

Early Vancouver

Volume Five

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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.

About the 2011 Edition

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MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. JAMES WALKER, ELDEST DAUGHTER OF JOSEPH SILVIA, "PORTUGUESE JOE, NO. 1" OF "GASTOWN," WHO HAD BEEN INVITED BY MRS. ALICE CRAKANTHORP, SOLE SURVIVING PUPIL NOW LIVING IN VANCOUVER AT THE FIRST CLASS OF THE FIRST SCHOOL, HASTINGS SAWMILL SCHOOL, TO TAKE TEA WITH HER AT HER HOME, 586 EAST 59TH AVENUE, 28 NOVEMBER 1938.

Mrs. Walker, daughter of an Indian mother, and so half Indian, was most becomingly dressed in black velvet, with a broad collar ornamented with tiny purple flowers, a necklace of two bands of imitation pearls of good quality, and a pearl brooch. A remarkable feature is her activity, almost vivacity, considering that she was old enough to be married over fifty-five years ago. She has a remarkable memory.

JOSEPH SILVIA. "PORTUGUESE JOE, NO. 1." "PORTUGUESE JOE, NO. 2."

Mrs. Walker: "As I have told you, my father was no relation to other 'Portuguese Joes' of 'Gastown.' Father was fair haired, with rosy cheeks; he must have got that from his mother, she was Scotch. Mr. Walker, my husband, was half Indian, but two of my children have fair hair. Father played the violin, guitar, and the mandolin. I remember" (Gregoris) "Joe Fernandez; I used to buy candy at his store in 'Gastown,' but I was not married when he died, so he must have died before 1883."

Mrs. Crakanthorp: "There was a drunken brawl, or fight, and Joe Fernandez got mixed up in it, somehow, and got a cut on the leg, and gangrene set in; he died. I was a little girl, but I can remember it. I think he was put in jail at Westminster, and died there."

Mrs. Walker: "You see, Father had a sister, and my cousins in Massachusetts used to write to me; there are a lot of Simmons" (or Simmonds) "they told me, in Massachusetts. You see, Father's real name was Simmonds, or Simmons; that's Scotch. We had gone to the farm at Reid Island more than a year when Joe Fernandez died." (Note: Joseph Silvia preempted Reid Island 9 September 1881. D.L. 35, preemption record No. 31, and crown grant.)

BROCKTON POINT. TOMPKINS BREW.

Mrs. Walker: Tompkins Brew was the first to build a house by the nine o'clock gun; then we were next; Brew was there when we went there; he was Justice of the Peace. Then my father was next; then Peter Smith came, and he used to come over and borrow Father's tools. Father had a bar at Brockton Point" (saloon bar); "he had a license. He was the first man to have a seine license to fish, too. It was quite a profitable undertaking—fishing; I remember some of the 'Gastown' men joking about going to give up storekeeping and lumbering, and go fishing; there was money in fishing; lots of money in it.

"We had moved from Brockton Point to Reid Island about two years when Vancouver began to grow, and I remember that my father was so sorrowful that he had sold the place at 'Gastown' so cheap, just as the great big city was starting to grow where he had been so long, and so early."

WHOI-WHOI. LUMBERMAN'S ARCH. POTLATCH. "TAYHAY."

"They gave a great big potlatch in Stanley Park, right where the Lumberman's Arch is. I was little, but I can remember it clearly. My mother took me to it on her back; she 'packed' me to it, and when we got near there were 'thousands' of Indians; 'thousands' of them, from everywhere, Nanaimo, Cowichan, everywhere, and I was frightened. I don't know who gave the potlatch, but I think my grandmother's brother, and I think Supple Jack; yes, that's Haytulk, that's his Indian name. I think he was in it too.

"They held the potlatch in a great big shed; a huge place; the Indians built it themselves long ago."

Major Matthews: How long would it be, a city block?

Mrs. Walker: "Oh, yes. More than that, I should think; it was all divided up into sections inside."

Major Matthews: How big inside?

Mrs. Walker: "Oh, huge. You could put this house inside it. There was no floor; just earth; and the fires were all burning. A great big high shed."

Major Matthews: How many? How about smoke.

Mrs. Walker: "About three fires, but the flames were leaping up high, as high as your chin, and part of the top of the potlatch house was open to let the smoke out.

"The platforms were high up, inside, of course, and the chiefs were away up on the platform, and throwing blankets and money down, and those below were scrambling for it.

"Mother took me, on her back, but when they began to dance and throw money about, I got frightened, and ran. I darted through under their legs, in and out of the crowd, and dashed out of the building; I didn't wait for anyone; not even Mother; she came after me and had to take me home; she could not stop at the potlatch because I was so frightened; I was properly frightened."

INDIAN BLANKETS. INDIAN PRINCESS.

"Before the potlatch started they had a great pile of blankets, and they got a 'high'" (i.e., girl of high social station) "girl to sit on it. That was part of the ceremony. To show that they had the blankets, I suppose. She, the princess, was my aunt" (Lomtinaht) "my mother's sister; daughter of old Chief Kiapilano.

