

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 4 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 4. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

Contact Information

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



3. Marion Alice, born June 17th 1894; she is now Mrs. R. Newton Hopkins, West 15th Avenue, Vancouver, and has three children. Mr. Hopkins is in H.M. Customs.
4. Margaret Grace, now Mrs. E.R. Wakefield, farmer, near Sumas, and has one adopted son and one adopted daughter. Born 17th August.

All above baptised at Vancouver.

5. Myrtle Agnes, now Mrs. Wm. Chambers, Renfrew Street, Vancouver; has one boy and twin girls. Born 11th August.
6. Charles Lloyd. Lloyd lives with me, is unmarried, and has a gas speed boat, the *Black Hawk*. Born 27th July.
7. Muriel Vera, the youngest, now Mrs. Henry Vincent, at Powell River, and has two daughters. Born 18th August.

The three last baptised at Port Essington.

“Marion, Margaret, Myrtle and Lloyd, all born at 1732 Bismarck Street. Vera was born in Port Essington.”

Mrs. Cameron signed original as correct, 9 November 1938.

J.S. Matthews.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. AND MRS. JOE W. CAMERON, 1903 BAYSWATER STREET, KITSILANO, WHO VERY KINDLY INVITED ME TO CALL THIS AFTERNOON, 6 DECEMBER 1937.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Cameron are active, considering their age; Mrs. Cameron's hair is pure white; Mr. Cameron, clean shaven, rather grayish. Mrs. Cameron received me most graciously, and I presented her with a tiny rose, just plucked, and told her I had brought it to prove to her that “roses in December” in Vancouver is a positive truth. Later in the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Fred J. Rolston, the latter her daughter, joined us to tea and cake. Mrs. Rolston is very well known in Vancouver as a most public-spirited woman, and recently contemplated “running” in the civic election for Park Commissioner, but retired at the last moment. Mr. Rolston is an official of the Mutual Life Assurance Company of Canada.

EARLY TRAINS. C.P.R. CONSTRUCTION. EARLY BIRTHS. FIRST ENGINE IN VANCOUVER.

Mrs. Cameron said: “We came to Vancouver in November 1886. Our home was originally at Campbelltown, New Brunswick; we lived on a farm at Charlo, N.B.; we were married at Charlo 28th July 1879, so that we shall, I hope, soon celebrate our diamond wedding. Then, Mr. Cameron got the idea he could do better in the new west, and, while I remained at home for perhaps a year, he went to Neche—on the Pembina River, close to the Canadian border, North Dakota.” (Addressing Mr. Cameron) “How long did you stay there?”

Mr. Cameron: “About two years.”

Mrs. Cameron: “He was in the carriage business; partners with a Mr. Ford. I went there too, and was there about a year, and then there was a Mr. May” (sic) “and he got the idea to come to Vancouver, so we all decided to come. We went to Winnipeg, and came west on the new Canadian Pacific Railway which had been opened five months before as far as Port Moody. We arrived at Port Moody, and stayed at the Winnipeg Hotel that night, and the next morning at 10 o'clock, we left on the old *Princess Louise* for Vancouver, and it was raining when we got here.

“But the following morning” (with emphasis) “was a *beautiful* morning; the steam was raising from the wooden sidewalks, and I said, ‘Thank goodness, we've found heaven.’”

Major Matthews: Do you expect to find steam raising in heaven?

Mrs. Cameron: “Well,” (laughing) “no, not exactly, but it was so nice and warm; Dakota was so cold. Mr. May went into the butcher business; there were two other butchers then, Gostry and Von Volkenburg; Mr. May made a third.”

GRANVILLE HOTEL.

“We went to the Granville Hotel on Water Street to stay for about a week; Tom Cyrs was proprietor. It was so hard to find a place to rent. You see, it was just after the Fire, and there were few places where people could live, so we had to take what we could get. There was a small bit of a building along Alexander Street, built right up to the sidewalk, and divided into two small stores; a one-storey building; there was nothing other than grass between the dwelling and Westminster Avenue at the time; everything was wild about us; the streets may have been surveyed, but there was nothing to show that they were; it was right where Letson and Burpee’s machine shop is now, and—”

Mr. Cameron, interjecting: “The front was built on an angle, due to Alexander Street not being square with the lot lines.”

Mrs. Cameron: “It was just one storey, no upstairs, and a shop window to the front door, and a big window with panes—not plate glass—I don’t think people knew what plate glass was, and a door in the corner which opened right onto the sidewalk, and when the drunken men went along they staggered right past; the front room was my bedroom, where Mrs. Rolston was born.

“At the back there was a lean-to, with a brick chimney and a woodshed. Mr. George Pollay, who was librarian at the Vancouver Reading Room, put up some shacks at the back, and there was just room to walk between them, and the back of our place; the new City Hall was right behind us.

“The street and sidewalk in front had a bit of a slope upwards the, but it has all been filled in, and it is level now.

“As I said, the building was really a little double store; each store was about 12 feet by 16 feet; we lived in the west one; Jim Cotter and his wife lived in the east one, and the front was just all window and door.”

(Note: the ground plan of the building, Nos. 132 and 134 Alexander Street, is shown on Dakin’s Fire map of November 1889, divided into two sections, close up to frontage on Alexander Street, and with other dwellings in rear, all on Lot 39, Block 3, D.L. 196. J.S.M.)

FIRST ENGINE ARRIVES, 23 FEBRUARY 1887. BIRTH OF MRS. FRED J. ROLSTON.

