

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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**VAN HORNE RETURNS TO EASTERN CANADA OVER C.P.R. LINES UNDER CONSTRUCTION,
AUGUST 1884.**

Copy of letter, ex-Alderman L.A. Hamilton, C.P.R. Land Commissioner, Vancouver, and now, 1936, the sole survivor of the first City Council of Vancouver.

Lorne Park, Ont.,
14th June, 1936.

Dear Major Matthews:

Yesterday the anniversary of the Great Fire at Vancouver brought the harrowing scene very much to my mind. The Toronto paper, "The Mail," "The Telegram," "The Star" all asked for personal interviews, the "Mail and Empire" going so far as to send a special reporter and photographer to interview and photograph. IN these hurried interviews there are always some minor mistakes; that goes as a matter of course. I am sending some of these which I clipped yesterday from the press.

In a former letter you asked me for the date of Van Horne's arrival in Victoria; the date is 4th August 1885; you know of course that he came over to Vancouver, and went overland on the line of the C.P.R., then under construction. Mr. Beatty and myself arriving late in January 1886. *[Note by JSM: Obviously an oversight in date, for he has dated his seven paintings of Burrard Inlet scenes from 1883 to 1885.]*

I cannot say definitely whether any of the steamers went up to Port Moody after it was definitely settled that Vancouver was the terminus.

Mrs. Hamilton asks me to thank you for your interesting letter of the 17th May.

My sister, Mrs. Leask, was with me on the 13th so we had long talks over the big fire, and the second threat when she and my daughter with many others were transported by boat to Moodyville. My house at the corner of Granville and Hastings was in process of construction; we saved it with great difficulty.

I am sorry to say my doctor has laid a heavy embargo on me. I must refrain from work; and rest, avoiding undue excitement, etc. etc. With this before me the chances of my getting to Vancouver look very slim.

Sincerely yours,

[signed] L.A. Hamilton.

(See Photo P. Str. 17, N. Str. 5.)

[LETTERS FROM L.A. HAMILTON.]

Lorne Park, Ont.,
14th July 1936.

Dear Major Matthews:

We have been labouring under the hottest spell of weather for a week, the hottest I have ever experienced, the thermometer rising to 106 degrees. I have in my time spent many weeks in deserts of Egypt; but they were cool in comparison with the ones we have lately (enjoyed?) This must be my reason for not replying to your letter of the 24th ult.

I have not seen the new City Seal so cannot say whether I think it superior to the one I designed many years ago. I have a very distinct recollection about framing the first one. The matter came up at one of our council meetings, whether that was before or after the "Fire" I cannot say, and as I was the only draughtsman or artist in this council, the lot fell to me to do this work. This was the time when the C.P.R. had reached the coast, and when the first ships had

arrived. Our industry at that time was lumbering and fishing (Spratt's Cannery was then in existence). These conditions relating to land and water showed that our future prosperity depended on them. So I drafted the sketch and gave as the Motto "By Sea and Land We Prosper." The first draft I made expressed it in Latin "Per Mare Per Terra" etc., etc. I submitted both at the next meeting of council with the result as I expected, the English carried. I think it was in the mind of some of the aldermen that they did not think, the "Mare" (Mayor) should be put in alone without the aldermen being coupled. So as I did not know the Latin for "aldermen" I had to stick to the plain English. Who engraved the crest I cannot say; the work would most likely be done in Victoria. It would be rather interesting to find my old drawing. Some of our early aldermen had not seen a great deal of the world. I call to mind when we were consider[ing] a proposal to have the City Hall lighted by electricity. The company soliciting the business, installed a 16 candle power light. Alderman Humphreys, much opposed to any new fangled notions, was prepared to squash the proposal. When the light was turned on, much to my enjoyment, Alderman Humphreys produced from under the table, where he was sitting, a common tallow candle, and striding forward to the centre electric light, struck a match on his pants, lit the candle, and then proudly holding it up to the electric lamp, said, "Mr. Mayor, they call this thing that they want to plant on us 16 candle power; I call it a swindle. I don't see any improvement in it over this common single candle." (Great applause with a certain section.) However, in spite of this demonstration we went ahead and made the contract.

With the first train going east from Vancouver to Port Moody, I got the Co. to give us an engine and coach to take the Council to Port Moody and back. I sat beside two of the aldermen who had never been passengers on a railway before. One of them, Alderman Mannion, who had always been in opposition to the things the C.P.R. needed in Vancouver, discussing matters appertaining to such things as if all his life had been given up to learn all the things about railways and their requirements. These two men, when the conductor called "all aboard," grabbed the side of the seat and held on for dear life lest they should be thrown down, (very amusing). Without wishing to blow my own horn, I often wonder how the Council could have managed, as I had the qualification, a long experience as a surveyor, civil engineer, road construction, architect, assessor, qualified accountant, etc., etc., and with the vision as to the future of the city. It would be a long story to tell you of the fight I had in getting approval of my plan for the future street grades; for the plan of separate sewers made by Mr. Mohun, C.E. consulting with me. These plans, before proceeding to build, were submitted to Mr. Waring, the greatest authority in the United States. I think Vancouver is unique in Canada in having the sewers placed on the lanes instead of on the street.

