

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume Five**

**By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.**

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*Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1936-1945.*

*Supplemental to volumes one, two, three and four collected in 1931, 1932 and 1934.*

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## **JOHN MORTON OF BURRARD INLET.**

Manuscript of Rev. P.C. Parker, one of the executors of John Morton.

*History of Salendine Nook Baptist Church*, by Rev. John Stock, D.D., LL.D.

The following is found in the closing page of the *History of the Baptist Church* at Salendine Nook, Huddersfield, Yorkshire, England.

It has come to my knowledge since the foregoing History was written that a family of the name of Morton, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, fled from Scotland because of religious persecution, and brought their work people with them, and settled in this neighbourhood. They established their Potteries, which are here to this day, and worked by this highly esteemed family.

These people organized a Presbyterian meeting which ultimately languished, and was finally absorbed in the Baptist organization; in which the Mortons have had no mean part.

There were the Potters that dwelt among the Plants and Hedges. There they dwelt with the King for his work. [*Note: this passage is evidently quoted from I Chronicles 4-23.*]

I made the acquaintance of Mr. John Morton and his wife on the first Sunday morning in December, 1907. They were at the service of the First Baptist Church, then on the corner of Hamilton and Dunsmuir Streets. They greeted me very warmly at the close of the service, and when I found, from conversations with them, they had been connected with the Church at Salendine Nook, Huddersfield, England, I cultivated their acquaintance for several reasons. First, because I had preached at the "Nook Church" twice—once soon after my ordination as pastor of the Newbold Baptist Church, Rochdale, England, and again in 1897 during my visit to England at the Diamond Jubilee; another reason was, Mr. Morton had made a donation of one hundred pounds sterling to the College in Manchester, England; where I received my theological training; and a further reason was, my college "chum," who acted as "best man" at my marriage in 1885, was the honored minister of the Salendine Nook Church at the very time I was acting as interim pastor of the First Baptist Church here in Vancouver, and Mr. and Mrs. Morton had just returned from a visit to the dear old house in England.

I became very much interested in Mr. Morton, and visited him at his home constantly, and took walks with him in Stanley Park, and learned much of his life story.

He said he was 29 years old when he came. He arrived in Victoria, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1862. The ship that he came on from Liverpool was sunk at the very next voyage by the Confederate ship, *Alabama*.

After reaching Victoria he waited until the first boat out from Victoria, and went on that boat up the Fraser River, and thence travelled up to the Cariboo like the other gold seekers. He said nothing about his fellow travellers, though he afterwards told me Sam Brighthouse was his cousin, and they had made the acquaintance of William Hailstone during their voyage from England; that Hailstone was from Newcastle district (north of England). He was very much disappointed like many others in the Cariboo, and that the mining wasn't what it was reported to be. One morning during his stay, when he was having breakfast, a man came into the restaurant and called out, "has anybody here got any horseshoe nails? The Dr. has been called to go a long distance to see a sick man and wants his horse shoeing, and we have no nails." Morton said, "yes, I have some nails." Here was an evidence of his thrift and carefulness—he had 22 nails and was paid \$22; a dollar per nail.

He left the Cariboo and came down and hired out to rancher on the (I think he said North Thompson River. I am sure it was Thompson River) for a period. He after that came down to New Westminster, and saw a piece of coal in a store window. He said the only store in New Westminster that was made out of finished lumber. He went into the store and asked where the coal came from, and the man came out and said, "there is that Indian going up the Port Moody Road. He brought it in, and he can tell you." So Morton went after the Indian. He, Morton, explained to me that he was not particularly wanting the coal, but he wanted the sub-stratum of

clay, which is usually found where there is coal, because he said, "I could make pots out of it, and people in this new country will need pots." There again comes in his foresight. The Indian induced him to go with him. They embarked at Port Moody in the dugout and the Indian brought him down the Inlet until they came to where the "Blue Ribbon Tea Co." building is. When Mr. Morton told me that I went to look for the building and found it at the foot of Howe St. (whether he was referring to the present building or some former one I do not know.) [*Should be Thurlow Street. JSM.*]

That said was the 16<sup>th</sup> of October. (The coincidence of April 16<sup>th</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup> was vividly impressed upon my mind.) They stayed all night under the trees. Next morning they took the dugout, and the Indian paddled him through the Narrows and brought him round to near where Siwash Rock is, and showed him the Coal near. Morton saw it was not profitable and there was no clay; evidently was washed away by erosion. He was quite disappointed again. The Indian said, "I show you White Sands." So he brought him around to what is now known as English Bay. These impressed Mr. Morton deeply. The dugout was pulled up and hid in the brush, and the Indian led Mr. Morton along a trail and brought him to a place where they had slept he night before. Mr. Morton said, "take me back, take me back." So they waited till the turn of the tide and the Indian guided him through the bush, got his dugout, and brought him back again through the Narrows. Said Morton to the Indian, "how deep?" Said the Indian, "totelem! totelem! totelem! totelem! totelem! totelem!" He repeated, "how deep?" and again the Indian repeated six totelem. Morton made a note of word and number and found that totelem was ten yards; six made 180 feet. This was the length of line the Indian used in the Narrows fishing for rock-cod. So he thought it was 180 feet deep.

