

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, 12 SEPTEMBER 1935.

(Whilst taking eight or nine photographs of her as she sat in her sitting room. W.J. Moore Photo Co.)

Mrs. Morton: "We went to England in 1888 the first time. Joseph was one day old when his mother died; Lizzie was born in Blackpool. Joseph had been living with the Greys" (or Grays) "in New Westminster, and when we went to live at Mission, he was astonished at the calves, pigs, and the farm generally.

"Once Mr. Morton and I went down to Westminster; a circus came in. Joseph would be about five years old then. We were going to take Lizzie, but I wanted to take Joseph. Joseph cried to go to the Greys; he called them Grandma and Grandpa; Joseph did not know me very well."

(Note: this indicates that after the first Mrs. Morton died, he had to place his little baby son Joseph in the care of his friends, the Greys.)

"At Westminster we saw the circus, the camels and the elephants, and when he got back, Joseph told Lizzie all about the big animals, with much gusto, and about one of them having a tail at both ends."

MEMO OF FURTHER CONVERSATION, 18 NOVEMBER 1935.

MORTON FAMILY.

Mrs. Morton: "I think my husband, John Morton, was the eldest of the family; there were ten of them I think, John was first, I think, then there was Jonathan, Alfred and Joseph, the youngest, and Mrs. Clegg, and Maria, Eliza, and some that had died; there were ten in all, I think; all gone now."

BAPTIST COLLEGE.

"I will give you this letter of September 5, 1890, from Mr. Morton to me. From it you can see his great interest in Baptist churches. He wanted to establish a Baptist College in the West End for the higher training of Baptists, and gave them ten lots" (66 feet each) "but they did not pay the taxes and gave him a lot of trouble to get them back. We came back from England and found the taxes had not been paid. He was very anxious about the location, and got Mr. Hamilton, the engineer, to select the best place."

RECIPROCITY OF TRADE WITH UNITED STATES.

"Mr. Morton was a Liberal in politics, and in 1911" (Laurier defeated in election fought over reciprocity) "was a great reciprocity man. He used to say then, 'If it does not come now, it will come eventually,' and it has come tonight." (Newspapers of 18 November announce signing of King-Roosevelt Reciprocity agreement.) "I am glad I have lived until tonight to see it. I am very pleased it has come at last, as he said it would."

THE FIRST MRS. MORTON.

"Mr. Morton's first wife died in New Westminster when Joe was born; she had a presentiment that she would never see the white sands of English Bay; she never saw them."

As narrated to me. J.S. Matthews.

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH MRS. RUTH MORTON, 15 MARCH 1937.

Widow of John Morton, first settler on Burrard Inlet, 1862 (and who died in 1912 in Vancouver) who kindly invited me to visit her this evening at her apartments, the "Montrose," 1190 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver, where she resides with her companion, Mrs. Buxton. Mrs. Morton will be eighty-nine in two days, that is, 17 March 1937, and for her great age looks a picture of health, says she feels very well, and she talks with those measured words which are becoming her years. She is tolerably active of movement.

Mrs. Morton is a very tiny lady, certainly not as much as five feet. Her hair is not white, but iron grey; her complexion clear; she has few wrinkles; her figure erect; her hand warm. She rose, not without some slight effort, when I entered, received me most graciously and the conversation, which lasted for an hour continuously, began, until I retired, fearing to fatigue her; but as I left, and she accompanied me a few steps to the door, she showed no appearance of fatigue.

Major J.S. Matthews: Well, Mrs. Morton, how well you look, and—such a long time since I have seen you.

Mrs. Ruth Morton: (a little huskily) “Yees. Where have you been; take off your coat.”

The conversation continued on the events of the past years, until finally she became reminiscent, laughed at previous stories she had told me, and which I repeated to her so that she might see I had paid careful attention to what had been told me (See *Early Vancouver*, Vol. [blank]), and then:

THE BRICKMAKER’S CLAIM.

Query by J.S.M.: Mrs. Morton, is it true that Mr. Morton slept under the trees one night when he first came to Burrard Inlet.”

Answer by Mrs. Morton: (slowly and positively) “He slept under the trees many a night; he told me himself. He used to tell me how, in the morning, when he crawled from under the blankets, he would look up into the high tree tops, and see things like a pair of trousers flying off; soaring away.”

J.S.M.: What on earth could they be?

Mrs. Morton: “Cranes.”

DEADMAN’S ISLAND.

Mrs. Morton, continuing: “And then there was Deadman’s Island. They had to do their own surveying, and he” (Morton) “wanted Deadman’s Island” (see Rev. P.C. Parker narrative), “but Judge Begbie said the Indians used it as a burial ground; buried their dead high up in the trees; and he could not have it.

“And then, one day, Mr. Morton saw a lot of Indians” (see Joseph Morton narrative) “coming and making a disturbance and noise, and he said to himself, ‘They are after me,’ and he made off towards New Westminster, and he kept looking back, and then he said to himself, ‘They are not following me,’ and he watched and saw them putting a rope over a branch, and then he watched them put a rope around an Indian woman’s neck, and then” (Mrs. Morton gave a serious glance) “they hung her.”

(Note by J.S.M.: The Indian woman is said to have killed her baby in a fit of jealousy; she was one of several wives of an Indian of prominence, who was giving especial attention to another younger wife, and the woman took vengeance by killing their baby.)

