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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CITY OF VANCOUVER
Archives

30 DECEMBER 1931 - THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886. EARLY TELEPHONES AND TELEGRAPHS. J.W. MCFARLAND, HUGH KEEFER, W.H. GALLAGHER. C.P.R. TRAINS.

The claim of Captain E.S. Scoullar that he and associates built the first telephone line into Vancouver can scarcely be substantiated in view of the following.

1-That Mrs. J.Z. Hall (see elsewhere) says that Mr. Hall, her husband, told her that he had a telephone long before Tilley's.

2-Mr. J.W. McFarland, manager for Hugh Keefer, contractor, construction of C.P.R. line from Port Moody to Vancouver: "Yes, we got the message that Vancouver was burning, by telephone. We were burying a man killed on the line, and were over at New Westminster. Tom Dunn got the message, and jumped up from the table, got a carriage at Tingley's, and dashed off. Yes, we got the message by telephone."

3-In the B.C. Directory, 1885, for "Granville," a Mr. Edwards is shown as "Telegraph Operator," and another man as his assistant. The rates, published in full to all parts of B.C., show "Vancouver to New Westminster as 25¢."

C.P.R. TRAINS.

"There was one train only to Port Moody, on July 4th 1886. Just how many there were after that I forget, but there were no trains in the winter of 1886, nor 1887; the snow sheds were not built." – W.H. Gallagher. (Photos of the first sheds are in the Archives.)

30 DECEMBER 1931 - THE CARTER HOUSE. MILK. MCGEER, THE DAIRYMAN. SMELTS.

Old-timers, in relating of the abundance of smelts once in the waters of English Bay, have been known to sometimes improve the story by adding an irrefutable morsel as a climax to their story by saying, "they even got into the milk" (with a chuckle). W.F. Findlay, nephew of Lewis Carter of the Carter House, is authority for the following, as to how this remarkable circumstance was possible. He says:

"We bought our milk from Mr. McGeer, father to G.G. McGeer, Esq., K.C., the eminent lawyer, and famous as an advocate of 'lower freight rates' during the 'Oliver' government term of office. He had a milk ranch out in South Vancouver; he left us a ten gallon can each morning; that would be about, probably, 1890.

"One afternoon he called, we wanted more. He said he would get some, but was short of cans; would we empty one; and then went away to get the milk we wanted.

"In the winter time, Mr. McGeer's milk got pretty thin, and our fine old Chinese cook whom uncle employed for perhaps fifteen years, suspected it was 'watered,' so while Mr. McGeer was away, he emptied all but about a gallon out of the can and then, from a basket of smelts which had just come in, picked out four or five fish and dropped them in the can of milk now empty all but the gallon.

"Mr. McGeer returned. The old Chinaman picked up the milk can, and proceeded—Mr. McGeer looking on—to pour the last gallon through the strainer, shaking his head as he did so, and muttering, 'Milk pretty dirty these days; how come; have to strain 'um alla time.' Then out dropped the four smelts, right before Mr. McGeer's eyes, into the strainer.

"Much protest; Chinaman [is] very indignant. 'Bossy man' wanders out to see what the disturbance is about; assumes magnanimous demeanour and suggests, in low modulated voice, that if he (Mr. McGeer) must put water in the milk, he might be reasonable and put in fresh water, and not just scoop up the salt chuck, (seawater) fish and all.

"Mr. McGeer [is] nonplussed; guilty or not guilty, the evidence is against him, and irrefutable, and like a wise man, picks up his cane and vanishes—in silence."