

## 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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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**[LETTERS FROM CHAS. J. PIPER TO ROBERT MATHISON.]**

4931 Hastings East,  
January 7, 1930.

Dear Mr. Mathison:

Yours of the 2<sup>nd</sup> inst. to hand; first let me hasten to assure you that you are not taking any joy out of life for me by your being the first to ride a bicycle around Gastown, (or perhaps it was called Vancouver then) and I am delighted to have made the acquaintance of the first cyclist of our fair city.

**FIRST BICYCLES.**

Far be it from me to rob Bob Mathison of such an honour, the magazine editor got mixed up a little, I stated to him that I was the first to own and ride a PNEUMATIC tyred bicycle in B.C., this is correct, the balance of the family coming out from Plymouth, England, in March 1891, my father bringing out a "Referee" safety wheel for me with him, a bike made then in London, the tyres of same were 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ " diameter, and I was also the first to ride this type of bicycle for any long distance in the Dominion of Canada. The dad broke his journey a little at Toronto and Winnipeg, taking the wheel out at each place and riding a few blocks, hundreds of people crowded around the bike with the huge tyres; this being the first time they had seen a pneumatic.

When my folk arrived at Victoria from England I took the wheel and rode it home to Cadboro Bay, about five miles out of town, the next day went for a long distance I think to Goldstream. (I was then sweet 21.) We all subsequently moved over to Vancouver in 1898. Since that time I have ridden a good many miles in this city and neighborhood, my present mount, a B.S.A., I have had it nearly 12 years, my mileage on it to date is 59,468.6 miles, so you will note I do a little riding still, and back in July I made a trip to Bellingham and back, 110 miles, a nice moderate day's cycling, staying at the other end about five hours.

I first rode the rear driving safety bike back in 1883-1884. There being only half dozen safeties, (as the present type was called then) in the City of Plymouth, so I was among the earliest safety bicycle riders; previous to this I rode the tricycle, but when I set eyes on the safety, I soon abandoned the three wheeler for the two wheels, and subsequently made several 225 mile journeys from Plymouth to London on same, up to date I have covered approximately 125,000 miles on cycles of various makes.

My first bicycle was a "New Rapid" made by St. Georges Engineering Co., of Birmingham, it weighed about fifty pounds, fitted with one inch solid tyres, with hollow rims.

The reason the bicycle of today was called a safety was, because you could not come a cropper on it like you could on the ordinary or high wheeler, a mount I have never ridden. I have competed and won prizes for racing both in Plymouth and out here in Victoria, B.C.

Wishing you and yours the compliments of the season and hoping you are still full of pep as I am.

Yours very truly,

*[signed]* Chas. J. Piper.

P.S. Shall be delighted to get a line from you any time you feel like writing.

5457 Culloden Street,  
Vancouver, B.C.  
Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup> 1936.

Dear Mr. Matheson:

Many thanks for your letter of July 21<sup>st</sup>, you are right about my total cycle mileage which is somewhere about 225,000 to 250,000, it was around /83 when I started riding the solid tyre safety, a year or two before that I was riding about Plymouth on the tricycle, I was one of the earliest safety riders in Plymouth, there were about half dozen to dozen machines around Plymouth when I got mine, a "New Rapid" cross frame safety with tangent spokes and steering head same as they are today, there were no diamond frames in those days, weight around fifty pounds.

Since the commencement of the Jubilee ceremonies I have to date cycled 1,825 miles, this is taking from June 28<sup>th</sup> last, (July 659.4) (Aug. 661.3) (Sept. to date 453.2) I think my long runs are over for this year, but my around the city riding will be around 400 to 500 per month, not too bad for a kid. The bicycle has covered to date 100,113.8 miles. How is that for a mouthful? I don't know how long I will be doing the next 100,000.

I am a pretty good healthy subject yet, keeping my subtle brain fully occupied, having several hobbies, the chief being music, I play two instruments, viz. the organ and the aeola, this instrument aeola looks something like a concertina, but is neither that or an accordion, but something a great deal better toned than either. I carry it around a great many miles on the bike, and is just about the same as the organ itself, total weight, in case, seven pounds, a wonderful little instrument made in London, England. I still possess a good tenor voice and am a member of a large church choir, am inordinately fond of church music, to me there is no music like it; clocks is another hobby, have four of my own, all running, so am not hard up for the time, and European makes, at that, one of them is an English fuzee over one hundred years old and running good yet. I always keep the standard time home. Drawing is another at which I am an expert, it comes natural to me like music, so I pass no dull moments altho a widower, with one charming daughter. I find music makes you a heap of friends, but there I think I will draw this lengthy epistle to a close.

With very kindest regards,  
Yours very truly,  
*[signed]* Chas. J. Piper.

P.S. Drop a line when you feel that way. On looking over old diaries, I bought my B.S.A. bike, May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

Another P.S. The organ (3 manuel) that you have up in the Anglican church in Kelowna. I helped back in 1901 to install in the old Wesley Church, I was then in this choir, since then, I have put in twenty years in the Christ Church Anglican choir here, am now in the Chown Church Memorial United Church choir, joining same a few months ago, have had a good musical training, starting when I was about seven years old.