

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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The Last 400

ENGRAVED on the time-scarred tablet of Vancouver's history are hundreds of names on which the present-day metropolis has been built—names whose every syllable conjures up a deed of bravery, fortitude, or—humor.

Now these names join that other popular roll of honor conducted by The Province, and are blazoned forth for all B.C. to see in The Sunday Province Magazine Section. The last four hundred—those who came "before THE fire." Those who were here when a city was swept out of existence beneath their very eyes—those who labored long and hard to rebuild it on the smoking ashes of itself.

Many of these pioneers tell their own story—stories filled with everything that goes to make up the drama and pathos and laughter of life. Read about them in this week's Sunday Province Magazine Section—is your name, or the name of a relative, in the roll of honor?

And we still have pioneers today—pioneers of the airways. Tom Corless is one of these, and George Cross tells of his breathtaking adventures with a rapid-fire of syllables and sentence recording modern history.

Then there is romance of the woods in the tale of Gray Owl, friend of every animal—romance of politics and war in the record of Carla Jenssen, spy extraordinary—romance of the sea in Boyd Cable's story of sailing ships—romance of people on the page of excursions into the world of men and women—romance of reading all the way through this issue of the Sunday Magazine.

THE SUNDAY PROVINCE MAGAZINE SECTION
"Every Line Interesting"

TALES OF OLD VANCOUVER.

By Major J.S. Matthews.

Illustrations.

1. The Scroll of Founders—the Last Four Hundred.
2. The Birthplace of our City. A dockless waterfront.
3. A forest giant near Hotel Vancouver.

Can it be true, or is it but a dream; this story of our pioneers? Is it that men—and women—still walk who saw the shadeless forest where blinks the red and green of traffic signals; who knew the silent solitude where shines the blaze of neon signs?

MEN WHO MATCHED OUR MOUNTAINS.

Who were these men; these men of simple tastes, simple clothes, who feared God, honoured the King, and had empires in their brains? They came silently, sans music, sans heralds, sometimes in a rowboat; men of peace, reason, justice; no sword was drawn, no blood is on our name. With cool, quiet courage they—and their wives—hacked out a clearing for a garden on the shore. May we, and our work, we who have come after to the completion of their great dreams, have found favour in their sight.

The creation of our city, carved out of the depths of dark primeval forest, was an achievement unequalled in the annals of the human race. There is no tale in the great chronicle of human endeavour which provides a more romantic, inspiring story; its vast significance is not fully recognized; we are too close to the event.

A RETROSPECT.

For aeons our land had lain in motionless repose, a silent thing, an empty space, hidden beneath an interminable green forest spreading on and beyond, and through which, at wide intervals, the white tips of snowcapped ranges broke like the foaming crests of waves breaking in green seas; the shores concealed a thousand coves, a thousand fiery paradises, framed in green; the air was fragrant in its purity. Then into the "Great Silence" came "The Builders," a strange race with white faces, and soon there came the railway.

The railway made Canada whole; linked up the loose ends of an empire, changed the gyrations of world trade. The recurrence of consequences so momentous to the human race, born or unborn, is unlikely. The great epoch of colonization, commencing with Columbus and his few, has ended with the settlement of the last great wilderness; the world's most youthful city may be its last.

Such is the epitome of a grand story which will yet enchant the coming generations.

HISTORICAL PRELUDE.

Captain Vancouver's Journal: "About noon," (13 June 1792) "we were met by about fifty Indians in canoes," ... "presented us with fish, cooked and undressed," ... "examined the colour of our skins with great curiosity."

Col. Moody, Royal Engineers, 25 January 1863: "Memo for Capt. Parsons, R.E. I wish Corporal Turner and party to proceed to Burrard Inlet to revise posts for town near entrance," ... "survey lands between such point and the village which has been laid out en bloc."

ENGLISH BAY'S NARROW ESCAPE.

Sir William Van Horne, vice president, C.P.R., 14 March 1885: "Owing to the extreme force of the tide in the First Narrows, the entrance to Burrard Inlet for large steamships will be almost impracticable, and from investigations made it seems that English Bay must be utilized as the main harbour" ... "the construction of docks, etc., will involve extensive tracts of level ground for terminal sidings and yards, and the only ground suitable is that on the naval reserve." (Jericho golf course.)

OUR FIRST MAYOR'S PROPHECY.

His Worship Mayor M.A. MacLean (own handwriting, 1886): "One hardly dares conjecture what marvels fifty years may work in the wilderness. Half a century is but a little while; even a quarter of a century has wrought amazing results."

MEMORIES OF "GASTOWN." (Year indicates year of arrival in "Gastown.")

Gather nearer, close around the circle. Harken as each pioneer family tells the tale of days of long ago.

Mrs. Ruth Morton, 1884 widow, John Morton, Vancouver's first resident (1862): "Mr. Morton was anxious to show me the white sand on a beach" (English Bay) "but the only rowboat was leaky. While I was waiting on the beach at the foot of Carrall Street I watched a sow digging clams, and a crow hopping along near her, making a meal on the stray bits."

