Early Vancouver

Volume Three

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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

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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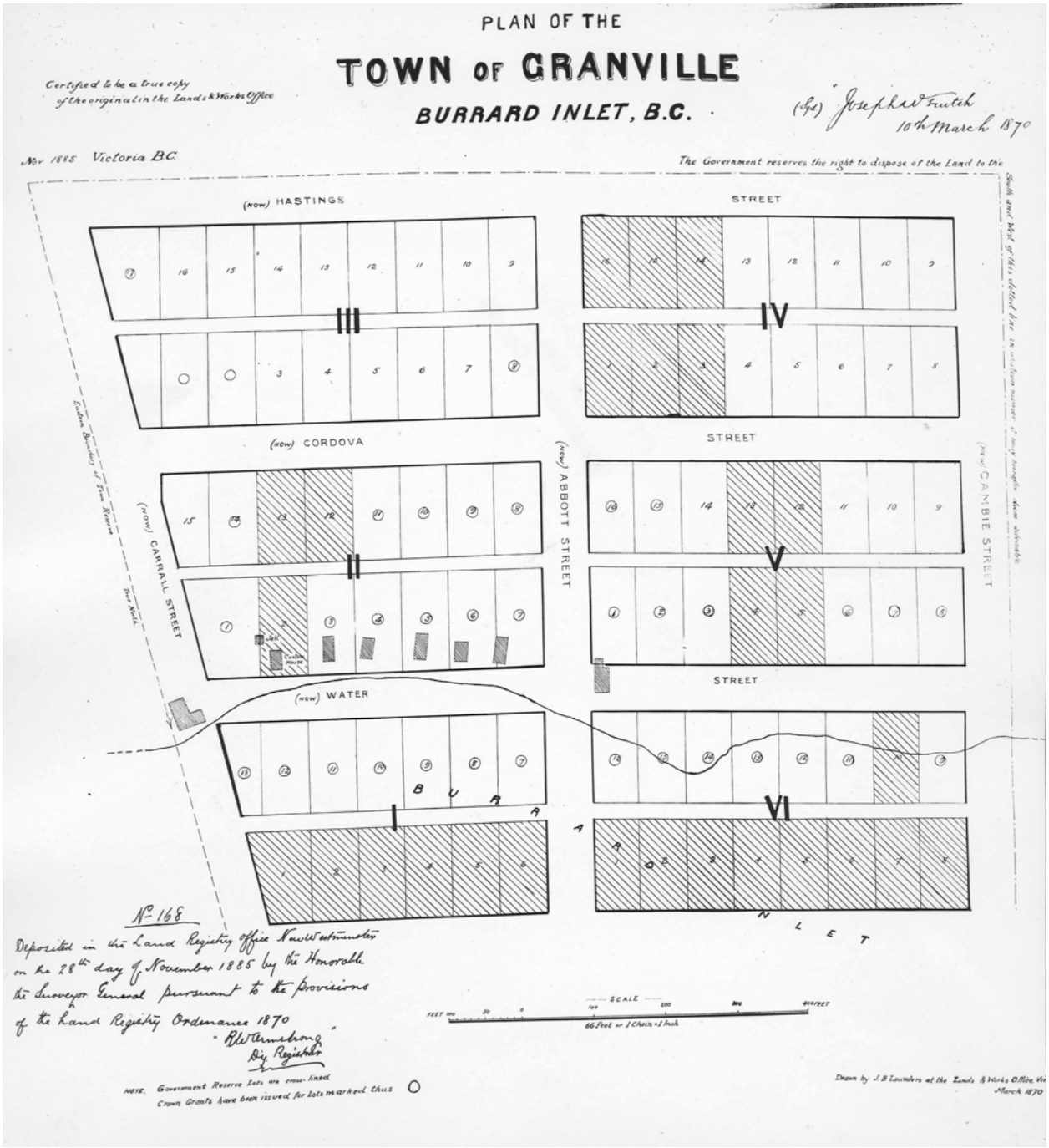
Christmas dinner was partaken of, and the cookhouse at both mills always saw two rattling dinners provided for the millhands.

