Empresses” from the Orient, for hardly anyone who had anything to do with the *Empress of China*, *Empress of India*, or *Empress of Japan*, the C.P.R.’s first yacht-like liners, escaped it. It was a terrible July; yellow flags were everywhere; no one who went through it will forget the scare we got.

“Houses were quarantined back and front—there was no getting out of them; people were quarantined all over the city. We lived on Nelson Street—I was Miss Greer then—Nelson Street was very sparsely settled, so was Robson Street, but there were cases on Robson Street. One young man, I recall, decided to help Mr. Hanna, the undertaker, contracted the disease and died.

“It was the custom to put those stricken in an express wagon, and with the driver ringing a bell to keep people away, warning them, the load of sick, frequently girls from Dupont Street, who had