

Early Vancouver

Volume Four

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1944)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1935-1939.

Supplemental to Volumes One, Two and Three collected in 1931-1934.

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. 4 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 4. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. AND MRS. JOHN EMS, 3345 WEST 27TH AVENUE, POINT GREY, WHO VERY KINDLY CALLED TO PAY ME A VISIT AT THE CITY ARCHIVES, 27 FEBRUARY 1937.

Note: Mrs. Ems was Miss Anne Murray, youngest daughter of John Murray, Royal Engineer, and of Port Moody, and is the only one of the Murray family to “avoid” having a Port Moody street named in her honour. She was born at Sapperton on [blank], and went to live at Port Moody when she was fifteen.

Mr. Ems will be seventy-five soon; he was born 30 March 1862, and they have been married over fifty years. He was in the service of the Canadian Pacific Railway over forty years.

ARRIVAL FIRST TRAIN, 23 MAY 1887.

Mr. Ems said: “I came to Vancouver on the first transcontinental passenger train, all the way from Montréal; arrived 23rd May 1887, and went to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway four days after arrival, and stayed with them for forty years, and was pensioned on June 30th 1927.

“Talk about a reception and welcome give to grandees who came to Vancouver; why, they have ‘nothing on’ those of us who arrived on the first train into Vancouver. Vancouver gave me the grandest reception. Why, they had a fire brigade, and a band, down to meet me when I came in. Wasn’t much of a fire brigade; just a few men and a couple of hose reels, and the band was only five or six musicians, but—we *did* have a fire brigade and a band to meet us. I have often laughed over it; they could not have given the ‘Prince of Wales’ a finer reception. Peter Righter was engineer; Peter Barnhart, conductor.”

City Archivist: Well, tell me please about the first train trip down from Port Moody to Vancouver.

Mr. Ems: “Pretty slow; only a cow trail, and some of the cuts so narrow the coaches could scarcely clear the banks. We picked up the decorated engine at North Bend.”

City Archivist: Mrs. Lacey Johnson says she helped to decorate it at Yale.

Mr. Ems: “She’s wrong. There was no roundhouse at Yale then. I was back at Yale a few days after, and the roundhouse was all burned. She’s wrong.”

Note: in a letter, 19 March 1937, Mrs. Lacey Johnson replies that she has made no mistake, reiterates that she decorated the engine at Yale, and adds, “North Bend became a divisional point later in the same year, after the workshops were burned down.” J.S.M.

C.P.R. LINE PORT MOODY TO VANCOUVER.

Mr. Ems, continuing: “As I told you, Port Moody was just a cow trail, and the cuts so narrow the coaches just got by. The first work I did was the take the track off the outside, and put it on hard ground. It was on piles, and well, the idea was to ‘get the train through.’ Pretty rough track, up and down, we shifted it off the construction bridges and put it on hard ground.

“About the passengers on the train. Most of them got off at the junction, and went down to New Westminster. In the coach I was in, there were a lot of passengers going to Oregon, and they got off at the junction, and went down to Westminster.”

Proof sent to Mr. Ems, 2 March, but never returned. J.S. Matthews.

FURTHER MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. JAMES THOMAS ENGLAND, FIRST SECRETARY-MANAGER, VANCOUVER GAS CO. LTD., 13 MARCH 1936.

VANCOUVER GAS CO. LTD.

Mr. England said: “Shortly after the B.C. Electric Railway Co. started operating the Gas Works, there was a rumour that the head office that the Company intended enlarging the works, and were seeking another site in order to build a larger works. I ask[ed] Walter Thomas if this was true and he assured me that such was the case. I have spoken of Mr. True of Halifax. When he was here I was asked by him to point out possible sites suitable for a Gas Works, and I showed him Leamy and Kyle’s sawmill site at the south end of Cambie Street bridge, subsequently occupied by the Vancouver Lumber Co., Cambie and Ash streets,

and I also showed him the 'Old Smelter site,' foot of Raymur Avenue on Powell Street, part of which is now occupied by Ross and Howard. Mr. Thomas having given me the impression that he was recommending the enlargement of the works, I saw Mr. Brewer, a one-time alderman for the City and first reeve of South Vancouver, and asked him if he would give me an option to purchase the property owned by him and Mrs. McNeely of Ladner, B.C. Mr. Brewer told me that I should have to see Mrs. McNeely in reference to it, that the price would be \$200,000, and I could charge my commission above that. I went to Ladner one weekend, and visited Mrs. McNeely in the evening at her farm site. She was very kind and very hospitable. With a woman's intuition, she assured me that she did not think the deal would go through. Personally she did not favour selling, but that as her brother, Mr. Brewer, of Cedar Cottage, was willing, she consented, and I obtained an option for 30 days at the above figures. That evening it rained very heavily and I had proposed going home, but Mrs. McNeely assured me that it was too dark to travel and very kindly put me up for the night. I have a very happy recollection of the comfort of her hospitality. The following week I presented a letter offering this site to the company; I cannot recollect whether this letter was sent to Mr. Buntzen or Mr. Sperling, but at any rate, Mr. Sperling knew all about it. Nothing ever came of the transaction, and Mrs. McNeely's hunch proved to be correct."

HASTINGS, B.C. GEO. BLACK. MAXIMILIAN MICHAUD.

