

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume Five**

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

**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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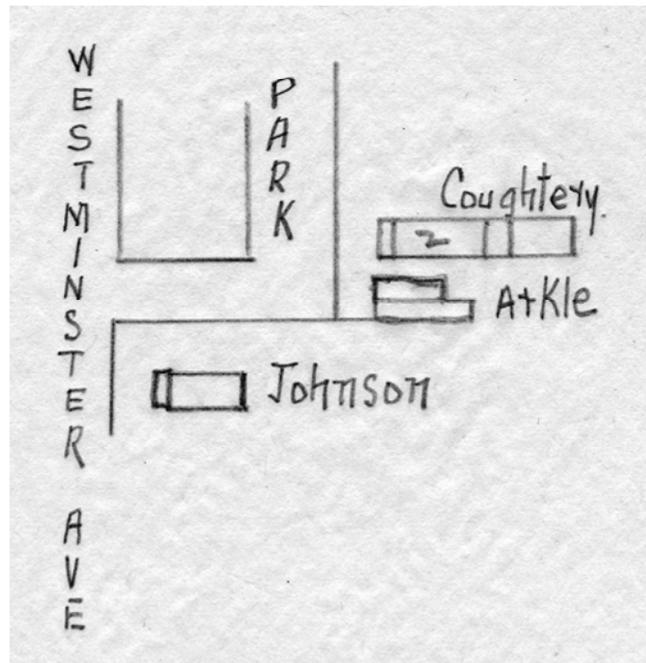
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west, right at the end of a short street joining Westminster Avenue and Park Avenue, and looking down the short street.

“Alex Johnson, who ran the Victoria Hotel afterwards, lived on the southeast corner of Westminster Avenue; one storey, little verandah in front, on Westminster Avenue, and looking west; just in front as we looked from our house down the short street.

“What you have written here, as a conversation with me, 31<sup>st</sup> May 1940, is quite correct.”



Item # EarlyVan\_v5\_044

**MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. DONALD ALEXANDER MATHESON, OF MAYO, YUKON, AND OF THE IRWINTON APARTMENTS, 777 BURRARD STREET, VANCOUVER, WHO KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES, CITY HALL, VANCOUVER, 7 JUNE 1940.**

Mr. Matheson was born at Dundas, P.E.I., 15 June 1869, sixth child of the family of eleven of Malcolm Matheson and Catherine, née McDonald, both of whom were born on the Island of Skye, Scotland. They came to P.E.I. early in life, were married on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. D.A. Matheson married Miss Adolphine Schock, of San Francisco, at Dawson, Y.T., on 31 October 1906, in first Presbyterian Church, and by the Rev. John Pringle (Col. the Rev. John Pringle, D.S.O.) They have one child, Malcolm Alexander Matheson, married to a Scotch lady from Dawson, and they also have one son, Gordon Alexander Matheson. Mr. Malcolm Matheson is in charge of his parents' former business in Mayo, Y.T., consisting of general store and telephone exchange owned and controlled by them.

**CLEARING “C.P.R. TOWNSITE.” FIRST C.P.R. ROUNDHOUSE. L.A. HAMILTON.**

Mr. Matheson said: “I came here in 1885 indirectly from Toronto, Ontario. I spent a few months in Toronto, came to Seattle by rail, then over to Victoria by steamer. I thought I was a man, and just started out. I stayed a couple of months in Victoria, worked at building the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway. Then I got the idea I would go over to Burrard Inlet. I came over on the side wheel steamer *Yosemite*; landed at the only dock, the Hastings Sawmill dock; that was in the summer, July or August, 1885.”

**THE GREAT FIRE, 13 JUNE 1886. C.P.R. TOWNSITE.**

“Patterson, Stevens and McCraney had the contract for slashing the townsite from the C.P.R. Then came the big fire in Vancouver, 1886. I was living in a cabin at the back of Carter's hotel on Water Street” (near

Cambie Street, south side.) "The fire broke out about two in the afternoon of that Sunday, and I was having a snooze, with my shoes on, on top of my bunk, and the door of the cabin was open, and I became almost suffocated with the smoke. I jumped up, and went to the door, and the heat almost knocked me down.

"I had no time to save anything; only to make my escape. I ran between two buildings towards Water Street, and just as I got started I fell down with the heat and smoke. I got up and tried to run again, and fell down again. So then I crawled on my hands and knees between the buildings and across Water Street to the inlet, and then walked out in the water until chin deep, where I remained until the fire passed over. I don't know if anyone was near me; the smoke was so dense you could not see your hand before you.

"When the fire passed over I got out to help them look for the dead. I think there were about eighteen people burned to death. Of my old cabin there was nothing save ashes. I joined the Relief Committee.

