

Early Vancouver

Volume Two

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1932.

Supplemental to volume one collected in 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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BRIEF ITEMS OF INTEREST.

Hugh E. Campbell, member of Volunteer fire brigade, 1886.

"The C.P.R. Roundhouse on False Creek was built in 1888; prior to that they had used a bit of a shed a few yards south of Pender Street, close to Carrall Street; just an open shed.

"Hastings Street, at the time of the Fire, June 1886, was just four blocks long; from Cambie Street to Westminster Avenue.

"Bill Cordiner's daughter married Chas. Nelson, first reeve of West Vancouver. 'Navy Jack' and Bill Cordiner helped to clear the forest off old Granville."

KERRISDALE.

Alderman W.H. Lembke of 2162 West 40th Avenue, three years reeve of Point Grey Municipality, and an old timer there before it came into the city of Vancouver, tells me that the first house in Kerrisdale is now numbered 2941 West 42nd Avenue, and is the home of Dr. J.M. Pearson. It stood on what is now West 42nd Avenue between Carnarvon and MacKenzie streets, and was originally on a five acre plot, and the house stood well back from the road. Kerrisdale gets its name from it.

HORSES RACING ON HOWE STREET.

Walter E. Graveley, who purchased the first lot sold by the C.P.R. in Vancouver (southeast corner of Carrall and Cordova) lived at the Sunnyside Hotel and kept the deed in his trunk. When the Sunnyside burned in the fire of 1886, the trunk was also burned, but the fierce draft wafted a bundle of documents out of the trunk, and they dropped on the beach, and a day later were picked up and delivered to Mr. Graveley who still, 1933, retains the ownership of the lot, and also the deed, much mud-begrimed.

Mr. Graveley states that as the old Vancouver Opera House was being built they used to climb the brick walls and watch the horse races on Howe Street—from about Nelson to Georgia—from its walls.

EARLY NEWSPAPERS.

Robert Mathison, who worked on the *Herald*, says it was the first newspaper. The *News* started 3 May 1886, and the *Advertiser* just after the fire of 13 June 1886.

The first newspaper on Burrard Inlet was a sheet called the *Moodyville Tickler*.

3 JULY 1931 – THEATRES.

The first theatre in Vancouver was Hart's Opera House on Carrall Street, the second the Imperial Opera House on Pender, and then of course there was the Vancouver Opera House. The Imperial Opera House was built in 1889, but whether before or after the Vancouver Opera House has not been ascertained at this moment.

When I came to Vancouver in November 1898 there was a small theatre called the Grand Theatre on Cordova Street, in the middle of the block between Cambie and Abbott Street—north side. It is still standing.

This theatre was a small affair. Its frontage was twenty-five feet, and its depth presumably about one hundred and twenty. In 1898 the Imperial Opera House was still in use, but as a Drill Hall. The only two theatres at that time which I recall were the "big" theatre, and the "little one," the former being the Vancouver Opera House, and the latter, the "Grand," and it was customary to go first to one, and then to the other, for there was no other one to go to; we alternated.

The stage was very narrow. There were boxes on both sides. The boxes were just wide enough for one person to squeeze into, and were entered by a passage way, very narrow, from behind which led to the stage. Box holders sat one behind the other. All the formality of etiquette was observed by those using them; dress suits with white bosoms, and the ladies in low necked dresses. In the middle of the theatre

were seats for the “common crowd” distant from the elite by a few inches only. In all, the boxes on each side of the small theatre probably held six persons (twelve persons in all) and these of course could reach down to those sitting in the seats in the middle of the theatre.

In the back was a very small gallery of some sort.

In the front was a tiny ticket office—about the size of a telephone booth.

In latter years the building was used, first as a moving picture house. I am under the impression that the first moving pictures regularly shown were shown there; afterwards half a dozen cheap nasty moving picture houses sprung up on Cordova and Carrall Street in several disused stores. After the war I think the building was used as a commercial warehouse—butter and cheese, etc.—and finally I think A.R. Gun and Co., the confectionary wholesalers, used it as a distributing warehouse.

In 1898 and for some years after, A.G. Ferrera, later the Italian Consul, conducted a restaurant about three doors west of the “Grand Theatre.” It was an excellent restaurant with small boxes, hung with heavy curtains. The cuisine was perfect, and it was famed far and wide. As with the theatres, so with restaurants; it was either the Hotel Vancouver or the Ferrera restaurant, known as “The Savoy.” It was a tiny affair as restaurants go now, built on a 25 x 120 foot lot, but it was exceedingly well conducted and the food was the best money could buy.

It followed then that the leaders of Vancouver society would drive up in their carriages, or perhaps hired broughams or hansom cabs, step daintily to avoid any little mud there might be on the macadam road, and sail into the boxes, where they observed all the forms of a more resplendent edifice, and after the “show” was over, would repair to the Savoy in all their finery for supper; and there, too, the waiters and others performed their parts with equal delicacy. It was a pretty performance of good manners in primeval surroundings; they lived to fare better, but not with greater grace.

One of the celebrated performers at the Grand was Jim Post, to my mind quite the equal of Harry Lauder or Charlie Chaplin, and others have agreed with me.

J.S. Matthews

THEATRES.

3 July 1931, J.S.M. The first theatre in Vancouver was Hart’s Opera House on Carrall Street, the second was the Imperial Opera House, then came the Vancouver Opera House. The Imperial Opera House was built by Crickmay and Robson in 1889. The Vancouver Opera House was built about the same time, but whether before or after has not been checked up. Prior to this there had been Sullivan’s Hall, Blair’s Hall, Keefer’s Hall, the former two on Water Street, the latter on Alexander Street, also the Methodist Hall, and the school house. Hart’s Opera House was also known as “The Rink” for roller skating.

THE GRAND THEATRE.

In November 1898 when the writer (J.S. Matthews) reached Vancouver from New Zealand via San Francisco, there was a small theatre called the Grand Theatre on the north side of Cordova Street between Cambie and Abbott streets, still standing in 1933. It was a small affair on a twenty-five foot lot. In 1898 the Imperial Opera House was still in use, but as a Drill Hall. The only two theatres recalled as existing at that time were the “big” theatre, Opera House, and the Grand Theatre, and people alternated between one and the other.

The Grand Theatre’s stage was very narrow, probably 20 feet. There were boxes on both sides of the “auditorium,” just wide enough for one person to squeeze into, and sit sideways looking towards the stage; the passage way to them—they were entered from the back like all boxes—was almost impassible for narrowness; box holders sat one behind the other, in a row facing the stage. All the formality of etiquette prevailed by the users, “boiled” shirts with big white fronts, dress suits with wide open bosoms, and the ladies in low neck dresses; both arrived in four wheel cabs or hansom at the door, tiptoed through the mud to the sidewalk (wooden), and walked to their boxes. In all, the boxes held about 12 persons, and these could reach down to the commoner herd in seats in the middle of the theatre.