

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

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C.P.R. S.S. ABYSSINIA.

"I lived in the cottage shown in the photograph of Vancouver, 1886, as not being burned in the fire. While I was in the cottage, one night, I heard a moaning sort of howl, and went outdoors to 'murder' a supposed cat, but it was the C.P.R. *Abyssinia*, the first steamer to the Orient, coming in. We were not accustomed to such noises in those days.

"The above cottage was on Dunlevy Avenue, just below Powell Street. That was the 'swell' residential district in those days. Those who lived there were R.H. Alexander, R.G. Tatlow, C.E. Hope, Henry Bell-Irving, John Boulton, Thos. F. McGuigan, Mayor MacLean, and—myself."

ST. JAMES CHURCH AND THE PRINCESS LOUISE TREE.

"St. James Church was at the foot of Westminster Avenue. The Princess Louise Tree was just west of the corner of Gore Avenue. Those buildings behind are tenement buildings, on Powell Street, I think. Single men paid \$5 a month for them, and eked out a living; a loaf of bread and some fish, or clams.

"F.W. Hart's place was on Alexander Street, about where the Europe Hotel is now; one of those shacks on the beach east of the Sunnyside is my office. My Chinese servant saved my laundry; it was clean, just come from the laundryman. He took it down to Hastings, but it got dirty, and had to be rewashed; for a time I was the only man in town with a white shirt."

CONVERSATION WITH MR. THOMAS RALPH NICKSON, OF STANLEY PARK MANOR, VANCOUVER, 5 OCTOBER 1933, AT CITY HALL.

J.J. NICKSON. VANCOUVER.

"My father, John Joseph Nickson, was born in Runcorn, Cheshire, near Liverpool, England, and left there, together with his family, consisting of my mother and three children, for British Columbia in 1885, travelling from Liverpool to New York on the S.S. *Baltic*, thence via Northern Pacific Railway to Portland, thence to Tacoma, and from Tacoma to Victoria, where he arrived in the month of April 1885. The family consisted of my mother," (née Miss Jane Allen of Birkenhead, Cheshire) "an elder sister Catherine Louise, myself" (Thomas Ralph) "and a sister Lindsay. My father was educated at the Liverpool Institute, Liverpool."

ESQUIMALT AND NANAIMO RAILWAY.

"On arrival in Victoria, he secured a subcontract under Bell, Larkin and Patterson, to build the bridges and trestles between Victoria and Shawnigan on the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway then under construction, and built all the wooden bridges from Victoria north to Shawnigan. He had been a bridge contractor on railways in England. My uncle, Thomas Ralph Nickson of Liverpool, a civil engineer, and formerly a partner of my father's in England, came out to Victoria, but he did not like the construction of the bridges after he had seen the drift bolts—said there was not enough iron in them—and returned to England where he became associated with Messrs. Lever Bros. of Port Sunlight, building their Sunlight Soap Plant there, and laying out their townsite."

VICTORIA WATER WORKS.

"My father next secured an appointment as superintendent of construction of the Victoria Water Works system, which procured its water from Elk Lake. He was not impressed with the source of supply of water, contending that the water from Elk Lake was of poor quality, but other plans were too costly—there was not enough money to go further away for better water—so the Elk Lake plant was built. He superintended the laying of all the steel pipe, with lead joints; employed by the City of Victoria, of course, that was about 1886."

VANCOUVER WATER WORKS.

"In the fall of 1888, my father was appointed by John Irving of Victoria, Superintendent of the Vancouver Water Works Company, and then we moved to Vancouver. We came over to Vancouver on the old *Princess Louise* and went to live in a small shack built on land which my father had purchased from the C.P.R. The exact spot is now 1270 Melville Street. It was a cheap board and batten cabin of two rooms, without garden or anything of that sort, and surrounded by enormous stumps of cedar and fir trees in all

directions from Granville Street to Nicola Street. I recall that the night we arrived from Victoria, Steve Maddison, afterwards Water Works Superintendent for the City of Vancouver, was working at the shack. He was then a boy and was trained by my father.”

C.P.R. CLEARING WEST END. WILD OXEN IN STANLEY PARK.

“The C.P.R. clearing had been slashed pretty well as far as the brow of the hill sloping down from Nicola Street; beyond that was forest. Phillip Oben was logging there with oxen, and some of the oxen got loose, wandered off, invaded Stanley Park, and could not be found again. The rumour got around that there were wild bulls in Stanley Park” (see *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2) “and children were warned not to go there. Burning stumps and smoke were in evidence in all directions from Hastings Mill westwards.

