

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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FIRST C.P.R. DOCK IN VANCOUVER.

The Vancouver News, Vol. 1, No. 29, 26 July 1886.

“Every effort is to be made to complete the C.P.R. Wharf and the thirty feet approach by Saturday next, which is the last day of the month.

“The engineer and his assistants are very busy straining every nerve to get the work finished before Mr. (Van) “Horne’s arrival.”

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE WILBY OF THE COMPOSING ROOM OF THE SUN NEWSPAPER, VANCOUVER, 10 OCTOBER 1934.

VANCOUVER’S FIRST CITY CHARTER.

“Yes. It is quite true that I helped to set up the type for printing the first charter of our city. I was working for Monroe Miller, job printer, in Victoria. In addition to the copies of the charter printed in the Government printing office, copies were required for private circulation, and as apparently there was no printing office in Vancouver capable of doing the work, it was done in Victoria. That must have been in 1886, or early in 1887.”

BOOM TOWNS.

“In addition to printing the charter for the new city of Vancouver, I also helped to print charters for boom towns whose boom was short; for instance, the town of Emory” (Emory’s Bar) “below Yale; that was supposed to be the western railway terminus and head of navigable water on the Fraser River. Then there was Port Haney and Port Hammond; I think we printed charters for one or both, I am not quite sure.”

THE WILBY FAMILY.

“I was born at Esquimalt in 1867. My father and Harry Edward Wilby, born in Portugal of English parents, and when about 25 years old, he, together with his prospective brother-in-law, bought a sailing barque in Portugal, engaged a sailing master, Captain Bannister, and with a cargo of general merchandise and products of Portugal” (wines, etc.) “sent by merchants there for sale on commission, and two or three passengers, set sail in October 1849 from Lisbon for California, where they arrived in 1850, nine months later. They had a rough time coming around the Horn; the ship was nearly dismasted; indeed I believe one of the top masts did come down, and sail blown to tatters.

“On arrival at San Francisco, they started off for the gold fields, struck nothing, and returned to San Francisco. The crew, being paid off, went to the mines, so the ship was used as a floating warehouse. There were a whole row of ships similarly employed; they were anchored in a portion of the bay which has since been filled in, and the site is now several blocks inland from the waterfront. It was safer to store goods in this way than in the wooden shacks along the shore where they were liable to destruction by fire.

“In 1853 my mother” (Eliza A. Searle) “and Miss Laidley, fiancées of the two partners, arrived in San Francisco; they came by way of New York and Aspinwall by steamer. The Panama railway was then completed only halfway across the isthmus, and they travelled the rest of the way to Panama over mountain roads on mule back. They were exposed to torrential rains alternatively with tropical sunshine which caused their soaked garments to steam. When they arrived at Panama City, Mother was stricken with tropical fever and nearly died. When able to travel again they proceeded by steamer to San Francisco, and on arrival the captain of the liner performed a double wedding ceremony aboard the steamer.

“After his marriage my father moved ashore and opened a commission business, and also tried sheep raising which was not a success.”

MOVE TO VICTORIA.

“Again following the gold rush, this time to B.C., he arrived at Victoria on the steamer *Otte*” (H.B. Co.), “Captain Mouat. At Victoria he engaged in different ventures, including commission sales, general store,

acting as vice-consul for Portugal, and driving an express to Esquimalt, then the port of call for the San Francisco steamers, which could not get into Victoria harbour on account of obstructions" (rocks) "which have since been removed. Later he moved to Esquimalt to live, and there I was born. I have two brothers, William and James, and sister, Mrs. M.A. Higgins, still living in Victoria. I have two sons living here in Vancouver."

THE *WORLD* NEWSPAPER.

"J.C. McLagan, the first owner and editor of the old *World* newspaper, now perpetuated in the *Sun* newspaper, was originally in Victoria where I had known him, and when I came over to Vancouver in 1895 he employed me, so that I have been now 39 years in the employ of this newspaper."

Query: Mr. Wilby. Would you explain how it was that the *World* newspaper, started in Vancouver as a large evening newspaper many years before the *Province*, permitted the latter newspaper to establish itself in 1898, and subsequently grow to such an important journal? It seem strange that a newspaper with such a good start and powerful connections as the *World* had should not have overwhelmed the field.

Mr. Wilby: "J.C. McLagan's personality carried that newspaper, and when he died, Mrs. McLagan and her brother, Fred McClure, of the family at Matsqui, who was business manager, took it over. Mr. McLagan's personal supervision and his standing made the paper, and when he died about the time of the death of Queen Victoria, that influence was lost. Even when he was dying he would have the correspondence sent to his bedside; he would allow nothing to escape him.

"Then Mr. O'Brien, who had been editorial writer for some years, continued in that capacity until L.D. Taylor, now Mayor of Vancouver, who, when he first came here, was working for the *Province* as circulation manager, bought out the McLagan interest with Victor Odlum as partner.

"Odlum was a very young man and I think the money must have come from his father, Professor Odlum, for it was young Odlum's first venture into business; he had just come back from the Boer War where he had been a private soldier in a Vancouver contingent. Later Odlum dropped out of the *World* newspaper and went up country.

"Disaster overtook the *World* when they built the towering 'World Building,' now the Bekins Building, at the southeast corner of Beatty and Pender streets, at the time supposed to be the tallest office building in the British Empire, about 1911. Why they ever built it there I cannot tell, it was a poor location; in the end the mortgages got it."

CITY HALL, POWELL STREET.

"In 1895 they were still using the old wooden City Hall on Powell Street—as a Court House and also as a water works office—I am not sure what year they discontinued to use it as a city hall, but they did [use] it for other civic offices long after they moved to the Market Hall on Westminster Avenue; still later it was used as a refuge for unemployed, December 1907. The Powell Street property was donated to the city for City Hall purposes by Dr. Powell, and when the city offices were moved to Westminster Avenue, the executors claimed it was a breach of the deed of gift."