

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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MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH CHARLES GAUVREAU, 160 HASTINGS STREET EAST, AT CITY ARCHIVES, VANCOUVER, 17 MAY 1937.

C.P.R. CONSTRUCTION.

Mr. Gauvreau: "I worked on the grade between Port Moody and Vancouver in January 1887; laid track, ballasting, and then in the yard" (railway yard.) "I worked on the track Port Moody to Vancouver in the winter of 1886-7.

"There were only two engines in the Vancouver yard, wood burners, and they were left out in the open at night; we used to turn them by hand, down on Pender Street by Carrall, at the first 'roundhouse,' suppose that's what you would call it. We got the engineer to run them on the turntable, and then got a couple of Chinamen, and turned the turntable by hand, pushed it around. The engine fires went out at night; we got down at seven in the morning and lit the fires in the engines; wood fires.

"How old do you think I am now? Seventy-seven. I worked down beyond Port Arthur from the time I was 19, building the C.P.R. I'm a pretty tough fellow" (note: he looks as strong as an ox yet) "but that was pretty rough work. Bad food, bacon with streaks of green in it; no vegetables; why, men were dying of black leg—that's scurvy—all the time; I suppose I've seen fifty buried along the track down there. You see, it was hard getting food in; it had to be taken in over the snow or not got in at all; in the summer the mud and muskeg was impassible, and there was no proper place to store it; some of the food was carried one hundred miles, and sometimes on men's backs."

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. J.B. GRIFFIN, EX-MANAGER R.G DUN & Co., VANCOUVER, NOW RESIDENT 6689 VINE STREET.

WOODWARD DEPARTMENT STORES. J.B. GIFFEN.

Mr. Giffen: "Do you know Charlie Woodward?"

Major Matthews: Of Woodward Department Stores? Yes. The first I remember of him he had a little store down on Westminster Avenue and he used to wear a big long apron of white cotton, with a bib up to his chin held up with a tape around his neck, and another tape holding it round his waist, and I remember him walking up and down in front of the store with a watering can, sprinkling water on the vegetables in a long box in front of the windows.

Mr. Giffen: "That's the way I remember him. When I first came here in 1908 I went over one day to get a statement for R.C. Dun" (Mercantile Agency) "from him. The store was all in confusion, things scattered about in a regular junk heap, and he was busy with customers. But to my great surprise, when I told him who I was, he was interested in me, and my purpose; a thing not usual in such an establishment. As soon as he had served his customers, he took me back to his office; it wasn't a real office, but a sort of desk with papers scattered all around, stuck on nails. He explained to me his position very carefully; he got a rating of about five or ten thousand dollars, and I remember him making a striking statement. It was: 'I am not going to be satisfied until it is a million dollars.'

"For years after that, once a year, after he had made up his balance sheet for the year, he used to take the statement up to Mr. Godfrey of the Bank of British North America. Our office was just across the way, and after he had been into the bank he used to bring the statement up to me."

Major Matthews: Did he ever reach a million dollars?

Mr. Giffen: "Oh, yes! Years ago. I remember the last time he came up, he came up with a statement showing assets of over a million dollars. He had finally got what he wanted. I looked at the statement, and we talked about it, and presently I asked him if he remembered the remark that he had made to me years previously about not being satisfied until he had reached a million dollars. Mr. Woodward replied, 'Oh, yes! I remember it very well.' He was a smart man. He still goes to his office every day, gets down about eight or half past, and of course, they put such papers as are of importance on his desk for him to see."

Also see Mrs. Sanderson, formerly Mrs. (Alderman) Towler; see that file.