“Some of the inlet people paid their friends in New Westminster a visit and vice versa. Very often many spent their Christmas in Victoria. The hotels of “gass town” were at this time always well filled with loggers and workers in the bush who made a point of coming to town to spend their Christmas.”



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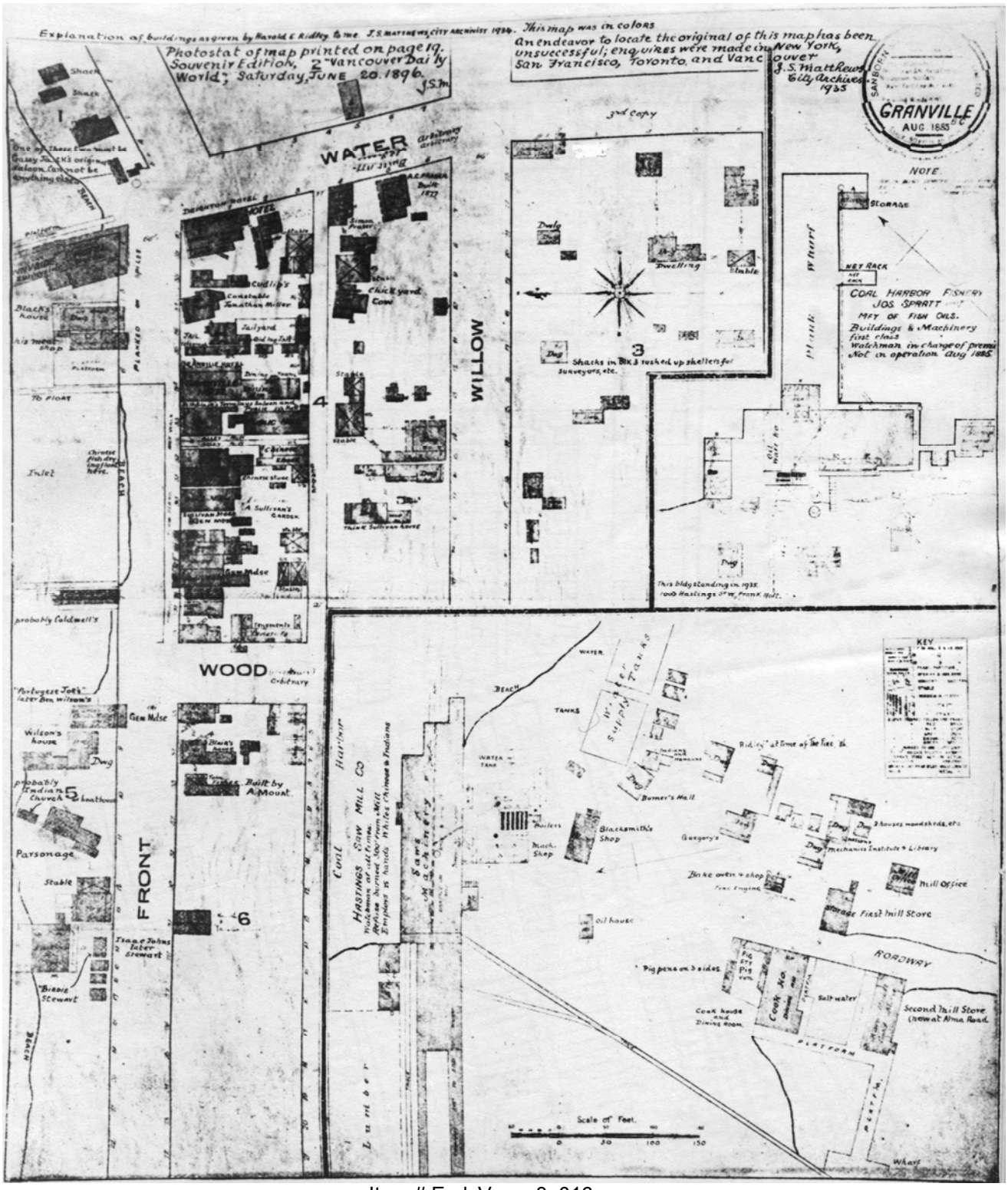

