

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH QOITCHETAHL (ANDREW PAUL), NORTH VANCOUVER, 12 FEBRUARY 1934.

Query: Can you tell me what Sasamat means? I understand Galiano and Valdes say that they called Burrard Inlet Floridablanca, and that the natives called it Sasamat—at least, that portion up about Indian River.

Qoitchetahl: “I never heard it called Sasamat, but I’ll find out from Haxten. It sounds to me like Tsaa-tsmat. You know Tsa-atlum, the cool place out at Point Grey; well, both names are from the same derivation, and I presume that the North Arm of the Burrard Inlet might be considered a ‘cool place,’ especially around Indian River.”

INDIANS. ARRIVAL OF FIRST C.P.R. TRAIN.

“You know the story of the Qoitchetahl (Serpent)? Well, I have always been told that when the train first came down from Port Moody to Vancouver, the Indians along the south shore of the Inlet took fright and ran. A great long black snake of a thing with a big black head came twirling around the curves, blowing long blasts, “Hoooooouooo Hoooooouooo Hoooooouooo, and the Indians thought it was a Qoitchetahl coming back.”

HOW ONE INDIAN FAMILY GOT ITS NAME

THE SCOWS OF ALERT BAY

A RECOLLECTION BY MAJOR J.S. MATTHEWS

A newspaper item, dated Alert Bay, 21 May 1934, states, “Special memorial music was rendered by the band and tribute was paid by the people of Bella Bella to the memory of Johnny Scow, chief of the Tzawatainenuk Indians, who died suddenly at Alert Bay last week.”

In May or June, about 1926-1928, I was living at Alert Bay, and on one long summer’s evening, sat on the shore chatting with Johnny Scow. He sat on one end of a short log; I sat on the other; both were smoking and idling away the twilight. I said to Johnny, “How did you get your name, Johnny?” Johnny replied, “You know Mr. Munn, have cannery down Fraser River?” I nodded. “One day there was a storm down Steveston; scow with lot Indian women and children break loose; I go after them; I bring them back; after that, Mr. Munn call me Johnny Scow.”

A day or so later, I was talking to the rector of the only church at Alert Bay, the little Indian church where the service was conducted on Sundays, partly in Indian and partly in English—Mrs. Cook acted as interpreter—and I asked the rector how he christened the several children of Johnny Scow. He replied, “Just Scow; they are all registered in the books as young Scows. I do the same thing with the Mountains. Harry Mountain, his Indian name signifies ‘mountain,’ so I christened all his children Mountain.”

ARCHBISHOP DEPENCIER.

The rector then chuckled, and said, “Did you ever hear about Archbishop DePencier of New Westminster and Johnny Scow? The Archbishop came up here for a meeting of the Indians, they all sat around in a circle, the Archbishop among them. These Indian meetings are very solemn and ceremonious, the Indians are quite good orators. After a while the Archbishop got a little impatient, and stood up and started to speak, but Johnny Scow, in his low, modulated voice, motioned him down, and said quite commandingly, but very slowly, ‘You sit down; you’ll get your turn.’ The Archbishop did as he was told.”

Johnny was a dignified Indian, solemn in his demeanor, a commanding personality; somewhat short and stout, and deliberate in his movements. It was always a pleasure to sit of an evening and talk to him; his sense of proportion, of morality, and the propriety of things was sound and sane. I enjoyed the pleasure of his company whenever I was fortunate enough to spend an hour or so with him.