

## **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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## 23 DECEMBER 1931 - GREER'S BEACH.

The death this week of Jason Allard, aged 83, son of Ovid Allard, born at Fort Langley, recalls my visit, last August 2<sup>nd</sup>, to Derby, for the 104<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of its founding. We were entertained by Mr. and Mrs. Alex Houston on that historic site. As we were leaving, Mr. Houston took my hand and said, "It did my heart good to hear you speak so of Sam Greer. It has always been my opinion that they did him out of his land; he got harsh treatment."

We drove back to Vancouver in Captain J. Hampton Bole's car (son of Judge Bole), and I repeated to him Mr. Houston's remark.

"Sam made one terrible mistake," said Captain Bole. "If he had not fired that gun at Tom Armstrong, he would have held his property. That mistake cost him the possession of the part of our city. Public opinion was so strong that the C.P.R. would have had to have given in; the people would have torn up the rails as fast as they laid them. Sam was a great Orangeman, and much influence was brought to bear to get him out of the penitentiary. He was a sort honoured guest there anyhow." (See Mrs. J.Z. Hall's remarks about how she—his daughter—used to visit him and take him out of the jail to bask on the river bank.) "About the same time, a Roman Catholic priest was put in jail for giving an Indian girl a hiding—one which she deserved, I am told—but anyway, the priest was put in jail, and the Roman Catholics tried to get him a pardon. I think he was from Mission City. The Orangemen objected unless Sam also got a pardon; they said, 'No pardon for one if no pardon for the other.' Both were pardoned and released; that was how Sam got out.

"What Mr. McCraney credits Alex Henderson" (Judge Henderson, a K.C., and former commissioner of Yukon Territory) "with saying about Judge Begbie building the jury is probably correct. Alex Henderson is a clear-minded lawyer. It is all very well to have 'hanging judges,' and 'Bloody Jeffries' in a wild territory where it is necessary to *enforce* respect for law. Begbie suited those conditions admirably, but as the land grew more settled, he became too autocratic for the changed conditions. He was an awful bulldozer, and towards the last grew into a sort of ogre. Dozens of young lawyers left on account of his behaviour to them. He tried it on my father, but my father was Irish, had a quick-witted tongue, and gave as good as he took, and for a time there was mighty little friendship between my father and Judge Begbie, but afterwards father owed much to Judge Begbie for the vast amount of work he passed his way."

What Mr. McCraney said on 31 July 1931 to me was this:

"I think Sam Greer had what we call a 'raw' deal. He was the only man in Canada who 'held up' the C.P.R., but they were too strong for him. Alex Henderson" (Major Alex Henderson, K.C.) "told me that he was at the trial, and that Judge Begbie bulldozed the jury into finding Sam guilty, and gave him eighteen months in gaol. Henderson said he never saw a worse case of a judge bulldozing a jury. We have often wondered what Sam got out of it. You see, he sold those lots at so much per lot, and the part which was 'down cash' was ten dollars, the balance agreement of sale."

Query: How much did Sam get out of it?

"They say the C.P.R. wanted title to the land but the government was afraid to give it to them, fearing some after action, but said to the C.P.R. that, if they could get Sam out of the way, or at least if the C.P.R. would guarantee quiet possession for ten years, they would give the company the title. Some say Sam got \$40,000 to go away. He did go away somewhere and start a hotel. Where did he get the money? After a period of years, he came back to Vancouver. The story may not be true."

(See *The Fight for Kitsilano Beach* by J.S. Matthews, 24 March 1928, in City Museum.)

"Oh yes. Mayor Oppenheimer had a lot of land in the east, and the west too, beyond Sam's place. Those who were in the know bought all they could lay their hands on. They knew the railroad was coming, and simply got it first."