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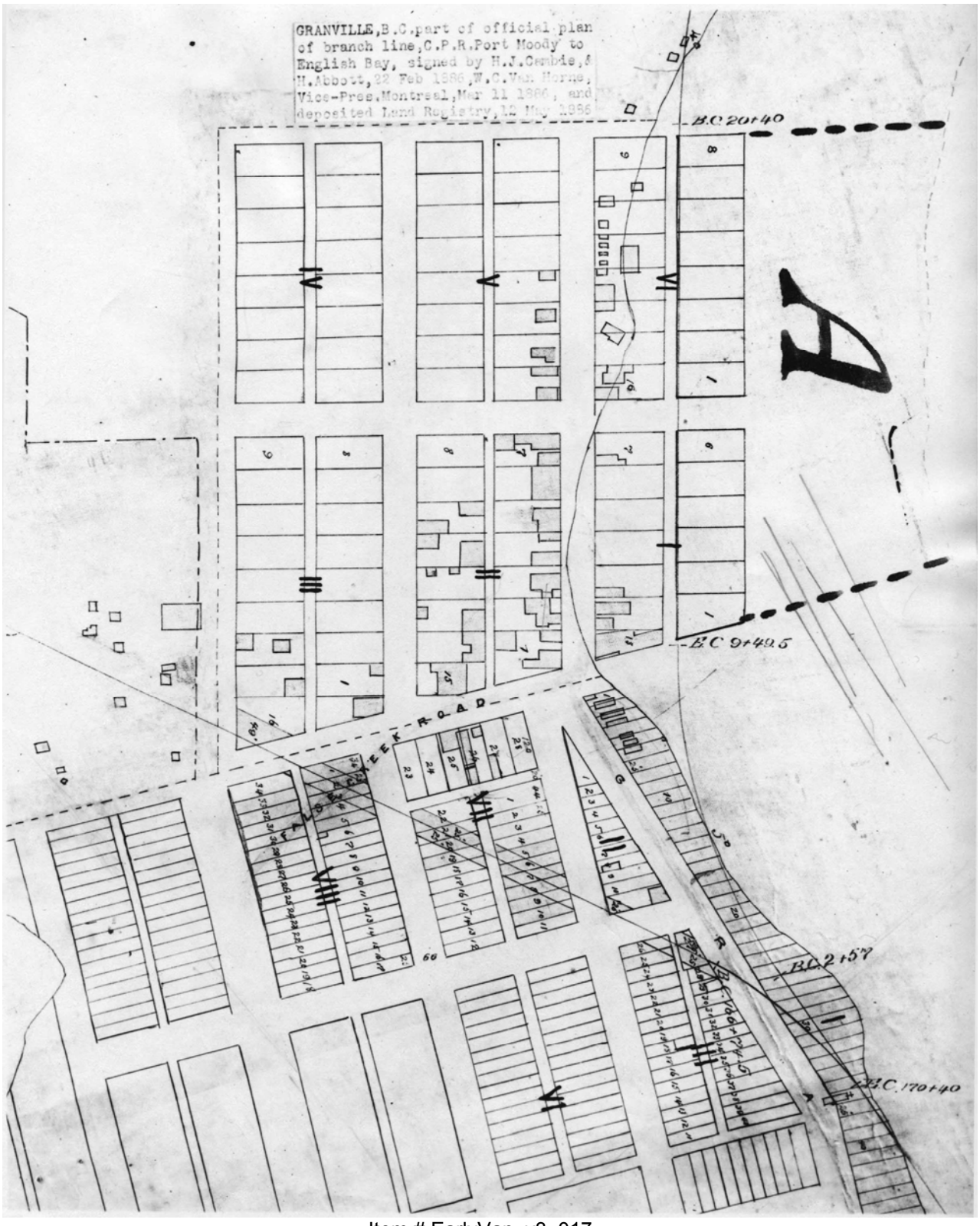

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Vancouver, about May 1st 1886. Water St looking east from near Cambie St.