"Shortly afterward it was announced in the press that the Company had bought 13 lots fronting on Burrard Inlet in the Hastings Townsite area. This was the site of the old Brighton Hotel" (not exactly correct) "owned by the widow of the late George Black, the property on Powell Street. I offered the Company adjoined that now occupied by Ross and Howard; it had 600 feet frontage on Burrard Inlet, with crown granted foreshore lots running out into Burrard Inlet a distance of 600 feet, and it ran back southward to Powell Street, and the C.P.R. right of way crossed it. It had a total area of about 15 acres. Today its value is inestimable. A year or so after this I was still keeping the lighting ledger for the B.C. Electric Railway; one day I was called up on the carpet by Major Gifford, a South African war veteran, who was a director in the B.C. Electric Railway—he had had one arm shot off—he wanted to know how it came that I, who was an employee of the Company, should be offering property for sale to the Company, and he threatened me that if I didn't tell the truth he would fire me. I replied to him that if he did he might not be doing me so very much harm after all, that I was making very little of a salary and I might possibly do better elsewhere. This rather appeased his wrath, and I then told him what has been above related. He wanted to know if I had the option at that time, and I told him, 'No,' that the option was for only thirty days, and that the Company had had one chance, and wouldn't be given another by me."

MAJOR GIFFORD. MR. BUNTZEN. MR. SPERLING.

"Mr. Gifford appeared to me to question my having received an option in writing, and I told him that I had shown it to Mr. Sperling, and if he didn't believe me he was at liberty to ask Mr. Sperling about it, and that ended the interview. It is easy at this date to look back and see why the offer was not accepted. In those days I trusted Walter Thomas, and had no knowledge of the bargain entered into between Mr. Thomas and Mr. Buntzen that, 'Jimmie England was to having nothing to do with the Gas Company,' at the Hotel Butler" (Seattle) "breakfast.

"Mr. H.A. Jones, a real estate broker, had been influential in the early days of the Vancouver Street Railway in having Mr. Buntzen appointed General Manager. They were on friendly terms and I hadn't a ghost of a show in making a deal in competition under those conditions."

FIRST GAS SERVICE.

"My recollection of the first gas service is that the Leland Hotel, a large four-storey frame building on Hastings Street, was the first building lighted by gas in Vancouver. I know it was common talk among the employees that this was so. It may have been on the 24th of May, 1887; it certainly was before my time as I did not come here until July 1887. I have a distinct recollection that the Leland Hotel account was No. 11 on the register of customers, but it does not follow that it was the eleventh customer that lit up; there was some holiday or special reason for getting the Leland Hotel going, and it was common talk among the men of the special efforts put forward to get the gas sent up to that hotel."

FIRST GAS WORKS.

"The meter house, retort house, and the purifiers were all in one brick building, which was the only brick building in the early days on the Company's property, and this must have been the building for which Mr. Rand advertised for tenders for construction in the *News-Advertiser*, July 9, 1887; this building is still standing, and an addition has been made to it."

GASOMETERS.

"Dakin's Map of Vancouver, November 1889, which you have, does not show the gasometers which were just to the east of the brick building, but they most assuredly must have been there, but are not shown. The holes in the ground in which they stood are now used for tar."

As narrated to me by Mr. England.

J.S. Matthews

CITY ARCHIVIST

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. WALTER FREDERICK EVANS, 849 WEST GEORGIA STREET, VANCOUVER, 23 JUNE 1938.

(Mr. Evans, retired pioneer.) Third child, and second daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel Lacey R. Johnson, V.D., first Master Mechanic, Pacific Division, Canadian Pacific Railway, Vancouver; on 23 May 1887, "honourary" engineer at the throttle of Engine No. 374, drawing first transcontinental passenger train into Vancouver; Grand Master, A.F. & A.M. of B.C., 1895-6 (see "Fifty Years of Cascade Lodge," 1888-1938.) Mrs. Evans very graciously called at the City Archives, City Hall, 23 June 1938.

LACEY R. JOHNSON. THE GREAT FIRE, 13 JUNE 1886.

Mrs. Evans said: "As Mother and my brother, now Col. R.E. Johnson of Montréal, and two sisters, Grace and Julia, were travelling westwards on the train, a telegram reached us from Father which read in part, 'Vancouver in ashes' (13 June 1886), 'so we got off at Yale. We had closed up our home at Carlton Place, Ontario, so our furniture en route went to Vancouver. Whilst at Yale, we lived, first, in a furnished cottage belonging to Dan McDougall' (see *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3), 'later in the Hudson's Bay Company's house, also furnished.

"We remained at Yale, and then came on to Vancouver in Father's railway car, September 3rd, 1887, and lived in it for about ten days on a siding at the foot of Granville Street until our house, 455 Seymour Street" (photo No. P. Bu. 119), "west side, close to Georgia Street, and now part of the site of the Hudson's Bay store, was completed. Father had started to build before the Fire; the lumber was on the ground, but the fire destroyed the lumber; it had to be replaced.

"I recall that when we first went there, there were no buildings near; the view down the slope towards Water Street was unobstructed; then, later, the nearest building was the No. 2 Fire Hall, on the east side of Seymour, south of Georgie Street."

CLEARING FIRES. CLEARING OFF THE FOREST. CHRIST CHURCH.

"I was a child, and I recall how frightened I was at the bush and clearing fires burning all around us.

"This photo" (C.V. P. Bu. 119) "of our first house, 455 Seymour Street; Father is on the steps with my brother Ernest, and I am looking out of the window. I remember it so well. Here is the Durham Block, on Granville Street, where Christ Church held the first service—in the evening—in one of the stores on the ground floor. You know that after Christ Church was built, the sheriff was going to seize the church for debt, and Mr. H.J. Ceperley, W.J. Salsbury, H.J. Cambie, and Father, four of them, contributed one thousand dollars each to 'save it.' I know that Father mortgaged our house to get his one thousand dollars. No, it was never returned to him."