

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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28 MAY 1931.

Went over to request Mrs. Hall's criticism of an article, which subsequently appeared in the *Vancouver Daily Province* on 28 June 1931, on the Dominion Day Celebrations, 1887, and then read to her the narrative above.

"It was out of the bedroom window that my father shot the wolf, not out of the milk house," said Mrs. Hall. "The little window in the milk house was facing the sea, and it was high up, too high for shooting.

"Tom Foster was on the C.P.R. construction gang, and he told me, and he laughed" (and she laughed too, as she told it) "that fast as the gang would lay the tracks in the day, father would pull it up at night." (See *The Fight for Kitsilano Beach*.)

"Oh, yes, that's true about the smelts; I used to take them to the city; that was what I gathered them in sacks for. No, never sold them, used to give them away.

"About the trout. You could get all you wanted. It cannot be explained to anyone now what it was like; they would not believe you. I do not think there was any place in B.C. where there were so many; I suppose there are still some places, but I doubt it. Every one of the little creeks along the shore here were just full of trout.

"The only people who passed by were the people who lived at Jericho; they used to pass in a boat. I must find out who used to live at Jericho before the Frasers. We did everything by boat. When we went to town we went up False Creek and landed somewhere. I don't know just where it was; it must have been somewhere between Cambie Street and Westminster Avenue."

(Note: it was probably the southern end of Carrall Street where there was, at least in 1886, perhaps earlier, a small wharf. Mr. DesBrisay, who came to Vancouver in August 1887, told me that when they went to Jericho for a picnic they used to land on the Royal City Planing Mills log boom at the foot of Carrall Street. Or it may have been at the foot of Granville Street, and thence by an old Indian trail to about Abbott Street.)

"The Reverend Mr. Hall" (Joseph Hall) "married a Miss Pollard, one of the pioneer families of Victoria. She went to the Cariboo and taught school, and he was minister there. He was minister in the Cariboo when I was born there.

"The canoe parades on Dominion Day were really beautiful. We used to sit on the waterfront, and watch them, down on Water Street. They had their lanterns in festoons and pretty shapes, and it looked as though the canoes were linked together; the whole inlet was illuminated" (a descriptive exaggeration). "I think they must have had torches." (They had Chinese lanterns of many colours, and perhaps torches also.)

"No, it was not Captain Peele; it must have been Captain Pittendrigh under whom my husband served in the New Westminster Rifles." (His uniform is B.C. Garrison Artillery. See photo.)

"Our first home in the city? Oh, that was up on Nelson Street. We had the first well on Nelson Street; the neighbours used to come and get water from our well."

Query: Did Granville Street ever exist as a forest road, or was Granville Street just cut out of the trees?

"I am not sure. Did you ever hear about the tree which fell on the sleigh. It must have been about New Year's or Christmas. It killed two. They were driving out Granville Street South, a young fireman—one of the city firemen. I think his name was Simpson, or it may have been; I think her name was MacClure. It was long before the train came." (C.P.R.)

"And, mind you, out on the River Road" (Marine Drive) "was 'away out' in those days. They were driving out Granville Street South when the tree fell on the sleigh, killed two and left two, brother and his sister's sweetheart were killed. They were out near Magee's farm, well Magee's farm ran right up to Granville Street. Mashiter, I think that's the way they spell his name, fine old gent, one

of the real old-timers, a great churchman, had a store up at Squamish now; he would tell you a lot.

“Did you ever hear the story of Christ Church, now the cathedral,” said Mrs. Hall, continuing. “I think the C.P.R. gave us those lots;” (incorrect) “the place was called the ‘Root House.’ The people who formed Christ Church were the descendants of St. James Church down on Cordova Street, and they came over to a little store, where Birks the jewellers are now, opposite the Hotel Vancouver. The first year we were there the See House in New Westminster was opened, and we hired all the rigs and buggies in town and went over to Bishop Sillitoe’s. We had a very happy time. Then we went and built the basement of Christ Church, the ‘root house,’ and some did not want the clergyman, and some did, Reverend Mr. Hobson; some wanted him to go, some did not; he could not be got out, so they starved him out. So finally, they put the sheriff in, and we went to the church one morning, and found a notice on the door. He stayed on three or four months. I used to take food and put it on the doorstep; there was no food in their house. He went to Boston, and I am told that twenty years afterwards he was at the same church. Fine woman, his wife; he was a coachman, and he ran away with her, or she with him.

“About our old home on Greer’s Beach. There was a little path of two planks from the front door to the gate, and from the gate to the beach. There was a big log near the gate which we used to jump off—into the water. On the north side of the house there was nothing, just some bushes, some small trees; hemlocks, perhaps a foot through, with wind blown limbs; no orchard. The trees in the front garden were apples and plums; not very large, four or five years old, about eight of them. The garden at the back was beautiful; we had all the vegetables we wanted. And over towards Cornwall Street there was the *densest* forest! The trees were a tremendous size; right down to the water. There was a spring over by where the track is now.” (Foot of Yew Street.)

“The house had a sort of peak roof, fairly steep, like they put on barns. When the C.P.R. came they went through the stable, and the spring was near that. The fence around the house enclosed quite a bit of ground. The cows used to just wander out in the swamp,” concluded Mrs. Hall.

J.S.M.

A typewritten record, in book form, entitled *The Fight for Kitsilano Beach, The Celebrated Greer Case*, by Major J.S. Matthews, has been prepared from many of Mr. Sam Greer’s original papers, loaned by his daughter, Mrs. J.Z. Hall.

Sketches of the old site, plan of house, etc., have also been collected and at the present moment, the well-known historical scenic painter, John Innes, Esq., has prepared a small drawing of Greer’s Beach in 1884 or 1885. [He never completed it.]