

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

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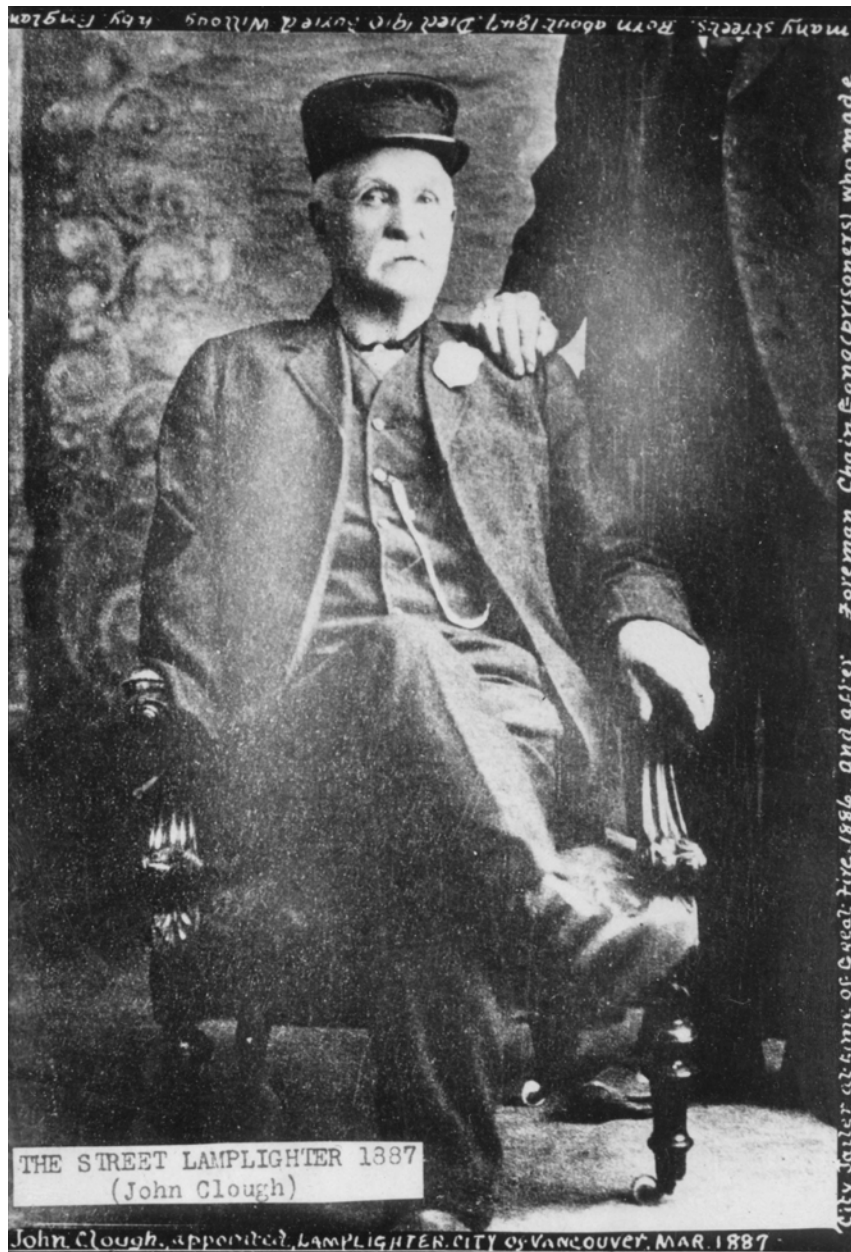
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Item # EarlyVan_v1_0078

19 NOVEMBER 1931 - JOHN CLOUGH. THE CHAIN GANG. THE LAMPLIGHTER OF VANCOUVER. OUR FIRST JAILER. THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886.

Called on Mr. Edgar Clough, son of Frank Clough and nephew of John Clough, at 255 Broadway West. Mr. Clough is now perhaps 60.

