

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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But the West End forest was seemingly inexhaustible, for in the late eighties, even ... [printer's error] ... the "follway" beside the logger's cabin and pigsty at the foot of Davie Street, and dumping them into English Bay. Then came Oben, and finished the job; what logs were left he sold to Fader's Mill (Robertson and Hackett's now).

Oben cleared the land, but it took some winning; the Royal Engineers were right; it was "heavily timbered." Then fire got into the slashings, excitement ran high; one terrible fire and two frights had made Vancouver nervous, and, too, Stanley Park was in danger. Our first fireboat, a tug, was improvised, and pumped water; the Park was saved. Oben won the struggle, but lost his fortune.

Phillip Oben was a discoverer. Vancouver's water supply first flowed beneath the Narrows about midnight March 25, 1889, but none knew positively where it came from. Oben undertook to discover the source of the Capilano River. Together with Capilano Joe and another Indian as guides, he set out—each carrying sixty pounds of "grub," rifle and a blankets, followed upstream—no trail existed—crossed and recrossed waist deep in water, until finally, high up on the precipitous mountainside, they found a lake, frozen solid in June; crossed its surface, reached the topmost ridge; food became exhausted, and half starved, they descended to Howe Sound, where they were succored at a pioneer cabin on the shore. Chief Joe said Oben was the first white man to traverse these parts.

The pioneer often pays for his courage; Oben paid well for his. He came with wealth of one sort; he departed with wealth of another. He left us a legacy more priceless than jewels—the memory of indomitable courage, of service to his fellows, an honored name and a gallant sailor son.

EXTRACT FROM THE PROVINCE, 10 JUNE 1933.

AN APPRECIATION

by J.S. Matthews

A young matron, babe in arms, fled terror-stricken through the stumps of Pender Street, and cast herself head-long into a shallow ditch of water besides what is now the C.P.R. freight sheds; strong arms—her husband's—threw a wet blanket over them. Both escaped death. The holocaust of 1886, which destroyed our first city, passed above them as they lay, burning as it went through the blanket, and singeing hair from the child's head. That was almost fifty years ago.

The child grew, and is now a well-known matron of Kitsilano; the mother, beloved and gracious lady, a pioneer of Gastown from 1884, died recently; full of honor and of years; her name, once on many lips, somewhat forgotten. Nothing especially remarkable, perhaps, at such an age, and in a land where good women are as common as blossoms in spring.

But wait. This woman was a soldier's friend, and soldiers, like children—and dogs—have long memories for kind friends. She was of that legion to which all soldiers bend a grateful knee; akin to Florence Nightingale, only different; that great galaxy of devoted Canadian women, some rich, most poor, many unknown, who helped—actually helped—in the Great War. She was a knitter of socks. Those there may be who will smile—such plebian wear—but such as do are not soldiers, and smile without knowledge.

With her own wrinkled fingers—she was about seventy then—this good friend knitted eight hundred single socks—four hundred pair—enough to outfit the battle strength of many a worn battalion; one half sock for each day of the war. She knew naught of the big raw blotches, torn and angry, after a hot day's march, of the bleached foot, bloodless, white and stinking after a week of wet boots, nor the misery of fitful slumber on frozen ground with feet cold as lumps of ice.

But her great soul felt for men she had never seen or heard of; her feminine intuition sensed the need, and patiently, faithfully, day in, day out, she knitted socks, warm socks, eight hundred socks. And the men wondered, but never knew, who were the angels who sent the socks.

Few realized in full the part the women played. The secret of the C.E.F. was its quality. First, every man was a volunteer, and secondly, the wholehearted support of those who stayed

behind—and the women. Their little package of remembrance which came, a stick of chewing gum, a box of cigarettes, a pair of woollen socks, handmade by loving hands. In such the “boys” found comfort; the generals, and the field officers, saw the greater meaning; subtle messages of affection and encouragement. Throughout the long-drawn strife, gentle hearts aplenty were crushed to tears, but there was no whimpering; soldiers cannot fight their best if the women wail, and battles are won by morale, not by guns.

The good lady’s name? There were others, too, in cohorts; thanks be to them all, God bless them. This one was Mrs. Reid, the late Mrs. Duncan R. Reid, first lady school trustee, 1898, of Vancouver; who passed away last month.

Province, June 10, 1933

An Appreciation

By J. S. MATTHEWS.

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