“My bedroom was the front room, about 12 feet by 16 feet with the big window, and it was there that my daughter, Tilly Jean” (Mrs. Fred J. Rolston) “was born the day the first C.P.R. construction engine reached the foot of Westminster Avenue, now Main Street. My bed was in the front room, and I could look out of the window; it was snowing, and the flakes were falling on the window panes, but I could see the men running through the snow to see the first construction engine.”

(Note: she was born 23 February 1887.)

WATER WELLS. TYPHOID FEVER.

“We got out water from a little well on the side of the slope just beside, but west of, Westminster Avenue. I don’t recall how deep the well was, but there was no windlass; we had to haul the water up with a rope; just threw a bucket, with a rope attached, down the well, and hauled it back full of water by sheer strength. Typhoid! Yes, that was how it was that typhoid was so prevalent.”

ROYAL CITY PLANING MILLS. CARRALL STREET. HART’S OPERA HOUSE. ROLLING SKATING RINK. SEWERAGE.

“We stayed in the little store from November 1886 to about March 1887. Then, Mr. Cameron, who was engineer at the Royal City Planing Mills at the south end of Carrall Street, found it better to move to a great big house, where we boarded, close to the mill; it was down on Carrall Street, across the lane, and south of the lane, on the east side of Carrall Street, just across the lane from Hart’s Opera House; only I never knew” (smilingly) “it was an ‘Opera House.’ I was never in it; I had the baby to attend to, but I saw them roller skating in it once.

“The big house, east side Carrall Street, where we boarded, was over False Creek tide water. Household slops and garbage, oh, we just threw it out, and the tide took it away. Mr. Mueller had a shack on a scow tied up just beside and behind us, quite close; and one time, when the tide was very high, the waves

dashed all over the scow, and I called out to Mrs. Mueller that she had better come over to our place, so just threw a plank across from her scow to our back platform, and came over with her child.”

HARRIS STREET. GEORGIA STREET EAST.

“Later, we bought a lot on old Harris Street, a twenty-five foot on the south side just west of Westminster Avenue; the Casselmans lived opposite, and the Mathisons lived on the alley next door; Mr. Cameron paid two hundred dollars for the lot.”

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH.

“Oh, yes. I remember the first church the Baptists had, quite well; I have attended service there; it was on the northeast corner of Dupont and Westminster Avenue. I remember them raising it; raised it high on stilts, and built a hardware store under it.”

FRESH FISH.

“Fish; how did we get our fish? Oh, the Chinamen pestered the life out of us with their fish; they used to bring it around in those big Chinese baskets slung one on each end of a pole carried anglewise on one shoulder; a big wooden lid covered the top of the basket, and the Chinamen would turn the lid upside down, and clean the fish on the bottom side of the lid—like a chopping board.”

Note: Mr. and Mrs. Cameron now reside on the corner of Third Avenue West and Bayswater Street, paved streets with concrete sidewalks. I remarked that the first time I had passed anywhere nearby—about 1900—I had been lost in the woods, having entered, to pick blackberries, a skid road branching off near Macdonald Street, from the old Point Grey Road in the forest, and suddenly discovered I had lost the trail, but found a trace of an old survey line, detectable with difficulty, and had followed it, and had come out on another forest road, presumed to be now Alma Road near Fourth Avenue. J.S.M.

JERICHO. GRANVILLE ISLAND. PRESBYTERIAN PICNIC. DALGLIESH OF JERICHO. ST. ANDREW’S CHURCH.

Mrs. Cameron: “Oh, yes, I remember; the Dalgleishes had a cow out at Jericho. We were going out there once for a picnic—a Presbyterian church picnic—a lot of us. We embarked on a scow with a tug to pull us out of the Royal City Planing Mill’s wharf at Carrall Street, False Creek, and the tug boat captain kept on urging people to hurry; he said the tide was going out, and he would not be able to get out of False Creek, and that was just exactly what happened; we stuck on a sandbar. The picnickers were so slow in getting on the scow. Mayor MacLean and Mrs. MacLean, the Reverend Mr. Thomson, the Presbyterian minister, Alex and George Mathison were among the crowd, and I had the baby” (now Mrs. Fred J. Rolston.)

“Finally we started, and got some distance down False Creek when we ran on the sandbar, and there we were, out on the sandbar, and we had to wait until the tide got low enough for planks to be laid, over the pools, from one little bar of sand to another; we all finally picked our way ashore in that way; and that was all there was to our day’s picnic, out on a scow in the middle of False Creek.”

(Note by J.S.M.: Conversation with Mrs. W.H. Evans, wife of “Billy” Evans, of the first trains into Port Moody, 1885 and 1886, 9 December 1938. “I was there. It was St. Andrew’s Presbyterian church picnic. The scow stuck on a sandbar in False Creek, and we stayed there all day. I was one of those who picked a way ashore on the planks laid on the wet sand.” Approved by Mrs. J.W. Cameron.)

8 SEPTEMBER 1938.

“I have had a very pleasant afternoon in the City Hall Archives with Major Matthews talking about the early days in Vancouver.”

Written by Mrs. Cameron as she, together with her daughter, Mrs. Fred J. Rolston, sat at my desk. J.S.M.

Mr. and Mrs. Cameron expect to celebrate their Diamond Wedding, 28 July 1939, and a recommendation is to be forwarded by Lord Tweedsmuir, Governor-General, to His Majesty the King, that a message of congratulations be sent them on that day.

J.S.M.

29 March 1939