

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

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

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1933-1934.

Supplemental to Volumes One and Two collected in 1931-1932.

About the 2011 Edition

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Prince Rupert, B.C. Oct. 6, 1933

Col. J.S. Matthews,
City Hall,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Sir:

FUNERALS.

Re "carrot funeral" we only sold the casket, don't know anything about the funeral. The style of the country was then, the people would buy their own caskets, and take care of the funeral themselves.

SUNNYSIDE HOTEL.

Re the "MacInnis" furniture. The hotel Sunnyside was leased and run by MacInnis. I bought the thing as a whole. I built a table all the way from their side door to my back door about 200 feet long. Sold the outfit to natives and citizens include Che Chacos. The hotel was re-leased by Harry Hemlow and I furnished the whole hotel with new goods throughout.

I've tried to locate the photo I had in view to send you but failed to find it. I have several others including the Rev. Thompson, first Presbyterian Minister in Vancouver and no doubt it will be useful as historical.

TEA SWAMP.

Re Tea Swamp. I too have seen it since it was macadamized, which makes a wonderful transformation. I can't see my own writing so I'll have to have treatment. Meanwhile I beg to remain,

Yours truly,

F.W. Hart.

13 NOVEMBER 1933 – MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH FRANK W. HART, OF VANCOUVER AND PRINCE RUPERT.

(See letters, photographs, etc.)

(Mr. Hart called, accompanied by Acting Mayor, Alderman Miller, an old family friend.)

"The way I came to Vancouver was this. I was born in Galesburg, Illinois, U.S.A., in 1856, so that I am now 77 years old. There were two colonies at Galesburg, one was Swedish, the other spoke English. My father's name was Hjort, which is Swedish for 'stag deer,' but the priest said no one knew how to pronounce Hjort, no one knew how to spell it, and he said he would change it to Hart, which is the same thing in the English tongue. I won't bother you just now, I'll tell you later about my early life, but I left home and then the trouble began, fighting Kansas Indians, and finally I landed up at Walla Walla, Washington, where I worked for a man in the furniture and undertaking business. I noticed how things were done, and that was how I got into the same line of business here in the early days.

"In the last days of 1884, I left Walla Walla for B.C. and went to Semiahmoo Bay by a little coaster; that was the only place on the coast we knew in those days. We made for Hall's Prairie (it was not called Hall's Prairie then, but some other name—I forget it—it was about half an hour from the beach—Hirst was the government representative there, and he still is something like that there) where I had a brother, and then during the first days of 1885 walked to Westminster. Times were stirring at Port Moody in 1885; the railway was building, and I tried to get into business there, but I could not get in; had not enough money; things were on a bit of a boom, so I decided to come on down to Granville, and squatted on a piece of the shore between Carrall and Columbia Avenue, and built a store about 150 feet from the Maple Tree on the water side of Alexander Street—not in the town site" (of Granville.) "I don't know who the land belonged to; never enquired, just squatted. I cleared the site for my store by cutting down the big trees, firs, cedars, and some alder and maple. There were no other buildings, except the St. James' Church, east or west of

me between the Sunnyside and Hastings Mill. Then the C.P.R. came along, and got Geo. F. Keefer, one of the C.P.R. officials to buy me out of there so that they could build their track, and they paid me \$800 for going. That was the end of my first store.” (Note: refer Andy Linton, or W.R. Lord.)

FIRST MERCHANT OF GRANVILLE.

“I claim to have been the first merchant to start a regular business, on account of the C.P.R. coming down from Port Moody, in the town of Granville. My second store was just across the street from my old one, and it extended right through from Alexander Street to Powell Street—about forty feet deep, and stood at the east end of the property on which the Europe Hotel now stands; you can see it in the panorama photograph of Granville before the fire. Geo. F. Keefer, a C.P.R. official, said to me when they took over my first place, ‘Why don’t you build yourself a permanent store?’ I was catering hard for their trade, so I did. That was my second store. Then the fire came along and cleaned me out. I was the biggest merchant loser in that fire in Vancouver. Ferguson was a heavy loser in buildings.

THE “MAYOR OF GASTOWN.”

“Joe Mannion of the Granville Hotel was the leading figure, ‘The Mayor’ of Granville, and he kept the Post Office for ‘Uppertown’ which was what we called ‘Gastown.’ There was no regular postmaster. Dan McNaughton was the old shoemaker next door to Mannion’s, old man with grey whiskers down to his middle, strong Presbyterian, he actually *looked after* the mail—everybody thought well of him. The boys got all their mail through him.” (See W.E. Graveley.) “The ‘Lowertown’ was the Hastings Sawmill. Hastings, B.C. proper, was known as ‘George Black’s’ and the Westminster people used to call Hastings ‘The End of the Road.’”

