

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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CONVERSATION WITH MR. J.T. ABRAY, ST. FRANCIS HOTEL, VANCOUVER, 30 JANUARY 1934 (WITH MR. HART LISTENING.)

He now lives at 570 21st Street, North Vancouver (on the Capilano car line.)

FIRST VANCOUVER POLICE. J.T. ABRAY

At this point Mr. J.T. Abray, one of the first policemen in Vancouver, and one of the group of four whose photo in front of the "City Hall" in a tent, then joined us. (The photo is our four policemen, one Chief Stewart, quite stout.)

THE FIRST ELECTION. MAYOR MACLEAN.

"I came to Vancouver in September 1885. I'll tell you how Mayor MacLean came to be mayor; how he came to run for mayor. I had known MacLean a little in Winnipeg. MacLean was a clever man, but when the boom burst in Winnipeg, why, he 'burst' too.

"You know the story about the 'North American Chinamen'; the epithet Alexander of the Hastings Mill used." (See *Early Vancouver*, volumes 1 and 2.) "The loggers were sore on Alexander—not a little bit either. Well, as they were going to run Richard Alexander for mayor, I thought we ought to have someone to oppose him; the arrangements had all been made for him to run for mayor. So I saw Angus Fraser, and Simon, his brother; both these men were loggers, and the loggers did not have much use for Alexander; very little use. So the two Frasers and myself went around to Abbott Street" (see *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1, and elsewhere) "the three of us went around to Abbott Street where MacLean had a little real estate office, and interviewed him. I made him acquainted with the two Frasers and they shook hands, and I asked him if he would run for mayor.

"MacLean said, 'Why, I have no dollars for an election.'

"I replied, 'We have a few dollars; if you'll make up your mind to come out.' So we left it at that for the time being.

"So we called again, and he gave his consent that he would run, so we got to work. I did a little electioneering down in the cabins away down where the Sugar Refinery is now.

"Did you ever hear how we got the first vote here? Everybody who had a lease had a vote; well, everybody that had a lease of \$5."

Query: A month, or a week.

Mr. Abray: "Oh, I don't know now. I had a lease. I had a restaurant on Columbia Street, where the old City Hotel was" (northwest corner Powell and Columbia.) "Upstairs I had thirteen boarders—remember, thirteen roomers upstairs. Then I had a shack on Hastings Street, next to the present Woods Hotel—right between it and the present City Hall" (Holden Building); "it was only one room, but I made it into four leases; so with the four leases in the shack and thirteen roomers at the restaurant I had seventeen leases, and a lease entitled you to a vote. It did not matter who you were; you could not let a day like that pass without voting.

"Anyway, we won the election by seventeen votes; just seventeen.

"Barker, of Williams and Barker of the brewery, said afterwards to me that how we wrote our leases faster than they could," and Mr. Abray laughed. (Read W.H. Gallagher, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1.)

CABS AND HACKS.

"The night of the election we had a hilarious time. There were no hacks in town, so we got one over from Westminster; drove over through the woods. There were very few streets, so we just drove around and around, and funny thing, when we got on to Cordova Street we had to drive over logs."

THE FIRST POLICE FORCE.

"I was sworn in as a constable the day after the Fire of 13 June 1886, sworn in by Mayor MacLean, right out in front by where the Maple Tree had been—out on the middle of the street.

"You see, after the fire some barrels of whisky were lying about—down on the beach. I suppose someone had thrown them out when the fire came along, they lay there, until the next day, when some fellows decided they wanted them, and got them in a boat, and were making off with two or three barrels of whisky in the direction of the Narrows. MacLean came along, and walked up to me right there in the street, and said, 'Here, Abray, you go off after that liquor,' swore me in as constable, and I went after it, and brought it back. I didn't intend to stay on the police force but I did.

"The police force at that time consisted of Chief Stewart, Sergeant McLaren, Heywood, and another fellow whose name I forget."

INDIAN RANCHERIES. POTLATCHES.

"The Indian rancherie down just east of the Hastings Mill was a hard place; the wonder is we never got our heads knocked in down there; drunken loggers and all that sort of thing."

Interjection by Mr. Hart: "The biggest potlatch ever held on this coast took place down at that rancherie east of the mill" (about foot of Heatley Avenue.) "It was a tough place."

POLICE. CHIEF STEWART. WATER WELLS.

"Old man Stewart, before he was chief, drilled a well for us down behind my restaurant, and we got splendid water, best in town, not a bit salt. He drilled down through the rock to a depth of thirty-two feet; right into the rock." (The restaurant was at the northwest corner of Powell and Columbia.)

THE FIRST NEWSPAPER. THE GREAT FIRE. OPPENHEIMER BUILDING.

"The day of the fire we had forty-two men eating at the restaurant; they were the men working out on the cleaning. When the flames came along, at first I helped to carry the type from the first newspaper that was published here, the *Herald*" (McDougall's.) "The printing place was next to my restaurant" (Alexander Street.) "I carried the type across the street into Oppenheimer's basement across the street diagonally; they had just got the foundation in" (southeast corner Columbia and Powell streets) "and we thought we would be safe there and could stay. But presently I said, 'Here, we've got to get out of here'; the type was beginning to melt; so we got out and ran east.