Said Mr. Morton to me, "I said to myself, this is a natural harbour and I am going to locate here." This is another instance of his foresight and carefulness.

He made his way to New Westminster to Judge Brew and found that the land was unsurveyed and unstaked, and Judge Brew told him that he would have to stake it out himself, and after he had done legal duties, they would survey the property and he would get his land. So John Morton returned. He said he communicated with Hailstone and Brighthouse and told them if they would join him they would share and share alike, but he wanted the narrowest part. The land was staked out from Inlet to Creek. He did not leave the place, slept under the trees until a few days before Christmas, 1862, and by that time the log hut was erected. He didn't say whether Brighthouse and Hailstone accepted his invitation, but subsequent events showed they must have. He said he never left the place after having staked it to go to do any other work, but the other two did to get money to keep things going until the legal requirements were completed. I have no knowledge of how he went to and from New Westminster. Here, however, is another instance of his carefulness and steadfastness of purpose. One day "they" received a letter from an individual who told them "that they were working land that had already been staked and belonged to him" (i.e. the writer of the letter) "but if they would pay him a shilling a year in acknowledgement of his claim they could stay on the land." When we got the letter Sam and Bill wanted "to throw up, and give up the whole business." Morton said, "I wouldn't leave the place for anybody." So he went to New Westminster to see Judge Brew. When showing the letter to Judge Brew he doubled under the signature so that the Judge would not see who wrote it. The Judge, who was a gentleman, never tried to see it. He read the letter, leaned back, heaved a sigh, and said, "I don't know who has written this letter, but he is either a liar or a knave. You go on with your duties" (legal requirements) "and when your time is up you can have the land surveyed and you will get your papers." Morton told me confidentially, "the writer of the letter was Captain Burnaby."

One day in April, he did not say what year, he looked across towards what is now Stanley Park, and there before him in its spring beauty was "Deadman's Island." When he told me this incident we were walking from his home, October 1911, through Stanley Park along the Driveway toward Deadman's Island. He said, "I wanted to homestead the Island. So I took my boat, went over to the Island, pulled the boat up on the shore, and took my axe and went to the bush, I saw a box in the branches of a tree. I knocked it down, and broke open the box, and there was a dead Indian sitting up in the box. So I skipped off to my boat, and rowed away as fast as I could; I went back a couple of days afterwards and put the box back. By and by I went to New Westminster

and spoke to Judge Brew about it. I drew a sketch of the Island and gave it to the Judge, and he said of, 'why, it is like the ace of spaces.' The shape of it. 'Now,' said the Judge, 'Morton, we had better be careful about this and find things out before anything further's done. We will see the chief. This is evidently the burial ground of the Indians, and they may hold it sacred, and we must not offend them.'"

The Indians called the Island, "Memelous Siwash Ille" (ill-lee.) Morton decided he did not want the Island. When Mr. Morton told me that incident we were in Stanley Park opposite Deadman's Island and I quoted the refrain I saw somewhere but can't remember where:

Our footprints press where centuries ago,  
the red men fought and conquered,  
lost and won,

Whole tribes and nations gone like winter's snow,  
before the rising of the  
springtide's sun.

One day there were two Indians came to their log hut, bringing with them a squaw. At the time they did not understand the Indian language—all the three English men were there, and the Indians talked and talked, and finally the squaw stood up and began to dance, and jumped over a bench. Meantime Morton and friends got into a corner of the hut and were in great terror, as they thought this was the war dance before the scalplings. Finally the Indians went away grinning and Morton having put down some of the words he heard, discovered that the Indians, seeing the men were alone with no woman to work for them, had brought the squaw for that purpose, and the dancing and jumping was to show how nimble and capable she was.

On another occasion when Morton was alone he was astonished to see a whole band of Indians come across the Bay, Stanley Park way, some walking along the trail, some in boats; they were beating tom-toms. Morton got alarmed. He fixed up a dummy in his bed, put a hat on at the top of the bed where the head would be, and a pair of boots at the bottom under the clothing with a bit of the boot sticking out; fastened his door and bolted up to where Hastings Mill is now, and from there watched the proceedings. He saw them put something over the branch of a tree, and it was dancing and struggling in the air. Gaining courage and going back towards the place, he saw it was a squaw that they had hung—near the entrance of Stanley Park. This squaw was the wife of Chief Supple Dick or Slippery Dick—some such name. She had been jealous because the wife of Chief had had a baby whilst she had none—and had pinched the baby's throat and killed it. There had been a hanging in New Westminster, some man had killed another, and had been hung for murder, I think it was Jack Sprague who was hung. Bishop Sheepshanks mentions it, and in Morton's phraseology, "white man hang white man for killy white man, so they hung squaw for killy papoose."

