

## **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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### **Contact Information**

City of Vancouver Archives  
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9  
604.736.8561  
archives@vancouver.ca  
vancouver.ca/archives



**MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. J.H. LOW, NÉE MATILDA ALCOCK, WIDOW OF THE LATE JOHN HALLOWES LOW, NOW OF 1118 MELVILLE STREET, FORMERLY OF 2758 MATHERS AVENUE, WEST VANCOUVER, WHERE SHE LIVES WITH HER DAUGHTER, MRS. S.L. DAVEY.**

Her son is Major J.R. Low, 6826 Laburnum Street, Vancouver, and Electrical Department, City Hall. (29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, C.E.F., and 67<sup>th</sup> Western Scots.)

Mrs. Low said: "I was born in Mitchell, Ontario, and came to Gastown on March 8<sup>th</sup> 1886. My mother was a widow, Mrs. M.J. Alcock, and my brothers and sisters—all eight of us came with her—including T.C. Alcock, who as you may have read in the newspapers, celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of Mother's arrival the other day. My father moved from Mitchell, Ontario to Manitoba in 1869 and settled there, and he died whilst on a trip to Ontario about four years later. My father's arrival at Fort Garry was quite a progress; he came across the prairie with magnificent transport, a fine democrat and a fine buggy, as well as a large family carriage, and about fifty covered carts following behind; the whole made quite a parade, and as the governor was expected about that time, he was at first confused for the gubernatorial party, and halted. There was trouble at the time, and the Roman Catholic French did not want the governor to pass, and mistaking my father for the governor, at first denied him passage, but when he protested he was not the governor, they let him pass. The governor's party passed the next day, and being with armed force, passed without trouble; I think McDougall was the governor's name."

**NAMING OF MELBOURNE, MANITOBA.**

"From Fort Garry my father went to Highbluff, Manitoba, which he so named on account of the high bluff of trees shading the river, then he went to Melbourne, Manitoba, which he also named; he died about four years later. From Melbourne, Manitoba, we came west via rail to Seattle, Washington, Seattle to Victoria, and to Vancouver by boat."

**THE GREAT FIRE, 1886.**

"Our house was across the street from the present Temporary City Hall" (Holden Building), "16 Hastings Street East, and when the fire came that Sunday afternoon, Mrs. Ward, my sister, was getting ready to go to Sunday School, and looking out of the window there seemed to be such a lot of people, all hurrying, their arms full of such things as birdcages, and then there was a burst; just a sort of burst of flames. It had been such a beautiful morning, calm and beautiful.

"After the fire we rented a place on False Creek; the house was not a house, it was being built and had just the shape up, but we fixed up something, and slept on the floor, all of us—and then we built our new home on the same place where we had been burned down.

"My brother Jack was quite a sport, and when he ran from the fire he picked up a valise, it was full of cartridges; he thought perhaps he would shoot something, perhaps to eat, for food; my uncle, William Small, my mother's brother, was with him when he started off, and my uncle was quite a care, so he dropped the valise quite near the road, and helped my uncle along. He left it quite near the road. C.G. Johnson and John Boulton came along and they were suffocating with smoke and heat, and chanced to lay face down on the ground beside the valise. Luckily the cartridges were pointed the other way" (in the valise), "for presently they went off with the heat; exploded. If they had not been faced the other way they would have injured, perhaps killed, Johnson and Boulton. Gardner Johnson told about it at one of the pioneer meetings, and he said, 'I'd just like to know who put that valise there; I have something to say to him,' so, as we were coming away from the meeting, my sister told him it belonged to Jack, and he laughed.

"I was told to get Louise out of the house—she was poorly—and take her down to False Creek—the road to the False Creek bridge ran across country then, so I got Louise and her parcel. By the time we got there, two more sisters came after us, and I said, 'Where's Mother?' They said she had stopped on the chance that someone might come along and pick up some of our belongings in a wagon, and then while we were talking, Mother came along with my eldest sister, and Mother was without a bonnet. My sister told me the sparks had got on it and it took fire on Mother's head, and her bonnet had gone up in flames.

T.C. Alcock, he stayed at our house on Hastings Street—his home was beside ours—to the last minute, and then started off; he fell, and brother Jack went back to find him, and found him lying face down on the ground unconscious. Brother Jack and Mr. Low, afterwards my husband, carried him to False Creek, and laid him down on the sand. False Creek was awfully nice at that time; nice sandy beaches. Well, T.C. Alcock, my brother, laid there on the beach unconscious for *four* hours.”

**FALSE CREEK SANDY BEACH. C.P.R. TOWNSITE. CLEARING FOREST. CAMBIE STREET.**

“There was nothing cleared on the other side of Cambie Street when we came; it was all forest beyond Cambie.” (Look up Schetky and see what he says; also see Barker photo.) “A little house, built like a shanty, a little tool shed used by the men clearing the ground, was on the other side of Cambie Street about Homer.”

**J.H. LOW. AIR BRAKE.**

“My husband was working for the C.P.R. at North Bend; he invented the air brake, the one they have on the railway cars, but he got nothing for it; his claim was investigated but they did not allow it, and then, one day, when he was working on a locomotive connection rod, he told them to ease it over, but they let the piston head drop, and it hit him on the head, and when he came home he tried to hide from me that his cap was full of blood, but I noticed it, and he told me to say nothing about it. But he always suffered, and finally they performed an operation and took a piece of his skull out so that when he leaned down the skin bulged with the weight of the brain. He finally died in the Westminster Asylum for the Insane. He was a very strong man.”

**ARRIVAL FIRST TRAIN VANCOUVER, 23 MAY 1887.**

“Mr. Low, my husband, was a foreman at Kamloops, and he decorated the first engine, No. 374, coming into Vancouver, May 23, 1887.

“I was nineteen when we came to Vancouver in March 1886, and was married to Mr. Low in 1887; married in our own home by the Rev. C.L. Thompson, the Presbyterian minister.

“My eldest sister, Mary Ann Alcock, was one of the first nurses in the wooden City Hospital on Beatty Street; Miss Crickmay was there too. I knew Mr. Owen Hughes very well.

“My eldest daughter died when she was seventeen; my other daughter is Mrs. S.L. Davey, of West Vancouver; she has three children. John Davey, my grandson, works at the ‘Safeway Stores,’ head office.”

Read and approved by Mrs. J.H. Low whilst at City Archives, 21 July 1936.

J.S. Matthews  
City Archivist.

Whilst Mrs. Low was listening to the above being read to her, the Golden Jubilee pageant for the day—bands, stage coach, soldiers—passed eastwards along Hastings Street before the site of her old home of 1886, and as she gazed down upon it from the City Hall windows, she soliloquised on the marvel of the scene before her. Only fifty years ago she strolled about on the same site, then nothing more than a new forest clearing of swamp and stumps. The Alcock home, of which she was a daughter, was at the northeast corner of Carrall and Hastings, but on Hastings Street at a point almost directly opposite the present City Hall, 16 Hastings Street East.

J.S. Matthews  
City Archivist.