"I got acquainted with Mr. L.A. Hamilton, C.P.R. Land Commissioner, who was a good churchman. Anyhow, when I was a young fellow I was made to go to church whether I liked it or not, and as a young fellow who had come west and carried my religion with me from my old home, I think Mr. Hamilton must have thought there was something good about me.

"Anyway, during the course of an interview with Mr. Hamilton he told me had instructions from head office to clear land down where the C.P.R. freight sheds are now; that was where the C.P.R. put their first yard, machine shops and roundhouse; he said they were in a great hurry to get the work done. So I asked him if he would give me the contract, but he laughed and asked if I had any experience in clearing land and blowing big stumps.

"He asked if I had any money. I told him I had three or four hundred dollars in cash, and the balance of my capital was character and courage, so he told me he would like to help me, but did not think I was quite equal to the task of big stumps, so I asked him to give me a chance; that I had never undertaken anything I could not carry through."

Major Matthews: (interjecting) That was true?

Mr. Matheson: (continuing) "Certainly. So Mr. Hamilton said, 'All right, come up to my office at a certain hour tomorrow' and I went. All this was after the fire."



Tree cut down on or about Feb 12, 1886 by Alex Russell. Tree four feet four inches. Log lying in front Block 53 Georgia St

JACK FANNIN ON EXTREME RIGHT, CAPT POWERS OF MOODYVILLE HOTEL NEXT (WHITE HAIR)

FAMOUS LOG, 1886, south side Georgia St between Seymour and Granville, dia. 14' 4", Sam Bighthouse one of pre-emptors, "West End" in centre of group. Provincial Archives, Victoria

City Archives 591 CVNTr7.PTr.1 2. 3 Sam Bighthouse 4 Cap Powers of Moodyville. 5 Jack Fannin of Hastings.

Item # EarlyVan\_v5\_045

[photo annotation:]

Famous log, 1886, south side Georgia St between Seymour and Granville, dia. 14' 4", Sam Brighthouse one of pre-emptors, "West End" in centre of group. Provincial Archives, Victoria.

1 [blank] 2 [blank] 3 Sam Brighthouse 4 Capt. Powers of Moodyville 5 Jack Fannin of Hastings

Jack Fannin on extreme right. Capt. Powers of Moodyville Hotel next (white hair).

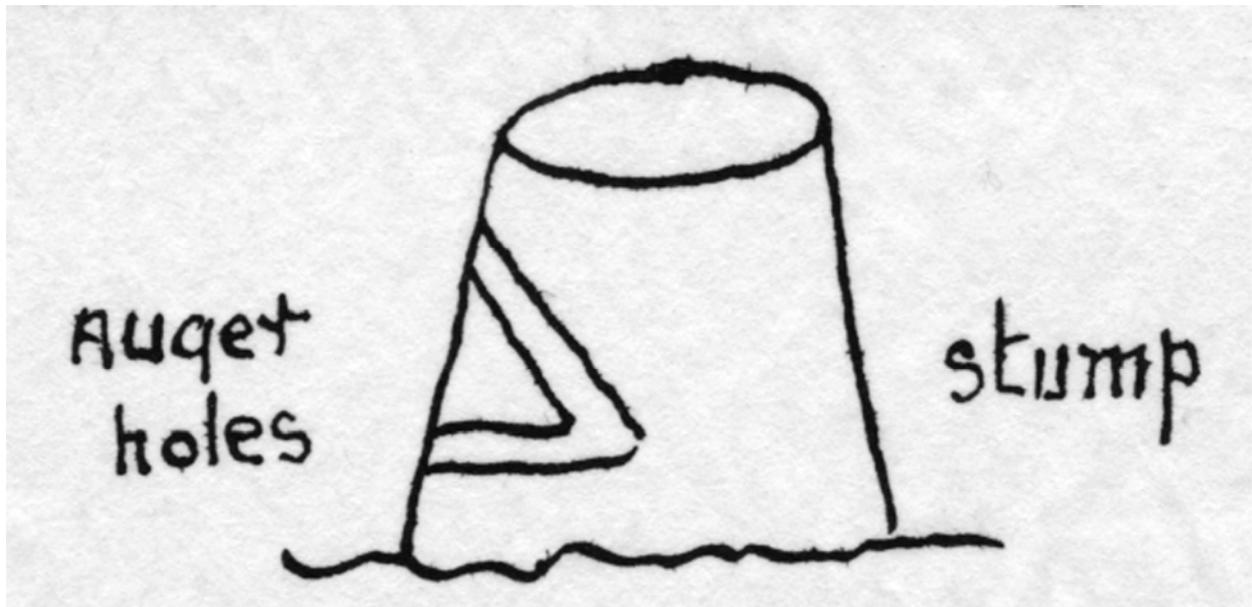
Cut down on or about Feb. 12 1886 by Alex Russell, ten feet four inches. Log lying on front Block 53 Georgia St.