“Where the Canadian Bank of Commerce now stands at the corner of Granville and Hastings Street, there was a one-storey grocery store” (DesBrisay’s.) “Hastings Street was a corduroy road, with a three-plank sidewalk on the south side running past the old Leland Hotel. Georgia Street was just being opened up, and had reached about as far as Howe Street. Beyond that there was a slashing as far as Stanley Park. The skids had been taken up on Georgia Street as far as Howe Street, and a narrow trail, sufficiently good to get a light wagon over with a load of furniture remained where the skid road had been. To reach our house we turned down the hill to what is now Melville Street; there was no other means of access at that time. My father petitioned to have Melville Street opened up.”

VANCOUVER WATER WORKS. FIRST DAM AT CAPILANO.

“The first work was the slashing of the pipe line down Georgia Street, the putting of the road in readiness, and digging the ditch for the pipes. Then the Pipe Line Road was slashed through the park, the Narrows crossed in boats, and the slashing went on up almost to the site of the present intake up the Capilano River. They then started to put in the log cribbing at the first dam, and finally Steve Maddison’s father became the first caretaker at the Dam.

“The ditch from Georgia Street to the intake having been completed for the receiving of the pipe, the drawing of the second line of pipe under the Narrows was undertaken and took three summer months to complete. The pipes were pulled across with a windlass and horses; and the launchways were built on the north side, and the pipe put together on the north shore. It was completed without mishap. Llewellyn was the diver.” (See photograph attached.)

WATER REACHES VANCOUVER. S.S. ABYSSINIA BREAKS MAIN.

“The water, when turned on, came through the pipes quite as expected, but not long afterwards the steamer *Abyssinia* ‘sat’ on the pipe and there was a ‘compound fracture’ for one end of the pipe went west and the other went east. However, in due course it was repaired, but in the interval Vancouver went around getting its water from horse-drawn wagons and buckets. When the pipe line had been repaired, my father put on a diver’s suit, went down, and inspected the work himself.

“He then became the general superintendent of the company; J.W. McFarland was secretary, and Geo. H. Keefer, engineer. The first office was located on Hastings Street, about midway between Columbia Street and Westminster Avenue” (now Main Street.) “On the south side. It was a little wooden building” (about the site of the present Hotel Howard.) “This arrangement continued until the City purchased the Vancouver Water Works Company, by which time a third pipe line had been laid across the First Narrows. When the City took over the Water Works, my father was appointed Superintendent, which post he held for many years. Later when Colonel Tracy was appointed City Engineer, my father resigned, and went to New Westminster as manager of the Gas Works there. Some time later he formed the Vancouver Construction Company in partnership with Tom McGuigan, City Clerk, and myself—then a youth.”

SEWERS AND WATER MAINS, VANCOUVER.

“He constructed a very large number of the original water mains and sewers on the streets of Vancouver, and the first septic tanks.”

C.P.R. IRRIGATION DITCH, CALGARY.

“He also built the intake, and started the great C.P.R. Irrigation Ditch (I think it is about 200 miles long) in Alberta.”

FIRST CRUSHED ROCK. COAST QUARRIES LIMITED.

“We secured the contract from the City to supply them with crushed rock for the streets. It started in this way: a man named Captain Williams had started a little stone quarry at Granite Falls up the north arm of the Inlet. We bought him out and formed the Coast Quarries Limited. The Canadian Pacific Railway had used rock previously to rip-rap the fills of their track from Port Moody, and to prevent the fills from being undermined by the wash of the sea, but the man who did that got his rocks, etc., from the shores and beaches of the North Arm, much of it around the Jug Island area. Later we sold the Coast Quarries to the Dominion Trust Company of Vancouver, and they in turn sold it to the late Mr. Bicknell, whose son still operates the old quarry at Granite Falls.”

LIKELY, B.C.

“At an earlier date, when the Golden River Quesnel Mining Company started at Quesnelle Lake” (now known as Likely, B.C.) “my father built the dam there for that company. It was a tremendous task, coasting approximately two million dollars. His old camp site is now called Likely, B.C.”

EARLY “RADIO.”

“Another incident might interest you. We had an organ in our home on Melville Street; also a telephone to the dam at the intake, and we used to play the organ, and at the same time remove the telephone receiver, and the lonely men at the intake would have music over the telephone wire from our organ.”

TELEPHONE: FIRST ACROSS NARROWS.

“The first telephone across the Narrows was stretched from the top of Prospect Point; the first steamer which came along tore it down; afterwards it was put in a cable.”

EARLY STREET CARS – ROBSON STREET.

“You know, the first street cars on Robson Street ran to a terminus about Nicola Street; well, they ran right up to the forest then.”

CAMPING AT ENGLISH BAY.

“Then again, we used to camp on the beach at English Bay in the summer, just set our tents down anywhere along the beach, where it suited us.”

RETIREMENT TO SECHELT.

