

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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KEEFER FAMILY.

I returned to Vancouver the winter of 1889 & 90. During the interval, my father and the rest of the family had moved out from Orangeville to Vancouver, and were living on Mt. Pleasant. On my arrival home there was two ft. of snow on Mt. Pleasant, and a foot or more of slush down town.

My next letter will deal with the first sewer system in Vancouver, which Hugh Keefer had the contract and on which I worked as form builder.

From the foregoing time you will be able, I hope, to place certain dates that may not be so clear to you.

GREAT FIRE, 1886.

McCormack was a mason and had a masonic funeral, all the R.R. contractors were at it as well as most of the business people of town, but its just as well they were away the only thing they might have saved would be their papers or documents etc. The old town burned plenty fast, people were burned to death running away from it.

Yours very truly,

[signed] Geo. H. Keefer

I don't know how "Carl Ave" came about or who Carl was, I may find out in Victoria someday.

[LETTER FROM GEO. H. KEEFER.]

Cowichan Bay,
Aug. 20th, 1935.

Mr. Matthews,
Archivist,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Sir:

To continue a few of my experiences in the early days of Vancouver. Allow me to state the following.

HUGH F. KEEFER. SEWER SYSTEM. SEWER PIPES.

In the winter of 1889 and 90, Hugh F. Keefer, my uncle, secured a contract to put in Vancouver's first Sewer which took in from the height of land in East Vancouver and following westward to (as far as I can remember) the height of land at or near Granville St., and taking in the territory between the harbor front and False creek. I am not sure to just the exact limits, but I know I worked here and there over most of that territory, making the forms for manholes, etc., also tressles over low ground on Water St., to carry the pipes. The pipes were terra-cotta and were about 16 inches in diameter by 3 ft. long, inside measurement, laid carefully with some sort of slicinite on the joints which were shouldered and fitted very neatly. A Mr. Mowan or Mouan was the Engineer on the job, and the ditches were dug by Italians and whites. All blasting was covered with small timbers, in the round, and chained together with log chains at each end. There were not many mishaps during the blasting; a few windows broken by concussion etc. As far as I can remember all lines lead down hill to Cambie or Abbott St., and was then carried out into the harbor, somewhere nearly opposite No. 1 fire hall on Water St. I remember trying to put in a wooden box out into the harbor to lay the outlet pipes in, and what a time I had trying to keep that box under water until the pipe was laid. All places where the pipes were crossing depressions the Engineer would have them houses in a box. This was to allow filling to keep same from freezing etc. Of course, now a days, all depressions "except one" in the surface have been filled in and some sort of solidity prevails. There was a lot of snow fell in Vancouver during this winter, and though it did not last long, it left a very wet kind of digging, and lots of water ran down the ditches especially after a big rain.

The Man-Holes were dug square with inside boxes framed to suit outlets and intakes. My job was to make the inside boxes at each hole, if the hole was 6 ft. in depth, I made 6 inside boxes as square as I could make them so that no matter which way the box might be turned, it fitted on the others. In some cases there were outside boxes made of 2" lumber where the Holes had a tendency to cave in.

The Concrete Setters cut out holes for outlets and intakes as they poured the concrete. This was a good job, labourers got \$3.00 per day, Carpenter \$4.50, and concrete men \$5.00 per.

I did not see the job finished as I left one day in July with a carload of horses for Kootenay, as my uncle had taken a bit R. Ry. contract to put a road from "Sproats Landing," now Robinson, to Nelson. Since then I have always been lost when I went to Vancouver, the place had changed so much. I knew every foot of the ground at one time, but today I am a stranger in a strange land, and feel more at home in San Francisco than Vancouver. I have been told many a time that I missed my opportunity in Vancouver; well I can't see it that way; perhaps I did, but who knows? I know lots of men who took hold of Vancouver Real Estate and who went broke paying the taxes. My experience shows me that if a smart man, with money, or a pull, might do very well in any boom town, but how many of the real old timers are well off in Vancouver today; I think they can be counted on the fingers of one hand. I am not grieving over any chances I overlooked in Vancouver or any other place for that matter. I learned long ago to let some other fellow do the grieving. My life has been a most interesting one, and I would not loose fond memories for all of Vancouver. So much for this time My good Friend.

[signed] Geo. H. Keefer

If there is anything else you would like to know, don't be afraid to ask. G.H.K.

[LETTER FROM GEO. H. KEEFER.]

Cowichan Bay,
Sept. 20, 1935.

Mr. Matthews,
Vancouver City Archivist.

Dear Sir:

Where did we leave off? I have been away on vacation for two weeks and have only come back to earth. However I had a real good time and am back home doing a little early morning fishing in C. Bay. You may think I am a pretty good letter writer, but let me tell you I am about the poorest fisherman this far North.

Everybody catches them but me. On one of my returns home to the wife, I told her I felt just like the "little boy who went to the Sunday School treat, and every one won a prize but him." Which proves to me that "Man and Woman are only children grown up," as the consoling Mother gave me, went a long way to making me feel better.

We have any quantity of fine fish Spring and Co-hoes in the Bay at present and a lot of fine catches have been made, but not by me. I did land a couple of good springs 15 and 20 lbs, and a few smaller ones. I thoroughly enjoy the early morning experience. We have as many as 50 boats out some morning and it is music to hear the reels singing. I think the largest salmon so far this year (caught in the Bay) was 45 lbs. One of these boys gives one a thrill when well hooked and one feels as though they need A-1 tackle.

Well, I think you suggested something in your last letter, which had in some manner been mislaid, however drop me a line I am always most pleased to hear from you.

I am hoping to be over in Vancouver next year. I suppose they will be having a 50 year anniversary of the Great Fire? I want to meet you in person. I realize we have met in spirit, and there is a whole lot of things we will have to talk about that I do not care to put down in writing.