THE FIRST ELECTION.

“In the first election in Vancouver every resident had a vote, that is, all except Indians and Chinamen. We had no meeting hall, the only place was under the old Maple Tree; we all stood up, listened, moved about a little, came back, and talked again. The election was actually controlled by about forty of us—all in favour of MacLean. At that time this province was commonly known as ‘British Columbia’; all those who came from Winnipeg and west of Winnipeg were known as ‘Winnipeggers’” (see old newspapers, and *Port Moody Gazette*.) “Ontario was Canada, and Québec was ‘French Canadian.’ MacLean came from Winnipeg, which few of the forty did, and we had a hard time to get the boys to see it as we did. Every citizen had a vote; I was an American citizen at the time; not naturalised until 1887. That night, Mr. Alexander of the Hastings Mill, and MacLean’s only opponent, had a long rope, about 100 feet long tied on to his buggy; and a fine buggy it was too, and he had a lot of torches; he was so very sure of being elected that he had a lot of torches prepared, and went to a lot of expense. He never used them. We had no torches, poor fellows, ha, ha.”

CHOOSING THE NAME “VANCOUVER.”

J.S.M.: Mr. Hart. Have you noticed that the bronze tablet on the site of the Maple Tree bears the inscription that the name was chosen by the pioneers assembled together under its branches in 1885? That cannot be true. What is the explanation?

Mr. Hart: “Yes, I know; it’s wrong. I forget who the man was who submitted the inscription to me before the tablet was made, but I had no power to change it, and then he said, ‘Who’s going to say they didn’t?’ The facts are, we talked about the name ‘Vancouver’ under the Maple Tree; we talked a lot about it; they said it was confusing on account of Vancouver’s Island, but we made no decision. How could we make a decision? We had no voice in the matter. Some objected, on account of Vancouver’s Island. How could we have any voice? We all knew that Van Horne was the actual power who would decide what the name would be.”

J.S.M.: Was there any suggestion it be called “Van Horne”?

Mr. Hart: “No!”

(The first appearance of the name Vancouver seems to have been about 4 August 1884, when the announcement that the new terminus would be called “Vancouver” was made by Van Horne.)

THE SUNNYSIDE HOTEL.

"When I first came here, Mr. McInnes was running the Sunnyside Hotel; when he left to go back to Nova Scotia, I bought everything excepting the hotel which was leased to him by Mr. Griffiths, afterwards one of our first aldermen, a good old soul. Yes, Griffiths was married and his wife was a nice woman, but they had no children; that is how you have come to think he was not married. When the Hotel burned down in the fire, Harry Hemlow, who was running it then, owed me from \$3,000 to \$5,000; he paid most of it; all he could. We moved the furniture all out—about \$3,000 worth—stripped the Hotel entirely—it lay vacant for a time. Then Harry Hemlow came along in about two or three months, and rented the place. I furnished it for Harry Hemlow with about \$5,000 worth of goods.

"After the fire Harry said to me, 'What am I going to do? I've got the lease and I want to go at it again.' The consequence was it was rebuilt by Alderman Griffiths, refurnished by me, and operated by Harry."

ARRIVAL OF THE FIRST TRAIN AT PORT MOODY.

"I was up at Port Moody when the first transcontinental train over the Rockies came in, and I carried the great big bouquet of flowers which was given to the first woman to come over the Canadian Rockies by train. Mayor MacLean had a presentation letter which he read to the lady, and that was what it said in the letter. She was Mrs. Hirschberg, proprietress of the Leland Hotel, on Hastings Street near Granville; a swell hotel; quite the best of the its kind in Vancouver at the time. Her husband was the first man buried in the Mountain View Cemetery when it was opened."

MOUNTAIN VIEW CEMETERY.

"I have told you before of the trouble I had getting the Mayor to buy a cemetery. Before we had a cemetery the custom was to bury only Indians and Chinamen on Deadman's Island. Yes, I know; I believe white men were buried there before that, but in my time it was Indians and Chinamen; the whites we took to Westminster. We just put the coffin in a boat and rowed over to the island, and buried them anywhere in the trees; no regular place. Then we got the cemetery, and the first funeral was Hirschberg's, who had committed suicide, and I have told you how I told the Mayor that I could not get a funeral to open the cemetery, but that finally I got a volunteer." (28 June 1887.)

FRASER AVENUE AND TEA SWAMP.

"The road out to the cemetery was awful; I had told you previously, too, about that. It was just corduroy; just round logs, about ten feet diameter, laid in the wet earth and muskeg. In the summer it was not so bad, but in the winter you just floated across. Before the funeral I sent my boys out to dig the grave, but there was nothing to mark where the plots were; the boundary stakes were in, but there was nothing to mark where the graves were to be; so the boys just dug a hole between two trees about ten or fifteen feet inside the boundary; I went out with the first funeral, and as we went along the road we were looking for the cemetery, until we came to a place where we said, 'Oh, here it is.' It was an awful place to get to."