He told me that John Clough was born about 1847 at Willoughby, Lincolnshire, and was buried there in 1910. He left England in 1869 at the age of 22, and went to New York, where he engaged with a Mr. Jones to drive stock through to California. A trip such as this took two years, the stock would rest, then go on, rest, and then go on again; they encountered Indians, had to make wide detours to avoid them, etc. He then went to the diggings in Sacramento, California, was successful, or lucky, digging gold, made a stake of \$16,000, and then came to San Francisco, where he bought passage back to England, but meeting with other miners, had a jolly party, a

“spree,” and lost his passage. The vessel was afterwards destroyed by fire at sea, and all hands lost. “Uncle John,” said his nephew, “used to say, ‘You can’t tell me that drink ever did me any harm.’”

Then he came to British Columbia, went to the Cariboo, but was not successful. He was afterwards foreman for Onderdonk, who built the C.P.R. right of way in part of B.C., and there it was that he lost his arm. He went back to examine a blast—they used black powder in those days—which had not exploded. It exploded just as he reached there. For a year or so, Mr. Clough, his nephew said, that he had no knowledge what his uncle did, but he was ultimately taken on (March 1887) as lamplighter in the city of Vancouver (see minutes City Council and previous narratives herein). He carried a light ladder for this purpose.

Previous to this he had been City Jailer—of a sort. When the Great Fire of June 13th broke out, Chief of Police Stewart had the prisoners in a tent tied to stakes. Clough was ordered to cut them loose, which he did, as the fire was driving down on them.

Mr. Clough could not say exactly when his uncle’s duties as lamplighter ceased, but presumed it would be when the electric light was installed later in the year 1887. He remembers seeing numbers of lamps—scores of them, he said—in an old back room at the City Hall on Powell Street. They were coal oil lamps, of galvanised iron, about seven-inch base, with circular sides sloping up to the base of the burner, which burner screwed in to the galvanised container. They had a glass chimney, of course. The whole lamp was inserted in a glass protection, shaped somewhat like a keystone, on the top of the street lamp post. (A photo of one can be seen in the photo of the first parade of soldiers in Vancouver, Dominion Day, 1887.)

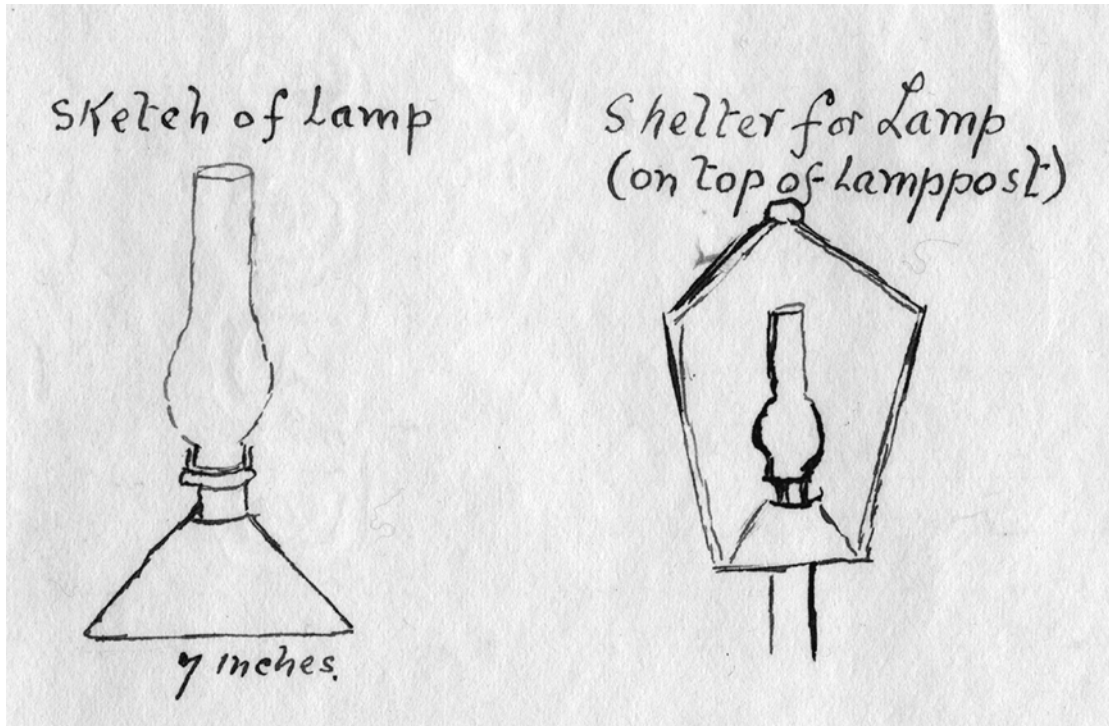
“Mayor Cope,” related Mr. Clough, “used to relate about my late uncle that, one night in 1894, when the City Council had been sitting late, after 11 p.m., he came out of the Council Chamber and saw Mr. Clough sitting there, and said to him, ‘Why, John, why are you still here, why not go home,’ to which John replied, ‘Someone has got to stop to put these lights out, and save the city expense.’ The habit of lighting the lamps had become so engrained,” said Mr. Clough, “that my uncle had forgotten for the moment that the lights were electric lights.

