

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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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. TOM EVANS OF EVANS AND HASTINGS, 3 JULY 1934.

MAGISTRATE JOHN BOULTBEE. THE GREAT FIRE, 1886.

“My wife was a Miss Alcock; her family kept a private hotel on Hastings Street, north side, around the corner from Carrall Street, where E.S. Knowlton now has his drug store. Her brother Jack saw the Great Fire coming on June 13, 1886, picked up a valise in which he kept his shooting material—he was fond of shooting—and dashed off down Carrall Street towards False Creek and the Royal City Mills. The valise was a little heavy, and the heat became so intense that he had to dash on to get away from it. My wife told me that Gardner Johnson and John Boulton followed running, and, seeing the grip on the ground, and being almost suffocated, lay down in its shelter with their faces close to the ground in an effort to breathe. The heat got so intense that the cartridges in the valise exploded, and the bullets struck the prostrate Magistrate Boulton in the back of the head; that accounts for the five or six bald patches in his scalp at the back of his head, which Mrs. Capt. D.C. Tuck speaks of as being allowed to amuse herself with by touching when she, as a little girl, sat on Mr. Boulton’s knee, and which she says were about the size of a ten-cent piece. My wife has often told me this story, and I believe it implicitly to be true.”

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. MAURICE O’NEILL OF 2325 ROOSEVELT AVENUE, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA, U.S.A., NOW ON A VISIT TO HIS SISTER, MRS. W. RAY NELSON, ROSECOURT APARTMENTS, 1336 WEST 11TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER, 11 AUGUST 1933.

Mr. W.R. Nelson was killed some years ago in an automobile accident on the Malahat Drive. Their only child, Miss Leona Marie Nelson, is a U.B.C. student in Vancouver.

An item in *The Province*, 10 August 1933, states, “Morris O’Neill” ... “One of the telegraph operators at the time of the big fire of 1886” ... “introduced to City Council by Ald. H.J. DeGraves.”

EARLY TELEGRAPH.

“The newspaper account is not strictly correct,” said Mr. O’Neill. “I was at New Westminster at the time of the Great Fire. Harry J. Edwards was the operator in Vancouver; he was a small man, about 140 pounds or so, but very active; he would walk very fast. You see, in those days telegraph men were combination men, part lineman, part operator; when the line was down the operator had to go and fix it; he had to keep his line open. Harry Edwards died at Trail years ago; I last heard of his sister and brother in New Westminster.”

Query: How did the line from Vancouver to Victoria run?

TELEGRAPH TRAIL TO POINT GREY.

Mr. O’Neill: “Why, by cable from Point Grey. Between Point Grey and Gastown the land line ran along a telegraph trail in the forest; the old trail was a ‘terror,’ you had to pick your way; it ran along the Spanish Banks Beach, then across Jericho, and along what is, roughly, now the Point Grey Road; just where it crossed False Creek, I don’t recall; anyway it entered Gastown, went from there to New Westminster, New Road. I was never in the old telegraph office, destroyed in the Great Fire; I went to Westminster in 1885 as a boy, and was handling the ‘Key’ at twelve years of age; I left here in 1895; so that the period I speak of was between 1885 and 1895. Only those who have followed a forest telegraph trail know of its difficult passage. The Victoria people were great telegraph patrons; they kept us busy; they seemed to do all by wire.” (See photo No. ?, Bailey Bros.)

SAM GREER, OF GREER’S BEACH (KITSILANO BEACH).

Query: Did Sam Greer ever give you any trouble? Cutting down poles, etc.?

Mr. O’Neill: “I don’t think so. He threatened to; Harry Edwards used to have his little battles with him.” (An injunction was issued by Mr. Justice Crease, afterwards quashed.) “I don’t think he actually cut any down; he threatened a good many times, but never did it.”

C.P.R. TAKES OVER TELEGRAPH LINES.

Query: What is the meaning of the notation "via Sumas" on those Great Fire telegrams between Sir John A. Macdonald and Mayor MacLean of Vancouver?