Sincerely yours,

L.A. Hamilton

P.S. The C.P.R. were good enough to send a special messenger all the way out to Lorne Park offering myself, and Mrs. Leask, free transportation out to Vancouver and return. I am sorry I could not give the delegate much encouragement. My sister is now, or will shortly be, 88. I will shortly be 84, and neither of us are just well enough to undertake the journey, my sister is practically blind; can see to read a little with a large magnifying glass. I am not so bad in that way, but am getting deafer day by day, and my visit with the doctor the other day is not encouraging. His report is rest, rest, and more rest. It is one of the disappointments of my life that I cannot undertake the visit. I had been looking forward to it. If you have kept any of my early letters, I think you will find that about three years ago I suggested the Jubilee which Vancouver is now celebrating. L.A.H.

P.S. I have nothing published of the trouble we had over the "deportation of the Chinese" from Vancouver, and the withdrawing of the powers of local Government which Vancouver held under its charter. Can you give me the date when the parliament in session at Victoria withdrew the powers we possessed, and sent the next day an officer to administrate the affairs of our city.

Note by J.S.M.: Among the other queer stories of the introduction of electric light is the old one that "it needed a candle to find the electric light."

J.S. Matthews, 21 July 1936.

Kissimmee, Fla.
10 Dec., 1936.

Major J.S. Matthews,
City Archivist,
Vancouver.

My dear Major Matthews:

Thanks for your interesting letter of the 28th instant. Thanks to you I received a telegram from the City Clerk re the opening of the new City Hall and in reply thereto sent the following message. "As the sole surviving member of the first City Council I send my heartiest congratulations on the opening of the new City Hall. From the small wooden building in which the first Council met to a million dollar edifice seems a fitting climax to Vancouver's Golden Jubilee." I hope the message arrived in time for the celebration. I would be glad to receive a copy of your Vancouver paper giving an account of what took place.

I am enclosing an article from the Toronto Daily Telegram giving an account of my sister's 88th birthday, as she was one of the earliest settlers of Vancouver and wife of the first City Auditor. Some of her friends, if living, would like to see this account of the celebration of her 88th birthday if an extract was printed in one of your newspapers. If I had been able to go last year to the Jubilee she would have gone with me, you see she has more spirit than I have. I feel much more able to make a trip to Vancouver this year than I did last. I never expected to return to Florida, but here I am and able to play with my brother, Bishop Hamilton, 9 holes of golf daily. I am sorry that the new Municipal Building has been placed so far away from the centre of the City, my choice for a site would have been on the ridge of the town East of the C.P.R. Hotel and about the spot that you give your preference for. I suppose nothing much will be done next summer to mark the opening of the line of Railway from Port Moody to Vancouver by the arrival of the first train; as far as Vancouver was concerned this was of more importance than the arrival of the first train at Port Moody. I doubt if we had a weaker man than Van Horne was, whether the abandoning of Port Moody as the terminus would have been so satisfactorily settled as it was. I have been laid by recently by reason of an operation for my hand which necessitated my retiring for a time from active work, I am glad to say the operation has been most successful.

Wish you a very happy Christmas,

I am sincerely yours,

L.A. Hamilton

Lorne Park,
17th May 1937.

Major Matthews,
Archivist,
Vancouver.

Dear Major Matthews:

In recognition of Vancouver's great day the 23rd marking the arrival of the first through train of the Canadian Pacific Railway at Vancouver. I am sending you two of my sketches showing the portal of Burrard Inlet and the entrance to the City of Vancouver.

The first shows the passing of the steamer "Beaver" through the Narrows. You, of course, know that she was the first vessel to sail on the Pacific Ocean under steam. I sat on the shore a short distance below the hill 50 years ago. When I made my first visit to the same sport after

returning from Winnipeg I found the “Beaver” wrecked on the very spot from which I had made the sketch.

If there had been an archivist in Vancouver at the time I feel sure he would have saved the wreck from the hands of vandals and had it placed in the city park where it would be an object of supreme interest. This brings to my mind the action taken by the authorities of the County of Simcoe in Ontario over the resurrection of the Gun Boat “Nancy” that was sunk by the British sailors during the war, I think of 1812, in the Nottawasaga River, to save her from falling into the hands of the American seamen. After remaining in the water all these long years the authorities had the hull raised, placed in the park beside the river so there she rests today an object of great interest to Canadian and American visitors.

