

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume Two**

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

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*Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1932.*

*Supplemental to volume one collected in 1931.*

### **About the 2011 Edition**

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### **Contact Information**

City of Vancouver Archives  
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9  
604.736.8561  
archives@vancouver.ca  
vancouver.ca/archives



## THE FIRST CHRISTMAS AFTER VANCOUVER BECAME A CITY.

*The Daily Province*  
Saturday  
December 21<sup>st</sup> 1912

Loaned by Mrs. Emily Eldon, 1932.

OLD TIMERS, asked about the first Christmas in Vancouver after its incorporation, which was the first Christmas after 'the' fire, recalled interesting events of that day with mingled sadness and mirth. There was mirth over how they had enjoyed themselves then in spite of the circumstances, and there was grief when there came thoughts of those who have since passed away. A few chats were had with old timers. While, as old timers will, they wandered occasionally from that particular day, what they have to say contains much of interest.

Vancouver was informally christened in 1885 (a) and incorporated as a city in 1886. The first election for the city was held that year, and the townsite was fire-swept a month or so after—on June 13<sup>th</sup>. The next election was held on December 13<sup>th</sup>, 12 days before Christmas.

### **BACK TWENTY-SIX YEARS.**

"The first Christmas in properly and legally incorporated Vancouver?" remarked Mrs. George Eldon, "Well, it was not much of a Christmas to tell the truth. There have been better Christmas celebrations, as far as jollity went, in old Gastown and Granville townsite days. But we enjoyed ourselves that Christmas, too, even if, in visiting neighbours one had to crawl over piles of ashes, in traversing which you could not tell what sad relic you might lay bare. (b) Still, there was a spirit of camaraderie in the air, and it is safe to say that no one in tent or shack or newly built home went without a greeting, or that anyone went without a Christmas dinner.

"After all, that spirit of neighbourliness that prevailed is something not to be forgotten, and certainly not to be ashamed of," added Mrs. Eldon reminiscently. "Most of us who were here were bound together by the common terror we had experienced on that recent day in June, and the newcomers were made welcome because we all remembered that they had come from places which had rushed help to us as fast as trains or steamboats could get things here.

"But as for that Christmas Day, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1886. Let me see. There were, I think, three Protestant and one Roman Catholic place of worship. I think they all had services on Christmas morning, but, bless you, when the services were over pastors and priest and all members of all denominations shook hands and wished each other a Merry Christmas. If there was tent or shack where anyone thought there lacked Christmas cheer there was no question as to what church the occupants belonged. They were visited, and if the shack was bare they were genially forced to come somewhere where good cheer prevailed."

### **REAL CHRISTMAS CHEER PREVAILED.**

"I believe that a real downright honest, hearty, true Christmas cheer prevailed in Vancouver that day as keen and pure a sense as it ever prevailed anywhere since the shepherds kept their weary but hope-inspired watch. I know, too, that Vancouver at the time had the sympathy of New Westminster, Victoria and Moodyville, and that hampers which came were satisfying, as were also the messages of good will that accompanied them were heart warming. There was open house at New Westminster and Moodyville for Vancouverites that day, and many took advantage of the kindly hospitality. Moodyville, the town on the spit, was then, as you know, some considerable place, and it is pleasing to know that it is coming back into its own.

"In those days, we might not have liked to see so much good lumber leaving there and also from the Hastings Mill for South America and other points, when it was so much needed for home-building here, but that was bringing money into the province, and just then money was badly needed. Optimism was prevalent here, then, too, and on that Christmas day men who were comparatively rich on June 12<sup>th</sup>, and had been fire-swept into pauperism on the thirteenth of that month, and while poorly domiciled in tent or shack had that spirit of hope which has made Vancouver what it is today."

Asked as to her activities on that day, Mrs. Eldon said, "Oh, I enjoyed that day with the rest of the folks, but while you are welcome to make use of my reminiscences, I do not care to figure personally. To tell the truth, even in the midst of Christmas jollity and genuine neighbourliness I could not quite forget the horrors of that thirteenth day of June."

*(a) Earliest known mention of "Vancouver" is September 1884.*

*(b) Human remains of those who burned to death.*

## **WAS BUSY JOLLY DAY.**

### **EX-CHIEF OF POLICE JOHN McLAREN.**

When asked about Christmas of 1886 in Vancouver, ex-Chief of Police John McLaren said, "Gosh hemlock, lad. Do not ask me to give all the details of that day. I was a patrolman then. The late J.M. Stewart was chief, and my associate on the force was ex-sergeant V.W. Heywood. Did we have a busy day? Well, yes, we did, but it was not in the matter of making arrests. The late M.A. MacLean was mayor then, and he thought the duty of the police force on that day was to ensure that everyone had his share of happiness rather than bother about making arrests. It was close to our duty that day to find anyone who was moping alone in a shack or tent, and see that he got out and enjoyed himself.