6 JANUARY 1912

NOTE ADDED LATER:

Typed from a clipping, probably *World* or *Province*, in the possession of his daughter Mrs. H.A. Christie, and upon which is written in ink, “Jos. Mannion,” “Jan. 6 1912.” J.S.M. 1934

VANCOUVER IN THE DAYS OF YORE

A shack of shakes,
A cross-cut saw,
A jug of whisky
And a squaw;
Salmon in the river,
Running deep and fast —
Ah, me! The simple life at last!

— from W.A.H.’s Rubaiyat.

LESS THAN HALF A CENTURY AGO AN INHARMONIOUS ROW OF SHACKS HOUSED SEA-DOGS AND ADVENTURERS—AND GASSY JACK WAVED THE FLAG AND SOLD THE BOYS HARD LIQUOR

BY “OLD TIMER” (Jos. Mannion)

I believe my first sight of the inlet was in 1865. Approaching it from the sea our first view revealed an inharmonious row of shacks. About three cables length from shore, where the foot of Abbott Street now stands, was a large square-rigged ship, the *Astarte*, loading spars, a vessel hailing from London and bound thereto. Her cargo was being delivered by Jeremiah Rogers, who had cut and made it at Port Neville to the order of Stamp & Son, who had them towed to English Bay, where they were delivered to the ship by rowboat. This was the first commercial prow to divide Father Inlet’s unruffled flood. How delighted he must have been to bear on his bosom such a substantial earnest of the future! Of course, there had been survey ships in ’59 and ’60, but they never approached nearer than English Bay, from which place they dispatched their exploring parties.

On the beach at the foot of Abbott street there was a building that had just been abandoned by a coal prospecting company, formed in New Westminster, headed by W.J. Armstrong, a merchant and M.P. for the city. The venture was not a success; after going down 1000 feet they gave it up. John Dick, an expert from Nanaimo, had charge of the work.

There was a shack at the foot of where Thurlow street looks on the inlet and the remains of a brick kiln. Why an industry of that nature should be started was beyond human ken. In an Indian country without transportation of any kind, not even a trail, and forgetting that on the Fraser there were banks of the finest clay in the world going a-begging; but probably they had some occult inspiration of a subway in the future, connecting north and south shores, when bricks would be in demand.

In ’62, a man named Dave Ramage, a native of Ontario and a millwright, built a water power at what is now known as Moodyville. With scant capital and no market its business life was short. It was later acquired by S.P. Moody & Co., and for nearly twenty years was carried on under the name of the Moodyville Sawmill Company, Ltd. The active manage, S.P. Moody, lost his life in the wreck of the S.S. *Pacific* in November, 1875, outside Cape Flattery.

The mill, now the Hastings, was being started. The company’s first grant from the government was a piece of land on Brockton Point, comprising about forty acres, reaching from water to water, and having Deadman’s Island and surrounding water west of it for boom ground, which was ideal for the purpose, but on the north side after spending a deal of time and money they discovered that the force of the current made it impossible to construct wharves or hold shipping, and asked the government to exchange for the present site, which was so ordered. The mill was constructed by an Ontario man named Ludgate, an engineer and expert in this line, from whom

