

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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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.

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MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. AND MRS. JOHN EMS, 3345 WEST 27TH AVENUE, POINT GREY, WHO VERY KINDLY CALLED TO PAY ME A VISIT AT THE CITY ARCHIVES, 27 FEBRUARY 1937.

Note: Mrs. Ems was Miss Anne Murray, youngest daughter of John Murray, Royal Engineer, and of Port Moody, and is the only one of the Murray family to “avoid” having a Port Moody street named in her honour. She was born at Sapperton on [blank], and went to live at Port Moody when she was fifteen.

Mr. Ems will be seventy-five soon; he was born 30 March 1862, and they have been married over fifty years. He was in the service of the Canadian Pacific Railway over forty years.

ARRIVAL FIRST TRAIN, 23 MAY 1887.

Mr. Ems said: “I came to Vancouver on the first transcontinental passenger train, all the way from Montréal; arrived 23rd May 1887, and went to work for the Canadian Pacific Railway four days after arrival, and stayed with them for forty years, and was pensioned on June 30th 1927.

“Talk about a reception and welcome give to grandees who came to Vancouver; why, they have ‘nothing on’ those of us who arrived on the first train into Vancouver. Vancouver gave me the grandest reception. Why, they had a fire brigade, and a band, down to meet me when I came in. Wasn’t much of a fire brigade; just a few men and a couple of hose reels, and the band was only five or six musicians, but—we *did* have a fire brigade and a band to meet us. I have often laughed over it; they could not have given the ‘Prince of Wales’ a finer reception. Peter Righter was engineer; Peter Barnhart, conductor.”

City Archivist: Well, tell me please about the first train trip down from Port Moody to Vancouver.

Mr. Ems: “Pretty slow; only a cow trail, and some of the cuts so narrow the coaches could scarcely clear the banks. We picked up the decorated engine at North Bend.”

City Archivist: Mrs. Lacey Johnson says she helped to decorate it at Yale.

Mr. Ems: “She’s wrong. There was no roundhouse at Yale then. I was back at Yale a few days after, and the roundhouse was all burned. She’s wrong.”

Note: in a letter, 19 March 1937, Mrs. Lacey Johnson replies that she has made no mistake, reiterates that she decorated the engine at Yale, and adds, “North Bend became a divisional point later in the same year, after the workshops were burned down.” J.S.M.

C.P.R. LINE PORT MOODY TO VANCOUVER.

Mr. Ems, continuing: “As I told you, Port Moody was just a cow trail, and the cuts so narrow the coaches just got by. The first work I did was the take the track off the outside, and put it on hard ground. It was on piles, and well, the idea was to ‘get the train through.’ Pretty rough track, up and down, we shifted it off the construction bridges and put it on hard ground.

“About the passengers on the train. Most of them got off at the junction, and went down to New Westminster. In the coach I was in, there were a lot of passengers going to Oregon, and they got off at the junction, and went down to Westminster.”

Proof sent to Mr. Ems, 2 March, but never returned. J.S. Matthews.

FURTHER MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. JAMES THOMAS ENGLAND, FIRST SECRETARY-MANAGER, VANCOUVER GAS CO. LTD., 13 MARCH 1936.

VANCOUVER GAS CO. LTD.

Mr. England said: “Shortly after the B.C. Electric Railway Co. started operating the Gas Works, there was a rumour that the head office that the Company intended enlarging the works, and were seeking another site in order to build a larger works. I ask[ed] Walter Thomas if this was true and he assured me that such was the case. I have spoken of Mr. True of Halifax. When he was here I was asked by him to point out possible sites suitable for a Gas Works, and I showed him Leamy and Kyle’s sawmill site at the south end of Cambie Street bridge, subsequently occupied by the Vancouver Lumber Co., Cambie and Ash streets,