

Early Vancouver

Volume Five

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1945)

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

Supplemental to volumes one, two, three and four collected in 1931, 1932 and 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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C.P.R. CONSULTATION. ARBITRATION.

In 1888 an arbitration was held at Hotel Vancouver in connection with this, Railway Company claiming it was not up to the standard of railway building for that time. Experts from other continental lines were witnesses and the result was the government put up 3½ million dollars to remedy matters. Nelson Butcher, (who was afterwards official reporter for the Railway Commission) had the task of taking the evidence in shorthand, and supplied the arbitration officials with a copy of the proceedings of each session on the following morning.

EVIDENCE. VAN HORNE.

He was to make typewritten copies and had a staff of eight on the job. He made an extra copy on his own initiative and later had it bound into four volumes and presented it to President Van Horne. The following New Years he received an annual pass good over any part of the C.P.R. system and this came each year as long as Van Horne was president.

BANQUET. HON. EDWARD BLAKE.

A banquet was held while the Arbitration was on, and Hon. Edward Blake was one of the speakers. When the question of building the C.P.R. was before the House at Ottawa, Blake thought it was folly to build through British Columbia, as it was a "Sea of Mountains." At the banquet he took it all back by saying he had enjoyed his trip across the mountains of Manitoba and the North West Territories and particularly across the plains of B.C. According to Nelson Butcher, he was speaking at times at 300 words a minute.

[LETTER FROM R. MATHISON.]

Kelowna, B.C.
June 9, 1936.

Dear Major Matthews:

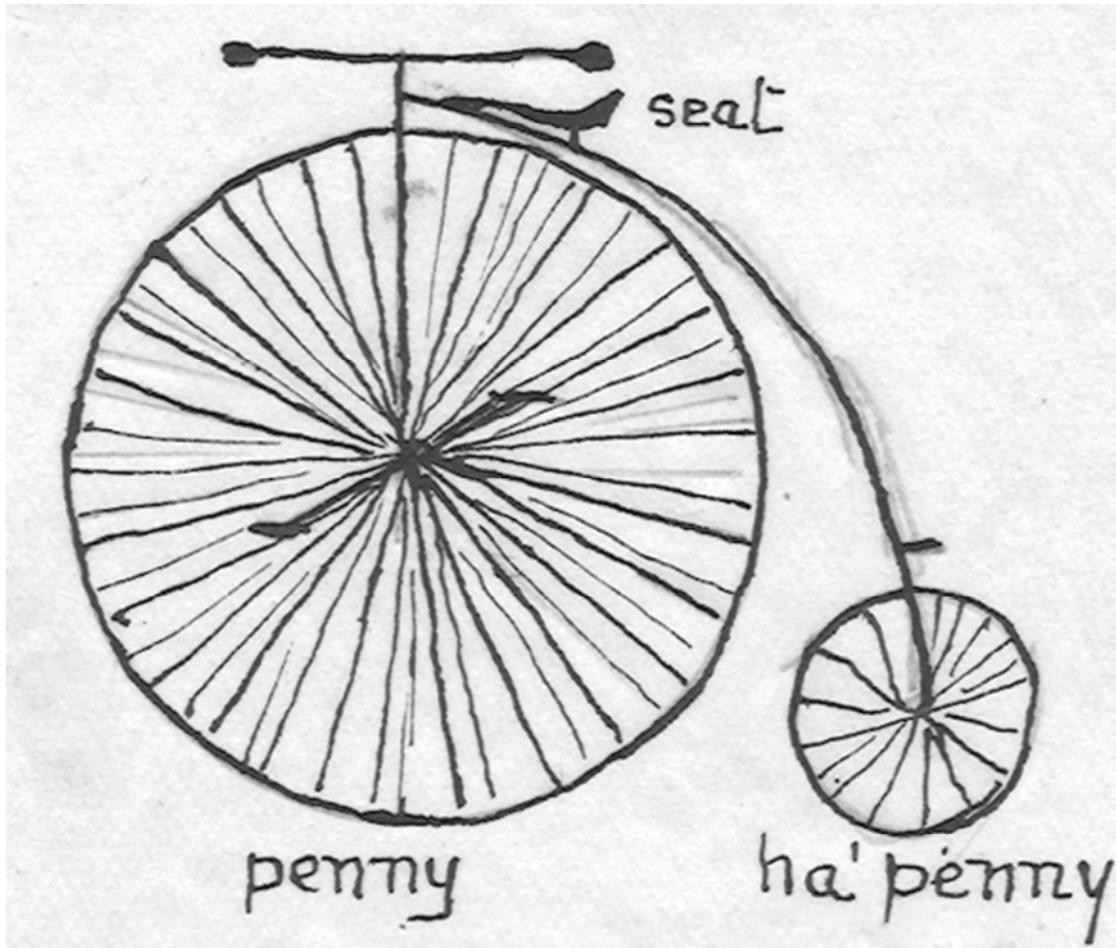
There was no argument between Mr. C.J. Piper and I about bicycle matter just friendly letters.