the gentleman of Deadman's Island fame claims descent. The mill advanced to completion rapidly and was in a condition to cut all that was required for home use; till one morning word came to close down, the big engine ceased to throb; litigation struck her on the windward gage, putting out her lights, and in the cause of forty-eight hours the mill's population had dwindled to about three people. After a period of nearly two-years idleness, law troubles ended, when Captain Stamp, who had been the moving spirit and promoter, severed his connection with the concern. The company was re-organized and placed its business under a new management, of which Captain J.A. Raymur, who was an old-time sailor like his predecessor, took charge of the affairs of the company as general agent, with head office in Victoria. The captain was a man of many sides, knew much and yet so little, but a splendid subject for a pen picture. He was a sailor, but the brine had left no mark, rather the opposite. With the pallor of an ascetic, which could be mistaken for intellect, nobody would believe that he sailed the seven seas, and I think his access to the quarter-deck was by way of the cabin windows. He was in strong middle life, well educated, well dressed, with that ready business manner, and in a beauty class he would have his place. On his visit to look over the ground, he asked: "What is the meaning of this aggregation of filth?" He was answered it was a by-product of the mill and would be within the sphere of his influence. "Aye, aye, and I'll make the beggars mind me. I will not permit a running sore to fasten itself on an industry entrusted to my care." The gallant captain kept his word; he declared war on Gastown and death to "Marican" freedom, which meant lawlessness, and what Judge Begbie was to the early years of the province, so Captain Raymur was to Gastown. The captain dearly loved a bit of display, and on court days his coming was "Gilbertian," lacking but costume to give it a Mikado setting. He was accompanied by his clerk, who labored under a great tome, large enough to contain all the statutes from William and Mary down, most of which the gallant captain was innocent of; but the court had a saving grace in the brains of the clerk who wisely directed proceedings and gave it a measure of legality. During the suspension of the mill the settlement languished, and one by one departed seeking repatriation in the open shop of Uncle Sam's domain. With the restarting came new blood and of a better class.

The place had no name until the advent of John Deighton, better known as "Gassy Jack," a Yorkshireman and an ex-mariner, who had mapped out the great oceans, including the green seas that waste their fury on the poles. He was a man of broad, ready humor, spicy, crisp and ever-flowing, of grotesque Falstaffian dimensions, with a green, muddy, deep purple complexion, that told its own story. He had the gift of grouping words, which he flung from him with the volubility of a fake doctor. By the way, these words, shot at random, always hit a mark; unlucky would be the man whom Jack would nickname, for he would carry it on his reluctant feet to Mountainview. Jack's story of his trip from New Westminster was an epic. He was marooned on an island for twelve hours, without fire or shelter; his faithless TIllicums abandoned him under the pretence of hunting game to renew his larder, which, they alleged, was scanty. His invective on the Indian population was scathing, adjectives and similes heaped together, but all unprintable. Jack was a sailor of the early part of the nineteenth century, and A.B. He could hand reef and steer, but the wooden ship had departed, and gone was the trim mail packet that walked the water like a spirit, the palatial East Indiaman and lofty line of battleship to whose beauty and lordliness old ocean made submission, and the iron tank that displaced them will never inspire a Dibdin or bring to the top a Nelson or a Collingwood.

Jack landed at his destination early in the afternoon in a light drizzle, with his family, consisting of his Leman, her mother, her cousin, a big Indian who was the motive power and on whom Jack often cast green-eyed looks, a yellow dog, two chickens, two weak-backed chairs and a barrel of whisky completed the outfit, and lookers-on remarked it was a doubtful acquisition to the population. Gassy, with craft of a Machiavelli, began to pass the loving cup with unstinted hand, telling that he had come to start a little business, that his means were limited and he would be glad to accept any assistance in the way of building the house. "Ten thousand swords leapt from their scabbards," saws and hammers fell from heaven and the populace joined, led by an errant carpenter named Mike McNamara, and in twenty-four hours the Deighton house flung its doors open to the public. This was the beginning of today. Jack pulled himself to the roof of the building, loosened out a Union Jack, and in a homely speech, pointing to the flag, told his hearers it represented all that was good, the blood and guts of England; it bobbed up on every sea, had