(The city felled the trees and dug the roots out of about twenty acres.)

WEDDING AT ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, RICHARDS STREET.

"I have been married twice, but there are no children. My first wife was Miss Josephine Crawford, and our wedding took place on June 20, 1889, in a little chapel east side of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Richards Street. St. Andrew's was not built, so we were married in the little chapel they used before they built St. Andrew's. We belonged to the Presbyterian Church in the east end, but we lived close to the little chapel, so we had the wedding in that, and it was a grand affair too; I had carpets, my carpets, on both sides of the street sidewalks, and a brass band. Rev. E.D. McLaren was the minister, and Rev. Ebenezer Robson, for my wife was a Methodist. My second wife was Mrs. Ferguson, née Miss Campbell, a cousin of my first wife, and a sister of Mrs. H.C. Clarke" (of Clarke and Stuart); "she is deceased also."

CAPTAIN AND MRS. SOULE.

"I must tell you of Mrs. Soule. Captain Soule came over to my store one day and asked me if I could repair a mattress. I knew nothing about mattresses, but I said I could. So Captain Soule took me over to his home, and we went into the sitting room, and he called Mrs. Soule who was washing dishes out in the kitchen. When she came in, Captain Soule said, 'Mrs. Soule, Mr. Hart; Mr. Hart, Mrs. Soule.' Mrs. Soule said, 'Oh! Get along with you and your nonsense.'

"This was how that came about. Soule had a 'hole' up in the Cariboo—digging for gold, and was sinking the bedrock. He had a windlass, and his man quit on him, so he hired a new man—did not ask his name—to help him put down the hole. Bill Soule put the new man down in the hole; he was on top of the windlass. Bill Soule shouted down to the bottom, 'What's your name?' The new man shouted back, 'Hart,' and then added, 'Jack.' Bill Soule wound up more buckets, and then the man at the bottom shouted up, 'What's your name?' Billed shouted down, 'Soule,' and then added, 'Bill.' The hired man called back, 'Go on with you and your nonsense.'

"Mrs. Soule had heard this story so often, that was the reason she said, 'Get along with you and your nonsense.'"

DYEA AND THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH.

"I left Vancouver in 1895 and went off down through the States and lost a lot of my money. I left with more money than any single man in Vancouver could muster at that time. I had it in a bank. I lost some in Utah, some more at other places, and then went to Rossland where I made some more, and then went up to Skagway and Dyea. Dyea is a town opposite Skagway, and arrival, just as Moodyville was a rival to Hastings Mill. I corralled the lumber output of the two sawmills up there, and built the whole town of Dyea in 90 days. There was a rush town of thirty thousand there, some in tents boarded up on the sides and canvas roof, you know what a mining rush is like. I built one three-storey hotel in three days, and turned it for double what it cost me. I had three clipper scows running backwards and forwards from Seattle bringing up lumber. I had \$250,000, but a slump came along overnight and I lost it, but I had a cargo of goods which I had been packing over the hill going into Dawson all that winter, 1897-8, at the cost of 26¢ a pound for 26 miles."

PERSONAL REMINISCENCES.

"I am a charter member of the Vancouver Board of Trade, of the Terminal City Club, was the first subscriber for Dun, Wyman and Co., now R.G. Dun and Co. or Dun and Bradstreets in Vancouver, started the Knights of Pythias, owned the first 'Hart's Opera House,' first theatre in Vancouver, built and operated the first store after the C.P.R. decided to come to Vancouver, was the first secretary of the Oddfellows Lodge, was manager of the Coal Harbour Quadrille Club, owned the first hearse, was the first undertaker. My business was to know everybody, and I think I did. Yes, I am 77 now."

(Read and approved by Mr. Hart, 3 January 1934, at St. Francis Hotel, Vancouver, whilst awaiting to enter General Hospital re his sight.)

MEMORANDUM OF FURTHER CONVERSATION WITH FRANK W. HART.

Now on a visit from Prince Rupert, B.C., and visiting Mrs. E.W. Morris, Suite 1, 1536 West 12th Avenue, Bay-7274-L. Mrs. Morris is the youngest daughter of Mrs. E.J. (Eliza) Carson, eldest daughter of ? Magee of Magee (now Kerrisdale), and the first white child born in Magee.

Read to and approved by Mr. Hart, 3 January 1934. J.S.M.

"I want to tell you about Rev. T.G. Thompson, the first Presbyterian minister in Vancouver, and the day of the Fire in 1886."

