

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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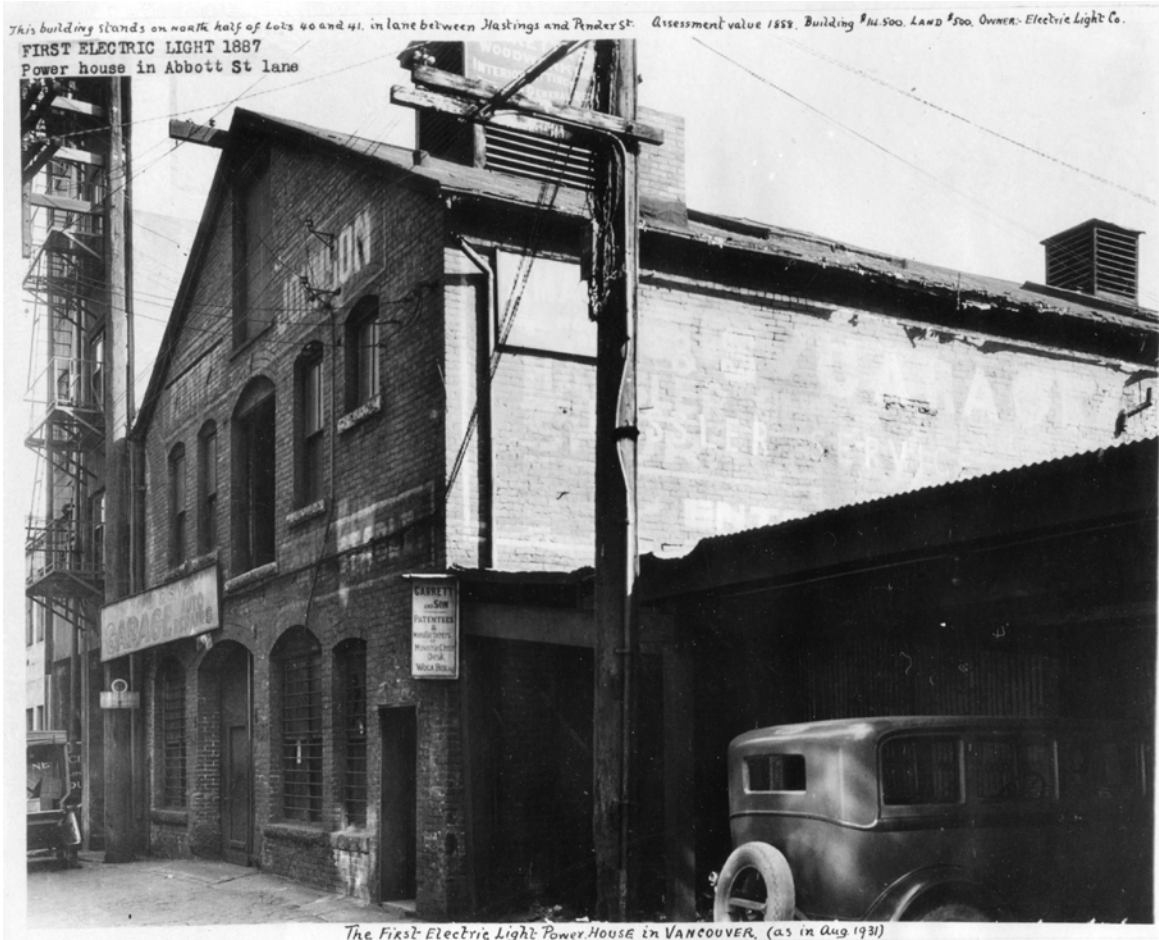
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Item # EarlyVan_v1_0054



Item # EarlyVan_v1_0055

30 JULY 1931 - THE FIRST ELECTRIC LIGHT IN VANCOUVER. THE FIRST ELECTRIC RAILWAY. H.P. MCCRANEY.

(This memorandum has been read and approved by Mr. McCraney, October 1931.)

Memorandums of conversations with H.P. McCraney, Esquire, of, in 1931, 3350 Cypress Street, Vancouver, and vice-president of F.L. Cummins and Co. Ltd., sprayer contractors, 1460 Howe Street, Vancouver. Mr. McCraney was one of the first Park Commissioners of Vancouver, *appointed by the City Council* to control Stanley Park when it was opened on 27 September 1888, and was present at the ceremony. He was also an alderman, 1902 to 1905 inclusive, and still retains his physical alertness, and is at his office of business every day.

