

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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“Some money was collected from fines inflicted on disorderly or drunken persons, but they were very small amounts, \$2.50, and went to pay the police salaries. Mr. Baldwin regarded that money as ‘dirty,’ and when delivered to him would finger it gingerly.

“The situation was pressing and desperate, but not forlorn. It was clearly a case for the Chief of Police, and he was told to ‘get busy,’ and doubtless winked the other eye and started to ‘clean up the town.’

“Word was passed around that Magistrate Boulton had signed some warrants for arrest, and then both he and City Solicitor Blake found it convenient to have an engagement in New Westminster. The chief of police actually had been busy, very busy, and had gathered in about twenty malefactors. The important thing for the moment was to get someone to sit on the bench and try the cases in the absence of the police magistrate.

“Mayor MacLean did not approve of the procedure which had been followed, and considerable persuasion was necessary before we could get him to see that the ‘reputation of the city was at stake.’ We implored him to take note that it was the city of which he was so proud, and of which he was the chief magistrate, and that ‘its reputation was at stake.’ Considerable pleading, plus a little invigorating stimulant at the Bodega saloon finished him, and we all went down to the old Court House on Powell Street, and His Worship got on ‘the bench,’ that is, his chair at the end of the table.

“‘T.F.,’ as we called him, the city clerk, read the first charge, the only charge read. Addressing the accused by name, he said, ‘You are charged with —, guilty or not guilty?’ The accused rose to the occasion and circumstances, and pleaded, ‘Guilty.’

“The court was astonished. His Worship’s dignity was already in the ascendant, and the plea of ‘guilty’ sent it sky-rocketing; he thumped his desk and exploded. Fastening the accused with his eye, he thundered, ‘How dare you stand before me and plead guilty to defying the laws of God and man AND THIS YOUNG AND PROSPEROUS CITY.’ He halted a moment, and then abruptly ejaculated, ‘twenty dollars,’ and with a sweeping gesture of his arm, ‘the same for the rest of you.’

“That settled that, and the court rose instantly. About twenty were fined.

“While it is true that Granville had possessed a gaol for perhaps twenty years or more before incorporation as the city of Vancouver, the surveillance which came after incorporation was not possible before incorporation. The malefactors were undoubtedly guilty of an infraction of the criminal code, and the money from their fines was very convenient at the moment to solve the more pressing needs of our civic finance.”

Tom McGuigan said “Birdie Stewart, etc., with keeping a house of prostitution.” Mayor MacLean said, “Birdie STEWART, how dare, etc.,” “of God and nature.”

THE CHINESE RIOTS.

“In the autumn of 1886, Brighthouse and Hailstone let a contract for the clearing of a portion of District Lot No. 185, that is from about Burrard Street to Thurlow Street. Early in 1887, it was snowing at the time, the contractor, McDougall, brought in a number of Chinamen to work. McDougall’s camp was near the corner of Burrard and Pender streets, almost exactly where the Elysium Hotel stands now, where there was a small spring and creek of splendid water—John Morton’s old place.

“The night of the Chinese riots a public meeting was held; the speakers spoke from the verandah of the Sunnyside Hotel. After a few speakers had addressed the crowd, a procession was formed to go up to where the Chinamen had been landed up at McDougall’s camp and drive them out. That would be well on towards midnight; there was snow on the ground; it was quite clear and we could see what we were doing. There were many tough characters among the crowd, navvies who had been working for Onderdonk, hotheaded, thoughtless, strong and rough, and many went along with the procession to try and prevent anyone from being hurt. I was not in the procession,

but I was within fifty feet of the front of it when they started. The column was singing as they marched along in the semi-darkness.

“When the Chinamen saw all these men coming, they were terrified. The crowd came up to the camp singing ‘John Brown’s Body,’ and such songs; the Chinamen poked their noses out from beneath their tents; the ‘rioters’ grabbed the tents by the bottom and upset them, the ‘war cry,’ ‘John Brown’s Body,’ still continuing. The Chinamen did not stop to see; they just ran. Some went dressed, some not; some with shoes, some with bare feet; the snow was on the ground and it was cold. Perhaps, in the darkness, they did not know that the cliff, and a drop of twenty feet [was there]; perhaps some had forgotten; some may have lost direction. The tide was in; they had no choice; and you could hear them going plump, plump, plump, as they jumped into the salt water. Scores of them went over the cliff—McDougall was supposed to have two hundred of them up there.

“Those who stopped at McDougall’s camp after we returned to the Sunnyside Hotel told me that those Chinamen who jumped into the sea were afterwards pulled out of the water and herded onto the C.P.R. wharf, where there was a steamer, and that they all went off to Victoria early next morning; perhaps it was the C.P.R. wharf upon which they were herded, but I rather thought it was Spratt’s Ark upon which they collected.

“To my mind, it was the singing, the songs in a strange tongue, and our different races, which terrified the Chinamen. When the Chinamen came to Vancouver from Victoria they knew they were not wanted; they came in the face of opposition—some Victoria Chinamen refused to come, and perhaps that knowledge helped to terrify them.

“My friends and I went along to prevent violence. After the trouble was over for the night, we all went back to the Sunnyside Hotel. There, the ringleaders proposed that we raid Chinatown. It was then three or four in the morning, and we prevailed upon them to wait until daylight; if they would wait until daylight, then we would join them. Finally the arrangement was made that we were all to meet at the Sunnyside at 8 a.m., which we afterwards did. Those who were trying to save the situation agreed to furnish drays at that hour. The crowd decided that the ‘Chinks’ had got to be moved out of town.”

EXEUNT THE CHINAMEN.

“The following morning—I was there—at 8 a.m. the crowd again assembled at the Sunnyside. Several of the draymen owned their own dray or wagon; others were hired. The former gave their services free; where it was necessary to pay, my party paid; there were probably twenty-five drays and wagons used altogether. The crowd moved over to Dupont Street, to Chinatown, between Carrall and Columbia Street, now known as Pender Street East.

Some of the more responsible Chinese merchants suggested to some of our business men that the Chinamen would leave peaceably if they were permitted to leave one man in charge of their goods, and after a hurried conference with the leaders of the opposition to the Chinamen, the Chinese request was granted, and the elderly Chinese merchants assembled their fellow countrymen to a man, and we had no more trouble; none tried to escape.

“The Chinamen in each building were permitted to select their own custodian to be left behind; no goods were damaged, there was no pilfering; one Chinaman was left in each store. The remainder, probably one hundred, assembled quietly, were loaded onto old fashioned horse drawn drays. They all stood up crowded together on the drays, and one by one the drays and wagons moved off to New Westminster—a pretty rough ride in a springless dray over a rough road—and put on a steamer for Victoria.

“I have heard it said that four Chinamen were tied together by their pigtailed and thrown in the creek at McDougall’s camp. If so, I know nothing of it. I do know that some of them were tied together by their pigtailed to prevent them escaping in Chinatown the following morning.

“There were no buildings up at McDougall’s camp on Burrard Street, at least none other than a cook house and a place for meals, both built out of one-inch and twelve-inch boards, and both of