

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



“A man called Armitage told me that, when they were putting in the Capilano water pipes, they found a cedar thirty feet in diameter, and said to be the biggest cedar tree in the world. It was right on the line of the water pipe—water pipe has to go straight—and they could not go around it, so they blew it up.”

NOTE BY CITY ARCHIVIST.

No logger I have ever met—and I have met scores—has ever told me of a tree larger than ten or twelve feet in diameter. Every effort has been made to find some authentic record of a supposed giant tree cut down near Vancouver; we have never been able to find anyone who ever saw it. The illusive tree, twenty-five feet in diameter, officially stated to have been cut down by George Cary—the only George Cary—did not exist, according to George Cary, who says he never cut such a tree, nor heard of anyone who did. A freak bole on a steep hillside might have grown. It has long been assumed that a barroom joke, or some lumbermen outdoing each other in boasting has, by repetition, become “fact.”

J.S. Matthews.

27 DECEMBER 1940 – BIG TREES. NORTH VANCOUVER. LONSDALE AVENUE.

In November 1940, there was presented to the City Archives six photographs of North Vancouver, in 1896, showing Geo. H. Dawson, B.C. Land Surveyor, laying out the central sections of the present City of North Vancouver; one of these photographs shows a survey peg, bearing the mark “Blk. 109,” which is about Victoria Park, at the junction of Keith Road and Lonsdale Avenue.

Another photograph, C.V. P.Tr.17, of the same group of six, shows Mr. Dawson concealed, all save his head, in the hollow centre of a standing dead tree, much charred by fire, out in the clearing. Assuming that Mr. Dawson’s head is six inches wide, then the diameter of the stump is:

On ground level: twenty and one half feet (20½) diameter.

At five feet above: eighteen and a half (18½) feet.

The photograph may, or may not, show the widest diameter; the tree may be even wider, as the photo was taken facing west, to conform with the angle of the sun’s light.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. BALFOUR, WIDOW OF THE LATER ALDERMAN ROBERT BALFOUR, ONE OF THE ALDERMEN OF THE FIRST CITY COUNCIL, 1886, OF VANCOUVER, 17 MARCH 1936.

Mrs. Balfour lives at 1421 West 15th Avenue.

Mrs. Balfour: “We built a great big hotel, three storeys, at the corner of Columbia and Hastings Street, and when ‘The Fire’ came we just ran; we went out of it with nothing but our clothes on our backs three weeks after we started; it stood I think where the Broadway Hotel is now.”

GREAT FIRE. BURRARD HOTEL.

“My husband was born in either Michel or Wingham, Ontario, and then went to Manitoba; then we came out to that high bridge, Stoney Creek, I think they call it, built for the C.P.R. We drove all through the mountains; first we came as far as the end of the track, Stoney Creek high bridge; we lived in a long cabin the engineers had built in the bottom of the valley; we drove west in an open wagon, just an open wagon with our mattresses and baggage on top, and it rained all the way. We stopped at cabins; they were about a day’s drive apart; we drove on the road bed, and when we reached Revelstoke, stopped there a month. There were no homes in Revelstoke then, just frame buildings at Revelstoke, and we had to build the bunks we slept in along the wall.”

C.P.R. MOUNTAIN. CONSTRUCTION.

“Then we drove down to Eagle Pass Landing” (near Sicamous.)

“Then we went down to Hammond by rail, in an old caboose, and oh, my, it was terrible; just like riding in a rocking chair. We got to some place—I don’t know where it was but it was a lovely little house—they had a Chinaman cook, the first Chinaman I had ever seen. Did you ever have tomato preserves? Well, he

had some; I have never tasted them since; but they were good—I should like some again; we stayed there one night.

“We got to Victoria in October 1885; my eldest child was with me, I was only 20. Then in December we went to Westminster because we were in New Westminster for Christmas 1885, and we moved over here as soon as our hotel was ready; it had been open just three weeks when it was burned, and when the fire came we just ran out of it with nothing but the clothes on our backs; we ran off up towards False Creek” (the False Creek bridge, now Main Street) “and sat around, and then there were a number of stages and rigs came, and took us to New Westminster.

“After our hotel at the corner of Columbia and Hastings was destroyed, we built another at the corner of Carrall and Cordova” (note: this must have been the old Balmoral) “and in 1887 we moved up to Langley, then to Donald, then back to Langley for fourteen years.

“My children were one son, Harry, and five daughters; Harry is working for the C.N.R. in Montréal, has been for twenty-six years; he has two sons and two daughters. Of my five daughters, the youngest, Marjorie, died in 1927; another, Mable, unmarried, died in 1934. The remaining three daughters are still living in Vancouver:

“Mrs. Helen Bawden, eldest daughter (printers, Water Street), no children of her own, but three as stepmother;

“Mrs. (Alberta) Aubrey Tomlinson, has a son Robert;

“Miss Beatrice, unmarried.

“All resident in Vancouver, 1936.

“My two children who were with us in our new Burrard Hotel when it was burned were Harry and Helen, June 13, 1886.”

Read and approved by Mrs. Robert Balfour
9 June 1936.

J.S. Matthews.

Mrs. Balfour died about the end of 1937 or January 1938.

THE BAND FUND.

The citizens of Vancouver will learn, with much pleasure, that upon the strength of the net receipts of the recent concert and ball, and the liberal subscriptions made by the people of this city, Campbell Shaw has ordered a set of instruments for the Vancouver City Band. It is expected the order will be filled in about four weeks, the delay being necessary in bringing the instruments from the East by freight. Police Magistrate Boulton has generously offered the band a cheque for the balance of the amount required; the money to be returned as soon as another grand concert can be given.

The people of Vancouver, prostrated but a short time ago by fire, deprived now of the increased activity which the arrival of daily trains would bring, are yet so public-spirited that any demand made upon them for a worthy improvement met with a most hearty response. The committee of management for the band will back this statement up with argument that the biggest sore head in the country will agree with without a murmur. Bound to be right from the start, the committee resolved to pay for the instruments upon their arrival, and they have worked successfully to that end. Mr. Louis Carter has had charge of the subscription list, and very cleverly he has managed his big part in providing a band for Vancouver.

Here are some more of the subscriptions: