

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1935)

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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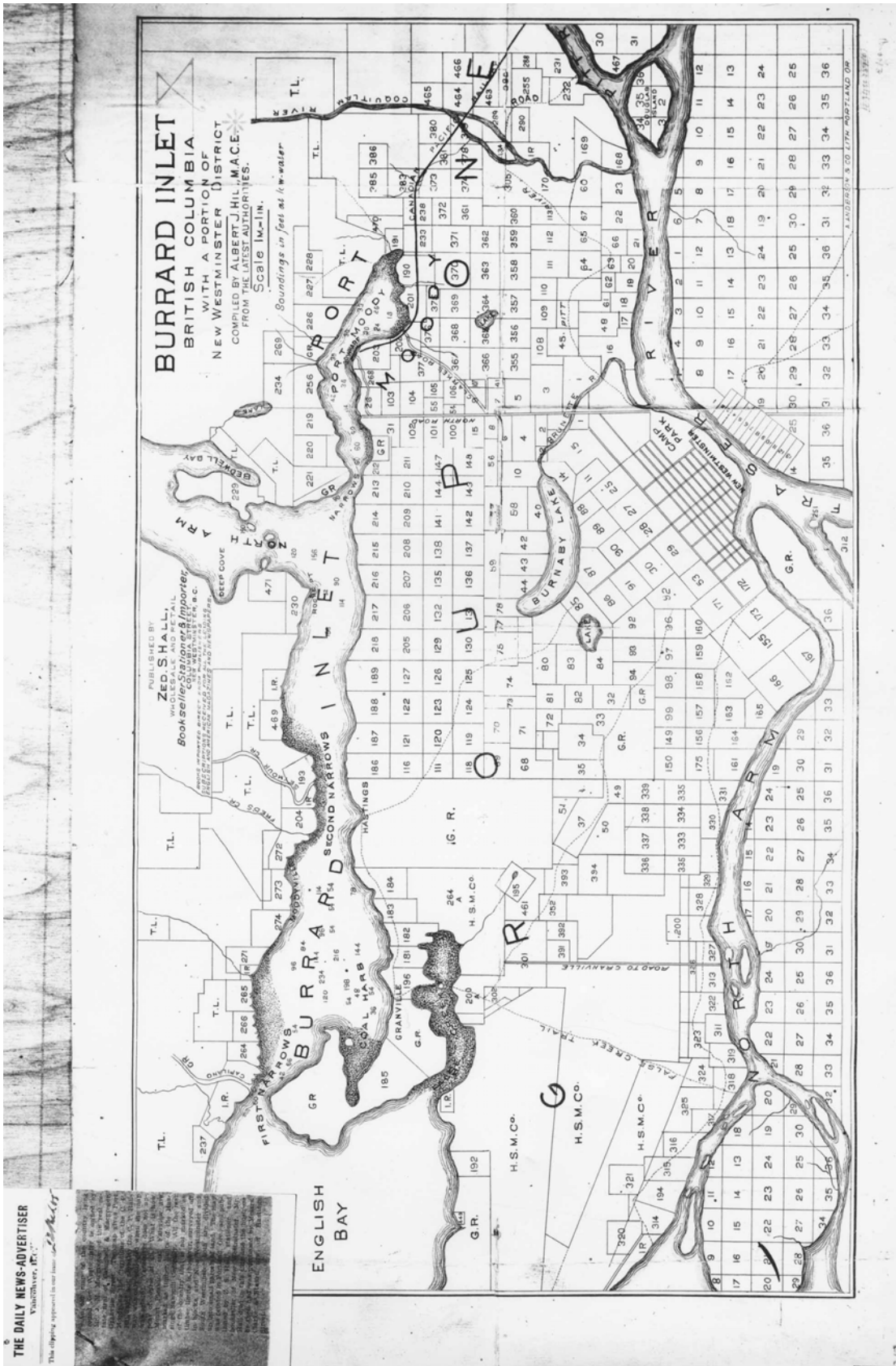
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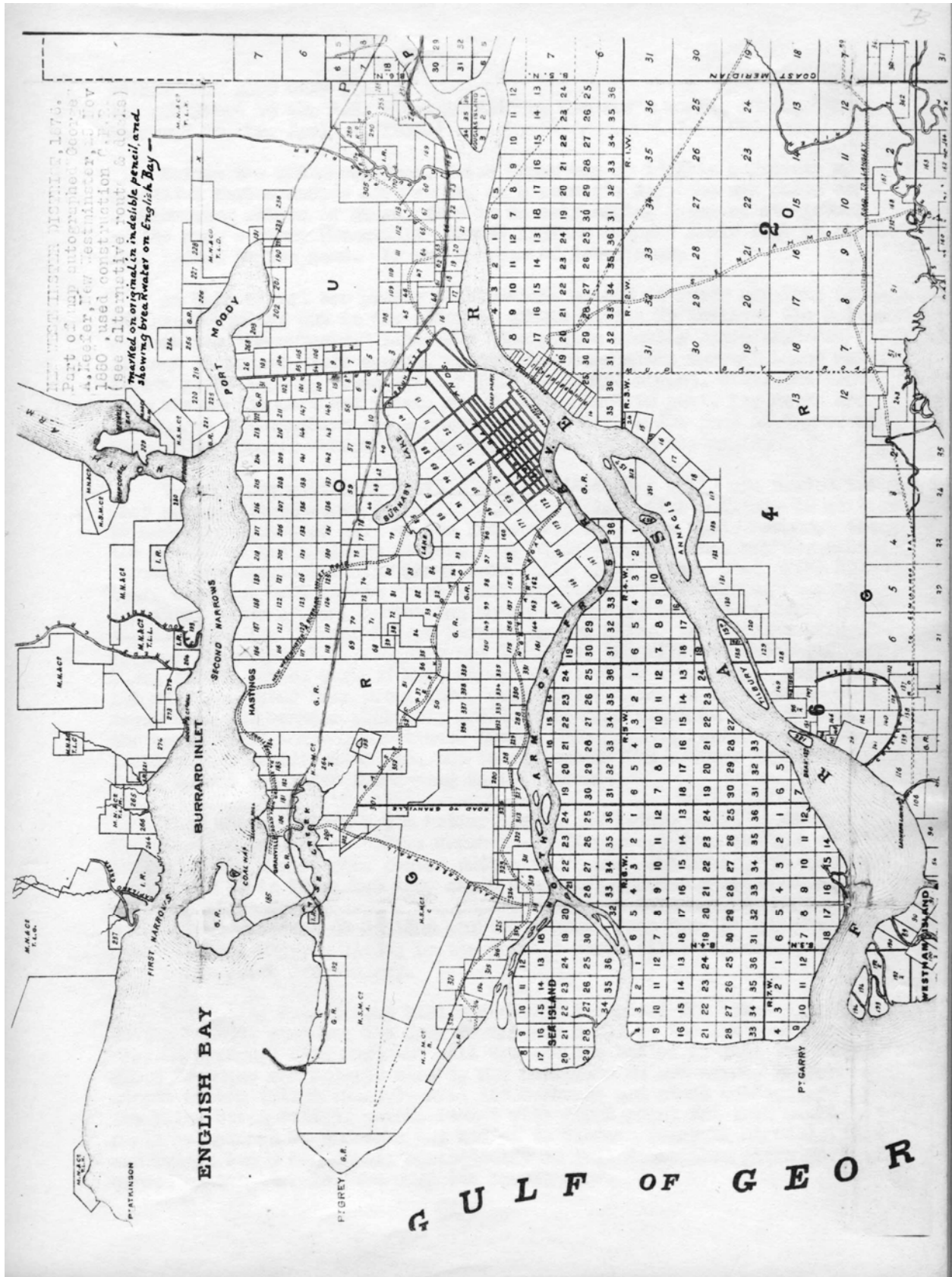
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Item # EarlyVan_v3_007



