

Early Vancouver

Volume Four

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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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[LETTER FROM GEO. H. KEEFER.]

Cowichan Bay, B.C.
July 29, 1935.

Dear Mr. Matthews:

Your letter of July 7th recd. O.K. and pardon my delay in answering as I have been working away from home.

FIRST MAP OF VANCOUVER. H.B. SMITH. MAYOR MACLEAN.

June 13th does seem to loom up very conspicuously in events pertaining to Vancouver. June 13th, 1936 will be the 50th Anniversary of the Great Fire, and I hope to be there to greet the remaining old timers who hold out that long and who were at that fire. H.B. Smith was assistant Engineer to Geo. A. Keefer, and was with us on the Survey of the Capilano Waterworks, the winter of 85 and 86. I quite well remember him working on the Map you mention. That map was made in George A. Keefer's office in Victoria the winter of 85 and 86. You will notice a lot of streets were named after some old Victorians and other Celebrities, such as Powell, Prior, Oppenheimer, Carrall, Cambie, Abbott, etc. etc., not forgetting Keefer. That map was soon outgrown by Vancouver and then Hamilton's surveyors took in more territory. Mayor McLean, the city's first mayor, accepted Smith's map as official of Vancouver as a starter.

KITSILANO INDIAN RESERVE. SAM GREER.

One thing that occurred during those hectic days and while I was clearing the right-of-way; one branch ran to the present wharf while the other ran to Kitsilano Indian Reserve. While clearing on the reserve, we encountered Mr. Sam Greer, who promptly stopped us at his property line. He claimed to have bought the reserve or part of it from the Indian Chief, and forbade all trespassing on his domain. Needless to say we quit right at his line, later on some C.P.R. officials, Mr. Cambie, Mr. McL. Brown and a few others went down to interview Mr. Greer; moral persuasion failed and they took his shack by storm; but not before Sam shot a hole big enough for the house cat to go through the door, with a shot-gun. I don't know whether it paid Sam or not, but I heard the Company had to buy him off after some trouble at Ottawa.

FIRST RAILWAY ENGINE ARRIVES VANCOUVER.

The first Engine came into Vancouver laying the steel some time during the winter of 1886 and 1887, later on came the first passenger trains. Some excursions, were ran via Steamer Yosemite to meet and see the first Passenger trains over the C.P.R.; Captain John Irvine, officiating.

PAT CAREY. SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD.

Late[r] on Sir John A. McDonald and Lady McDonald came over the line on a special. Lady McDonald rode on the cowcatcher through some of the most scenic parts of the mts. As Sir John left by boat from Hastings Mills Whf. for Victoria one old timer, Pat Cary, held out his hand to shake with Sir Jno.; the boat was just a little too far out for Sir Jno. who smiled and said, "I'll take your word for it, Pat," much to the amusement of the large crowd gathered to see Sir John and Lady off.

FIRST SEWERS, CITY OF VANCOUVER.

In the spring of 1887, I left Vancouver for Seattle to clear Right-of-way on the Seattle Lake Shore and Eastern R.R. just starting, so all these afore mentioned events took place between the dates mentioned, or during my so-journ in Vancouver. I returned to Vancouver the winter of 1889 and 1890 and helped put in the first sewer system in Vancouver. H.F. Keefer having the contract. I was building concrete forms for the Man-holes, and in June 1890 I took a car-load of horses from Vancouver to Nelson for H.F. Keefer who built the road from Robinson to Nelson.

WESTMINSTER ROAD. GREAT FIRE. DOUGLAS ROAD.

The day Vancouver burned was Sunday. There was one of our sub contractors (by name McCormack) killed, and was being buried by the Masons at New Westminster, and consequently all or most all of the prominent business people were over at New Westminster when the fire was at its worst. In those days the road was a one way traffic bush road, built by Jno. McDougall with tall timbers on both sides. I was at English Bay when the fire started and only got back to town (when the place was licked up) in the evening. The scene was awful from my point of view, English Bay. Just one mass of rolling cloud half a mile wide and a mile high of black smoke like as though it was half pitch.

L.A. HAMILTON.

I did not know the Stewart you mention unless he was of the firm of Foley Welsh & Stewart. I knew L.A. Hamilton well. Hamilton gave H.F. Keefer the contract to slash the Brighthouse Estate, which I and McDougall did. I have one eye-witness to the Great Fire my brother John Keefer of Rosedale, B.C., who was with me on that date.

[signed] Geo. H. Keefer

[LETTER FROM GEO. H. KEEFER.]

Cowichan Bay,
Aug. 14, 1935.

Dear Mr. Matthews:

In reading over your letters I see where in several places you have mentioned instances and dates in error somewhat. For instance one letter mentions Quote—"The note you that you finished the Right-of-way, June 12th, 1885 is wrong should be June 12th, 1886."

I am in this letter going to give you a short history of myself which may clear up a lot of things, and which I know to be rather misty from the numerous writings you may have on hand, and probably in which the dates do not coincide.

KEEFER FAMILY.

I was born 1865 and raised in Ontario, County of Dufferin. Am the eldest of a family of eight. Six boys and two girls, everyone of them are living in or around today. On my 20th birthday, June 23rd 1885, I was given a farewell party at my home, at Bowling Green, Ont., prior to my leaving for Victoria, B.C.

I landed in Victoria July 6th 1885 after a very pleasant trip across the continent via Northern Pacific. The C.P.R. was under construction at that time through the mountains, and I therefore had to come N.P. to Tacoma, thence by boat to Victoria.

JOHN MCDOUGALL.

A few days after my arrival in Victoria, Hugh F. Keefer arrived in Victoria from C.P.R. construction with an outfit of plan men and horses; to commence operations on the E. & N. Ry., commonly known as the Island Ry. Hugh had secured a three mile contract along Shawnigan Lake, and McDougall and I took the contract of clearing the right-of-way, finishing up the job sometime in November of that year. I was then considered a pretty strong man and a first class axe-man. I had to be strong for I had fought my way through a bunch of tough lads at Orangeville High School, the previous two years.

FIRST MAP OF VANCOUVER.

After completing our work on the Island Ry. I came to Victoria to look around and prepare for Xmas. I used to spend considerable time at Geo. A. Keefers office, where H.B. Smith was at work on that map you have of Vancouver. I used to run errands for the office, bring the mail, post letters, etc., etc. All the talk of the Vancouver extension was going on at that time, and during the winter Hugh Keefer went to Ottawa and secured the contract for same.