"It would be improper to have a common girl sit on the blankets; they had a great pile of them, and a princess sitting on top. They could not put any common girl on the blankets; you have to choose some high society girl."

INDIAN CANOES.

"They gave away a big canoe; great big canoe. All the men Indians would gather around the canoe and catch hold of it with two hands; everyone that could get a hold of the canoe" (gunwale) "had a hold on it, and if there was no one bid for it—like an auction—they would go wild, and even break it up, but as soon as someone bid for it, all would let go, suddenly, just like that" (demonstrating releasing hold as altogether.) "Of course, if the canoe was not too big, they would have the ceremony of the canoe inside the potlatch house, but if it was too big, then they would have it outside.

"The blankets were all in a pile, and the seat on top of them was the seat of honour, to show all the people present, to show all the blankets to the people, and the princess on top was 'somebody,' a good looking girl. They then threw all the blankets away from the platform above; threw them down for the people to seize."

INDIAN GRAVES.

"There was a lot of Indian graves all along the First Narrows. They did not bury their dead; they put them on the ground, with the blankets, and put a shelter over them; just slabs of wood, no floor, two slabs leaning one against the other to cover the body; there was quite a lot of them along where the *Empress of Japan* figurehead is erected now on the First Narrows shore. There was Indian graves all along there. And some of the little houses had windows of glass in them, but that was only the chiefs, or some 'high' Indian, but the others they just laid them on the ground with their blankets and things, and put the shelter over them." (Note: an illustration of such a grave is to be seen in L.A. Hamilton's watercolour of Stanley Park, 1884.)

INDIAN WIVES OF WHITEMEN. PETER SMITH. TOMPKINS BREW. KINCAID. HARRY TRIM. JOSEPH MANNION.

"Tompkins Brew had an Indian wife; big fine beautiful woman, and he was fond of her. But she got sick, and I can see him yet, with his arm around her neck as she was lying there in her bed; but she did not get better, and she died. She had a son, Arthur Brew.

"Peter Smith had an Indian wife, too. And Kincaid, he had an Indian wife. And he had a sloop, too. Harry Trim had an Indian wife. She belonged to the False Creek Indian Reserve, and they had two daughters; one was Maria."

MOWITCH MAN. "MOWITCH JIM."

"Joseph Mannion had an Indian wife; they called her father the "Mowitchman"; everybody was afraid of him; they said he was an Indian doctor. The way he got his name was that when they" (whiteman)

"wanted a deer, they would tell him to get them a deer, and he would say, 'All right, I get you two,' and go off. And he would come back with a deer, perhaps two. Where he got them I don't know, but 'Mowitch' is

the Indian word for deer, and that was how they called him 'Mowitch.' 'Howe Sound Jim' and 'Mowitch Jim' were two different Indians."

WILD ANIMALS. BEARS. WOLVES.

"Oh, the bears used to come right down to the cabin. I remember how" [blank] "used to tell about being inside a cabin and hearing a thump, thump, thump, outside, and then her father went out and there was a bang, bang; her father had shot the bear. And the wolves. You could hear them howling. But there was not many wolves around Burrard Inlet. It was up Howe Sound that the wolves were. You could see lots of them up Howe Sound, hanging around the beach like dogs. We lived a couple of years north of Gibson's Landing, at a logging camp where they had oxen; the wolves ran about like dogs."

HOWE SOUND. SCJUNK. STAW-KI-YAH.

"Indian name? They used to call Howe Sound, Scjunk. Staw-ki-yah?"

"Stawkiyah, that's wolf; Indian name for wolf." (Refer: Indian places names, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3, for Scjunk and Stawkiyah, given by Khahtsahlano as the Indian names for Gibson's Landing and Roberts Creek.)

BROCKTON POINT.

"There are a lot of Chinamen buried along by Brockton Point, between the Nine O'Clock Gun and the lighthouse. We used to walk along there, and in and out among the little mounds; no head boards; it was quite a little burying ground."

MRS. JAMES WALKER.

"Yes, I know. They have it down on the marriage paper that I was twenty years old when I was married, July 15th 1883, at Kuper Island Anglican Church, but they cheated on my age. I was only sixteen; I had four children, two girls and two boys, before I was twenty."

CHRISTMAS DAY IN GASTOWN. HALLOWE'EN IN GASTOWN.

"Oh, yes. They used to have lots of fun at Christmas and Hallowe'en in Gastown. The men used to dress up, and put on long white whiskers, and at Hallowe'en put on masks. Oh, yes, I remember it; it used to be delightful for the children."

Read to and approved by Mrs. J. Walker, 17 January 1939.

J.S. Matthews.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH BROTHER WALSH OF VANCOUVER COLLEGE.

KEEFER'S HALL. FIRST MASS. VANCOUVER COLLEGE.

Brother Walsh: "The first mass was said in Keefer's Hall. Vancouver College was started as a school for boys in 1922, in just a bit of a wooden building on Richards Street, about the middle of the block; then we moved to Shaughnessy Heights."