"On that day in Vancouver crimes were not even thought of, much less committed. We did not have much of a jail to put anyone in anyway, and no one would have been cruel enough to chain a man up to a stump just because he had had a drink or two. There was a bit of a jail it is true, about where the old City Hall on Powell Street is now, but what few prisoners were in it had a good time under the supervision of Mr. John Clough. Every old timer remembers John, though he might not know who you were speaking of if you said Mister.

"The prisoners in that jail, I may mention, had no trouble about keeping warm if blankets counted for anything. There was something in the way of a miracle connected with those blankets. At the time of the fire John Clough was sojourning in the jail on account of having been generous in treating an Indian friend to firewater. When the fire gained uncontrollable headway the jail was forgotten, and John did not propose to stay there and be burned up, so he let the other prisoners out, and took French leave. (c)

"John went out in the woods, and stayed there until a day or so after the fire was all over, and then he came back and reported. John had only one arm, but when he reported he had a pile of blankets with him that would have kept the Turkish army from getting cold feet. They came in mighty handy, not only for prisoners, but for others. When asked how he came to obtain, much less carry, so many blankets, John's laconic response was, 'Oh, I'm an old prospector,' and we let it go at that.

"There were only three hotels worthy of a name in the city then. They were all crowded, but there was no quarrelling or fighting on that Christmas day. It was a case of, 'Drink hearty, but behave yourselves, and let the spirit of the day prevail and forget your troubles.' Vancouver has had many happy Christmas days since then, but none more genuinely jolly than that one."

*(c) Said to have been chained to stakes.*

## **AS MR. PAYNTER RECALLS IT.**

### **ASSESSMENT COMMISSIONER PAYNTER.**

"I remember the first Christmas in Vancouver well enough," remarked Assessment Commissioner Paynter, "but I was very much of a cheechako at the time, and perhaps should not speak authoritatively. As a matter of fact I had just arrived. I remember that there was no club here, and that the general meeting place was at a very popular one on Carrall Street. I know this, however, that on Christmas morning, my family and myself attended service at St. James' church, but was in an upstairs room on Alexander Street, the lower floor of which was used as business premises of Keefer Bros." (d)

*(d) Probably Keefer Hall.*

One of the oldest men on the city hall staff could tell many interesting stories about those happy go lucky times, but he, having been a newspaper man in his earlier days is naturally very modest about getting into print. He does say, however, that the first Christmas Day celebration in Vancouver after incorporation was more or less a continuation of the second election ever held in Vancouver.

The first election was held in May of 1886, and the second on December 13<sup>th</sup>. In that second election for the mayoralty the late M.A. MacLean defeated Thos. Dunn, who is now in Prince Rupert, by 154 to 122. The elected aldermen were Sam Brighthouse, Dr. J.M. LeFevre, Jos. Humphries, Joseph Mannion, R.H. Alexander, Robert Clark, Edwin Saunders, G.H. Lock, David Oppenheimer and Isaac Oppenheimer.

In those days everyone knew everyone else, and on Christmas Day all the candidates met to drown sorrow or to celebrate victory. The Bodega Hotel on Carrall Street, run by Sandy MacPherson, of genial memory, was the headquarters, for be it known, there were no clubs in Vancouver in those days, and the Hotel Vancouver, later a general meeting place, was then only a prospect.

### **EX-ALDERMAN JOHN MCDOWELL.**

Ex-Alderman John McDowell says that his clearest recollection of the Christmas Day of 1886 was the fact that on that day the first collection for a hospital in Vancouver was taken up. The present chief of the fire brigade, Mr. Carlisle, and himself were the originators of it, and all the other subscribers were teamsters. Speaking of that first Christmas reminded Mr. McDowell of Vancouver's first municipal election held in May of that year. He had only arrived in Vancouver a short time before, and he was met on the street by Mr. Sam Greer, who asked him to come over and vote for Mr. MacLean for mayor. "What shall I vote on?" queried Mr. McDowell, referring to his lack of property qualification.

"Oh, that will be all right," said Mr. Greer, "come with me."

Mr. McDowell accompanied Mr. Greer to Pat Carey's hotel. The hotel was more than full at the time, but there were tents in a vacant lot alongside.

"Here's a man wants a room," said Mr. Greer.

"All right, come along," said Pat, and he led the two out to a tent. "There's your room, No. 5," said Pat.