### **CARTER HOUSE. THE GREAT FIRE. PENDER STREET.**

"So I started in to clear the site of the first C.P.R. Roundhouse on Carrall Street. I asked Mr. Hamilton to give me as much time as possible in which to do the work."

### **INDIAN CUSTOMS. PITCH STICKS.**

"In those days there were Indians going around selling pitch sticks for starting fires within our stoves; there was no birch bark around, or anything like that, so I said to an Indian, 'Where do you get this stuff?' And the Indian said, 'Oh, there's lots of it in the stumps; the stumps are filled with it.' So I asked the Indian to come and show me where he got the pitch, and we went and climbed up on a stump—in the heart of the tree there is pitch, and the Indian told me that it extended right down into the roots. However, I got the idea that the stumps could be burned out."



Item # EarlyVan\_v5\_046

### **JACK STEWART, BLACKSMITH. JOHN STEWART, CHIEF OF POLICE.**

"So, John Stewart, who was then running a blacksmith shop, and was afterwards Chief of Police. I went over to Tom Dunn's Hardware store and I bought two augers; two-inch augers, and took them to Jack's blacksmith shop, and asked him to make the shanks longer—to three feet—and he said, 'What the hell are you going to do with an auger that long,' and I said, 'Never mind, you'll see in a day or two.'

"Well, the use I made of the two augers was to bore two holes in each of all of the stumps—lots of them; some stumps as big as this room. One hole was for a draft—horizontal—and the other for the smoke to come out, perpendicular."

Major Matthews: How did you make the two holes meet?

Mr. Matheson: "Well, bore the horizontal one first, and stick in a stick in it, like a broom stick, and then get on top of the stump and cast an eye on it; easy to see where to bore."

“When things were ready, I dropped coals of fire, and a little willow bark, and I had one of those little bellows we used to use in our kitchens and parlours to help the fire to start. Once the fire started everything went except the sap. When I was clearing there were fifty or sixty stumps all burning at the same time, and people were nervous, and saying, ‘Where does the smoke come from’; the smoke was pouring out the auger hole, but they could see no fire, and by and by, the fire got down in the roots, and the smoke was coming up through the ground; there’s lots of pitch in the roots, and people thought that” (the smoke) “was queer, too. Logs and stumps were as thick and as numerous as hair on a cat.

“Anyway, the scheme was a huge success, and I cleared the ground in a third of the time I was allowed.”

#### **BIG TREES.**

“There was lots of big trees lying around on the ground; some of them two or three hundred feet long; logs, branches, all in a regular mess. Well, the way I cleared them away was this. I bored a sloping hole about ten feet from the end of each log, and then more holes about every ten feet—at an angle of forty-five degrees—and then I put black powder in each hole, and cut the length of fuse to allow the explosions to go off one after another like a cannonade. The first hole to ‘go off’ was the one nearest the end of the log; the first one cracked the log; the next one continued the crack; the log would not fall apart, but just was opened up, and when that was done I put a fire the same way as the stumps, in each of the holes. Those fires would continue to burn until there was nothing left but the sap; the upper half of the log kept falling on the lower half below as it burned.”

#### **HASTINGS STREET. ABBOTT STREET. CARRALL STREET.**

“The ground around there was pretty low and wet. I forget the exact acreage, but it was considerable and extended from Carrall to Abbott Street, and from Hastings Street to False Creek; it was the site on which the C.P.R. afterwards built their first machine shop, roundhouse and turntable. When I had finished the contract the ground was clear; we did not dig out the roots; they burned out a certain depth. Mr. Hamilton examined the work, and told me I was making too much money too fast, and he wanted me to supervise the work of clearing the balance of the ‘C.P.R. Townsite.’”

#### **C.P.R. TOWNSITE. C.P.R. CAMP OF GRANVILLE STREET. YALE HOTEL, DRAKE STREET. CORDWOOD FOR LOCOMOTIVES.**

“So then I took charge of the work under Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Charleson. I got a salary of \$125 a month and had as many as one hundred and sixty-five men under my charge.”

#### **D.B. CHARLESON.**

Major Matthews: That’s more than Mr. Charleson got; he got \$65 a month; look, here’s the original letter from Mr. Abbott, 26<sup>th</sup> February 1886, saying his salary would be \$65 a month; you’ve had to wait fifty-five years to find out what salary Mr. Charleson drew.

