

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

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THE GREAT FIRE, 1886.

In regard to the Vancouver fire at the time I was interested in a general store on Water Street also in a logging camp on the North arm of the Fraser. I left Vancouver that morning to take our last boom to Chemainnus. We saw the smoke as we went down the North arm but thought it was from the clearing fires which had been burning for some time. When we got to the mill I got a wire telling me everything we had was burnt. Got the boom scaled as soon as I could, then the mill owner very kindly sent me to Vancouver in one of the mill tugs. We could not land on account of logs and debri [*debris*] but I got on a log and worked my way to shore; it was dark and raining, no place to go, so I piled up some lumber, crept under it, next morning (Thursday) we decided to build, I had been used to putting up rough buildings so laid out a building, left my partners to nail on the boards, hunted up some cedar, and split shakes for the roof; by Friday night we had the roof on and Saturday our goods came from Victoria and we started business. As I was away at the time of the fire; what I know is largely hearsay, but there is one item which I think is work recording.

SHACK ESCAPES DESTRUCTION.

At the South East corner of Abbott and Hastings street [1] there was a small shack in which an old man lived; he fought the fire round the shack till overcome by heat and smoke, fire all round him, blinded by smoke, he saw no chance to escape, so said he thought he might as well be burnt in the shack so crawled in, and the shack did not burn; one of the strangest things I have ever known; everything else in the vicinity was burnt clean, I have forgotten the old mans name.

REV. HALL.

Another sad case was the burning to death of Rev. Hall's horse and dog. Mr. Hall was in the habit of riding over to our camp every Sunday, putting his horse up, have dinner with us when he and I would walk down to Eburn to service, the week before the fire he had been using his horse, and thought he would give it a rest on Sunday, and borrowed another horse and his own was burnt in the stable; his fine dog was chained and perished also, his cow was loose and saved herself by swimming out in the Inlet, my old sleigh dog which I had brought down from Cassiar, was picked off a log in the Inlet after the fire had gone down.

Wm. Mashiter.

[1] Excerpt, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2, Mrs. D.R. Reid, "we built a two-storey house just west of the C.P.R. crossing on Pender Street," "escaped destruction," "a single little shack occupied by sick old bachelor just a few yards west of our house."

RIVER ROAD TRAGEDY, 26 DECEMBER 1889.

You ask aboute the terrible accident I was in on the North arme road. Six of us were returning from a party at Mr. Rowings [*sic. Rowling*] in going we noticed a large fir tree burning. I made the remark that it would fall across the road when it fell. In our return just before we got to it we saw it begin to fall. I shouted to the driver to pull up as I saw the tree would fall ahead of us; instead he whiped up the horses to a gallop, and the tree crashed diagonaly on the sleigh, just missing Miss Lawson and myself, after striking the ground the tree sprang up several feel leaveing the sleigh clear. I was thrown out into the snow. I jumped up and draged Miss Lawson who was held down by branches; at first I thought she was dead; she came to in a moment and the first words she said is my brother killed. I led her away a short distance; then went back I had some maches [*sic. matches*] and looked at each of the bodys to see if there was any life but they had all been instantly killed; one horse was dead, the other so badly hurt it had to be shot. I then took Miss Lawson home and broke the news to her parents; such a task I hope to never have to do again. Mr. Lawson and I went to a neighbour (Mr. Daniel) knocked him up; he got out his team, and we brought the bodys to Mr. Lawsons, and laid them in one of the rooms. Young Lawson and Bodwel were burried at the same time. My old friend Rev. Dr. McLaren officiating. I can never forget his kind words to me at the funeral. Frank Hart was undertaker.

Wm. Mashiter,

Squamish

sh, Mar. 14—1936.

P.S. You ask how it was that the tree was being burnt down; it was a new settler that wanted it for fire wood, and was told that the easiest way to get it down was by burning it by auger holes, which used to be a very common practice of felling large timber; you probably know how this was done; in case you don't. A two inch hole was bored into the tree about two feet, then another above it, at an angle to meet the lower hole, hot coals were dropped in the upper hole and the draft from the lower hole would drive the fire into the heart of the tree; large trees often burn for a week or more before falling.

W.M.

See *Early Vancouver*, vols. 2 and 3. Also Rowling file.

This accident happened somewhere near the foot of Victoria Road on Southeast Marine Drive. The old name for Marine Drive was River Road; still earlier, North Arm Road. Read *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3.

[LETTERS FROM WM. MASHITER.]

Squamish, March 14—1936

J.S. Matthews Esq.

Dear Sir

I must really try and write you a few lines to thank you for your kind letter of Dec. 12. It is rather a hard task for me to write as I have not much education. I was delicate till about twelve years old, then took charge of our little farm doing most of the work so there was not much time for study. What a lot of old faces your letter brought to mind. Bishop Dart, my father in law went to school under him in England, he came and spent a week with me shortly before he died. Rev. Cliton [*sic. Clinton*], Father Fay, the merry priest, the good natured Dr. Bell Irvin, J.C. Keef [*sic. Keith*] the first banker in Granville, Mayor McLean, Dave Oppenheimer, stern Judge Begbie, stern on the bench but with a kind heart, A.W. Vowell, the wild Irishman when roused, but one of the finest men I ever traveled with, many a hard days snow shoeing we have had together. D. Burdis, Wm Shannon, and a host of others all have passed to the unknown, soon in the course of nature I must follow. I came to Squamish in 1890 took charge of the Magee ranch and opened a general store and stopping place in 1894, got married in 1904, and wife I spent the summer in England, returned in fall to our little place here where I am now living. I lost my wife in 1925, and a niece has kept house for me ever since. What little money we had we invested in Vancouver, that and what we made off our place kept us very comfortable till the hard times came, then as you know rents interest loans could not be collected and I could not make enough to pay the taxes so most of my hard earned money is gone, but I have the best of health which is much better than money, and if I was fifty years younger I would strike out for the Peace river, and start all over again, but at 87 that is not to be thought of.

Yours

Sincerely,

[*signed*] Wm Mashiter.

Squamish, March 31, 1936.

My dear Mr. Matthews:

THE GREAT FIRE, 1886. SQUATTERS IN GRANVILLE, B.I.

Your kind and most interesting letter of March 22nd duly to hand, thanks very much for it. I can quite understand you being very busy with Jubilee work, the willing horse gets lots to do at such times. You ask about the shack I spoke of I don't think I can possibly be mistaken in the location I gave you, viz. south east corner of Hastings and Abbott street. Our two houses were on the north east corner of Hastings and Abbott and I can picture in my mind's eye the little shack