THE GREAT FIRE.

"The morning of the fire, Jack McGregor, the 'Cambie Street millionaire,' and I, went over to Tom Turner's milk ranch across the inlet" (now North Vancouver.) "We went over before the wind had time to get up, pretty early, about nine o'clock Sunday morning, a row boat with two sets of oars. After we got there, and were there some time, we saw a great big column of smoke. Jack said, 'I think we'd better go back,' I said, 'You cannot; wind is too high; we can't pull back.' So we said to a young Indian boy from the rancherie, 'Will you go with us and help pull?' He came with us. Then we put the sail up, but in no time we had to pull it down again, and the two of us lie flat in the bottom of the boat to ballast her and stop her going over. It was that Indian boy who really brought us over, and we landed, I forget where, but just near the Hastings Sawmill slab pile fire.

"Then we raced for town. My furniture factory, warehouse and dwelling was about 200 feet from Rev. Thompson's place on Alexander Street, near corner of Gore Avenue, and I headed for it with the 'Cambie Street millionaire' following. The town was burning then, and a great black column of smoke was rising. Jack said, 'I believe the town's gone.' Jack's store was near the Sunnyside, same side the street, grocery store; Otton was his partner, close to the Sunnyside, a cheap one-storey house; he did not build it, he rented it, it could not have been bigger than 25 feet wide by 40 feet long; on piles at the back, on land in the front. Jack was heading for his store.

"We did not get any further than Rev. Thompson's. We had made a bee line from the boat to my factory and Jack was heading for his store. The fire hadn't reached my factory. Chas. Weigand, afterwards well-known furniture man in Vancouver, and now living on his ranch at the north end of Bowen Island, was my bookkeeper in 1885 and 1886 too. Charlie had the key to the factory, and I could not find Charlie. As far as Jack McGregor was concerned we could not get nearer the town than about 100 feet west of the Princess Louise Tree at about the foot of what is now Main Street" (Gore Avenue.) "There was a two-plank sidewalk ran along the beach side of Hastings Road from Hastings Mill to Gastown, and we didn't get any further than the Rev. Thompson's house; about there.

"Rev. Thompson's house was about twenty feet from Charlie Coldwell's place; Charlie Coldwell's home was about a storey and a half; anyway, there was one window in the upstairs. And when we got there, here was Coldwell sitting on top of the roof, and what the dickens d'you think he was doing? Why, firing his pistol, his revolver. Coldwell's house did not burn. Every now and again he would point the revolver up in the air and fire a shot; every minute or so. There he was, up on the roof, sitting down, and firing his revolver in the air.

"The Rev. Thompson's house was not on fire; my factory was gone, so we started to get the furniture out of Thompson's house. Coldwell was foreman at the Hastings Mill and a 'big' man; I was not so 'big' about town, but I told him what I thought of him. We were struggling to get the furniture out, and the piano; we got the piano out but broke a pedestal doing it. I got mad at him sitting up there on the roof, and shouted, 'You damn fool, come down here and help us.' He may have been a 'big' man about town, but that didn't stop me telling him what I thought then.

"Anyway. The fact remains Charlie Coldwell's house was the last house which the fire did *not* burn; the fire stopped there." (See Geo. L. Schetky.) "I don't know, but he said that the firing the pistol caused an air draft to go up. It may have, I don't know. He was a practical man, and ought to know what he was doing; he said it did. Anyway, the fact remains that Coldwell's was the first house saved, but at the time, it did seem to be a fool thing to doing, and he was quite cool and collected about it, too. Just sitting there firing away." (Note: the peculiar circumstance is referred to by Geo. L. Schetky in *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1.)

FURNITURE BUSINESS, F.W. HART.

"In the first boom after the C.P.R. arrived, and up to 1889, seventy-five percent of all the furniture handled in Vancouver, and at no time less than fifty percent, in the first eight years, was handled by my firm. We used to have a car load of furniture a week arrive, and, including stablemen, drivers and others, had as many as one hundred men on my staff at one time or another. I was prosperous then, and helped to build St. Andrew's Church; that is, I contributed to the cost of building it."

ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH. THE FIRST.

J.S.M.: Mr. Hart, you spoke of the little old church they had before St. Andrew's was built; where was that? The one you were married in?

Mr. Hart: "It was at the back of the site where St. Andrew's stood; on the same lot, I think, a bit of a building facing Georgia Street, near the lane. It was used until St. Andrew's was built."

CAPTAIN EDWIN SAYRE SCOLLAR, "WESTMINSTER RIFLES," THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886.

Pioneer hardware merchant whose store was south side Water Street, between Abbott and Cambie, said, "There wasn't a piece of wood left big enough to make a match, and my store was 42 feet by 128." (128 feet?)