

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



It's historic.

Inspired by "She Never Saw the Sea" (very sorrowful), *Province*, 29 May 1937, Ronald Kenvyn in "Over the Foreyard."

W.A. Grafton, conversation, 20 May 1937, says "Holy Joe" built *Holy Terror* at Kew Beach.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH THE MISSES MARY S. AND ETHEL LOUISE HOMER, OF 114 PARK ROW, NEW WESTMINSTER, 7 JULY 1937.

Daughters of the late J.A.R. Homer, Esq., M.P., distinguished pioneer statesman, and in whose honour Homer Street, Vancouver, has been named.

J.A.R. HOMER. HOMER STREET.

Miss Mary Homer said: (whilst Miss Ethel listened) "Father was born in Barrington, Nova Scotia, I presume about 1827, for he was 59 when he died in 1886. His family were United Empire Loyalists; that fact is recorded in a printed book, a family history, in my possession, and I have been told so many times by my mother. The book is still in my possession, mostly personal family matters rather than state affairs.

"The Homer family apparently consisted of two brothers in Massachusetts before the War of Independence; they were East Indian merchants and ship owners; commercial people; two brothers, one of which remained in the United States, and the other migrated with the United Empire Loyalists to Nova Scotia. They were originally from Etingshall, a manor house in Staffordshire; that was where the original Capt. John Homer came from. Etingshall was probably older than the time of Elizabeth; it was taken down in 1868. My father's uncle, and also his cousin, were members of the Nova Scotia parliament; his grandfather was Joseph Homer, J.P., Collector of Customs.

"My father" (the late J.A.R. Homer) "went to England from Nova Scotia; then he went to California in the mines, and then, before he married, he went to B.C. in 1859; then back to Barrington, Nova Scotia, where he married my mother, Miss Sophia Wilson, in 1859 or 1860" (Church of England.) "Mother's father was a ship owner. The day Father and Mother were married they started for B.C. via Panama; they lived in Victoria for a few months, and then settled in New Westminister."

LUMBER FOR AUSTRALIA.

"I am not sure, but I think he had the first lumber mill in New Westminister. He sent the first ship load of lumber to Australia; he wanted to introduce Canadian lumber into Australia; it was the first cargo that ever left for Australia. It was not a successful business speculation, and he lost a lot of money over it.

"He was a member of the first legislature of B.C. at the time when the capital was at New Westminister; this is a photo of him standing at the top of the steps on the legislative building; he is the third from the top.

"Father had eleven children; only four are left; my sister, Ethel Louise, and my sister Mrs. R. Eden Walker" (Vancouver) "and my brother Charles William of Victoria, and myself.

"Father was a great friend of Sir John A. Macdonald; you see what Sir John wrote my mother when Father died in 1886. Here is another letter signed 'Fred Seymour'; it is dated December 23rd. Governor Seymour sent her a Christmas box at Christmas; you see it is dated December 23rd, that is, 1868.

"Father owned a lot of land on Front Street, New Westminister; his mother left him some money, too, a small fortune.

"You see, Westminister was to have been the capital, and he figured much on that, and then they moved the capital away to Victoria, and that was ill for his fortune. He built the first hardwood finished house in New Westminister—California redwood—it is standing yet.

"While the capital was at New Westminister he was high sheriff; there are a lot of papers in Victoria about that, reports that he signed, etc., etc., but the change of capital and the Australian misfortune pretty nearly ruined him, and for a while he lived in Victoria, and three years in San Francisco before returning to B.C., then back to New Westminister, and entered the commission business. He lost two fortunes; the fates

seemed against him, and then, just when the railway was coming" (C.P.R.), "just when he was about to reap the benefits of his foresight, he died, in 1886."

J.S. Matthews

The above (revised copy) was submitted to Miss Mary Homer, 13 July for approval, and returned corrected as shown on the original memo. Miss Homer adds: "I have made a few corrections in the account. I am sending you a short account of the English ancestors" (as follows.)

HOMER FAMILY.

The first of the surname on record is Thomas de Homere, Lord of the Manor of Homere, Somerset, England to whom lands in the neighboring county of Dorset were granted in 1338 by Lord Maltravers. Later on in the same century, Thomas De Homere left his native county, and settled in the county of Stafford where he or one of his descendants built the house of Ettingshall. It was in such a state of decay that it was taken down in the year 1868.

Besides the property at Ettingshall, the Homer family owned property in Sedgley nearby. One of the family built the chancel of the old church at Sedgley, and the family burial vault was under this chancel. Through age and dilapidation about the year 1828 the family vault was destroyed.

Edward Homer erected a pew in this church in 1620 which was occupied by his descendants until the church was destroyed. The seat of this pew was accidentally preserved, and came into the possession of the Earl of Dudley, and now forms part of the wainscot of a house belonging to him in the Old Park, at the Wren's Nest, near Dudley. It bears the following inscription: "This sete setop at the proper cost and charges of Edward Homer, anno domini 1620."

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH THE CELEBRATED HARRY HOOPER, 18 AUGUST 1937.

Pioneer of "Gastown," associate of prince and pauper, who is in Vancouver, at the Regent Hotel, from his placer mine on the banks of the Fraser River, two miles from Chimney Creek, twenty-two miles from Williams Lake, twelve miles from the nearest store, two miles from his mail box, where he lives with his three dogs and four cats, but no one else, surrounded by his garden full of vegetables; with his radio; gets six newspapers at a time at the end of the week; hangs beef, port, and mutton in the shed in winter time, and when he wants some, cuts it off; catches the finest of salmon in the river, and salts it down; says that money is worthless; that there is no need for a solitary individual in British Columbia to be "on relief," and says he has washed fifteen hundred dollars of gold out of the hill side since last May—about four months. He wants a road into his place—about two miles of road; he also needs teeth.

We had lunch together in the lunch room, City Hall.

HARRY HOOPER OF GASTOWN AND CHIMNEY CREEK.

Mr. Hooper said: "I am fifty-seven now—on the 28th April 1937—and I was three when I came with Father and Mother to Gastown, so we must have come in 1884." (Note: he also said he was born in 1880.) "We came via Portland, Oregon, then up to Victoria on the *George E. Starr*, old paddlewheel boat with walking beam. Then Father and Mother went over to New Westminster, and then over here; just one child, myself; we lived down about Gore Avenue, near the Hastings Mill store."

GREAT FIRE, 1886.

"There is a lot of bosh talked about the Great Fire; the pioneers did not suffer so very much. It was summer time; you could sleep out under the trees, and the fire did not go past the Hastings Mill much; the fire missed a lot of that locality."

"WEST END."

"I recall my daddy floating lumber down False Creek to English Bay to build houses; took it down in a rowboat from the old Royal City Planing Mills at the south end of Carrall Street; to build those cottages facing on the little park" (Alexandra Park) "where the bandstand is; one at least of them is there yet; it is the first house on Burnaby Street going east from Beach Avenue. There is a board which sticks out, and if