#### **EARLY ACCIDENT.**

Another incident in the early life of Mr. Morton. Saved from drowning. He and Hailstone had gone across the Inlet to the North Vancouver side to get some poles that were more suitable for their purpose than those on the South side. Coming back they fastened the poles on the top of the canoe and Morton got in front and Hailstone at the back. When they thought the tide was right they paddled for the South Shore. By and by they were overtaken by the rush of waters. The canoe was filled. They could do nothing but keep going, expecting every minute to be overwhelmed by the tide; when they got to their landing place Morton jumped for the shore. Hailstone being in the rear—the canoe tipped by his weight and he was plunged in the Inlet. Morton had quite a difficulty in fishing his friend out of the water for he was nearly drowned.

#### **SAN FRANCISCO.**

When Mr. Morton was through with his preemption duties and they had received their deeds to the land, he went to San Francisco. He and some of the boarders where he was staying decided to go to England. They all went down to get their ticket; others were before him, and their baggage was on the boat. As Morton was going up to the wicket, for some unexplained reason he got nervous, and got out of line and went to the rear and communed with himself, then he thought he was foolish to get that nervous, so he got in line again; the nearer he got to the wicket, the

more nervous he became, so instead of buying a ticket he rushed past the wicket and went on board, got his baggage and went back to the boarding house where he underwent no small amount of scoffing for his timidity. The next morning, however, his hostess said, "O you lucky man the boat has gone down with all hands." The vessel was the *Golden Lion* or the *Golden Age*—something golden.

I'll give you another instance which shows you the carefulness and the thriftiness of John Morton. He was very strong in the common virtues. One day, just before I came here in 1907, there was a man doing some work for him on his house down at English Bay. Mr. Morton was drawing some old nails out of the lumber and straightening them to be used again. The carpenter he was employing would not use them, told Mr. Morton he was mean. It was about this time that John Morton went to Church one Sunday morning, and there was a Russian Baron—Baron Uxgull, who was making an appeal for funds for a Baptist College in Russia to train Preachers for the Ministry. John Morton gave \$250 at that Sunday service for the work. Afterwards I said to him, "a man that cannot save cannot give."

### **BAPTIST COLLEGE.**

Mr. Morton gave to the Baptist Denomination several acres of land in the West End for a Baptist College. He got a Mr. Hamilton, an engineer, to choose the most suitable part of his estate for this purpose, and he chose the part near the entrance of Stanley Park where there was a splendid view up the Inlet. The city did not subdivide it. The property was donated to the Baptist Convention but they failed to pay the taxes. The property reverted to the city for taxes, but Mr. Morton stepped up, paid the taxes and took the property back. Mrs. Morton has some letters which show that, as far back as 1887, Mr. Morton counseled with the Rand bros. that were his agents, indicating his desire to provide money for religious educational work. He had a lawsuit with someone who had squatted on his property at the foot of Bidwell Street, which somehow was lost to him. I witnessed his will. He asked me to make it for him, but I told him it was a legal matter and I did not understand that kind of work. Mr. C.B. Morgan made it.

When I organized the Fairview Baptist Church in 1908, Mr. Morton was very generous, giving \$300 as a start, and when it was finished any indebtedness that was on the Church he himself and Mrs. Morton paid. Afterwards he said, "as winter will be coming on, you will require a furnace." I said, "yes." "Well," he says, "I will get you one of the best there is in the city."

Mr. and Mrs. Morton furnished all the funds for the "Ruth Morton Church." They also paid the indebtedness of the North Vancouver Baptist Church. There was no lack of the generosity of this worthy couple.

Checked with original manuscript. 12 January 1936. J.S. Matthews.

### **MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. RUTH MORTON, WIDOW OF JOHN MORTON, FIRST SETTLER OF BURRARD INLET, AT HER APARTMENT, 1190 WEST 12<sup>TH</sup> AVENUE, BAYVIEW 5523L, 6 SEPTEMBER 1935.**

#### **MRS. RUTH MORTON. JOHN MORTON.**

J.S.M.: Is that you, Mrs. Morton?

Mrs. M.: (feebly; scratchy voice, but most agreeable tone) "Yee as."

J.S.M.: I want to come up to see you.

Mrs. M.: (same feeble voice of an aged lady) "Let me know when you're coming," etc. etc.