

Early Vancouver

Volume Two

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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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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.

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THE GREAT FIRE, 13 JUNE 1886.

Written especially for this record by Mr. Allan K. Stewart of Hope, B.C., 3 May 1932.

I was employed as clerk and draughtsman by Mr. T.C. Sorby, architect for the Canadian Pacific Railway at Vancouver; our office at the time being in the A.G. Ferguson Block, about the only office of any pretension in Vancouver at that time and situated at the corner of Carrall and Powell Street diagonally opposite the old Sunnyside Hotel. It being a Sunday the office was closed and I was resting and writing letters in my boarding house at the time the fire started. The boarding house was kept by a Mrs. Alcock and family and was situated on Hastings Street East on the north side quite near Carrall Street; only about two blocks away from the office and almost directly opposite where the Holden Building (City Hall) is now situated. I noticed much smoke and somebody outside was yelling, "Fire." I got out with the others and my first thought was to get to the office and try and save drawing instruments, etc., but I never got there; the heat, flame and smoke made it impossible to get there. I dashed back along Carrall Street to the boarding house; somebody gave me a bucket and a number of us tried to get water from the part of False Creek (now of course filled in and reclaimed) which came right up to Hastings Street East across Pender Street East. But the flames, smoke and heat drove us out. I remember one of the Alcock girls came out of the boarding house with my derby hat on, the only thing of my possessions saved. She had grabbed it from the hall for protection, I suppose, as she rushed out. I noticed some people throwing things down a well in the hope of saving them.

After fighting fire in different places with others, among them the late Harry Hemlow and the late Captain C. Gardner Johnson, eventually near the Carrall Street wharf I came across the late H.O. Bell-Irving, who had a sailboat. His house near the Hastings Mill had escaped the fire. He took me in his sailboat to Hastings, giving me a chance for a swim in Burrard Inlet to get some of the dirt off. My money had been burned in my trunk at the boarding house, but I had \$1.10 in silver in my pocket. Somebody gave me a lunch at Hastings and I got a stage to New Westminster, camped out that night and next morning sent through the bank there for \$23 I had in a bank in Victoria. I forget how I arranged this and how I was identified, and I think I stayed with Dr. Trew, but I remember well going to a ready made clothing store and buying a grey tweed suit, blue necktie, and some underclothes. The coat and waistcoat fitted me well, but the suit had evidently been made for a short man, and unfortunately my long legs were far too long for the trousers, and when I walked over the old Westminster Road (now Kingsway) back to Vancouver I shall always remember the horse laughs some of my friends greeted me with about three inches of my socks which were showing permanently.

I worked as a reporter for the late William Brown who was publishing a small newspaper until Mr. Sorby, the architect, returned from San Francisco with new drawing instruments, etc., and we started again at the plans of the Hotel Vancouver, the original brick building. The plans and tracing had been all ready to turn over to Mr. L.A. Hamilton of the C.P.R. Land Department, but were destroyed in the fire. I did not notice where the fire started, but I attributed it to the piles of brush in the large area from the C.P.R. Depot to Robson Street. Beyond Robson Street westwards to English Bay was pretty much all bush still, but I feel sure that a fire also started from the clearing at False Creek (Roundhouse). My account of the Fire was sent by my parents to the Morning Post, and I was glad to hear from Mayor McLean later that he had received \$500 in response to it for relief purposes.

Allan K. Stewart.