

## **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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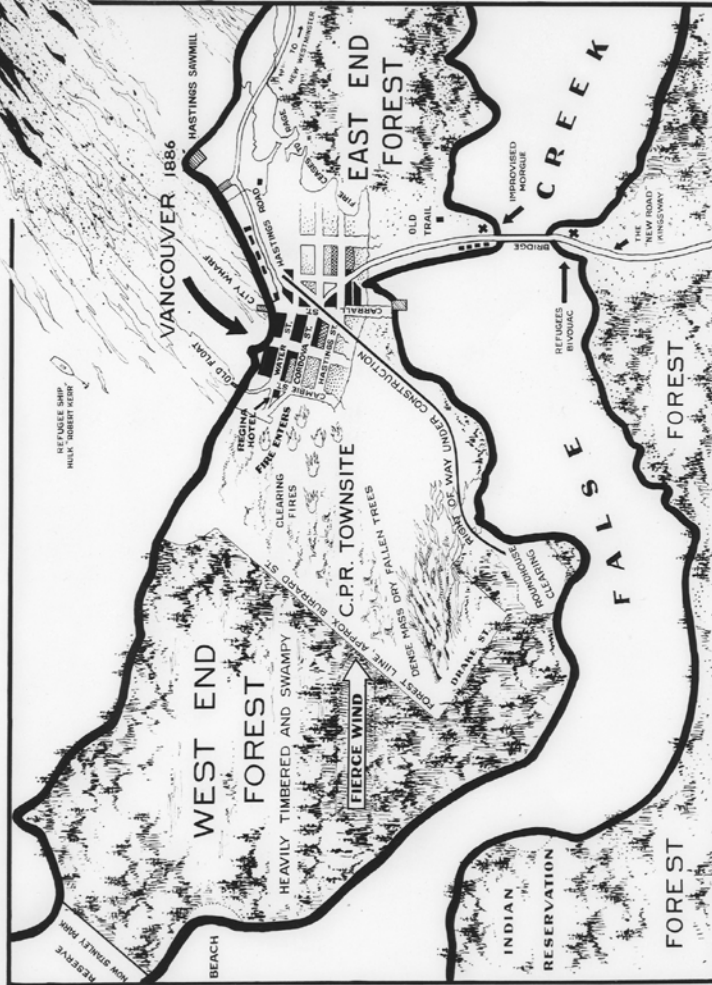
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### **Contact Information**

City of Vancouver Archives  
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9  
604.736.8561  
archives@vancouver.ca  
vancouver.ca/archives



# The Great Vancouver Fire



*OK  
Geoff. Schellky  
May 20/32*

Item # EarlyVan\_v1\_0098

**GOD BLESS THE SAILORS.**

"I must tell you of a most touching scene, the late arrival of four sailors with medical supplies.

"For some time, there had been a telephone from New Westminister to Onderdonk's at Port Moody, and by that means the news of the fire reached Port Moody and some ships lying there. Four sailors had volunteered [and] immediately started out, rowed all the way in a row boat, part of it against the tide, and brought medical supplies. Many persons were burned in the fire, had

had no medical attention; no bandages or other medical supplies were available; all had been burned. The sailors had sized up the situation and dashed off with the badly needed medical aids.

“They were certainly very weary after their long pull, and no doubt very hungry too.

“At first the men distributing the food from the wagons said there was not a morsel left for the sailors, but as they were emptying the crates and boxes the food had been sent in—it was a topsy-turvy confusion of eggs hurriedly fried and placed between slices of bread, or perhaps hard boiled eggs in a soda can protection—a man named Slater, who together with myself had been appointed by the Mayor to police and superintend, and who had taken a very prominent part in seeing that women and children were served first, called out that he had discovered in one of the crates something which had been missed. You must realise that almost complete darkness prevailed in the bivouac. It was a little parcel, neatly done up, and was given to the sailors. Some thoughtful New Westminster woman had prepared some sandwiches, just fried eggs between bread, but with it was a little note which feelingly said she regretted it was very little, but was all she had. Sane, sensible woman, whoever she was; how pleased she would have been had she seen what her little mite accomplished for those splendid men.

“The sailor man who got the note turned and faced the east, raised his hand in an attitude of supplication, and offered the most beautiful prayer for New Westminster and its people, imploring the Almighty never to let them be in such distress, and asking the Lord to reward them a hundredfold. You do not expect that sort of thing from a rough sailor, and in the middle of the night.”

It may have been a reflection of light which I saw, or it may have been a tear which fell, but when some days later I read these notes to Mr. Gallagher, I glanced out of the corner of my eye and now I am sure it was not a reflection.

“Some say,” he went on, “that I have an undue prejudice in favour of New Westminster. It is hard to forget, to forget their wholeheartedness in the hour of our great distress.”

#### **AN IMPROVISED MORGUE FOR THE DEAD.**

“The Regina Hotel was, of course, the only building of any consequence which escaped, and it was located at the corner of Cambie and Water Street, north of the fire as it were. But on Westminster Avenue near the bridge, south of the fire, and protected by an indent of water from False Creek, six or seven buildings, including the Bridge Hotel, survived. The Bridge Hotel on the east side of Westminster Avenue adjoined the bridge, while across the road almost opposite were three houses: John Boulton’s, our police magistrate; Mr. John’s, the collector of customs; and Mr. Costrie’s, the meat merchant; all three houses close together on the west side. We converted a small building adjoining the Bridge Hotel into a rude morgue, and before daylight there were deposited there the remains of twenty-one persons.”

#### *NOTE ADDED LATER:*

“The back of the Bridge Hotel was on piles; later a platform on piles was built, and, after the fire, you could drive a team around the back of the hotel. I know, because I used to shoot duck from it myself.” – W.F. Findlay, 12 April 1932.

“We gathered together some bits of board and built a table about three feet high, five feet wide and thirty feet long, and as each body—or part of a body—was brought in, it was reverently laid upon that table. Some bodies had not an arm, nor foot, nor head left; some of the poor remains would not hold together; some weighed a few pounds, perhaps twenty or thereabouts; all had so suffered by fire that they were not recognisable. The Bridge Hotel gave us their blankets, and in those were wrapped such remains as were found, with a little note attached to each parcel saying where the contents were picked up.

“Altogether, there were twenty-one parcels, and I know of others, those which were not discovered until the work of clearing away the debris of the burned buildings began. There was