

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.

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. 2 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2. 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



THE DAILY PROVINCE

Published daily at The Province Bldg.,
Victory Square, Vancouver, by The
Vancouver Daily Province Limited.

The Province aims to be an inde-
pendent, clean newspaper for the
home, devoted to public service.

MONDAY, JULY 31, 1933.

Phillip Oben, Pioneer

By J. S. MATTHEWS.

PHILLIP OBEN has gone, aged 78, and the "builders of Vancouver" are one fewer.

What did he build? He cleared the ground—or some of it—, he swept away the forest that we might have a street, a home, a lawn; he banished age-old shadow; he let the sunlight in.

Come to the West End, and there, from the brow of the hill which slopes gently westwards towards Stanley Park, gaze over the panorama of splendid homes which cluster, row on row, between the waters of English Bay and Lost Lagoon; there, all below Nicola street, Oben first labored.

Peer into the past, and see the sights that Oben saw; the towering forest, dark and damp; feel the solitude; glimpse the hastening deer. Or, listen for the sounds that Oben heard; the slow measured chock, chock, chock of the woodsman's axe; hear the long swish as falling trees sweep earthwards, the dull heavy thud as great trunks bump to ground.

Then, phantomlike, slide down to the bunkhouse on Coal Harbor, near the Park entrance. Watch the cook draw his water from a spring, or "haul off" and with iron bar strike the steel triangle; a piercing ring, metallic, musical, stirs the ear, and serves as dinner gong to call weary men to supper. Here comes the tired bull puncher and his eight yoke of oxen—hauling forest debris into heaps, for burning is hard work—and following down the skidroad plods "the boss," Oben.

The Royal Engineers, who in 1863 first surveyed the "Brickmaker's Claim," i.e. the West End, wrote across their map, "heavily timbered land, very swampy in places," and so it was; old logging bosses say, "the finest stand of timber I ever saw"; old sportsmen shot wild duck in the swale below the Courthouse. Then Morton, Hallstone, Brighthouse, the original pre-emptors, who got their land title at "our Government House in our city of New Westminster," from "Victoria by the grace of God, etc., and of the Colonies in Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australasia, queen," sold some logs to Moody's Mill (North Vancouver), more logs to Capt. Stamp's Mill (Hastings Sawmill) and the "oregon pine" lumber went to foreign parts by sailing ship. Solitary axemen hewed octagonal spars for the British navy.

But the West End forest was seemingly inexhaustible, for in the late eighties even, and Australasia, Queen," sold some logs to the "follway" beside the logger's cabin and pigsty at the foot of Darle 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 blankets, followed upstream—no trail existed—crossed and re-crossed 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 those 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.

SEVENTH AVENUE WEST.

The full reason why Seventh Avenue West was the first street cut through from Westminster Avenue (Main Street) to Centre Street (Granville Street south of False Creek) are not completely known, but those who recall Mount Pleasant and Fairview in early days tell of the very swampy nature of the land (see Capt. Nye, *Early Vancouver*, 1932) between Westminster Avenue and Bridge Street (South Cambie Street). Just west of Bridge Street stood the Leamy and Kyle Lumber Mill almost on a level with Fifth Avenue; the road to North Arm, and the "New Road," or Westminster Road, branched off at Seventh Avenue to the east; Seventh Avenue was the logical street to cut out and clear; there would be no sense in going up to Ninth Avenue, or Broadway at that time, but which street, after the carline was laid down, became the most important of the two thoroughfares.

West of Bridge Street is Ash Street, and just west of Ash Street a creek came down the hill, and entered False Creek exactly at Sixth Avenue; an arm of False Creek indented as far as Sixth Avenue exactly, and, at that point on Sixth Avenue a bridge two to three hundred feet long would have been needed, whereas the bridge on Seventh higher up was a very short one comparatively. Passing still further westward, the shore of False Creek approached the line of Sixth Avenue so closely, and the land dipped down so near to sea level, that Sixth offered no attractions for the site of a rough road over which horses were to draw loads. Seventh was infinitely a more level, less expensive prospective route, and was, in addition, a familiar route to pedestrians who always take the easiest level, because there had been an old trail, a man's width wide through the forest, for years from Gastown, via the False Creek Bridge to Snauc (False Creek Indian Reserve), Greer's Beach, and on to the logging camps of Jericho.

EXTRACT FROM *THE DAILY PROVINCE*, MONDAY, 31 JULY 1933.

PHILLIP OBEN, PIONEER

by J.S. Matthews

Phillip Oben has gone, aged 78, and the "builders of Vancouver" are one fewer.

What did he build? He cleared the ground—or at least some of it; he swept away the forest that we might have a street, a home, a lawn; he banished age-old shadow; he let the sunlight in.

Come to the West End, and there, from the brow of the hill which slopes gently westwards towards Stanley Park, gaze over the panorama of a splendid homes which cluster, row upon row, between the waters of English Bay and Lost Lagoon, there, all below Nicola Street, Oben first labored.

Peer into the past, and see the sights that Oben saw; the towering forest, dark and damp; feel the solitude, glimpse the hastening deer. Or, listen for the sounds that Oben heard; the slow measured chock, chock, chock of the woodsman's axe; hear the long swish as falling trees sweep earthwards, the dull heavy thud as great trunks bump to ground.

Then, phantomlike, slide down to the bunkhouse on Coal Harbor, near the Park entrance. Watch the cook draw his water from a spring, or "haul off" and with iron bar strike the steel triangle; a piercing ring, metallic, musical, stings the ear, and serves as dinner gong to call weary men to supper. Here comes the tired bull puncher and his eight yoke of oxen—hauling forest debris into heaps, for burning is hard work—and following down the skidroad plods "the boss," Oben.

The Royal Engineers, who in 1863 first surveyed the "Brickmaker's Claim," i.e. the West End, wrote across their map "heavily timbered land, very swampy in places," and so it was; old logging bosses say "the finest stand of timber I ever saw"; old sportsmen shot wild duck in the swale below the Courthouse. Then Morton, Hailstone, Brighthouse, the original pre-emptors, who got their land title at "our Government House in our city of New Westminster," from "Victoria by the grace of God ... and of the Colonies in Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australasia, queen," sold some logs to Moody's Mill (North Vancouver), more logs to Captain Stamp's Mill (Hastings Sawmill) and the "Oregon pine" lumber went to foreign parts by sailing ship. Solitary axemen hewed octagonal spars for the British navy.

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