“My uncle was a character, a great character,” said Mr. Clough. He never had any money for the reason that, if he could stop it, by furnishing the money for her fine, he would never allow a woman to be locked up, and, as men were often discharged from jail in a penniless state, he often “staked them.”

The chain gang was a gang of prisoners which consisted of any prisoner who had been sentenced to three or four months or so imprisonment, and I recall as recently as 1900 or perhaps later seeing the wagon in which they were taken to work every day, coming at a snail’s pace up the main streets of Vancouver. As a rule they avoided the principal streets, but this was not always possible. The men sat lengthwise on seats, John Clough driving, picks and shovels with them; a mournful spectacle, but apparently a happy body of men from outside appearances, which remark Mr. Clough the nephew confirms. The chain gang worked on the construction of our lanes; they must have constructed a very large number in the West End, Fairview, Mount Pleasant, and the East End west of Grandview.

The men took their lunch with them, and during noon hour could be seen sitting on stumps or logs enjoying the meal. My recollection is that Mr. Clough treated them very kindly; he may have carried a rifle or revolver, but it was never seen; the men wore leg irons.

Mr. Clough, the nephew, said he had often driven the wagon for his uncle. Grady succeeded Mr. Clough as chain gang foreman, Mr. Clough being pensioned off when the Police Department moved to the new jail on Cordova Street East.



Item # EarlyVan_v1_0079

Mr. W.M. Horie, of Baynes and Horie, tells me that the chain gang worked on streets around Balsam, York and First Avenue West in the winter of 1907. Grady was then in charge, and used to come to his house appealing for gloves, overcoats, etc., etc., "for my poor fellows, some of whom are not properly clothed for this sort of weather."

JSM

19 NOVEMBER 1931 - GRANVILLE AND SEYMOUR STREETS.

In the early 1890s and later, a shallow valley existed under, approximately, the corner of Granville Street and Dunsmuir Street. Mrs. J.R. Seymour, accompanied by Mr. Seymour's sister, Emma Seymour, once went gathering skunk cabbage in that shallow ravine, took a good armful home, thought they looked beautiful flowers, but could not understand where the awful smell came from as they carried them. They were then new arrivals in Vancouver. This ravine ran diagonally northeast and crossed Seymour Street between Pender Street and Dunsmuir, where, for years, the sidewalk on stilts was high above the ground beneath. The tree tops grew about to the level of the sidewalk, this is, second growth willows, etc. Old photos will illustrate the exact contour. Mr. J.R. Seymour was one of our early druggists and a well-known public man. In 1931 he was living in the 2000 block on Whyte Avenue, Kitsilano Beach. One of his two sons is a barrister in St. Catharines, Ontario, the other superintendent of the Edmonton General Hospital; his two daughters are unmarried. See *Who's Who*, 1923.

J.S. Matthews

J.R. SEYMOUR.

Of Mr. Seymour's two sons, one, Ainslie, was captain of the Vancouver High School Cadets, which made the trip to Australia in 1912; the other, Murton, was one of those interested in the very early aeroplane owned by Mr. Stark, photo of which is in the Archives, which is claimed to be the first aeroplane in Vancouver which flew. It was a queer looking contraption with the engine