

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 BRUNSWICK HOUSE.

This stood on Hastings Street, between Carrall and Abbott—an old directory shows it as 29-35 Hastings Street West—and was owned and operated by Pat Carey and his wife. Opposite was the C.P.R. Hotel.

“It was built in 1888,” said Mr. W.F. Findlay, “and although on the fringe of the woods, did a good business. It was on the north side of the street (?), between Carrall and Abbott, about the middle of the block.” (See photo in Archives.)

“Pat was a rough diamond, an Irishman, and a character; he died in Prince Rupert about 1927. In the winter of 1889, the police were ordered to clean up Dupont Street; some of the women scattered, one landed in the Brunswick House. Pat found out. At first, he would not credit it; it was proven; then followed a scene which everyone talked about but no one mentioned in polite company; some caustic remarks were passed by Pat. Pat saw her off in a hurry, in one of Adam Hick’s cabs.”

(Note: see A.E. Beck’s *Memoir of Early Vancouver* for telegram from Pat to Judge Begbie to “hold the court down until I get there,” and Judge Begbie’s threat. Also, on 1 July 1887, Vancouver was possessed of one brougham only.)

20 JULY 1931 - KITSILANO BEACH. GREER’S POINT. THE “HOTEL SITE,” KITSILANO BEACH.

Kitsilano Beach was, until about 1910, commonly known as Greer’s Beach, but as Kitsilano grew, especially after the C.P.R. offered land for sale in that district, it quickly became Kitsilano Beach, hastened by the introduction of a street car service with the designation “KITSILANO.” The point at the northern end remained unnamed.

It was Major J.S. Matthews who first, about 1925 or 1926, made the proposal that the point be named “Greer’s Point.” Major Matthews was one of the earliest settlers; he built his home behind Greer’s Beach in 1912, and when moving in, his furniture was carried down Maple Street from Cornwall, Maple Street being impassable for wheeled traffic.

He regretted that no honour, such as a place name—Greer Street was not changed from Short Street until about 1928 or later—had been given to the memory of the sturdy old pioneer Sam Greer, and through a friend, Mr. W.J. Findlay, brought the matter before the Vancouver Pioneers Association, who petitioned the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, who in turn took it up with the Admiralty authorities in London, with the result that after some lapse of time it was officially designated “Greer’s Point,” and so appears on the Admiralty charts of 1930.

JSM

KITSILANO BEACH, GREER’S BEACH.

In the *Daily News-Advertiser* for Wednesday, 6 July 1887, the following advertisement appears.

TO CONTRACTORS AND BUILDERS.

As the injunction has been raised by the Supreme Court off my property, I am prepared to furnish the best quality of pit sand.

(signed) S. Greer.

English Bay.

20 JULY 1931 - KITSILANO BEACH. THE “CANADIAN BAND.” BULL FROGS.

Up to about 1920, the “Canadian Band,” or bull frogs, nightly furnished music of sorts at Kitsilano Beach; at certain periods of the evening it rose to an almost continuous roar, and even as late as

1923 or 1924, there was still a certain amount of croaking, in the springtime, in the low garden of Major J.S. Matthews at the corner of Whyte Avenue and Arbutus Street.

The frogs were the last survivors of a great band which in earlier days made the low ground, the muskeg, at the back of Greer's Beach, their habitat. Even as late as 1920—after the sand had been pumped in seven years—there was a goodly chorus each summer evening; most of the noise came from the south side of the Kitsilano Street car tracks, which had not been filled in; a low area ran from east of Maple Street to Yew Street with Cornwall Street as its southern boundary. The reason for this was as follows.

In 1913, there was considerable dredging to deepen the channel of False Creek; it was necessary to secure some place to put the dredged out sand. The low land adjacent to the beach and behind it offered a suitable spot; the sand would be taken from where it was an obstruction to navigation, and placed where it would raise the level of residential lots to that of the street car tracks—in places, as much as thirteen feet.

The property owners in this low section were offered the opportunity to have this low land filled in with sand, pumped from False Creek by the Pacific Dredging Company, who had the contract. At that time there was, north of the track and on the low land, three houses only, those of Major Matthews, Dr. Humber and Alderman Williamson. The City of Vancouver offered to elevate these three houses free of cost; the Pacific Dredging Company wanted payment, \$100 per lot, from the property owners for the filling in. Major Matthews, at least, paid the charge, and the other two probably did, and in due time the land was filled in, that of Major Matthews, at 1343 Maple Street, being filled in thirteen feet. The sand was pumped in from the dredge anchored in False Creek by means of huge pipes, carried on small scow floats to the shore, and then run over the land, continuous moving from place to place being necessary for the outlet. There was a tremendous flow of water through the mouth of the pipes, and many fish came through with sand and water, and gave the school youngsters much amusement and wet feet. The pumping continued for about three months.

The property owners on the south side of the street car track—between that and Cornwall Street—assumed a haughty demeanor. The owners of the only two houses on that side of the track—they stood on Laburnum Street, east side—took the view that if the dredging company wanted to pump sand onto their lots they could do so, and so could the city raise their houses, and could be responsible for damage. The city and the company wanted to do it, said they, but we are not going to pay for it.

The City and the dredging company simply turned their face away, and now, eighteen years after, throughout all those years, the land still lies in ugly vacancy, low as formerly, with rough streets and poor sidewalks on Laburnum Street, almost unchanged since they were built in 1911. For many years the lots—all of them—remained vacant; since the war, a few have been built on; on the north side of the railway there is scarce a vacant lot. During all these years they have been paying taxes on useless property on the south side which might have long since been built upon or sold—the lots are practically unsaleable.

An illuminating commentary on the futility of greed.

In the winter of 1930–31, all that area north of Cornwall Street, bounded by Yew and Arbutus streets, soon to be a park, was filled with earth, drawn by wagon, taken from the tunnel to contain the great sewer constructed on the hillside above, from Mount Pleasant to Jericho. The northern boundary of this area is the street car tracks. In 1931 it was still a mass of earth mounds. The grass plot, behind the beach, and between Whyte Avenue and the tennis courts was made into a lawn, but not used, in 1930. The old eyesore is now a beauty spot.

20 JULY 1931 - FIRES AND FIRE BRIGADES.

Memorandum of conversation with Mr. J.A. Mateer, of 900 7th Avenue West, a very early pioneer, and who has resided at this address since 1903.