"When we had gone a little way east, we met Jonathan Miller, afterwards our postmaster, coming towards us. He shouted, 'You cannot go that way; you can't get through.' We hurriedly answered and kept on. 'Well, you can't go that way' (nodding to the way we'd just come), 'you come with us'; so he did and that saved him; he was running right into the fire.

"I had a man working for me, Anderson, from Owen Sound, as cook. He was worthy of a better position, but he was sick, his heart was bad, and he had come to the coast for his health and worked as cook. When we had run about as far as Gore Avenue, Anderson fell down, and said he could go not further. I picked him up; it was a desperate situation, but I carried him, and helped him, and then he fell down a second time, and he said, 'Go on, Jack,' and I simply had to leave him. I got through, we got down to the Hastings Mill, threw some powder stacked on the wharf into the inlet, jumped on the boat, the *Yosemite* or something, and got over to Moodyville.

"When I came back, the first thing I did was to go and see about Anderson. I expected to find his body, but all I found was his little grip with his masonic jewels and charms all melted together; he had crawled out on his hands and knees to False Creek."

BURNED TO DEATH ON HORSEBACK.

"Faucett, the soda water manufacturer, died on his horse in the middle of Carrall Street."

Query: Wasn't it in his cart? Only the ashes found, and the iron tires?

Mr. Abray: "No, on his horse; he used to ride a white horse; he left it too long, and got caught in the fire."

C. GARDNER JOHNSON.

"The first time I recall Gardner Johnson was right after the Fire. I had a nice little cottage just above Spratt's Ark" (foot of Burrard Street. See elsewhere re use of Ark during fire.) "The city had appointed him to look after the blankets which were sent, and the first thing I recall of him was one day when he said,

'Officer, take these people down to the Ark and give them some blankets'; we had quite a few people down there, and a little restaurant for them in the Ark."

BURRARD HOTEL.

(Northwest corner of Hastings and Columbia.) "The Burrard Hotel was to have been a swell place. Abbott, of the C.P.R., and all the officials were staying there. Why, they constructed a special sidewalk" (wooden) "all the way from Powell Street, just to lead to that hotel."

SMALL POX.

Query: Do you think the Indians had small pox here before the white man came, as August Jack says they did?

Mr. Abray: "Nobody knows whether they had it before the white man came, but they had lots of it for years before we got it first in Vancouver. People have told me that, up the coast, you could have seen all kinds of skulls out in the woods where the Indians had crawled out into the bushes and died. We had two or three scares on Burrard Inlet."

THE FIRST SMALL POX.

"At the time of the first scare we had a little shack, cost about fifteen dollars, and Dr. McGuigan used to go up to it with a little stick in his hand, and rag on the end with something" (disinfectant) "on the end of the stick which he would hold in front of his mouth. We had nine of them. I helped to pack them out, and the kids" (children) "all around watching."

THE SECOND SMALL POX.

"Afterwards we got a better pest house. The next one they got a scow and put a little cabin on it, down towards the east of the Hastings Sawmill; way down, out in the inlet so that no one could get at them."

THE THIRD SMALL POX.

"It was after that that they began to take them out to Deadman's Island, to the pest house out there."

JAIL (BEFORE THE FIRE).

"I don't remember much about the jail before the fire, but it was in Miller's, and I think there were three or four cells; don't remember much about the place; was never in it."

FURTHER CONVERSATION WITH MR. FRANK HART AT ST. FRANCIS HOTEL, 1 FEBRUARY 1934.

OLD GRANVILLE.

"All 1885, Gastown stood at a population of about 300. You see, Port Moody was booming, Gastown was a second consideration; you must not forget that the actual boom in Gastown, or Vancouver, took place in 1886, in the spring before the Fire.

SUNNYSIDE HOTEL.

"I have told you previously of how I came down from Port Moody because I had not enough money to get in there. The first thing I did when I got down was to rent that little cabin from Harry Mole at the southwest corner of Cordova Street and Carrall Street, and started to make furniture there, but it soon became too small altogether; I could do nothing, the house was full of goods." (Note: he rowed down to the Hastings Sawmill and brought up his lumber for furniture in a boat.)

VANCOUVER. PANORAMA PHOTO, MAY 1886.

"Then I went down to the waterfront, as you know I have told you. If you will look at that panorama photo of Vancouver before the fire you will see the east of the Sunnyside, and just in front of the Ferguson Block on the corner of Carrall and Powell, a sort of shack on the shore, quite a big one; well, that was the place I squatted in. I built that house without money to speak of; from that Hastings Mill I picked up slabs and culls—they had plenty of culls—and built it, 16 feet by 24 feet on a squatter's lot on the shore. I was a hustler, and soon found that I was 'King of the Country.' It was no time before I made it sixty feet long; I began to flourish; I made three additions, all in 1885, before Keefer came along and bought me out for the C.P.R. right of way for \$800. That is the building I sold for \$800. I had six months in which to move out.