"The start, or beginning," said Mr. McCraney, "of what is now the B.C. Electric Railway Co. Ltd., with interests over half British Columbia, was the Vancouver Electric Light Company, a private firm which built the first electric light plant in Vancouver in a building situate on what is now the lane between Hastings Street West and Pender Street West, and between Abbott Street and Carrall Street, about one hundred feet from Abbott Street, and on the south side of the land. It is of brick, with two ventilators, the original one still showing in the roof. It was about fifty feet wide and sixty feet deep, and was, at the time it was built, more or less surrounded with swamp on the west, but not on the east. It is a two-storey building, and its first use was as a power house; in later years it was used as a stable for Messrs. Atkins and Johnston, transfermen; still later as a laundry, and now, 1931, as a woodworking factory for Messrs. Garrett and Sons."

(Mr. McCraney was good enough to go down and actually identify the building, and photograph as taken by Rowland Towers, and is now in the archives of the Vancouver City Public Library.)

Mr. McCraney continued, "The plant was started in this way. People were tired of coal oil lamps. In April 1887, the City Council had appointed an official lamp lighter; the first train arrived on 23 May 1887; on July 1st we had our first grand Dominion Day celebration, and in September 1886, three men—they were electricians—came up from Portland, Oregon. I forget one name, but the other two were Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Giltner. They had electrical equipment for sale, and approached local people to form a company, and so give the undertaking local 'colour.' I forget all the names of those who formed the company—you can see a lot in the old Council minutes—but two were Bob Balfour and Tom Dunn. I was a shareholder, but not a director. The money was raised, the plant built, and I had the contract for erecting the pole line. The system did not spread far, just around Hastings, Cordova, Cambie, Carrall, Oppenheimer, Powell, Alexander, Cambie and Abbott streets, and the street lights were glow worms—thirty-two candle power carbon globes or bulbs which did not give much light. Bear in mind, this company was a purely *electric light* company; it had nothing whatever to do with the electric street railway which came later.

"The three promoters were, I think, in the electric business in Portland, Oregon, and wanted to sell electric plant, so they ran it until it was in operation only. The city had given permission for the poles to be erected in the streets, and soon after we started putting lights in the houses.

"At that time, the idea of a street railway had not been thought of.

"As I have said, the people were tired of coal oil lamps and candles. Three men formed the first company, and they put a lot of lights on the street for the city, and then put them in the private houses. Jim Carnahan got the poles from the head of False Creek; you could not get any there now" (with a smile.) "I had the contract for digging the holes and putting up the poles; they were little things as we compare them now. In this I was associated with Mr. Stephenson; in building the street railway I was alone. Of the original promoters, Mr. H.T. Ceperley was the last to survive. Mr. Ceperley was a sort of representative of Mr. McKee, of whom I will tell you later. Yes, it was Mr. Ceperley who afterwards donated the children's playground in Stanley Park."

THE START OF THE ELECTRIC STREET RAILWAY.

Some time early in 1888 a meeting was held to consider the building of a tram service or street railway. It was a meeting of local business men, but the meeting was not fruitful of results; it was too soon. Then some Americans came to Vancouver, and made a proposal to the City Council, and the local people had to get busy. When this local company was formed, Dr. Lefevre, who was the "pusher," but also a member of the City Council, introduced a by-law granting to George Turner and H.P. McCraney the right to build and operate a street railway for a company to be formed. The by-law passed, and an agreement was made covering the route; a crooked route: Granville to Hastings, Hastings to Cambie, Cambie to Cordova, Cordova to Carrall, Carrall to Powell, and Powell to Westminster Avenue, and down Westminster Avenue to the bridge which crossed False Creek, and in addition, the Powell Street extension down to Campbell Avenue. The whole distance was about three and one half miles single track. George Turner was one of the financial men of Vancouver, a speculator.

"Subscriptions for shares in the company were taken all over town; we were somewhat careful who we took in, and each party took shares at five hundred dollars each. It was at first thought possible to build an electric street system, but sufficient funds could not be raised, so the contract was let to me (H.P. McCraney) to build a horse drawn system.

"Horses—not very many—were purchased, and the stables built across the Westminster Avenue Bridge at the corner, southwest corner of Dufferin [Front?], I think it was, though it might have been Lorne [Front?] Street. They were afterwards used by the Gurney Cab Company, and were torn down a couple of years ago. The ground was very wet and swampy around the stables, and the floor of the building was elevated four or five feet above the muskeg. The entrance was off Westminster Avenue, and the stables would be perhaps seventy-five feet long. At that time, the