Mr. O'Neill: "Our telegrams were accepted by the Western Union Telegraph at Sumas, at the boundary; we were a government telegraph line; that was before the Postal Telegraph built their line to the international boundary. Afterwards, early in 1897, the Canadian Pacific Railway took over the government telegraph lines. New Westminster was a busy little office. There was a line down to Ladner's from New Westminster, which made delivery from Ladner's, and to that district including the salmon canneries on the river bank. I don't remember whether the line from Vancouver to Moodyville via Hastings was a cable or wire stretched over the water; I don't think there was a line to Eburne; I don't recall any."

Footnote by Mr. O'Neill, his letter, 1 May 1934, from Victoria: "Very good, Major. We shall let it go as it is. With our kindest regards, Maurice O'Neill et al."

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. G.C. HODGE, 884 BUTE STREET, VANCOUVER, 22 JANUARY 1934.

BURRARD INLET AND NEW WESTMINSTER TELEPHONE COMPANY.

"I came here on 7th April 1891. J.J. Banfield and I slept in the same bunk all the way out on the train. I came to Vancouver for the first two or three months and then went over to Westminster to take over from Geo. Pittendrigh the management of the Burrard Inlet and New Westminster Telephone Company; Mrs. Geo. Pittendrigh was one of the first girl operators—she was Hattie Fowler; she has all the old telephone books for years and years.

"The first telephone operator here" (Vancouver) "was King; he worked for Tilley in the old bookstore, and it is through him that I get my information."

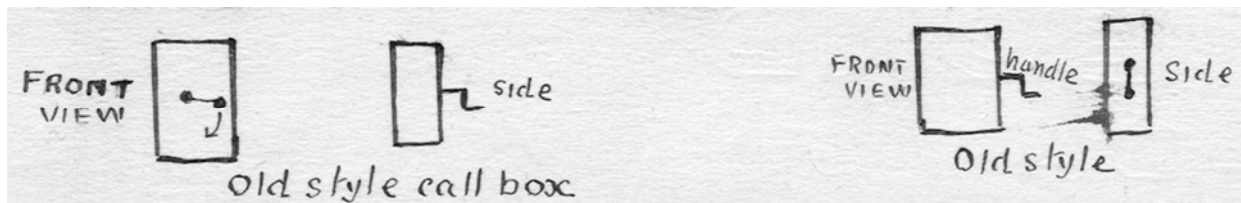
FIRST TELEPHONE SWITCHBOARD. MOODYVILLE TELEPHONES.

"You know about the so-called *first* switchboard in Vancouver they have up at the B.C. Telephone Office. King told me that was not the first switchboard in Vancouver; it is the Moodyville switchboard. There used to be a cable run across to Moodyville from the Hastings Sawmill."

J.S.M.: From the Hastings Sawmill? Not from Hastings?

Mr. Hodge: "From the Hastings Sawmill; they would have had to run the line all the way back to Hastings, then across, and down through the brush on the other side to Moodyville. That cable was afterwards taken up and used at Nelson, the first cable across the lake at Nelson.

"No, the *first* switchboard in Vancouver is not at the B.C. Telephone Co.'s office. I think you'll find the *first* switchboard in Vancouver in the middle of Burrard Inlet. The one the B.C. Telephone have was the Moodyville switchboard. The first Vancouver switchboard was dumped into the centre of the inlet, about 1900, together with a very valuable lot, for historical purposes, of old telephones, and old equipment, cleaned out of the basement of the old Lefevre Block, northwest corner of Seymour and Hastings streets (Empire Block). I was in the Upper Country at the time it was done. There were a lot of old transmitters with cork diaphragms, and old magneto bells with the handle in the front and in the centre; you know afterwards they were on the side" (see diagram) "but these were in the centre. I am almost sure that in that bunch was the old Gilliland Board, which, *I would* say, was the *first* board in Vancouver."



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