

Early Vancouver

Volume Two

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

2011 Edition (Originally Published 1933)

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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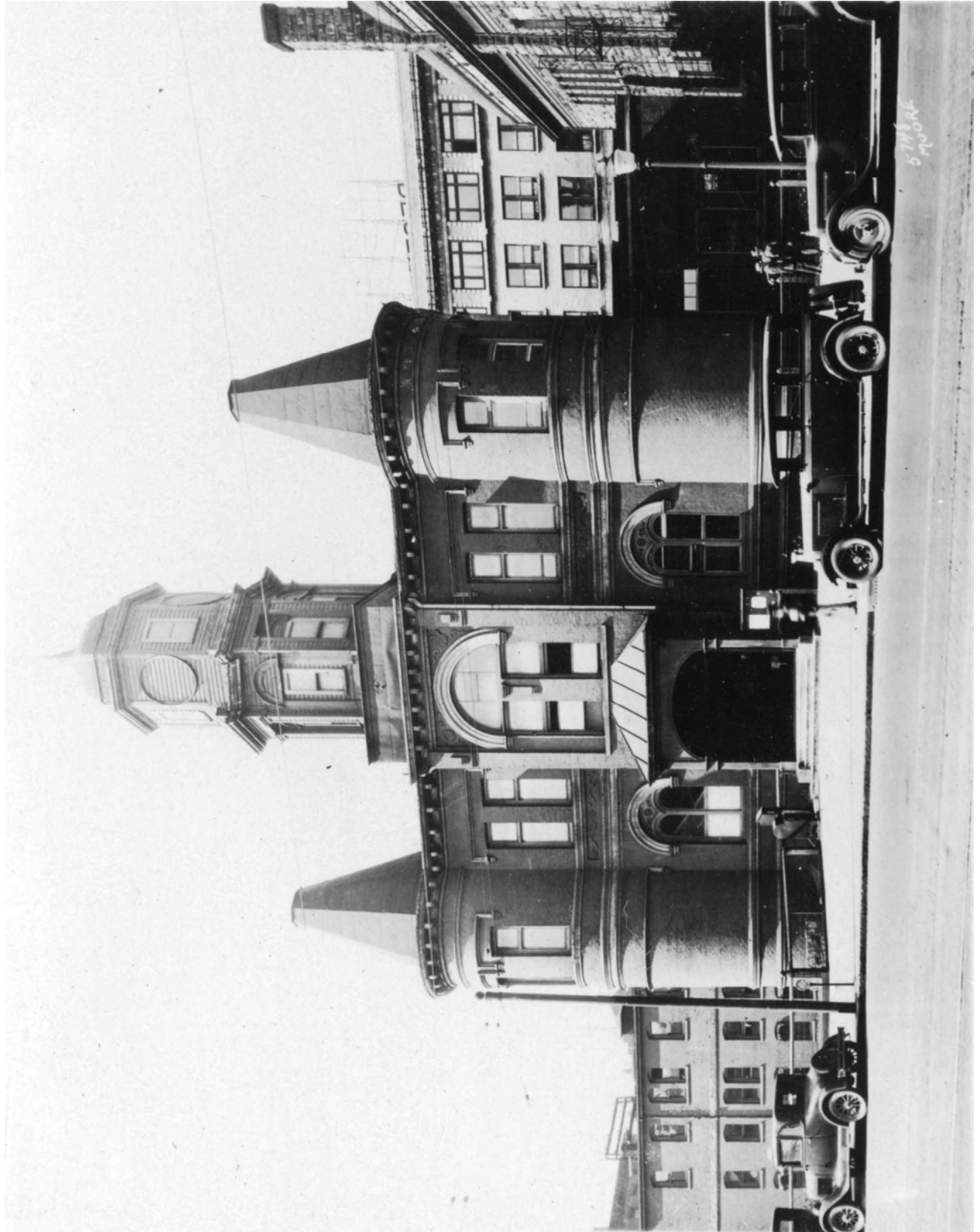
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ITEM # EARLYVAN_v2_138



Item # EarlyVan_v2_139

The Librarian

and

The Archivist



T.P.O.M.

Wishing you a very Happy Xmas and New Year 1935 ~

Item # EarlyVan_v2_140

CITY HALL. MARKET HALL. MAIN STREET. ARCHIVES. TOWER.

5 January 1932, J.S. Matthews. The Tower of the old City Hall, formerly Market Hall, on Main Street, and for so many years the prominent landmark, especially in photographs of early views of Vancouver was removed during the Christmas week 1931. The reason was that rain water was leaking into the Archives Room below, a dirty dilapidated chamber used without heat, light or anything else, and furnished with an old desk and broken chair, and a small box for a filing cabinet.

