

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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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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31 DECEMBER 1931 - WATER STREET. THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886. THE "CUSTOMS HOUSE". DRUG STORE. PHOTOGRAPHER. GRANVILLE, 1886. H.T. DEVINE.

"When I first came here," Mr. H.T. Devine, an early photographer who took many famous photographs of early Vancouver, now a financial and insurance broker on Seymour Street, "there was no bridge on Water Street. After traversing Hastings Road and passing the Deighton House, Water Street, such as it was, dipped down several feet and then rose up again near Abbott Street along the old shore. There was a bit of a sidewalk on the south side of Water Street.

"McCartney Brothers had a drug store in 1886 on the southwest corner of Abbott and Water Street; it had been, in 1883 and 1884, the old Wilson store, and was burned in the Great Fire.

"We built a large photograph gallery on Lot 6 on Cordova Street, and were in it three weeks before the fire. The day before the fire, father and I bought a building on the northeast corner of Alexander and Water Street, and paid cash for the building and leased the land. The next day we had not twenty-five cents. For two or three days after the fire we camped in the middle of Abbott Street, between Water Street and the lane; mother and my sister were in the tent, father and I out in the open on the side of the street.

"The first 'Customs House,' after the fire, where Mr. Johns was a collector, was a little place on Lot 7 on Abbott Street, close to Water, almost exactly where we had camped." (This must have been the building which Mayor MacLean afterwards used for a "Mayor's office.")

"At the time of the fire, so far as I recall, there were no buildings on the water side of Water Street, excepting the Sunnyside and Geo. Black's, but some were in process of erection.

"Sullivan was a squatter, and, with Mrs. Sullivan and their sons Charles and Arthur, lived on the south side of Cordova Street. After the fire they put up the Sullivan Block.

"The Chinese cabins were on Lot 15 on Cordova Street, in the stumps. They did our laundry."

5 JANUARY 1932 - REMINISCENCES OF A PIONEER DOCTOR, DR. H.E. LANGIS.

"Just adventure, that's why I came west; you know those were the days of 'Go west, young man,'" said Dr. H.E. Langis, now on a visit to his relatives at 1708 West 40th Avenue, Kerrisdale. Some twenty-two years ago he suffered terribly from rheumatism, and went to live at Parksville, and the change cured him and he has remained there since. He is now 74, and quite active and alert. One would have thought he was older—he seemed an elderly man thirty years ago, but he says his hair was white at 30, a family trait. He's a bachelor, and was formerly a partner of Simon J. Tunstall, M.D.; both were eminent and well known in their profession. Previously, and in the earlier days, his partner was Dr. McGuigan, afterwards mayor of Vancouver.

"There was no street called Granville Street until after the fire of 1886. The way, the best way, to get to the big tree on Georgia Street, so well known in photographs as a real estate office, 'VANCOUVER LOTS FOR SALE,'" (no, just an advertising stunt) "was to take a boat at Andy Linton's at the foot of Carrall Street, row to Spratt's Ark" (not "Ark" but "Oilery"), "walk up the skid road to where the tree stood on the site of where Charlie Queen afterwards built a hotel. I have walked up there, through the trees, before the fire, nothing to do of a Sunday afternoon, and had to go and explore the country; never went up purposely to see the tree. I know where it stood; it stood where Charlie Queen built his hotel." (Livery, not hotel. Queen's Livery stables, see Bailey photo.)

"Spratt's Ark was at the foot of Burrard Street; the skid road slanted from there up to the Hotel Vancouver, ran diagonally. The John Morton-Brighthouse clearing had just one shack. A man named Procter, maybe Porter, he married an Indian woman, was living in it; he was making spars for the British Admiralty about 1883 or 1884." (No. Spratt's Oilery had several buildings. Dr. Langis did not come 'til 1883. Procter lived in Stanley Park near Deadman's Island, I think. JSM)

"In 1883 I was at Port Arthur, in charge of a division (as medical officer on construction). I reached Victoria on 15 July 1884. British Columbia was pretty small in those days; about 3,000 at

Victoria, Port Moody about 125. I was up at Yale for quite a time, then they all came down and settled in Yaletown, up around Drake Street.

"I remember walking on the wharf at Port Moody with the Hon. Adolphe Chapleau; that wharf, and the (Neeping?) hotel at Fort William was one of the scandals of the C.P.R. construction. The government built the C.P.R., and they sent iron piles to build the wharf all the way from England, around the horn. The piles were lying on the Port Moody wharf in heaps; some may be there yet. The hotel in Fort William and the Port Moody wharf were items in the Pacific scandal; enormous waste of money; cost Sir John A. Macdonald defeat; McKenzie beat him.

"Sam Greer was done out of his land; the government gave everything to the C.P.R., even the Granville townsite.

"The squatters fought, but there was little they could do; some of them had to get out for the C.P.R. 'Jimmy' Orr, the member of parliament" (M.P.P.), "his place was two or three lots west of the corner on the north side of Cordova Street, about where Woodward's Garage is; they pulled his buildings down as fast as he could build them.

"The prettiest little house in Granville, before the fire, belonged to Gillespie, the logging boss. It was on the south side of Cordova between Abbott and Carrall, next to Joe Mannion; Sullivan's was across the street opposite."

NOTE ADDED LATER:

See Peter Clair's garden (photo) almost next door but after the fire—pretty lot of flowers. Site of (about) Beacon Theatre (1936).

"The 'C.P.R. Hotel' on Hastings Street was just a name; McPherson had it and a license; the C.P.R. had nothing to do with it, no interest."

5 JANUARY 1932 - THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886. DR. LANGIS'S SKELETON.

"I was away at the time of the fire, in New Orleans, from April or May 1886 to January 1887. I did not vote at the first election. I heard of the fire in New Orleans.

"My skeleton was that of a Swede who had hanged himself over back of Moodyville about two years before; he was buried on Deadman's Island; that was where we got the skeleton found after the fire under my office. They used to bury people at Deadman's Island, and Brockton Point too, where the gun is; there was no cemetery which I can recall on the north side near Moodyville. Several whites were buried on Deadman's Island; McCartney, one of the three brothers—he had the drug store on the corner of Abbott Street, southwest corner, on the street—his child was buried on Deadman's Island.

"I went over to Deadman's Island in April 1886 and at the time of the fire the skeleton was in McCartney's store, and after the fire they picked it up in the ashes and took it to the morgue. And do you know what I am told they said when they picked it up? 'Poor fellow; he must have been sick before he died; his back is all wired together.'

"I don't know how many were burned in the fire. We had no coroner in Granville; the district coroner was Charlie Hughes at New Westminster. My recollection is that the dead were buried in New Westminster; perhaps the coroner's records over there would show.

"I have forgotten. There was a little wooden building on the corner of Hastings and Abbott Street before the fire, right opposite Woodward's." (See fire map of 1885, C.P.R. map of 1886, in *Early Vancouver*, Volume 3.)

"The only one I recall being burned to death in the fire was Faucets; he was a soda water man; and then, there was a painter whose name I forget. I was away in New Orleans."