Joseph Morton, John Morton's only son: "Father and I were walking near where now stands the Marine Building when he said to me, 'Do you see that knoll; that's where we built our cabin.'"

Alexander McLean, 1858: "The high water flooded our Pitt River land, so we boarded the sloop again, and went in search of dry land on which to farm; we cruised all around where Vancouver now is, and up as far as Port Moody."

H.S. Rowlings, 1868: "The trail from 'Gastown'" (Carrall Street) "to Hastings would accommodate pedestrians only. I hauled logs with oxen down Gore Avenue, also out of the Park at Broughton Point, had a logging camp at Greer's Beach, and another on Granville Street at False Creek."

Rev. C.M. Tate, 1872: "The Indian church at the foot of Abbott Street was on a lot washed by the waters of Burrard Inlet; hence it was very convenient for the Indians, and also for the preacher's boat, as the only means of getting about."

John Strang, 1873: "There were seven white families in Gastown and six in Moodyville. Jerry Rogers had three logging camps; one on Cordova Street, one at Greer's Beach," (Kitsilano) "and headquarters at Jericho."

Hugh E. Campbell, 1886: "'Navy Jack,' Bill Cordiner, and the Sullivans helped to clear the forest back of Water Street off old Granville."

Otway Wilkie, 1883: "We" (party surveying line for railway from Port Moody) "reached 'Gastown' on Christmas Day 1884—in a snowstorm."

C.E. Pittendrigh, 1876: "I shot deer and grouse where the city of Vancouver now stands."

Mrs. J. Cronin, 1883: "I came by Hastings Road; a mere horse trail through the woods."

George Cary, 1884: "Many a night, as I lay in my bed in my front room in Tom Cyrs' Granville Hotel on Water Street, I have heard the deer's hoofs go tap, tap, tap on the board sidewalk beneath. The deer up in the C.P.R. Townsite" (Granville and Hastings streets) "got used to the men slashing, and became fairly tame."

D. Sutherland, 1882: "There was a mud road where Water Street is; a rough trail ran to the" (False) "Creek about Carrall Street. Cordova Street and Hastings Street were heavily timbered."

Capt. F.R. Glover: "A walk from Water Street to Pender Street at high tide usually meant wet feet; at extreme high tide the waters of the inlet and the creek almost flowed into one another."

W.H. Gallagher, 1886: "Carrall and Water streets had the stores; Cordova was residential."

L.A. Hamilton, 1885 (who laid out our streets): "I cannot say that I am pleased with the original planning of Vancouver; the work was beset with many difficulties; the dense forest, the inlet on the north, the creek on the south, a registered plan on the east, another on the west, and old Granville in the centre. Then I had to make the principal streets lead northerly and southerly to a large block of land south of False Creek. I planned all the streets leading westerly" (from Burrard Street) "so that they would run without a jog, but one owner determined to fight in the courts to prevent any change in the registered plan, and I was able to give continuous line on alternate streets only."

"The corner post, with nail in centre of top, from which the survey of Vancouver commenced, was planted with a certain amount of ceremony at the corner of Hastings and Hamilton streets. Those whom I recall with me were Commodore C. Gardner Johnson, John Leask, first city auditor, Jack Stewart, now Major-General Stewart, and Louis ... chief axeman."

Richard Trodden, 1884: "I helped to lay the first plank sidewalk on Hastings Street."

THE GREAT FIRE, 13 JUNE 1886.

Edward Cook, 1886: "The force and heat of the flame was terrific; those who did not dash off in the first five minutes were burned to a crisp."

J.A. Mateer, 1885: "We had no water supply other than wells." "The famous Maple Tree was destroyed in the fire."

H.T. Devine, 1886: "For two or three days we camped in the middle of Abbott Street."

A.M. Whiteside: "I saw the fire from New Westminster, in the sky."

Theo. Bryant, 1878: "A big cloud of dark smoke drifting over Sumas Mountain indicated a big fire somewhere; there were no telephones in those days."

A.K. Stuart, 1884: "Mayor MacLean told me later that my story to the London *Morning Post* brought him \$500 for relief purposes from that paper."

Dr. H.E. Langis, 1884: "My poor skeleton," mourned Dr. Langis, whose anatomical specimen was found beneath the ruins of his office, "do you know what they said when they picked it up. Well, they said, 'This poor fellow must have been sick before he died; look, his bones are all wired together.'"

Geo. R. Gordon, 1886: "What rebuilt it?" (Vancouver) "Why, faith; we'd nothing else; all we had left was our debts."

Peter Gonzales, 1877: "I still bear the scars of that disastrous fire."

