

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 125th anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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character; not such as would have remained unheard from. There is little doubt that those brave men perished in a gallant attempt to bring the fire under control.”

VANCOUVER CONSUMED BY FLAME.

“The city did not burn; it was consumed by flame; the buildings simply melted before the fiery blast. As an illustration of the heat, there was a man (driving horse and wagon) caught on Carrall Street between Water Street and Cordova Street; man and horse perished in the centre of the street. The fire went down the sidewalk on old Hastings Road, past our office, so rapidly that people flying before it had to leave the burning sidewalk and take to the road; the fire traveled down that wooden sidewalk faster than a man could run.

“I waded out into the harbour at the back of our office, between Carrall and Columbia streets now, with hundreds of dollars of pay money in my pockets, and nearly suffocated. The heat was so intense that we had to stoop down almost to the surface of the water to get our breath. There was a current of cool air close to the surface of the water we were standing in, between the heat and smoke and the surface of the water; we breathed that, and it saved us.

“Word that Vancouver had been destroyed reached the outside world from George Black’s at Hastings; Hugh Keefer, who had the contract for the construction of the roadbed from Port Moody to Vancouver, had a telephone—the only one.

“As soon as the news reached New Westminster that Vancouver had been destroyed, the city officials sent out young men on horseback who rode up and down the streets shouting that Vancouver had been burned, and the people without food. Truly splendid services were rendered wholeheartedly by the people of New Westminster. They immediately began to collect provisions, and the housewives to put up parcels of food, practically to the last fragment they had. That afternoon and evening, the New Westminster Fire Brigade, the ‘Hyacks,’ helped to collect it.

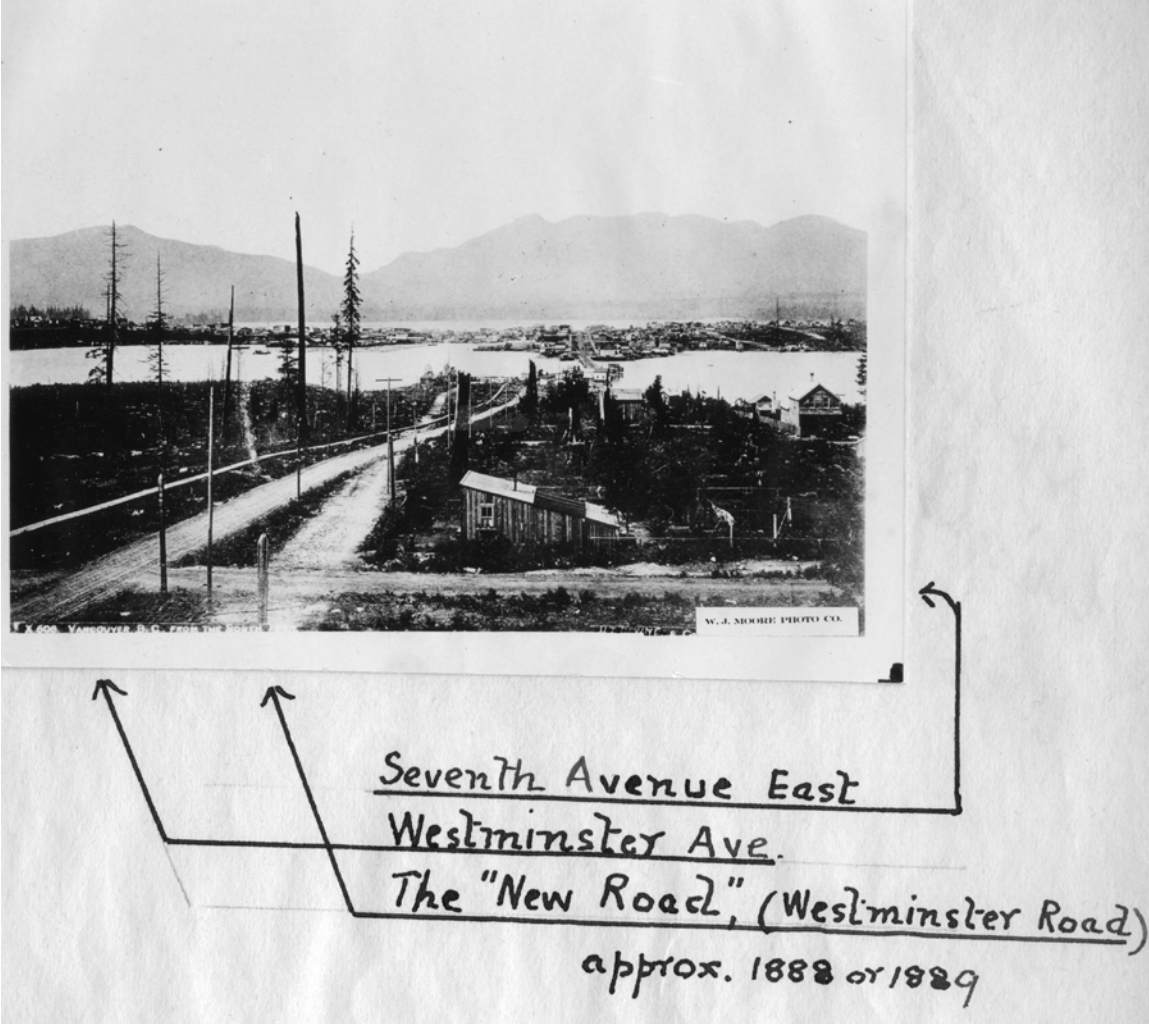
“In the meantime, a messenger had arrived on horseback in Vancouver, saying that food for women and children was coming, and all the blankets they could send. Mayor M.A. MacLean and Chief of Police Stewart sent messengers to the places where the people were huddled together for the night, and advised them to assemble at the south end of Westminster Avenue, just over the bridge—now the northern part of the Canadian National Railway ornamental gardens—and the only practical place to assemble, for the most of the rest of Vancouver was unapproachable, a mass of glittering lights in the darkness of the night, smouldering embers and smoke. The city had been swept clean, save for a half a dozen buildings on Westminster Avenue, the Regina Hotel, and a few floating scow houses. Mr. Alexander’s house and one other adjoining also escaped.”

“Mayor MacLean’s call to assemble was followed by what was probably the sorriest looking procession Vancouver had, and I hope ever will see, and long to be remembered by those who witnessed it. Hungry and temporarily despondent women, children and men who had lost all they possessed, some even their clothes, straggled in twos, threes, or larger downcast groups, along that rough old trail through the woods in the blackness of that dark, dreary night, and gathered together to await the arrival of food.

“At twelve midnight, two wagonloads of eatables arrived at the south end of the bridge. They had hastened by a rough bush trail, a wagon’s width wide, the ‘New Road,’ now Kingsway, then a mere furrow fringed with scrub through the forest. The weaker and the elderly were served first, both food and blankets; the men got what was left.”

NOTE ADDED LATER:

It was the Knights of Labour who did most.



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