"Come along and vote," said Mr. Greer, "you are registered now."

*(e) See W.H. Gallagher, Early Vancouver, Matthews, 1931 for method of voting and registration.*

### **LIEUT.-COL. C.A. WORSNOP.**

"No," said Col. Worsnop, "I was not here on Vancouver's first civic Christmas, having arrived just three months afterwards, in March 1887. This, however, is the twenty-sixth Christmas I have spent in this city—some white, some wet, some mild as spring. That of 1887 was so mild that two or three four-oared crews of the old Vancouver Boating club went out rowing on the inlet.

"I well remember the 1887 festival. I was then on the *News-Advertiser*, and a jolly crowd formed the staff. Mr. Carter-Cotton was editor-in-chief, and some of the other members were the late M.H. Hirshberg, Cecil Freeman, now in England, Jack Wilson, who furnished the power—his strong arm—for driving the old fashioned hand press, (he died in South Africa), Jim Wright, foreman, best of fellows, and 'Fatty' Waters, a typical old typo, who periodically threw down his stick and went out prospecting. Other members of the 'chapel' came and went when the spirit moved them. That old operator, Time, has ticked out '30' for most of them. This was long before the days of the linotype.

"Well, on Christmas Day, 1887, the chief and I started for a walk across False Creek (there was no Mount Pleasant or Fairview then). The day was a brilliant one. There had been quite a fall of

snow the night before, and the sun shone brightly, making the forest, which came very close to the embryonic city in those days, glitter with its white covering.”

### **LOST OVER FALSE CREEK.**

“Making our way across the Westminster Ave. bridge we followed the trail along the bank of False Creek until Leamy and Kyle’s mill was reached. This, the third mill in Vancouver, and the first south of the creek, stood near where the end of the magnificent new Connaught Bridge is now. Here we struck a skid road, and started to climb up the hill, through dark stretches of forest and small clearings, until after a couple of hours tramp we ran into a clearing where lots of new stakes, planted by surveyors formed a second growth almost as thick as the original.

“To our amazement we found written on one of the stakes, ‘Twenty-Second Avenue,’ and then we realized what a distance we had come. Not wishing to retrace our steps on the skid road, we made our way easterly along the rough trails, and blazed lines until after some hours hard work we emerged on the Westminster Road, wet from head to foot. As we pushed through the bush the newly fallen snow would drop in miniature avalanches down our backs, and from time to time, when walking along, some fallen monarch of the forest, we would slip off into the deep snow. You can imagine how overjoyed we were to reach the road, and how gladly we turned our faces towards home and dinner. Such a tramp, however, had its reward in the keenest of appetites, and a willing capacity to enjoy the festive turkey and other seasonable delicacies.

“In spite of many drawbacks incidental to a new place, we old-timers used to enjoy ourselves in those days.”

## **CHRISTMAS THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AGO IN VILLAGE WHERE VANCOUVER NOW STANDS.**

*The Daily Province*  
Saturday.  
December 21<sup>st</sup> 1912

(This story, and the preceding one, was probably written by Mr. Carter-Cotton, son of the Hon. F.L. Carter-Cotton, and formerly a reporter on his father’s daily, the *News-Advertiser*.)

“What kind of a Christmas did they have in Vancouver thirty-five years ago? How did you spend your holiday?” These questions were asked the other day by the *Province* of an old-timer—one of the bright old men whose memories of early events in this city has not even been dimmed.

“What kind of a story would you like?” queried back the old-timer. “How would you like a bear story—for there were plenty of the black fellows then in the woods where West End apartment houses now stand? Or I might tell you how Captain W.R. Soule arrested Tompkins Brew, how the Victoria special constables turned white, or ---.”

“But has that anything to do with Christmas?” the interviewer asked.

“No,” was the quick reply, “but those incidents come into my mind when I think of Christmas. There are many people in Vancouver today who can remember the city as it was twenty-five years ago; but when it comes to pushing back the hands of time ten years more it is almost like communicating with another generation. The ten years preceding 1887 you might regard as a period of slumber or stagnation. The people were looking forward during the earlier years to the settlement of the railway terminal question—just as Sir Charles Tupper pointed out in an admirable article last Saturday. Everything was much undecided, and there was a very strong pull in favour of Bute Inlet.”

### **TIMES WERE PRETTY DULL.**

“With such an unsettled condition of affairs, can you blame those who were here in not investing money in property? Indeed, there was no property to buy. The Hastings Mill Company would not sell, the townsite of Granville was a reserve, and you could not get a foot of it from the government for love nor money. You ask—why did we not squat? One reason was we were law