

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

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. HENRY STANLEY AVISON AT CITY ARCHIVES, VANCOUVER, 22 JULY 1933.

STANLEY PARK. PARK RANGER.

"My father was the first park keeper" (I suggested "park ranger"; he responded, "No, park keeper.") "of Stanley Park. He was a native of Mayo, Ireland—a landscape gardener—and first worked for the City of Vancouver blowing stumps on Hastings Street between Cambie and Granville streets. He arrived in Vancouver just after the Fire in 1886." (Photo shows "PARK RANGER" in letters on cap badge of uniform worn.)

"When Stanley Park was opened he took charge from the start, as park keeper, landscape gardener. We went to live in the park lodge at the entrance, on the knoll overlooking the old wooden bridge from the northern end. The lodge was afterwards ivy-covered. I was born there, in that house, February 17, 1890, and was christened Henry Stanley, after the park, Avison. Father laid out the first grounds, cut the first trails, did the first landscape gardening. Mother was actually, but Father nominally, the first zoo keeper.

"As park keeper he was nominally in charge of the zoo, which must have started, I think, with one bear; one big black bear; Mother had it chained to a stump; she had bears on chains for five years before they were put down in the old concrete bear pit in the ground; there were three bears when they were put down in the pit. I remember so well because a minister's wife poked the old bear, chained to the stump, with her umbrella, and the bear tore her umbrella and all or part of her skirt off." (See W.M. Horie, also photo of pit.) "A park commissioner wanted the bear shot, but Mother said, 'No'; she handled the bears herself; no one else would go near them. The old bear used to slip his collar, get loose, wander off, and Mother would catch him again, bring him back and tie him up; others were afraid to. At that time the animals consisted of some monkeys, some coon, the bears—eight cages in all, all wooden.

"After eleven years in charge of the park, Father left—George Eldon took his place—and joined in the rush to the Klondike; went in over the White Pass trail with a man by the name of McMillan; I think that was in the spring of 1897, maybe 1898; we followed later. We came out in 1906, went to Prince Rupert when there was only a tent there, and then to Prince George in 1912." (See *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2.) "I often wish there was something in Stanley Park to associate his name with it—there is nothing now."

HENRY AVISON.

Born Mayo, Ireland, died Prince George, 1924, aged 69. First park ranger, Stanley Park, laid out gardens at entrance, cut first trails, etc.; first zoo keeper.

By first marriage (wife's name unknown) had issue—Mrs. P. Balling, deceased; John, 1600 block Venables Street, Vancouver; Mrs. E.G. Harris; Mrs. B. Schmell, Vancouver. By second marriage to Miss Kate Gray of Edinborough, Scotland, Jessie (Mrs. Jamieson), born Medicine Hat, and Henry Stanley, of Prince George, B.C., born park lodge, entrance Stanley Park, 17 February 1890; address P.O. Box 75, Prince George; married, 1920 at Prince George [to] Margaret Peterson, died 1928; second, Jessie Viola Hornby; has issue Jessie and May. (See Genealogy form, August 1933.)

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH W.M. HORIE (BAYNES AND HORIE), 23 APRIL 1934.

STANLEY PARK ZOO. STANLEY PARK. LORD STANLEY.

"I arrived in Vancouver on the 31st day of May, 1889, and soon afterwards worked on the building of the arch at the entrance to Stanley Park built in preparation for the ceremonies when Lord Stanley arrived; the bridge had been built earlier; the arch was built after the bridge.

"The zoo at that time consisted of one bear; the bear used to get loose; they had him on a chain, and it was reported that a man named McConnell had gone after the bear with a gun and shot it. This raised quite a protest in the newspapers; people were indignant at the idea of McConnell going off with a gun after the tame bear; the kids were very fond of the bear, and there was talk about going after McConnell with a rope" (to hang him.) "After all the furor had subsided a bit, it was found the bear had not been shot at all, but later it resulted in the building of a bear pit, a deep bear pit of concrete." (See photo.) "Times were hard in those days, just as they are now, and almost every contractor in town put in a tender. Some of them had difficulty figuring the quantities because the bear pit was round. Then they got an oak tree in

Victoria, cut off the branches, so that what was left were stubs; this was put in the middle of the pit for the bears to climb up. That was the start of the zoo in Stanley Park.” (See Avison, first park ranger.)

PIONEERS’ PICNIC, NEWCASTLE ISLAND, 14 JUNE 1933.

Rev. E.D. Braden, president (whose father built on the first, if not the first house—small cottage—in the east end, after the fire), speaking in the Pavilion: “I won’t keep you long; I don’t believe you want a long ‘sermon.’ Mr. Malkin” (former Mayor Col. W.H. Malkin) “says, ‘No soul is saved after the first twenty minutes of a sermon.’”

C.P.R. CONSTRUCTION.

W.J. Bower, former premier of B.C., to Major Matthews, who had been telling him of Mr. Thos. White’s attendance the day before at the golden wedding of Mr. and Mrs. J.R. Seymour, pioneer druggist, Vancouver.

“Tom White’s a pretty old man now, must have been the oldest pioneer there. Tom White helped locate the C.P.R. with Mr. Cambie; Cambie stayed on with the C.P.R., Tom White left them. Then he located the Canadian Northern” (now Canadian National) “afterwards. D’you ever hear the story about the time Tom White was at North Bend during the construction of the Canadian Northern, and Lord Shaughnessy came along? Lord Shaughnessy says, ‘Hello, Tom, what are you doing here?’ ‘Working,’ says Tom. Shaughnessy says, ‘Yes, but what at?’ ‘Oh,’ says Tom, ‘rectifying the mistakes I made when I located the C.P.R.’”

HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, LORD BESSBOROUGH, AT THE VANCOUVER PIONEERS BANQUET, GEORGIAN ROOM, HUDSON’S BAY STORE, 26TH OR 27TH MARCH, 1934.

During the course of speech: “The secret of happiness in old age is the contemplation of one’s own work, and to see that it is good.”

“FELIX PENNE.”

(Author of “’Tis infamy to die and not be missed,” etc.)

J. Francis Bursill, founder of the “Dickens Fellowship” and Bursill Library in Grandview, was a charming old literary man who had seen many years of newspaper work in London, England, migrated to Vancouver, and about 1926 was a columnist on the *Vancouver Daily Sun* newspaper. He wore a bushy beard, usually in need of brushing, and his inattention to tonsorial detail prompted little jokes, some true, others fiction, on his personal appearance. One of these follows.

As Mr. Bursill emerges from “White Lunch” Restaurant on Granville Street, Mr. Noel Robinson, well-known journalist, passes door.

Mr. Robinson: (halts, smiles and says) “Good morning, Mr. Bursill.”

Mr. Bursill: (his voice had a rather high pitch; i.e., squeaky) “Good morning, Mr. Robinson.”

Mr. Robinson: “Been having breakfast, Mr. Bursill?”

Mr. Bursill: “Yes.”

Mr. Robinson: (whimsically, and shaking one finger at him) “And I know what you’ve had.”

Mr. Bursill: “No. I don’t think you do.”

Mr. Robinson: (still smiling) “Yes, I do.”

Mr. Bursill: “Well, what did I have now?”

Mr. Robinson: “You’ve had eggs.”