“Then Mr. Morton, he told me himself, next day started for New Westminster; that was the nearest civilisation, and the day after they” (the authorities and Mr. Morton) “came back to Burrard Inlet, and they saw Chief Kapilano, and told the Indians that it was not lawful to do *that*.”

CHIEF KAPILANO.

“But the Chief said, ‘The whitemans do it when their people murder.’

“And they told the Indians that that might be, but they” (the Indians) “were never to do it again.

“Chief Kapilano was a good chief; they could reason with him; he was a good sort of chief, and after that they” (Morton and the Indians) “were good friends.”

ENGLISH BAY WHITE SANDS.

“Then, when I came to B.C., Mr. Morton told me that he wanted to show me the white sands at English Bay” (see her previous conversation with me in *Early Vancouver*, Vol. [blank]), “and he told me he wanted to show them to the first Mrs. Morton, but she never saw them. He said she” (first Mrs. Morton) “replied that perhaps it was all right, but she did not think she would ever live to see them” (the white sands) “and then she died.”

THE GRINDSTONE. DUCKS.

“Then, he had a grindstone” (see Joseph Morton narrative) “and he let the Indians use it to sharpen their hatchets; hatchets, that was what they called them, and the Indians and Mr. Morton got to be good friends, and they brought him ducks, and they showed him how to dig a hole in the ground, and put hot cinders in it, and then the ducks, and then more hot cinders on top, and then cover it up with earth;

smothering, they called it, and the ducks would come out so sweet" (cooked tastily.) "And they" (Morton and the Indians) "were always good friends after that" (hanging incident.)

INDIAN INCIDENT.

"And then there was a man who came from Huddersfield, and Mr. Morton and the man were sleeping in the cabin, and one morning the man heard something rattling outside, and he looked out and saw a lot of Indians, and some of them were sharpening their hatchets on the grindstone, and the man said—he was alarmed—" (quickly) "'Mr. Morton, get up, get up, the red devils are here, and they will kill you.' But the man said, 'I don't like them. I'd like to tell them to go away; what do I say?' And Mr. Morton told him to say, 'Ikta mika,' that is, 'What do you want?' So the man said it, and the Indians said, 'Ah ta' and then they laughed, and the man thought they were making fun of him before they killed him. And Mr. Morton continued to lie asleep, and the man said, 'What shall I say?' And Mr. Morton told him to say, 'Mika klatawa' (go away), but what he said was, 'Michael! Clatter away.'" (And Mrs. Morton chuckled.) "Oh, it took Mr. Morton to tell a story."

DUCKS.

"Did I ever tell you about ducks? Well, the Indians had the canoes, and they got the canoes all ready, and they pulled down branches, and when the mallards came—they were supposed to be the best—they" (the Indians) "would cover the canoes all over with branches, and then they would get underneath, and they would drift down on the tide, and the ducks would think it was just a tree in the water, and they" (Indians) "would have a stick with a prong on the end of it like two fingers" (Mrs. Morton illustrated with her fingers), "and they would go gently in the canoe, and when the ducks would come right under" (the branches), "come close, they" (Indians) "would push the stick out, and catch the duck's neck between the prongs, and they gave a little jerk. You would think the other ducks would be alarmed, wouldn't you, but they didn't get alarmed. Oh, the Indians brought Mr. Morton lots of ducks."

KANAKA RANCH. COAL HARBOUR. MCCORD.

Question by J.S.M.: Mrs. Morton, did you ever hear anything about the Kanaka ranch down on Coal Harbour? There was a little place on Georgia Street, between the street and the water, where they had apple trees, and raspberry bushes, and pigs. (See McCord, or Mrs. R.D. Smith.)

Answer by Mrs. Morton: "Yes, I remember. When we went to England, they, Brighthouse and Hailstone, did not look after the property" (West End), "and they had an agent or something, and there was a woman, her name started with 'M'" (McCord), "and she squatted on the land, and it seems if they stay long enough you cannot get them off, and Mr. Morton tried and tried, but he could not get her off; the Indian woman just stayed. And Mr. Morton had an agent, the Rands, they were supposed to look after it, but they never could get the woman out. It was down by the 'Arena'" (corner Georgia and Denman streets); "expensive water lots too, weren't they?"

CARIBOO.

"Then when we went to England once, Mr. Morton showed me, as we passed along in the train, the Cariboo Trail he had walked over; he was up in the Cariboo twice. And he told me there was a lot of machinery in a mine, and they went to law over it, and Jones was a policeman, and Joe" (Morton's son) "went up there, and it did him good; he went out shooting; he was up there for a month to look after things; that was at Wingdam, I think they called it; there was deep water. He was there to see they took nothing out. But the place was deserted; there were lots of houses, but there was no one living in them."

After one and one half hours conversation, I left to go, as she seemed to be slackening, and I feared to tire her. The dear old lady rose to bid me farewell; she will be 89 in two days, March 17th. I had given her a small box of chocolates when I entered, and wished her many happy returns of her birthday; I repeated the wish, and shook hands, kissed her hand, and backed towards the door. She followed with Mrs. Buxton, the door was closed slowly, and this charming and good old lady disappeared from my sight, and a remarkable visit was concluded.

It seemed almost incredible that in this late year, 1937, I had been speaking to the wife of the first settler on the site of this now great and beautiful city of over three hundred thousand people.

(Written immediately I got home.)

15 March 1937 J.S. Matthews.