I'm enclosing his which you may keep. Get in touch with him and get his up to now mileage. You should find him extremely interesting. Mr. Piper sent some photos of busy Granville Street to the "Province" about January 1st, 1930, which were published in the Magazine Section, and referred to him as having the first bicycle in Vancouver. I wrote to Mr. Piper saying, I hoped it would not take all the joy out of life for him, but I was of the impression I had the first "bike" in Vancouver—in March 1887.

I had the nice letter of his which is enclosed, and he also wrote the "Province" to the same effect that his was the first pneumatic tyred bicycle in Vancouver and his letter was published in the next week's magazine section. To make a good story of it someone started the article by saying it had taken all the joy out of life for me having him claim to have the first "bike."

In the summer of 1936, the "Sun" [*unknown date but page 18*] published the enclosed picture of Mr. Piper and his "Bike" and I wrote and congratulated him. The letter was addressed to 4931 Hastings St., East, but came back to me, so I then sent it c/o the "Sun," and received his letter of September 22nd, 1936.

I bought my high wheel bike in 1883. Front wheel fifty inches in diameter. It was a "Liverpool," and cost fifty dollars (\$50.00) Hard rubber tyres about an inch in diameter. I had it shipped out to Vancouver in March 1887, and on my first trip down town (from Hastings St.) the "Daily Advertiser" had an item saying "Bob Mathison came in from the country today on his wheel." "He's a daisy on wheels"—a slang expression of that time.



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Sure I had some tumbles, the worst one on Water Street, when a crack in the wooden roadway pulled the tyre out, and it caught in the fork. I gathered some splinters in both hands. I shoved the wheel into No. 1 Fire Hall, and left it there for three or four days, during which time several of the boys learned to ride it without mishaps. I gave it away some time in 1889, but I've forgotten to whom. My present "bike" I got in 1903—I've only had the two—and it's still going strong. The frame and handle bar are original and I've worn out three coaster brakes, and about three months ago got new front and rear wheels for it, following the wrecking of the old wheels by an auto crashing into it at the curb where it was parked. It will probably last as long as I will.

I cover an average of one hundred miles a month, winter and summer. I won a small cup the first year I had a wheel—the only race I was ever in—being about six inches ahead of this other fellow.

When Vancouver held its first celebration in 1887, two nice prizes were allotted for a bicycle race. There were only two entries, and so both prizes would be given, I entered (I was the starter) and rode about a hundred yards. Fred Turner, of New Westminster, won first prize, and a lad from Nanaimo (I've forgotten his name—have an idea it was Deeming) the second.

Mr. Piper, I have no doubt, could give you some facts re church choirs, music, organs, etc. His address on his 1936 letter is the only one I have.

Capt. Bill Watts and I took in Earle Kelly's program on May 19th, and when I introduced myself he asked, "Where does 'Mathison, the printer' come in?" I told him I was one of Vancouver's first printers, but had no further conversation with him as others had come up to speak to him.

I think it was after I saw you, I ran across a story of a taxi driver and his passenger and three dollars, (\$3.00). Let me know if I told it to you. You, or Kelly, might make use of it.

Altogether I had a very delightful visit.

I suggested to Mrs. R.B. Bowden that she give you her set of Howay's History of B.C.—this was before I located Vol. 1 with Bill Watts. She picked it up at a sale for \$8.00, and it was up in the attic. Perhaps you will get it. I'm quitting now before I get writer's cramp.

With kindest regards.

Yours sincerely,

[signed] R. Mathison

EXCERPT FROM OLD CEMETERY RECORDS.

City Clerk's Office,
City Hall.

MILLER, Edwin G. 44 years old when he died
born at New Westminster, B.C.
died at San Diego, Cal., Feb. 4, 1916
buried Feb. 16, 1916—accidental fracture of skull, cause of death.
religion Presbyterian
single.

MILLER, Jonathan. 82 years
born Ontario
died Vancouver, Dec. 6th 1914
buried Dec. 8th 1914—Broncho Pneumonia, cause of death.
religion Church of England.
widower.

MILLER, Margaret. 69 years
born Delawara, Ontario
died Vancouver, Sept. 17, 1906.
buried Sept. 19, 1906—Senile decay, cause of death.
religion Church of England.
married.

Note: in connection with the possibility that Edwin G. Miller was the first white child born on Burrard Inlet, it will be noted that his birthplace—as given on his death particulars in the City Hall—shows that he was born in New Westminster, and *not* at Granville.

A newspaper clipping—see Jonathan Miller file—reporting his death in San Diego, Cal., presumably from a Vancouver newspaper dated about 5 February 1916, states that he *was* the first white child born on the site of the City of Vancouver, and that he was born in the old Provincial Government building on Water Street.

It is not altogether extraordinary that the claim of H.O. Alexander, born at Hastings Mill, 13 December 1873, and widely published for many years, as being the first white child born here, has not been disputed, for the reason that the Miller family were notoriously careless in genealogical matters. Mrs. Crakanthorp—see *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3—prefers to state that he was the first at *Hastings Mill*. On the other hand, it is extraordinary that such Miller records as we have, state Edwin Miller was born at Granville, yet his death certificate—particulars of which must have been furnished by his family—state at New Westminster.

JSM.