

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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This is an instance of how democracy operates. Here was an irresponsible, kindly gentleman, physically quite incapable of the onerous duties of mayor, who had never taken an interest of scarcely any sort of public affairs, quite out of touch with civic matters, somewhat eccentric, no money to speak of, a very indifferent business man in his own trading, and operating a third-rate retail store which looked more like a museum than a store, legally able to have his name placed on the voting ballots at a civic election involving many thousands of votes, and in company with two or three names of the highest standing in the community. His candidature was a joke—all knew that—yet such is our system of electing our governing officials that such debacles as the above are possible.

JEWISH SYNAGOGUE.

A memo of conversation with Mr. Rubinowitz, dated 2 October 1933, records that “my great-grandfather, after whom I am named, was a native of Ponemon, across the River Nemo from Kovno, Lithuania” (formerly Poland Russia) “and lived to be 107 years old.

“I am probably the only survivor of the original Jewish congregation which 42 years ago assembled in the first Jewish house of worship; not a synagogue, just a small hall, or large room upstairs in the Dunn-Miller Block on southwest corner of Cordova and Carrall streets.” J.S.M.

Note: in his mayoralty contests he received:

In 1926, 197 votes out of 15,972;

In 1928, 236 votes out of 36,809 cast.

J.S.M.

GREAT DEPRESSION.

EARLY DAYS.

The first evidence of the “Great Depression” became visible in the spring of 1931, but went unrecognised by the general public. There were features not dissimilar to those in the earlier days of the Great War. In both cases, British Columbia was unprepared; an appreciation of the situation was lacking; neither officials nor the general public comprehended; there was no system of method whatever to control it, and, as in the case of the Great War, most persons said it would end “in three months.”

The year 1929 had seen its stock boom in which all, from capitalists to stenographers, indulged. Life was worth living, a dollar invested today became two dollars overnight. During the year 1930 sufficient time had not elapsed for the penalties of the wild speculation to reveal themselves; people still had resources on which to live; some were suffering, some were grumbling, the public was hibernating—like a bear dened up for winter, and “living on its fat.” Then came 1931 and its spring; the slacking up of industry—and idle men were numerous as flowers in spring and summer, periods when labour should ordinarily be at a premium.

THE JUNGLES OF 1931.

Suddenly the newspapers reported in striking headlines the fact that men were living in “Jungles”; the public was politely interested, a curiosity to see what a “Jungle” looked like evinced itself; few bothered to go and look. Pictures were published; it was all very interesting. Few realised what was coming; a few of the more charitably inclined who came in personal contact with the “rod riders” (men who rode freight trains) started relief measures (see Col. Williams, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1), and interested themselves in the unfortunate “Jungleers,” but after the first flush and flash of interest had passed, the general public took not notice, and questioned each other, “Don’t you think business will improve next month?” A few said, “Recovery will take some time, perhaps two or three years,” and such as did were promptly branded pessimists to be shunned.

Even the men in the “Jungles” were not at all certain that the deplorable situation in which they found themselves was not due in some measure to their own individual deficiencies; they had been extravagant when they should have saved—which was perhaps quite true in most cases; they had always been unfortunate, they chided themselves; they had lost opportunities when they were young, had defied

parents, neglected school, been wayward; it was their own fault they were in trouble; others did not appear to be (they judged by outward appearance); others had good clothes (clothes had not had time to wear out.) Few realised what was coming to any greater extent than they had when the Great War broke out. The news that war had broken out in Europe was an interesting item in the morning paper—that was all; it was thousands of miles away; we should be quite safe in British Columbia.

The following will give a slight conception of a situation which still existed three months after the first Jungle was started in Vancouver; that is, in September 1931, and will illustrate what slight preparation had or was being made to prepare for the thousands who were to go on Government or Civic Relief before 1932 and 1933 had passed.

**MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION, 23 AUGUST 1933, WITH MR. W.J. MOORE,
PHOTOGRAPHER, 420 HASTINGS STREET WEST.**

[Mr. Moore] took the photographs (September 1931) of the False Creek Jungle (unemployed camp) on the False Creek City Dump, for refuse, between Campbell Avenue and Heatley Avenue. (See thirteen photographs.)

THE JUNGLES OF 1931 (FALSE CREEK JUNGLE). REV. ANDREW RODDAN.

Major Matthews: How did you come to take these photographs, Mr. Moore?

Mr. Moore: "The Rev. Andrew Roddan, pastor of the First United Church, requested me, about September 1931, to accompany him; just what his idea in having them taken I am not sure; I believe he wanted them for use in emphasising the contention that these destitute men were the charge of the Federal or Provincial governments, and not a civic responsibility; the desperate situation was, in his opinion, a national one, not a local one.

"The Jungle, as it was called, was the Jungle on the city dump for rubbish at the False Creek fill between Campbell Avenue and Heatley Avenue—there was another Jungle on the old Hastings Sawmill site. It was a collection of nondescript habitations made out of anything which could be begged, borrowed or stolen, to be hung together some way to afford shelter from the elements to a large number of unemployed men; men from everywhere, all sorts of ages, education, characters, attainments, and which a common want and some misery had banded together in larger or smaller groups for mutual help.

"It was a wet dreary evening when we arrived—which accounts for the lack of sharpness in the photographs—probably six o'clock. A cold September drizzle was falling.

"While I was taking the photographs some women came by; to gratify curiosity, I surmise. I observed that one of the women watchers had tears running down her cheeks; one could hardly blame her; I felt a little similarly inclined myself.

"Then a girl, more correctly a young woman, strode forward; was she undoubtedly of Communist theories, and angry. She harangued the men, called them ugly names. In a shrill, strident voice she ejaculated, 'You call yourselves men; you stand for this and do nothing! Why don't you fight?' she went on in a commanding voice and attitude. 'You call yourselves human beings and starve while the bosses wax fat. Why do you stand for it? Why don't you get a bit of Socialism in your miserable spirits?' It was a harsh bullying declamation of a wild impassioned young female. 'Why, Jesus Christ was a Socialist,' she finished.

"The Rev. Andrew Roddan solemnly nodded acquiescence, and muttered in a low tone, 'Yes, that's true; the greatest Socialist the world ever knew.'

"But the men took no notice of the girl; they just looked at her; neither smiled nor scowled; just looked in stern silence. The Rev. Roddan stood nearby. Preparations were in progress to 'dish up'—I suppose that is what it might be called—the evening meal; his presence controlled the situation. I doubt if there was another man in all Vancouver who could handle those men as the Rev. Roddan could. They respected him; they obeyed him. He explained quietly to the men that there was just so much food and no more; that no man should be allowed to go hungry if he could help it; that if there was any left over after each had had an equal share, they could come back, and finish what was left over. The men were very orderly.