

Early Vancouver

Volume Four

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

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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Contact Information

City of Vancouver Archives
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9
604.736.8561
archives@vancouver.ca
vancouver.ca/archives



[LETTER TO EDITOR OF SUNDAY PROVINCE FROM GEORGE H. KEEFER.]

756 Cloverdale Avenue
Victoria, B.C.
Mar. 22nd, 1932.

Editor Sunday Province:

I am rather interested in your call on the old timers I can't recall the exact date of arrival of Granville but I well remember the party of surveyors who left Victoria one evening on the old steamer Maud which took all night to plough her way to the Hasting's Mill wharf.

CAPILANO WATERWORKS.

The party consisted of Geo. A. Keefer, chief, H.B. Smith, assistant engineer, Fred Bodwell, Fred Little, chainman, and myself, picket man. We took up quarters at the Sunny Side Hotel with the late Harry Hemlow as proprietor, Tom Jackman, bartender and good old Joe Fortes a hotel runner, shoe shine and man of all trades. In those days when it became known we were surveying for waterworks to be brought across the Inlet, we were thought to be a little queer by some of the old timers of Gastown. They could not see how we could bring water across that foaming tide. However, we operated from the Sunny Side Hotel going across the bay each morning and back in the evening taking our lunch put up in great style by Mrs. Hemlow and her sister.

Harry and Ben Chase were running the Dayton Hotel just across the street from the Sunny Side. Bill Blair ran the Terminus Saloon up Water St. a little. It rained nearly every day so that we hardly ever came home with a dry shirt.

After the survey was completed we returned to Victoria on the old Princess Louise from New Westminster to Victoria. We had to drive over by stage, an old democrat doing the service. Kingsway in those days was a narrow winding dark road through tall timbers and full of muddy pitch holes. The old plugs could hardly make Mount. Pleasant hill and we were on the look out for a hold up. Everybody in the party were jubilant and we sang most of the way to help keep the holdup men off.

C.P.R. EXTENSION TO GRANVILLE.

My real experience of Vancouver came later when in March 1886 I commenced clearing the Right of Way of the C.P.R. Ry. from Port Moody to English Bay when I accoutered Mr. Sam Greer at his property line Kitsolana. I had 85 Stikene Indians and about 50 white men on the Right of Way and completed the job on June 12th moved a big scow with my camp outfit down to the Sunny Side Wharf on float and tied up. The 15th was pay day on the Ry. so I went to Hugh Keefers office who was the head contractor drew some money and gave each \$5.00 in advance. These men, next day when the fire took place ran down to my scow turned it loose and were blown down to Hasting's Mill saving all my outfit and provisions.

THE GREAT FIRE.

The day after the fire the idea struck me to put up my tents and feed the people. So I got my men together and putting up two long tents with floor, tables and bench opening up as the R.R. dining rooms. I sold first class meals to all commoners at 25¢ and took, in \$75.00 at a meal for some time. Many old timers will remember a big banner on canvas R.R. dining rooms. Well, business howled for about 6 weeks by which time new buildings began to open up and R.R. dining rooms went on the bum.

“C.P.R. HOTEL.”

McPherson put up a big barn of a place opposite Pat Cary's on Hastings Street. I remember the sign read “Raised from the ashes in three days.” The day after the fire, I saw a burned out hotel keeper selling whiskey from a bottle on his hip pocket and a glass in his hand, his counter being a sack of potatoes. The night of the fire, June 13th, I slept on the ground near

Hugh Keefer's safe which lay upside down in the ruins, and which was supposed to hold the pay for the railroad gangs ready for the 15th payday.

FIRST CITY COUNCIL. POLICE STATION IN TENT.

I knew most of the old timers and helped to elect Mayor MacLean, Dr. McGuigan, and Harry Hemlow, and well remember the old maple tree, and the first council meeting after the fire. There was a tent just behind that famous picture which was the city lock-up and when that picture was taken there were a few sore heads with leg irons on them laying in that tent.

GREAT FIRE, LOSS OF LIFE.

Pat Gannon kept butcher shop next door to the R.R. Dining Rooms; he was my butcher and banker, and a fine old fellow. The only building escaping the fire as I can remember was "Costello's" hotel, half built. I can't quite recall the name at present. The fire killed about fourteen people as far as I can remember. There was a masonic funeral that day and most of the prominent people had driven to New Westminster as we had no graveyard in Vancouver at that time. McCormack, a sub-contractor on the ry had been killed blasting stumps, and they buried him in New Westminster. Tom Sawyers [*sic. Cyrs*] kept the Granville Hotel. Poor Tom was under the impression that he was some relation to the old prize fighter who fought Heenan, hence his many street fights of which old timers well remember. He made one big mistake one day when he undertook to lick Alf Banham the butcher, for Alf just backed him across the street, landing a good openhanded slap on Tom's ears with every slip.

LIQUOR WAREHOUSE.

Many old timers will also remember Fred Burrows' fighting bulldog. Fred was supposed to keep a wholesale liquor house, but most of the time was spent keeping out of jail over his dog; his dog was something like Tom Cyrs, thought he could lick anything on earth.

I look back with pleasure on those old days for I seem to see only the comic side; they seem to stick out above the more serious ones.

Now, Mr. Editor, if you care to publish my letter of old times in Vancouver you may do so but please connect it up suitably for print, as it is not written with that idea in view; just talk on old times by an old timer.

Yours very truly,

George H. Keefer.

[LETTER FROM GEO. H. KEEFER.]

Victoria, B.C.,
756 Cloverdale Ave.,
Nov. 6th, 1933.

Mr. Matthews,
Vancouver City Archivist.

Dear Sir:

CAMPBELL AVENUE. J.W. MCFARLAND. GEO. A. KEEFER. CAPILANO WATERWORKS.

Your request of Oct. 27th just to hand, having been returned from Taghum. 1st question I do not know who Carl, Hawks were but Campbell most probably was after the pioneer Druggist of Victoria now in the Campbell Blk. Cor. Douglas and Fort Streets. Now Mr. Joe W. McFarland of Vancouver might give you the desired information as he was bookkeeper and paymaster in early construction days for Hugh F. Keefer, contractor and who was my uncle.

Geo. A. Keefer was Locating Engineer for the C.P.R. through the mountains under Major Rodgers. Keefers station on the main line was his headquarters and hence took the name. Geo. A. was the promoter and Surveyor of Capilano Waterworks. I worked for him on that Survey. He