Geo. L. Schetky, 1886, member, Vancouver Volunteer Fire Brigade: "That reminds me of the bush fire at the corner of Howe and Pender streets, where Father Clinton lost his hat. We got back about three in the morning, and found the women had turned out with hot coffee and sandwiches; that was the start of the 'Coffee Brigade'; the women always turned out after that."

Mrs. McGovern: "Grown men, the silly things, would race across the street to see the train come in; they had never seen one. Father used to assure them it was quite safe to go on board."

Dr. "Bob" Mathison, Kelowna, 1886: "I was printer on Vancouver's first newspaper, the *Herald*."

Mrs. S.W. Handy, 1884: "My step-father, Jas. Southam, then late British Navy, put his land script on 150 acres of what is now Stanley Park."

James McWhinnie, 1878: "Jericho! Oh, that was a little cove, first known as 'Jerry's Cove'; Jerry Rogers had a logging camp there."

John McDougall, 1878: "I built the wagon road" (now Kingsway) "in 1884; later I cleared the forest off 440 acres west of Burrard Street."

Mrs. J.Z. Hall, daughter of Sam Greer of Greer's Beach, and whose early home stood on the site of the present Kitsilano bathhouse: "A two-plank sidewalk led from our front door to the sandy beach; beyond the picket gate was a log we used to tie our boats to. Along the beach were a few bushes, above Cornwall Street the enormous trees were very dense. Our cows pastured in the swamp behind. It was a fairy dell on a silent shore."

Mrs. Percy Nye: "The Simpsons built the first bathing pavilion at English Bay; a bit of a shack; I built the second, out of bits of boards and driftwood; I was just a girl. I charged five cents for individuals, and ten cents for families; saved the nickels and bought a watch."

Many pioneers of 1886: “Good old black Joe Fortes, bartender, shoeshine and man of jobs at the ‘Sunnyside’; one of the only two men to whom Vancouver has erected a monument.”

Wm. Walton, 1885: “After the fire I built a shack on the island in Coal Harbour. One day I came home, and found someone had buried a Chinaman near, and about a month later they planted another dead man near my house. I said to my partner, ‘I’m going to get out of this, this is a regular dead man’s island.’ ‘Good name for it,’ he replied. When the Chinese riots took place they wanted me for a witness, but I had gone to my island to look at some traps I had set for coon. They asked my partner where I was. He said, ‘Deadman’s Island.’ They said, ‘Where’s that?’ He told them, and the name stuck.

Geo. L. Allen, 1885: “‘Cambie Street’ was undoubtedly our first playground, and before Stanley Park, too. Al Larwell was honorary caretaker, the city’s first. A fine man, strict, but the boys loved him just the same.”

Geo. H. Keefer, 1885: “When it became known that we were surveying for water to be brought across the inlet we were thought to be just a little queer. How water could be brought across the foaming tides of the First Narrows was a bit of a puzzler for some who drew their water from wells.”

Philip Oben, 1887: “Chief Joe Capilano, who was my guide, told me I was the first white man to penetrate to the headwaters of the Capilano River. I was sent to find out where the river came from. Joe and I came out on Howe Sound.”

Jas. A. Smith, 1888: “I was lost in the forest. I slid down a steep cliff; it must have been Strathcona, above the Quilchena golf course.”

H.P. McCraney, 1885: “John Clough, the official street lamplighter, had been appointed, at \$30 per month, to light the coal oil lamps on the street lamp posts, but people were tired of coal oil and candles, so we started the electric light plant; the street lights were 32 candle power, little ‘glowworms.’

“The first street car track I laid on Granville Street, just above Pacific Street—on the level, so that the horses would have an easy start when they commenced to pull.”

Capt. Percy Nye, 1890: “I was walking up the board sidewalk on Granville Street, when I saw a woman in white coming through the bushes Howe Street way. She called, ‘Is my boy under there?’ Granville Street was road on one side only; the other was a hollow, and the boardwalk elevated about six feet on stilts. I jumped down and peeped under the sidewalk into a boy’s play shack made out of boards, and lined with newspapers. I often wonder what distinguished citizen of today had his ‘pirate’s den’ under the boardwalk opposite the Hudson’s Bay store.”

Mrs. H.E. Campbell, 1890: “Someone cried, ‘Oh, look, come look.’ We all rushed to the window. It was a woman crossing the field where now is the airport; women were rare morsels in those days.”

A.C. Muir, Comox, 1884: “Vancouver newspapers continually report me as one of the ‘pioneer dead.’ Now just who may they be?”

W.E. Graveley, 1885: “Yes, Mayor MacLean was a man of broad vision, generous to a fault, and a man of whom Vancouver might well be proud to have had for its first mayor. Many of our first aldermen, too, were distinguished men of great heart and understanding.”

Our first mayoress, Mrs. M.A. MacLean, 1886: “The lovely flowers sent by his Worship Mayor Taylor and the City Council are a constant source of pleasure. This gracious message on my 84th birthday has so greatly added to the happiness of the occasion.”

AND OUR CITY IS THEIR MONUMENT.