

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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And thus the little orphan church found a mother.

Letter, W.J. Wenmoth, Anyox, 24 November 1931.

I have put in [*above*] how the mission came to be handed over to Christ Church. You cannot call Mr. Tuson a “rector of St. Mark’s.”

I always had charge of the Sunday school, and continued to do so after Christ Church took it over. I cannot understand how Holy Trinity [*overlooked in a preparatory sketch of the history of St. Mark’s submitted to Mr. Wenmoth for correction*] has been overlooked. We were in its parish all the time; we knew it, and were not allowed to forget it.

The few times that Mr. Gilbert took the services we had not been taken over by Christ Church, and when Mr. Owen did take charge, Mr. Sovereign and Mr. Day took it in turns to take the services. H.J. [*Gilbert*] may have taken the evening service.

SELECTION OF SITE OF ST. MARK’S CHURCH, CORNER WEST 2ND AVENUE AND BALSAM STREET.

The way the site was discovered was very simple. Our boundary on the east was Vine Street. So we went up the hill to Vine on Second Ave. Then we had to build not less than two blocks from the boundary. So we went another two blocks west, and came to the site.

Why Mr. Tuson put up that church building at his own expense we could never understand.

Note: the little old building at the corner of 1st Avenue West and Maple Street was a tall narrow structure, probably twenty-five feet wide by fifty long, with basement on the ground level—wet soggy ground—and the body of the church reached by a flight of steps up the front from Maple Street to the first floor. There was no access from the basement to the upper floor or church proper. When the services were held, the procession of the choir, etc., formed in the basement, and with every solemnity, equal to that of a cathedral choir, moved out from the basement onto the three-plank sidewalk on the street, and proceeded up the steps into the church. After discontinuance as St. Mark’s, the church was used by Seventh Day Adventists Conference for a year or two; it is now, 1932, a private dwelling of a sort.

In the year in which the earlier St. Mark’s was instituted a waste of wilderness spread over what is now a densely settled area. The original St. Mark’s was a tiny edifice of wood, erected in 1908, on the fringe of settlement then known as West Fairview, a designation now never heard. It was built by the Rev. W. Tuson, a superannuated Episcopal clergyman of the United States at his own expense and initiative. Of the original structure, the crosses which adorned its roof are the only relics known to have been incorporated in the new church, the present St. Mark’s at the corner of 2nd Avenue West and Balsam Street. The original building still stands, 1933, at the corner of 1st Avenue West and Maple Street, greatly altered, scarcely recognizable, and now a residence.

WEST FAIRVIEW IN 1908.

A considerable settlement had long existed at the southern end of a long narrow wooden bridge on piles which spanned False Creek from Granville Street (north side of creek) to Third Avenue. In the earliest days, before the bridge was built in 1888, there was a plot of green grass, a great maple tree near what became Third Avenue, and a logger’s hut, and not far to the west was the Indian settlement. Then came Tait’s Mill, a small sawmill on the shore exactly where the bridge reached Third Avenue, and a few feet to the west of it; the mill was in operation in 1888 at the time the first bridge was built. Higher up the hill, about where Seventh Avenue is now, was a logging trail which led towards Kitsilano Beach, and was traversed by such pedestrian traffic as there was going in that direction.

Later, after the pile bridge was built, and connected by road, a new road, to Eburne, Third Avenue was opened up, and ultimately became the principal thoroughfare leading to the west, the only thoroughfare for many years, and connected with Point Grey Road, a sinuous trail a few feet wide which started somewhere about Yew Street—or east of Yew Street—and more or less followed the shoreline westward; east of the City Boundary (Trafalgar Street) it passed through stumps, etc.; west of the City Boundary it entered the forest.

The employees at the Mill, the Fairview car line and other factors, started a settlement at the south end of the Granville-Third Avenue bridge, at first close to the bridge, then gradually spreading from it, principally on Third Avenue, but a few dwellings on Seventh. In 1899 there were very few houses above Third Avenue; none at all on Fourth; to the east of Granville for several blocks there were not more than three or four poor buildings. Almost in every direction were stumps, debris; behind the mill there clustered a few houses west of Centre Street (Granville).