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HORSES SWIM DOWN MAIN STREET.

(As published in the B.C. Electric Railway Company's weekly sheet, *The Buzzer*, No. 55, 6 April 1934.) By Major J.S. Matthews.

Before the whitemans came, False Creek was an idyllic paradise; a beautiful marine avenue down which, on a summer's day, the sun shone on a shimmering ribbon of azure, deep in an overhanging frame of evergreen; on the grey sandbar (Granville Island) Indians trapped their fish in hurdle nets staked in the sand. It was a haven of loveliness.

At Main Street two pretty points—pale shades of colour strained through the grove—juttied out in the water to almost meet. To Indians, the narrow passage was *Ke-wahusks*, literally, "two points exactly opposite," and through it passed their canoes, as our *Empresses* glide through Lions Gate, to the great lagoon, *Skwa-chice* (C.N.R. yards) beyond, where the sturgeon were. The northern point, now Thornton Park in part, lay north and south, and the southern one a narrower ridge with a few feet of dry crest between two shores—where Main Street twists—lay on the angle.

In 1865 the whitemans built a sawmill (Hastings Mill) and needed water. They bridged *Ke-wahusks* (opposite C.N.R. station) with a flume—on stilts in mud—and clambered over on its framework; they swam their horses. Along the summit of the southern finger, some pioneer slashed his way dry shod through the tangle—perhaps along some still older track, used alike by bear, deer and Indians—to break trail for the new water flume, possibly our first water system, to the Tea Swamp (Kingsway and Fraser Avenue) which emptied into the "Second Bridge Stream" up the hill. The "Second Bridge" spanned the creek about Kingsway and Broadway; the mill dam was lower down, i.e., in the ravine east of Main Street about Sixth Avenue East. Afterwards, the mill got water from Trout Lake, where the whiteman's flume found much favour with the beavers that they built their dams right in it and shut the water off. Rough remonstrance taught them greater reason and henceforth they so built as to aid, not to obstruct. The beavers repaired their dams, raised the water level—and kept it raised.

Then the whitemans cut a better trail, and later, still another. The first, dignified as "False Creek Road" (Kingsway) from the old Capital of B.C. whence came driven cattle for meat. The other, "False Creek Trail," built in 1872, but long since vanished, meandered cross country over the hills from Eburne's (Marpole), and by it Lulu Island settlers brought farm produce to Gastown and the mills. Both "Trail" and "Road" were slits, a buggy's width, in the forest; dark, silent, sinuous; the blue crack above was the sky.

Originally Main Street hill was steep; too steep for horse-drawn wagons; so the "Road," avoiding the deep ravine and knoll to the east, crossed "Second Bridge," slid down the hill through the hollow to join the "Trail" about Broadway and Ontario Street, and continued as one across the corduroyed muskeg (First Avenue)—with its muskrats and skunk cabbage—on to the False Creek Bridge, which, decked with round poles cut from nearby saplings spanned *Ke-wahusks* and led on to Gastown (Carrall Street). The old bridge had a bad habit; periodically it fell down; then pioneers jumped across on its timbers, and swam the horses over.

First, the deer trail in the bushes; then the whiteman's water flume; then the corduroy "Trail" through the swamp; next the improved "New Road" of mud or dust; then macadamised "Westminster Avenue," oft-times altered; and finally "Main Street," where it twists; but we clung to the old angle, and paved it—bend and all.