

## **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.

### **Copyright Statement**

© 2011 City of Vancouver. Any or all of *Early Vancouver* may be used without restriction as to the nature or purpose of the use, even if that use is for commercial purposes. You may copy, distribute, adapt and transmit the work. It is required that a link or attribution be made to the City of Vancouver.

### **Reproductions**

High resolution versions of any graphic items in *Early Vancouver* are available. A fee may apply.

### **Citing Information**

When referencing the 2011 edition of *Early Vancouver*, please cite the page number that appears at the bottom of the page in the PDF version only, not the page number indicated by your PDF reader. Here are samples of how to cite this source:

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.

### **Contact Information**

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



street railway and the electric light company were distinctly separate; neither had anything to do with the other.”

### **THE STREET RAILWAY.**

“When the street railway was formed, R.P. Cook became president. He was Dr. Lefevre’s father-in-law.

“In the spring of 1889, I commenced operation in building the first street railway in Vancouver. The first track was laid on Granville Street, a little north of Pacific Street, perhaps a hundred feet north, where the slope runs up to a level. We started just at the level so that the horses may have an easy start when they pulled. The track was to run from bridge to bridge through the town. At that time, the Granville Street vicinity was mostly stumps, although down in Yaletown, a couple of hundred yards east or so, there was quite a little settlement. For the history of Yaletown you had better see Hugh Gilmour, who was Master Mechanic there; he came from Yale when the shops were moved down by the C.P.R.

“We continued to build for a horse-drawn tram system, and got down as far as the old Vancouver Opera House, between Robson and Georgia streets, where the first switch was put in. There was another switch on Powell Street, and another on Main Street (Westminster Avenue).” (There was another switch on Hastings Street between Homer and Richards.) “However, just at the time the track reached the switch at the Opera House” (C.P.R. owned), “a retired lawyer from Omaha, a Mr. McKee, whom I have already mentioned as represented by Mr. H.T. Ceperley, arrived on the scene, and bought up considerable stock of the company, a control of the interest. They had about \$30,000, and with his \$30,000 making \$60,000, it was decided by the directors that there was sufficient funds on hand to convert the project into an electric street railway.”

### **THE ORIGINAL ELECTRIC LIGHT COMPANY AND THE STREET RAILWAY AMALGAMATE.**

“It was then decided to take over the original electric light company. The street railway shareholders were given two shares for one, and the electric light company shareholders one share for one of the old company. You will find it in the minutes. The two companies were amalgamated, and I think were called the Vancouver Street Railway Company Limited.

“When it was decided to electrify the railway, a contract was given to F.S. Osgood of Seattle, who was representative of Thompson, Houston Electric Company of Boston, Massachusetts—they had a big plant at Lynn, Massachusetts—for the equipment.

“At this time, a bond issue was created to be used for the purpose of electrifying, and afterwards extending the line around 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and making improvements to the electric light system. Among such improvements was the adoption of the arc light for the streets, and the disappearance of the ‘glow worm’ lights.

“The construction of the track was completed in the fall of 1889, but it was not operated. The delay was on account of the slow delivery of the equipment. It was finally opened in May 1890 with a bit of celebration. We had four or five street cars, little bits of things; one is in the grounds of the Vancouver Exhibition Association at Hastings Park now.” (First car ran 26 June 1890; see elsewhere in the book.)

“Vancouver was growing, and growing fast, but the line could not pay. There was not track enough, so an arrangement was made to extend the track around 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and form a belt line. The Canadian Pacific Railway, through their land agent Mr. Browning, made a grant of lots for taking the road around to make a complete circle. I had built the track from bridge to bridge on the north side of False Creek; Dan McGillvary got the contract to build it on the south side from bridge to bridge. That completed the well-known ‘belt line,’ and belt line it has remained ever since—the principal line of the B.C. Electric Railway.

“After the ‘belt line’ was completed, Mr. McKee saw that the thing was not going to pay. While he had construction money he could show a profit, but when he had no construction money—you can call it what you like—it could not be made to pay; not on account of bad management, but because it was ahead of its time. The population was not big enough. So Mr. McKee had a statement drawn up, etc., etc., and traded his interest to J.W. Horne for Vancouver real estate. He immediately took a boat for the Orient, and as far as is known has never been seen in Vancouver since.

“The railway to New Westminster was built the same year as the extension was made to complete the ‘belt line.’ They were an entirely separate company, the New Westminster and Vancouver Street Railway.” (See yesterday’s *Vancouver Daily Sun*, “Forty Years Ago,” July 1891.)

“J.W. Horne sold his interest to the New Westminster and Vancouver Street Railway Company. It is presumed they had little money, and that he was anxious to get rid of his interests, so they gave and he accepted notes. You had better see Mr. Burdis, who was Mayor Oppenheimer’s private secretary, about the statement J.W. Horne presented to the New Westminster and Vancouver Street Railway Company. Anyway, the thing hung fire; they refused to pay the notes. J.W. Horne stayed at the Leland Annex. He and Carter-Cotton were the first two members for Vancouver. Frank Barnard tried to form a local company, but I believe he failed; see Mr. Burdis and also Judge J.A. Forin—he will tell you about the Horne statement, etc. The bondholders held an interest of \$300,000. They offered the road and all assets to the City of Vancouver for, I think the sum was \$275,000. It was put up to the City Council, who submitted the proposal by by-law to the people, who turned it down. They afterwards came to the City and asked them to guarantee their bonds. The City Council turned that proposal down too.

“Then someone went to the Old Country. I know Barnard went, and got in touch with Horne-Payne, perhaps it was—I think it was—Farrell, father of Gordon Farrell, and I think Frank Barnard went with him.

“Of course, Vancouver was growing like a weed. They say Horne-Payne made a success of the railway and light. It was not Horne-Payne; it was the citizens of Vancouver who made a success of it. Their numbers were growing.

“David Oppenheimer was ‘frozen out.’ He had put so much money in it he was ‘broke,’ but I think afterwards they gave him enough money to pay his debts. Anyway, they say David died happy because his debts were paid.

“They say it cost Horne \$40,000 to be elected as one of the first two members of the B.C. legislature. Carter-Cotton got about 1100 votes, and I think Horne got about 586.”

J.S. Matthews