As the years progressed the settlement spread, but the greater number of cottages still persisted to cluster, even after the completion of the Fourth Avenue bridge (high level) about 1911, around Third Avenue. At the time of the "bicycle craze," approximately 1900-1904, a cinder bicycle path ran down the north side of Third Avenue to about Cypress Street, where it terminated, and bicyclists bound for Greer's Beach followed from its end a rude cross country trail which led along the edge of the muskeg on the north. Third Avenue was a narrow macadamized road, then beside it came a gutter with a running stream, then the cinder track for "wheels," and finally the two- or three-plank sidewalk. The road ended somewhere about Cypress Street at the foot of the hill, and a wagon track curved off towards Greer's Beach, wandered through patches of green grass where cows were tethered, or roamed loose. The creek came from the upper reaches of what is now Shaughnessy, and near Third Avenue and Cypress Street there was a large pool in which, at the proper season, salmon struggled in an effort to get up it. It finally entered the muskeg about where the Henry Hudson School is; children fished for trout in it. The bicycle path ended at Cypress Street (about), then bicyclists followed the narrow footpath through stumps and grass—Sam Greer's old pasture—and crossed the creek on a single log, pushing their "bikes" before them.

To the north of the small settlement behind Tait's Mill where the few pioneer homes of modest pretensions scattered themselves about, was the Indian Reserve, forest clad, still the home of the False Creek Band of Squamish Indians, and known by them as Snauq. A creek entered the sea beneath the present Burrard Bridge. Their burial ground was close to where the bridge entrance now crosses First Avenue; the last burial was in 1907.

Still further westward, nearer Greer's Beach, was a great muskeg, wet, soggy, impassable in winter, covered with a scraggy accumulation of remains of a forest, small bushes, skunk cabbage—all that low land filled in by sand pumped from False Creek in the summer of 1913—and bounded by approximately York Street, Cypress and Maple, and Whyte Avenue. If memory serves correctly, access for wheeled traffic to the northern higher section, now Ogden and McNicholl Street, was by a trail or old logging road through the Indian Reserve; to cross the muskeg was impossible and, as early as 1880, there was a trail of pretensions from the Indian Reserve along McNicholl Street to the beach.

But in 1908, at the time St. Mark's was erected at the corner of 1st Avenue and Maple, there had been a considerable extension of settlement on the hillside about the beach where the C.P.R. had thrown open land for occupancy; the street car service, single track, had been inaugurated. The low land about 1st and Maple offered less attractions, remained unoccupied; a small creek still crossed First Avenue close to the church, entered the muskeg, where lived muskrats; the last rat was caught in 1913, in the creek slough on Creelman Street. North of Cornwall Street the whole area was devoid of roads and without a single building.

To the west, on Kitsilano Hill (Vine, Balsam, Larch) a profusion of stumps, stones, ragged bushes and decaying forest littered a torn surface. Here and there a rough road or trail had been cut out to mark future streets and provide access of a sort. Beyond Trafalgar, and over the hill to the south, the forest stood in primeval state, save for such large trees as had been removed by loggers twenty years previously, and whose abandoned logging trails, etc., provided means by which berry pickers collected quantities of blackberries and salmonberries.

It was in such primeval surroundings that Rev. Mr. Tuson built his building which afterwards became the first St. Mark's. At that time Holy Trinity Church was on Pine Street, and St. Michael's in Mount Pleasant. Holy Trinity Church is now numbered 2380 Pine Street, and is the Orange Hall. Mr. Tuson continued to administer to his tiny congregation until 1 January 1908, when he resigned and returned to the United States.

“St. Mark’s was now without an incumbent,” says Mr. H.J. Gilbert, “and at the moment, it was impossible to send a successor.” (See W.J. Wenmoth’s account.) “I had arrived in Vancouver in the fall of 1907, and interested myself actively in the affairs of Christ Church, was granted a lay reader’s license, and authorised by the Rev. C.C. Owen, rector of Christ Church, to take temporary charge of St. Mark’s, its services and Sunday school. Mr. W.J. Wenmoth was warden.