“Father began to retire from active business about 1907. He went, at first, to look after a small quarry we had at Sechelt, and from which we got the first rock paving blocks used for paving the downtown lanes. It was a small quarry located about two miles west of the Indian village of Sechelt. He remained at Sechelt until he died of heart disease on July 12, 1912, and he was buried with Masonic honours” (Cascade Lodge) “in Mountain View Cemetery, Vancouver.”

MRS. NICKSON, SECHELT.

“Mother still resides at Sechelt; a home has been built there, some acres cleared, and known by the cognomen of ‘Rexwood.’ Mother was 78 on the 15th of August, 1933.”

THE BELL OF THE HUDSON’S BAY STEAMER *BEAVER*.

“It was Mother who presented the bell of the historic steamer *Beaver* to the gentlemen of the Merchants’ Exchange, to be placed in their offices in the Marine Building; I think you will find an inscription upon it to that effect. It came into her possession through the fact we boys, her sons, and other boys, used to play around the wreck of the old *Beaver* at Prospect Point; we took the bell home, Mother treasured it for many years, and it was finally presented to the Merchants’ Exchange.”

THE OLD MELVILLE STREET SHACK.

“Our first shack, the two-room affair, is at the back of the house at 1270 Melville Street, but on account of alterations is not recognisable now.” (See photo of house built later on same land.)

LORD AND LADY ABERDEEN VISIT VANCOUVER. EARLY SCHOOLS.

“This photograph, by Bailey and Neelands, of a great group of children on a grandstand adorned with bunting and flags, etc., is of a school children’s reception to His Excellency the Governor General Lord

Aberdeen, and Lady Aberdeen. All the school children were there; they came from the Central School on Pender Street, and from the little wooden school house which stood on Burrard Street, at the corner of Barclay and Burrard." (The Aberdeen School is built there now.) "The Dawson School further south was built afterwards. I am somewhere in the group; Mother is also. The children of all schools were given a holiday and sang songs from the grandstand, for the edification of Lord and Lady Aberdeen. This took place in the C.P.R. Park, which faced the Hotel Vancouver." (Photo No. ?)

CHILDREN OF THE LATE JOHN JOSEPH NICKSON AND MRS. NICKSON OF SECHLT, B.C.

(Eight—three sons and five daughters.)

Catherine Louise, born at New Brighton, near Birkenhead, Cheshire, England. Widow of the late Fred S. Deal.

Thomas Ralph, born at Seacombe, near Birkenhead, Cheshire, England. Married Bay Banfield, daughter of J.J. Banfield; has three sons—John, Allen, Rex. (*NOTE ADDED LATER*: died 16 or 17 March 1939.)

Margaret Jane Lindsay, born at Somerville, near Birkenhead, Cheshire, England. Unmarried.

Edith Hilda Charlotte, born Cobble Hill, Shawnigan Lake, B.C. Widow of late Arthur Follett Paddon; has two children—Edith Frances Jane, John Reginald.

Martha Beatrice, born 1270 Melville Street, Vancouver, B.C. Married E.S. Baylis; has two sons—John, Denbigh Hoults.

John Reginald Washington, born at 1270 Melville Street, Vancouver, B.C. Went overseas in 1915 with the 2nd Canadian Mounted Rifles; afterwards Pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, in England; was killed on 2 January 1918 whilst training an American airman to use "Bristol Fighter" aeroplane. Was unmarried.

Robert Harold, born at 1270 Melville Street, Vancouver, B.C. Unmarried.

Jessie Irene, born at New Westminster, B.C. Married Major Thomas Douglas Sutherland, D.S.O., M.C., etc., Imperial Army. Has one son—Thomas Douglas Lindsay Sutherland.

N.B. "I notice that no mention is made of the work Father did for the Canadian Pacific Railway, including the work in connection with the Loop—Cambie Station, the Roundhouses he built for them in Regina and Kamloops—also the clearing of the original Shaughnessy Heights.

"Other works which might also be mentioned are:

"Building the Railway in the State of Washington.

"Clearing of the land in North Vancouver for the Lonsdale Estate.

"The railway, etc. built for some American firm at Three Valleys. (Mr. Mundy was one of the principals.)

"The first stone sea wall at English Bay, built near the entrance to Stanley Park, for Dr. Lefevre."

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. JANE NICKSON, MOTHER OF T.R. NICKSON, 13 JUNE 1934.

(After reading her son's narrative to her.)

CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE.

"The one-storey grocery was DesBrisay's; I got my first groceries there." (Southeast corner Hastings and Granville Street. See photo No. ?)

GEORGIA STREET.

"The cart bringing our furniture got stuck in the mud on Georgia Street about Thurlow Street, and we had to carry it; everything, down to our cabin on Melville Street."