The second sketch showing the rocky point in the foreground shows Captain Vancouver’s entrance into Burrard Inlet, during the time he was employed in making surveys and soundings of the coast line north of the Columbia River 1791-1795. You will see that the date 13th June is very near the same day of the month that Vancouver celebrates the arrival of the first train viz 23rd May. This is the way the Historian puts it:

“At 5 in the morning of the 13th June we again directed our course to the Eastern Shore and landed about noon on above mentioned low bluff point. This was as suspected the South point of a very extensive sound with a small arm leading to the eastward, the space which seemed to be its main direction and appeared very extensive took a Northerly course.

“The observed latitude here was 49 degrees 19’ Longitude 237 degrees 6’ making this point, which, in compliment to my friend Capt. George Grey, of the navy, was called (Point Grey) seven leagues from Point Robert’s. The intermediate space is occupied by very low land apparently a swampy flat that retires several miles before the country rises to meet the rugged mountains which we found still continuing in a direction nearly along the coast. Sailing Northwards Vancouver came upon a narrow opening not more than a cables length in width up which he sailed returning the next day.”

(Note here commences the origin of my sketch.)

“As his yawl accompanied by the launch returned sailing westwards towards the narrow opening the land upon the southern shore presented an unknown line, of standing timber silent and unscrutable; while to the North the hump of a mountain raised itself against the skyline. The shores of this channel, which after Sir Harry Burrard of the Navy I have distinguished by the name of ‘Burrard’s Channel,’ may be considered, on the southern side of a moderate height, and though rocky well covered with trees of large growth, principally of the pine tribe. Vancouver and his companions were the first white men to look upon that place—the expedition was but one of many like it, a few days work in a five years job. Long since, the forest that Vancouver saw on the southern shore has vanished, and where it stood tower up the sky-scrapers of the metropolis named after him, while through the narrow channel (no more than a cables length in width) come and go great ships carrying away the grain crops of the Canadian Prairies and bringing produce in from half the world.”

(So much for the sketches.)

Will you ask the Mayor to convey to the people of Vancouver, the congratulations from an old alderman who was present with the Mayor to welcome the first train to Vancouver 50 years ago, on the proud position the city holds in Canada and my wish that she may continue to grow and prosper that at the end of the next 50 years Vancouver may hold the position of the largest and most important city in Canada. Nothing would have given one more pleasure than to be with you on the 23rd to rejoice with you over the prosperity that has come to the city that I was privileged to take an important part in laying its foundation.

Your letter which I received today re Major General Stewart. If this is my old friend Jack Stewart, I welcome the news as I have been living under the misapprehension that he died last year.

I have to thank you also for a copy of the article from the "News-Advertiser" on the arrival of the first train at Vancouver. I have turned it over to my friend Fred Williams, a special writer for the "Globe Mail" to make such use of it in its column as he desires.

Sincerely yours,

L.A. Hamilton

P.S. You will I know be pleased to learn that approaching my 85th year I am in much better condition than I was a year ago, and still have plenty of work in me much to my enjoyment of it.

L.A.H.

Lorne Park, Ont.,
16th Sept. 1939.

My dear Major:

I expect to spend my birthday, the 20th inst., at Lorne Park in a quiet way. I was invited by the Alumni Association of our college in Toronto to their sessions, and intended having lunch with them on my natal day, 87th, but the affair has been cancelled for various reasons.

I have not been in Toronto since I was taken down with illness, except for a ten minute service in Wycliffe College at its private chapel, just before the great public service at St. Paul's preceding the burial of a very dear old friend and principal of the college, R.B. McElheran. He was one of the scholars in my Sunday afternoon class at Trinity Church, Winnipeg; unknown to him I had built his first church St. Mathews, in Winnipeg, and I have sat for years with him as a member of the College Council. We have a difficult task before us in finding a successor. So far as we know at present the man to take his place will probably come from Vancouver.

A very distinguished doctor made an examination of me yesterday and today, and he finds a marked improvement in my condition. I am able to get about now without a walking stick, but am watched wherever I go as I am liable to take a tumble.

My sister, Mrs. Leask, is a marvel. She is looking forward to her 91st birthday on the 29th November. She walks about alone in Collingwood without a helper. My eye sight is better than hers, but my hearing is not so good. I would like to have seen the C.P.R. Exhibition, especially the float.

I don't suppose in history that a City Hall was built as rapidly as the one in the tent, erected, in five minutes, the morning after "The Fire." Did you know that a magistrate's court sat there with Mayor MacLean presiding. We had a lot of men of a very tough character living at that time. These were tried and sentenced, but having no gaol we shackled the prisoners to a couple of telegraph poles, and there they remained, day and night, for the short term they were sentenced to. I like to contrast this in my mind with your present City Hall.

You will notice from my writing that my hand is not as steady as it was, and I find a difficulty in spelling, since the crash I had that evidently affected my brain. My memory of past events is more or less a blank.

Yours sincerely,

L.A. Hamilton