been his chum forty years, that he had pinned his faith to it and would stay with it; thanked everybody for their generous help, and regretted to inform them that he would have to postpone the christening for a few days. He anticipated a shortage and dispatched the Indian cousin with an order to New Westminster, the answer to which read thus: “Cannot deliver your order to Indian, particularly the fireworks part; risk too great.” Just before this announcement, a big red-headed woodsman came along very dry, and unable to extract anything from the much-drawn-upon barrel, buried his axe in the head and kicked it over the bank. A North Briton, who had been looking on, with the born utility in his blood, took up the barrel and placed it outside the kitchen door of the hotel. “To what base uses may we return.” Oh, Mrs. McNaughton, please don’t laugh. A most unbefitting assignment for a vessel which carried the sacred uskabaugh (water of the soul), that Ossian sang of, and brethren of the Sacred Lyre followed in sweet strain, though perhaps less lofty.

At this time there were two roads out of New Westminster; one called the Hastings, looking out on the Second Narrows, the other to the south arm or Port Moody, both built by the Sappers, or Royal Engineers.

A man named Oliver Hocking, a Cornishman and a musician, opened a wayside house at the end of Hastings road, looking out on Second Narrows, which was afterwards acquired by Maximillian Michard, a French-Canadian, who for years kept a first-class hostelry. The place was known as Maxie’s; it was the seaside resort for the elite of the Royal City. In those days New Westminster was a small place; every resident there could have a block of his own; the town was laid out on broad, liberal lines; the 25-foot lot was unknown, the last being an offspring of the C.P.R., or the rustler and land scalpers, who came after. The way out was per stage by Hastings road; the stage line was owned by W.R. Lewis, an American citizen, a man of enterprise, somewhat brusque, but of a standard uprightness, whose word could always be relied on. There were no reserved seats; peasants and peers were treated alike. He never deviated from his schedule time for anybody; money or notes entrusted to his care were as safe as registered mail.

He was ably assisted by his chief whip and stable manager, James O’Halloran. Jimmy was a typical Celt, with the fire and broad humor of his race. It was frequently my good luck to be his guest on the box, and when his time was not wholly taken up with Gilbert, a tricky horse, he lightened the way with snatches of seditious lore, always derogatory to the Saxon. Apart from this, there was a romance in Jimmy’s life; it seems that the wicked Cupid perched and flitted, leaving a puncture, a legacy of sweet pain, which I hope to this day remains under Jimmy’s inner vest.

Jim Wise, Frenchy and Jim Ellard had the monopoly of Front street. Philips Hicks and Joe Arnand divided the hotel business between them on the north side of Columbia street west. Dean Withrow (furniture), Ebenezer Brown (the great wine and spirit merchant), Mrs. Lewis’ boarding house. (Peace to her ashes; her 50¢ meal was ample and varied.) On the south side Holbrook’s stone warehouse, wherein it seemed always evening. It must not be forgotten that the Hon. Holbrook was the first man to can and preserve salmon. Next was Johnston’s shoe shop, whose famous made-to-order shoe reached the outermost limits of the province; next was an ancient apothecary’s shop; then came Cunningham’s general store, which would be a credit today, but if I remember right I think Charlie Major had a dry goods business between Cunningham’s and the drug store. The Sisters of St. Ann had a crescent to themselves. Sergeant Moray was the police force, commissioner, inspector and cop.

In the little burg were some bright, progressive men, Edmunds and Webster, Homer, the Cunninghams and the Armstrongs. I am glad to write that the head of the latter family is still on the crust. Long may the winds blow softly on his declining years. As for Joe, I saw him not long ago on Hastings street, dividing the crowd like Alexander seeking new worlds to conquer.

There were times when Father Fraser, like a cowl’d monk, sought retreat, and in his icy seclusion denied himself to the world, thereby causing great inconvenience to the whole of the mainland. The regular Victoria steamer was forced to make a detour and land her freight and passengers as

best she could at Port Moody, which was without wharf or other landing accommodation, but this did not happen more than thrice in a decade.