“The rapid growth of population now demanded a more systematic administration of spiritual government; the real estate boom was at its height, and we were slaves to the slogan, ‘One hundred thousand men in nineteen hundred and ten’; our city was divided into parishes,” continues Mr. H.J. Gilbert. “On March 11th 1909 the boundaries of St. Mark’s parish were defined, and, of course, two Anglican churches in such close proximity to one another was impractical, one had to move, and St. Mark’s undoubtedly intruded into the older Holy Trinity’s parish, and still further, its location was growing more and more unsuitable. The settlement of homes was farther to the west on the higher ground; the whole district to the west was growing by leaps and bounds. About 1905,” (July 1st) “the street car service had been inaugurated by a single track service, then the Canadian Pacific Railway opened for settlement the land on the face of the hill; a change of location for St. Mark’s was imperative. It could no longer be delayed and the search for the best location commenced. The high location and superb view of sea and mountains from the brow of Kitsilano hill was attracting the best residents—for Shaughnessy Heights had not yet been opened for settlement—that location was the natural one.” (Note: see W.J. Wenmoth and Rev. A.H. Sovereign.)

“Together with Mr. W.J. Wenmoth we prosecuted the search for a new location. Rev. Mr. Sovereign also assisted, and others, and soon we were able to request the attendance of the Rev. C.C. Owen to a site which we felt was worthy of consideration. It had the merit of being located in the centre of a large area of land about to be opened for settlement; it was on the very highest eminence in Kitsilano. Mr. Owen was enamoured. A huge hollow stump was on the corner of the property, and Mr. Owen, perhaps seriously, perhaps jokingly, suggested that, if it were carpentered and polished it might be incorporated in the church as a unique and perhaps beautiful pulpit; it was never done; I wish it had been, for I think it would have been a most attractive pulpit.”

“The particular location on which St. Mark’s stands,” said Canon Sovereign, soon to become Bishop of the Yukon, “was selected on account of its commanding position; the highest in Kitsilano; the ground slopes in all directions. At the time it was chosen the surrounding land was a wilderness of stumps. Mr. Gilbert found the site, others came to view it, and finally it was bought. We hoped someday we should build a church with a tall tower or spire which could be seen for miles, and would become a landmark.”

“The cost of the corner, the first 100 feet frontage of the 250 feet frontage now possessed, was \$6,000, financed partly by subscriptions, and partly by mortgage at the insistence of the late J.Z. Hall, an early pioneer of Vancouver whose wife was the daughter of the first resident at Kitsilano Beach, Mr. Sam Greer of Greer’s Beach. Mr. Hall was one of the first churchwardens,” continued Mr. Gilbert in narrating his recollections, and tells an interesting commentary of the devotion of those early servants of St. Mark’s in connection with the first load of lumber which was delivered for the construction of the new church.

“The Teamsters of the E.H. Heaps Mill at Cedar Cove” (Powell Street) “were indirectly the cause.

“Early in the year, 1910, the spring of 1910, plans were formulated for the erection of the first portion of the new church, now that part used as the chancel. Mr. Wenmoth, who had been churchwarden under Mr. Tuson, and Mr. Acheson, both skilled in carpentry, were the technical leaders of a volunteer party of builders, amongst whom were Messrs. Wenmoth, Acheson, Gilbert, Duncan, Buck, Fleming, Sam Wye, Jones, Cuncliffe, Iver, Selby, and Thompson, and Calvert. Work was commenced on a holiday, May 24th 1909, the late good Queen’s birthday.

“The teamsters at the E.H. Heaps & Co. sawmill demurred at losing their holiday, so Mr. Gilbert volunteered, provided that the wagon was loaded with the lumber and the horses hitched to drive the wagon of lumber from the mill on Powell Street to the church site. All went well as the slow moving horses drew their heavy load through the city, but on reaching the corduroy trails which led up Kitsilano Hill a misfortune befell the load of lumber which illuminates the conditions existing at that time. In passing over one portion of the trail near its destination, the wagon tilted on the slope of the hill, and tilted so far that its driver, Mr. Gilbert, perched high on top of the lumber, slid off to the ground, injured his knee, and incapacitated himself from further work for a time. Help was near at hand, and the load reached the

volunteer carpenters. In due course, the small church was completed, and the selection of the first rector was the next step.