Mr. Matheson: “Well, I had about one hundred and sixty-five men to look after, and our camp was the building now called the Yale Hotel on the southeast corner of Drake and Granville Street. That building was erected for our camp; where we lived, now Yale Hotel. It was a big building of wood at that time, but I think it must have been brick veneered since. Anyway, it was especially built for the accommodation of the men clearing the land, and it is the same building as the present Yale Hotel; big two-storey building of lumber then.”

#### **GRANVILLE STREET, A TRAIL. CORDOVA STREET. HASTINGS STREET. HORSES. MULES. CORDWOOD FOR C.P.R. ENGINE.**

“I forget how we got our water; it may have been delivered to us, or there may have been a well. You see, Granville Street was the first street cleared after Cordova and Hastings streets. It was cleared but not crowned or ditched; not even grubbed; just flat bare earth. We had sixteen horses and mules. The wood of the logs was cut up into lengths, about thirty inches, for the C.P.R. locomotives, and was stacked along the C.P.R. track down at the foot of Granville Street; single track; the horses were used to hauling the cordwood, and helping to pull the logs and stumps into a heap to fire. There was no such thing as a steam donkey in those days, nor did we use a gin pole; everything was done by hand. No Chinamen; all white men, and paid \$1.25 to \$1.50 a day wages, and found.”

### **FIRE CLEARING.**

Major Matthews: Anything happen to the cordwood?

Mr. Matheson: "Yes, it got burned, but not in the C.P.R. engines. We saved some of it, but the largest amount of it was destroyed by forest fire. How that fire started was never known; that was always a mystery, but it started near Granville Street and followed the pile of cordwood right along; there was a lot of cordwood, well, I don't know precisely, but over two thousand cords."

### **DONALD A. SMITH BLOCK. RICHARD ANGUS BLOCK. HOTEL VANCOUVER.**

"Then, when the teams were doing nothing, when we were not clearing or drawing wood, the teams were used to excavating the Donald A. Smith Block" (southeast corner Granville and Georgia streets) "and R.B. Angus Block, and last, but not least, excavating for the first Hotel Vancouver."

### **L.A. HAMILTON, "FINE MAN." PROVINCE NEWSPAPER.**

"L.A. Hamilton was a regular father to me. He would say to me, 'Dan, you had better buy some property,' and he would tell me where to buy; where were the best locations. You see, I would make a first payment, and wait twelve or fifteen months, and someone would come along and want the property, and I would, well, perhaps it had cost me \$1,000, and I would sell for \$2,000 and take the money and make the second payment on other property I had bought from the C.P.R. I used to own the lots where the *Province* newspaper is now; southeast corner Cambie Street and Hastings, and I owned a whole block in Mount Pleasant; I had a lot of property. Mr. Hamilton was very kind to me; very fine man."

### **DAWSON, Y.T. KLONDIKE RUSH. MAYO, Y.T. R.P. MCLENNAN.**

"After we were done with the clearing of the south end of Granville Street of the C.P.R. Townsite, I started a logging camp up at Blinkinsop Bay; team logging; thirty-five men, and sold the logs to anyone who would buy them; to Hastings Sawmill, Moodyville Sawmill, Brunette Sawmill, or Sayward of Victoria; got four to five and half dollars per thousand.

"Then I went to Dawson, Yukon first as a contractor, and installed the present water works at Dawson for fire and domestic purposes; Mr. R.P. McLennan" (McLennan and McFeely) "and myself installed and operated the water system. Stayed in Dawson until 1920, contracting, operating the waterworks, etc.

"Then I went to Mayo, Yukon; it is about one hundred and sixty miles south of Dawson; small in those days but big silver mines there now, and I started a General Store, and installed a telephone exchange, both of which we still own and operate. Mrs. Matheson and I are going in for a visit to our son about the 20<sup>th</sup> this month; he attends to affairs while I am 'out.'"

### **COL. THE REV. JOHN PRINGLE, D.S.O.**

"I was telling you about the Rev. John Pringle who married us. He was a big man. I recall one time there were two fellows got in a quarrel in a cabin, and he was there too, and he remonstrated with them, and one of them told him it was none of his business, but he replied that it was his business, and the fellow made a 'pass' at him or something; anyway, Mr. Pringle was a splendid wrestler; I thought I could wrestle but he could beat me.

"So anyway, he just made a grab at the fellow, and gave him a bit of a twist, and the first thing he was on his back on the ground, with the Rev. Mr. Pringle sitting on his chest. Mr. Pringle talked to him good and earnest; told him he would let him up if he promised not to, but the fellow wouldn't, and Mr. Pringle told him he would have to wallop him if he didn't; didn't want to wallop him, but if he wouldn't promise he'd have to, and finally the fellow promised, and he let him up."

Approved, after correction, by D.A. Matheson, 12 June 1940.