

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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"The hospital on Powell Street was kept going for quite a time, two or three years, after the C.P.R. line was completed. Dr. Lefevre was in charge; he kept it going. They were very good at that hospital; if you had money, you paid; if you were without, well, you got the best of treatment in either case.

"Then there was some criticism, and the criticism caused its closing."

THE FIRST COURTS.

"It was Chief Justice Matthew Begbie who held the first court in Vancouver after the fire, the case of Sullivan, held in the old Sullivan Hall on Cordova Street, built on the east end of the sixty-six feet on which the old Atlantic Hotel used to stand.

"Jonathan Miller, constable and jailer before the fire, postmaster after it, acted as clerk of the court on several occasions. In 1887, Mr. C. Gardner Johnson was registrar of the County Court. Mr. Johnson was brother-in-law of John Boulton, our first magistrate, and in consequence was kept busy, too busy, with the appointments he received. He was also a special constable with myself and others to keep law and order after the fire.

"The first court house, of course, was just around the corner from Carrall Street, on Water Street, and was where our first City Council met. It was burned in the fire. Just when it was built I cannot say; it may have been built by the Royal Engineers, or by the government; old maps show a jail and customs house there in 1870, and it may have been the original customs house, and built in crown colony days.

"No. 1 Fire Hall, afterwards demolished, stood there in early years."

OUR EARLY SCHOOLS.

"In the early days the provincial government built our schools and paid our teachers. The first school was, as is well known, at Hastings Sawmill; the second school, that is, our first city school, was on Cordova Street about two blocks east of Gore Avenue, built and paid for by the provincial government. Some agitation resulted in school trustees being appointed, but even then the provincial government furnished the money for two or three years, say, up to 1888 or 1889, and, quaintly, our teachers got five dollars per month less salary because they were teaching 'west of Yale.'

"The third school was on the site of the present Central School, a long low wooden building about the middle of the block and close to Hamilton Street, and one storey. Of that block the city owned the Pender Street half; the C.P.R. gave the other half, that next Dunsmuir Street, where the school board offices are now, for a high school site. The gift was in the form of a letter, and for many years the city had no title to that property other than that letter, a fact which I pointed out to the civic authorities a few years since, when they secured a proper title, as a result of my pointing that out to them.

"The C.P.R. was very good to Vancouver in the early days. The Townsite Commission, R.B. Angus and Lord Strathcona, were both big minded men; they fathered us; for instance, the C.P.R. paid their taxes, before they were due, when we were out of finances to meet city expenditures."

THE CAMBIE STREET GROUNDS. HASTINGS. GEORGE BLACK'S.

"The first ball games, cricket and baseball, etc., were played at George Black's at Hastings. George Black's Brighton House, a very early hostelry, was standing twenty years ago and was on the shore of a wide bay just north of Hastings Park where the Hastings Road, from New Westminster, reached the water. When the C.P.R. was built the line circled around George Black's hotel; the Hastings station was almost exactly opposite the hotel. It was of two storeys, stood perhaps 150 yards from the railway, and the surrounding land sloped gently down to the shore. Two shallow hollows with streams flanked it, one to the east and one to the west, and it was surrounded by considerable land, partly cleared, partly in small bushes.

"Adjoining were two or three acres of rough lawn, and it was there that many early games were played. At the eastern end of these grounds was a barn dance hall, and in the days of later

Granville and early Vancouver, George Black's was a most popular resort. The afternoon athletic games were frequently followed by barn dances in the evening. Charlie Queen, afterwards alderman, who drove the daily stage, used to take the boys out to Hastings free of charge; there was no charge for the grounds or barn.

"But the Hastings ball ground was very cramped and, as Vancouver grew, too far away for convenience. When the question of grounds for athletics came up, Alderman Hamilton, also C.P.R. land commissioner, naturally wanted the Cambie Street location; Alderman Oppenheimer naturally wanted the Powell Street site. We had a lively time between the two interests, and although we got the Cambie Street grounds first, we ultimately got both.

"The C.P.R. rough cleared most of the Cambie Street grounds; the prisoners of the chain gang, under John Clough, did a lot more; the cricketers and the baseball boys worked hard, too.

"The Powell Street Grounds, being more convenient for practice than Hastings, were at first used for that purpose and the matches played at Hastings."

"SALMONBELLIES" AND SALMONBELLIES.

"It was on the Cambie Street grounds that the famous New Westminster lacrosse players got their sobriquet 'Salmonbellies.' It was given them by an Italian bootblack, a well-known character about town, formerly of New Westminster, latterly of Vancouver, and who, following the usual custom of the days, carried his polishing outfit over his shoulder wherever he went.

"One day in the early nineties, the Westminster lacrosse 'boys' came over to Vancouver for a game with the sticks. Vancouver gathered together a scratch team, and both teams, followed by a straggling crowd of pioneer 'fans,' assembled on the Grounds to play it off. The bootblack was 'rooting' for New Westminster.

"The New Westminster men got the ball down towards the Vancouver goal and tried to rush the net. The bootblack was 'rooting' vociferously, and in his excitement yelled, 'Git there, salmonbellies.'

"The epithet tickled the jocular fancy of the onlookers—everyone heard it—much hilarity followed, especially amongst the Vancouver supporters, and the descriptive nickname fitted so well that it has survived ever since, and has in a measure attached itself to all who hail from the old salmon town. In the earlier days of the salmon industry it was centred largely on New Westminster, and perhaps Ladner's, not on Steveston as it afterwards was."

It was remarked to Mr. Gallagher that, in Vancouver today, there are probably thousands of people who have no knowledge of salmonbellies, and who regard even the use of the word as not entirely polite. It was pointed out to him that, in the prize list for the British Columbia Rifle Association annual prize meeting held in New Westminster in 1877, one of the principal prizes, presented by S.W. Herring Esq., was a half barrel of salmonbellies, an epicurean delicacy well known to our pioneers.

"And he gave a real prize," answered Mr. Gallagher. "The preparation of salmonbellies is a lost art now; the old fishermen at New Westminster knew how to do it; they are too hard now; the old fishermen knew how to keep them soft, and to preserve the fat. Down on the Delta the farmers used to boil them, skim the oil off, put them up in earthen crocks with cinnamon bark and cloves, and carefully cover them over again with their own oil. They kept for years and were delicious."

"TAR FLATS."

"'Tar Flats' was a collection of non-descript huts—and characters—on the shore of Burrard Inlet, beyond the present sugar refinery but not as far as Cedar Cove; a dirty place; a sort of rancherie, and got its name from some vessel."

EARLY STANLEY PARK. L.A. HAMILTON. A.G. FERGUSON.

"Mr. L.A. Hamilton, alderman as well as C.P.R. land commissioner, himself surveyed the first path around Stanley Park, and the present driveway is in almost exactly the same position as his first