

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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CLEARING FOREST OFF WEST END, 1886. SUNNYSIDE HOTEL. JOE FORTES. GREAT FIRE, 1886.

I would be lost in Vancouver today! I might as well be in a foreign country, only that, I might be able to hear my own language spoken. I slash the whole of the West End of Vancouver from Burrard St. west to Stanley Park and from Coal harbor to False creek. *[Of doubtful accuracy. J.S.M.]* It was fire from this slashing that the great fire of 1886, June 13th started or, at least got its impetus. My headqtrs. at that date was the Sunnyside Hotel, Mr. Harry Hemlow, Prop. Tom Jackman, Barkeeper and old Black Joe Fortes, porter. We were in those days like one big family. Well on the afternoon afore mentioned we all lost our happy homes. I don't know where the rest of them slept that night, but I slept on the side of Water St. near a pair of big safes that lay in the charred ruins of H.F. Keefer's office. I expect to be over in Vancouver next year 1936 for the 50th ann. of the great fire and hope to meet all the old timers that may be left who were there on that memorable day. Let me know if you will have photo.

Yours truly,

[signed] Geo. H. Keefer.

EXCERPT FROM LETTER RECEIVED FROM GEO. H. KEEFER (NOT GEO. A. KEEFER), 4 JUNE 1935, COWICHAN STATION.

C.P.R. CONSTRUCTION.

"I am keeping fit, and feel as well as in the days when I cleared the right-of-way for the C.P.R. into Vancouver. I had about eighty five Stickine Indians on the job, and some of them were quite smart and intelligent; all of them good workers; good with axe and handspike."

J.S. Matthews.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH JOHN NEAVE, 1743 EAST EIGHTH AVENUE, 6 JUNE 1938.

He worked on construction of Shaughnessy Heights in 1911 and 1912.

SHAUGHNESSY CLEARING. QUILCHENA GOLF COURSE.

Mr. Neave said: "The first construction camp, in 1910, was cut out of the forest on Granville Street; there were tents right in the forest; then they moved it because too many houses began to come near. They moved it down to Bodwell Road near the B.C. Electric Railway interurban track, where the Quilchena Golf Course is now, in the hollow near the curve of the railway; I was there when we moved, and we cut the camp site out of the forest."

WILD ANIMALS. RACCOONS.

"One day when we were clearing, we were digging stumps, blasting them, and there was one which was peculiar; it had a natural groove in it. One of the men put his hand, or arm, right down the groove, and pulled out two young coons. I kept them, put them in my pocket, and, after lunch, phoned the parks board office to know how to feed them; what to feed them on. I had a little trouble explaining that the coons were animals, not men, negroes; the parks board man thought we were crazy, I guess, and wanted information what to feed 'coons' (negroes) on. Finally he 'caught on,' and said, 'Oh, feed them the same as the other kind of coons.'

KING GEORGE V. SHAUGHNESSY HEIGHTS.

"The night of the coronation of King George the Fifth, we had five great big bonfires, huge piles of roots and stumps and logs piled with a tall gin pole and donkey engines, and set them afire; five big piles; right where Gen. McRae lives at 'Hycroft' now, and Blake Wilson, on Tecumseh Avenue, on the brow of the hill; you could see them all over Vancouver." (22 June 1911.)

Note by JSM: These bonfires lighted up the whole brow of the hill, and from downtown Vancouver, made a spectacular sight.