In those days the moral scales were badly unbalanced; the habit of concubinage was common and growing. It was handed down by the Hudson's Bay Company. The men who fell victims to this practice can be divided into three classes: it was common to the small rancher, the shingle-maker, millhand and lone sailor, that is the man who owned a small craft and in himself composed the crew. This class cannot be much blamed, the isolation of their respective callings seeming to compel the practice, but the cold utility man who pleaded necessity, convenience, the open door, etc., etc., alleging it was only a tie that could be cast off at any time, found this a woeful mistake. He was more human than he thought. The next was the fool class of the Pelleus order, composed mostly of errant Englishmen, youths, without restraint, educated, who had drunk in the romance of the middle ages, husk and all. Each imagined himself a Lancelot. There was a pathos in the life; your sympathy went out to them. In looking over their goods you would be sure to find some token, a book, photo, a reliquary with crest pointing to higher life; and though it may seem paradoxical, quite a few of this class led a blameless life, lending themselves loyally to the duties of husband and parent, virtues which cannot be written for the party of the second part. "The old order changeth," thanks to the railroad and the ocean liner, and the decadence of the aborigines, which has swept the practice away for all time. I am glad to record that Eastern Canadians, thanks to their puritan training and moderate habits, although they hovered round the margin of the yellow pool, seldom entered it.

After John Deighton came Ebenezer Brown, wholesale and retail liquor trader. Early in the '70s Jones and Thomas acquired the business. Mannion bought out Thomas' interest and they built quite a commodious hotel. There was one general store, kept by Joe Fernandez, a Portuguese, which later B.H. Wilson of Moodyville purchased and continued the business up to his death.

There was an additional store opened by Arthur Sullivan. A Hebrew named Gold, from the republic, put his shingle up, dry goods and general groceries. About this time Joe Spratt, from Victoria, built a herring fishery about one block west of where the Canadian Pacific station now stands quite a large plant. He tried to convert the fish to guano or fertilizer, which was not a success. They found it was impossible to dry it sufficiently for shipping. Later the C.P.R. acquired the property and added it to their domain.

There was always a sprinkling of trade from the North Arm and Sea Island farmers, which, together with the fishing business, helped to keep the rickety burg from stewing in her fat.

After heaven claimed our much regretted judge, we had quite a number of shallows. R.H. Alexander, Ben Springer and Jeremiah Rogers, the last named a man of sterling worth but unfitted by training for the trade of law-giver, generous and easy-going, always happiest when giving. On election days, when the law commanded the town dry, Jerry during polling hours could be seen walking up and pacing down, with a bottle of whisky in each outside pocket. Everybody could drink, but Jerry heeded it not. All day long till the close of the poll, he never left his beat, except for the purpose of getting rid of his empties and renewing his stock.

We were never neglected by the spiritual drummers, who kept driving home the gospels in spite of difficulties. During the pastorate of the Rev. James Turner, there was a Methodist church and a parsonage built, all or most of the money being subscribed by iniquitous Gastown. Both were swept away in the fire of '86. The honor of the first teacher falls to a Miss Sweeny, whose father at that time was mechanical foreman of the mill. For a small place on the elbow of an unknown land, we contributed our share to the population. The Alexanders, Millers, Springers, Soules and Cordiners of today are all native sons and daughters, who received their first hospitality on the shores of Burrard Inlet. Captain W. Soule was for years the mill company's stevedore. I am glad to write that he still hits the cement with no uncertain tread. In the early '80s the awakening or coming of the flood was heralded by frequent batches of Winnipeg refugees, who worked their way per tie and friendly construction train, carrying no excess baggage and innocent of the potent metal. Bereft of everything except wits, which were polished to such a dangerous edge that a tilt in the business field would be quite a risky experiment.