“St. Mark’s Church,” continued Mr. Gilbert, “has ever been self-supporting, and being an offshoot of Christ Church, always ‘low’ church. The founders were very jealous of their trust, never accepted outside support, and this determination to succeed without financial assistance other than that they themselves provided, has permitted a certain freedom in the selection of the rector. They were anxious to have a clergyman from Wycliffe College. Rev. A.H. Sovereign, previously curate of Christ Church, was their first and only choice, and until his election to the Bishopric of the Yukon in 1931, was their only rector for twenty-two years. Mr. Sovereign’s appointment was not effected without some difficulty, for the Lord Bishop of New Westminster, Bishop Dart, had other plans, nor did he accede to their wishes until it was pointed out to him that the choice they had made was unanimous. His Lordship attended a last meeting to settle the matter, but departed without giving his approving answer; he had in mind another clergyman whom he was especially anxious should receive the incumbency.” Mr. Gilbert says, “I accompanied His Lordship to the interurban tram on his return trip to the Royal City, and as he was boarding the tram car he remarked to me, ‘Ask Mr. Sovereign to please call upon me at the See House on Wednesday.’ At the appointed time, Mr. Sovereign waited on the bishop in New Westminster, and was welcomed with the words, ‘Mr. Sovereign, allow me to congratulate the first rector of St. Mark’s.’

“At the first service, November 14th 1909, the Ven. Archdeacon Pentreath inducted the Rev. Mr. Sovereign to his new charge.”

“In those days,” said Mr. Sovereign as he was leaving for his new field of endeavour as bishop of the Yukon, “the limit of civilization was Vine Street; to the west, and around the church, there was nothing. A single track street railway ran to the foot of Balsam Street produced, and from there St. Mark’s was reached by a convenient trail, an old logging road, which ran from the end of the track on the beach diagonally across the land until it reached the church. At night we carried a lantern.”

“Then the boom came. On one occasion, we counted, without moving from the spot on which we stood, one hundred and fifty houses all in course of erection at one time; you could hear the hammers humming like a beehive.

“We had a little ‘groan box’ for an organ, and started our Sunday school with seventeen children; today we have six hundred.”

Mr. H.J. Gilbert was the first churchwarden of St. Thomas’, South Vancouver, and also of St. George’s, Fairview. He served four years with the Forestry Corps in the Great War. He is still, 1932, teaching Sunday school at St. Mark’s. His only son was killed whilst serving with the Seaforth Highlanders (Imperial Regiment) in the Great War.

HADDEN PARK.

Hadden Park is just two blocks long, between Maple Street and Cypress Street, north of Ogden. It was presented to the City of Vancouver by Mr. Harvey Hadden of Vancouver and Nottingham, England. He died about 1929 in England, leaving an unsettled estate which included a large bequest to the City of Vancouver which, so far, 1933, has not materialized. It is understood there was not sufficient residue. He paid \$45,000 for the two blocks of Hadden Park which, with the exception of two lots privately owned, were all owned by the Canadian Pacific Railway. He also donated \$5,000 for the clearing of the land, and its cultivation. This was commenced in 1929.

The manner in which this property came to be donated was as follows:

About 1924, Major J.S. Matthews, long a resident of Kitsilano Beach, was in a downtown office of a surveyor, when he was shown a new map of the Kitsilano Indian Reserve, which had been drawn up dividing it into fifty-foot lots for commercial purposes with railway tracks, etc. It had been prepared at the order of the provincial government, who at that time were not convinced that they had not acquired title to the land by the payment of \$300,000 to the Indians to move away. Major Matthews was astonished at the proposal to turn the area into commercial uses; he had previously been extremely annoyed that the fir and cedar trees had been cut down about 1919 or 1920, for the “sole purpose of providing a few days