The story is this. In May 1931, Major J.S. Matthews, for many years an amateur collector and once a director of the City Museum, was descending the Vancouver Public Library after a "mourn" with a curator of the Museum on the lack of accommodation and facilities for preserving historical records. E.S. Robinson, the Librarian, was ascending the staircase. They stopped for a moment, when Major Matthews said, "I suppose you have no place you could put me." Mr. Robinson replied that he thought there was. A search was made, first in the basement of the Public Library, then in the basement of the old City Hall, where in a huge built in wooden box 10 feet wide and 30 feet long beside the furnace the city records were kept. Finally the caretaker's room in the tower was selected, a dirty, empty room which had not been cleaned for many years, festooned with cobwebs and falling wallpaper, and with the ceiling plaster largely fallen to the floor through dampness caused by a leaking roof. Here a start was made in May 1931. A year later, in July 1932, the room was cleaned and the wallpaper removed. In the meantime it was used secretly, in shame that the people of Vancouver should learn that their archives were kept in such a place.

The City Museum has occupied the top floor of the Library Building since about 1902, since the building was presented to the city by Mr. Andrew Carnegie; the two lower floors were used as a library; both institutions shared the basement, where the furnace, a room for museum junk, and old newspaper files for the library were stored. The Museum was and is still terribly cramped for space on the top floor.

The janitor's garret—the tower of the old City Hall—was cleaned out a bit, and an old desk, which fell apart as it was being carried up, two bar room chairs, and a cardboard filing box constituted the furniture; there was no heat, light or water, and as this was being effected, more of the ceiling plaster fell. A single document was placed in the filing box, and Major Matthews relates that he looked at the poor forlorn thing and wondered; wondered if it would grow.

A year later, May 1932, a special committee of the City Council (Aldermen Bennett, Fraser, McRae and Lembke) was, at Major Matthews's urging before the Council, appointed to enquire, and as a result of their report the Library Board was asked to institute an archives department. They appointed Major Matthews as "archivist" with an honorarium of \$30 a month, but with strict admonition that he was not to consider himself an employee of the board nor entitled to any privileges. This arrangement lasted two weeks very amicably; then the Librarian informed the archivist that the Board had made a mistake; that they should have appointed him (the librarian) as "archivist."

Of the \$850 allotted by the Council for 1932 activities, about one quarter was spent on repairs to the building, during the year the archivist received \$360 salary and probably \$100 expenses; the balance went for lantern slides, photographs, etc., etc. Whether the entire appropriation was used up is not known at this writing; trouble developed, and in December the archivist withdrew, quietly removing all material before doing so; he left a bare empty room, on which had laboured for over eighteen months with much enthusiasm and effort.

Prior to retiring, Major Matthews had told his troubles to Hon. Lt. Col. W.H. Malkin, first mayor of Greater Vancouver, 1929-1930, who called a private luncheon at the Georgia Hotel. There were present Col. Malkin; John Hosie, provincial archivist, Victoria; City Solicitor J.B. Williams; Roy Brown, editor-in-chief, the *Vancouver Daily Province*; and Major Harold Brown, president Board of Trade; and Major Matthews. Also D.N. Hossie, K.C., president Canadian Club. Another larger luncheon was promised by Col. Malkin.

When it was discovered that the Archives material was missing, the archivist received two letters demanding its return, the first by 27 December 1932, and the second by 23 January 1933; of neither was any notice, other than acknowledgement, taken. There were many interviews, but the archivist was obdurate.

This removal of the archives material, and refusal to give it up—it was stored in various places—was due to Major Matthews's recognition that the Public Library was no place for an archives department to function. The Board met once a month for an hour or so, sometimes there was not a quorum, and the meetings were frequently postponed to get one. This placed the Librarian in control, and while in some respects he was sympathetic, in others he was very much the reverse. Further, he had a circulating library issuing 1.25 million books a year to look after, and still further, about September a two-column article appeared in the *Province* recounting the enormous loss of books, several hundred out of the Reference Department. How could people be asked to deposit their historical treasures in an institution which acknowledged the annual loss of hundreds of books out of a department supposed to be theft proof. For weeks at a time, the Librarian would never enter the "archives" department; of the board one member only, of the five, was in it in two years.

At the end of 1932, Major Matthews withdrew his material, and continued to work on at his home without remuneration or expense allowance, and borrowed the money for his living expenses.

Among those who were of very material help during this trying time was (Worshipful Master) W.J. Moore, Esq., of W.J. Moore Photo Co., who did much, very much, work on the chance that someday he would be paid, and much more for nothing at all. Others were Alderman W.J. Twiss; W.H. Lembke; City Solicitor J.B. Williams; John Hosie, provincial archivist; Alderman Fraser; Col. Malkin; there was no lack of support, but to get anything established in an orderly way seemed impossible. Day after day passed; nothing done. The genealogical forms prepared in July and paid for by the Canadian Club were still unmailed in February; no funds for envelopes nor stamps; no proper place to have them sent back to if there had been. Two years has passed, and more, since Major Matthews first started; it was hard work to keep on; to stop would be even worse.