

Early Vancouver

Volume Six

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1940-1945.

Supplemental to volumes one, two, three, four and five collected in 1931, 1932, 1934, 1939 and 1944.

About the 2011 Edition

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classmates never spoke to me, yet I prayed to God as all Roman Catholics do. That was a hard thing for a young kid, only fourteen, to go through.”

Major Matthews: Are you a Roman Catholic?

Mr. Nagao: “Yes. Four years later, I left Japan for San Francisco, and I found the social condition of the American people, although they claimed they are Christian, were not so good as I was told by the missionary, and I found many points which were much worse than in Japan, so I had to change my mind. I have changed my mind altogether now.”

Mr. Nagao partook of such humble food and a cup of tea as I was able to offer from my luncheon parcel. We ate at my desk. I suggested that sometime, perhaps, long years in the future, the hatred which, due to war, existed between his nation and mine would disappear.

Mr. Nagao: (fervently) “I hope so.” Then continuing: “I came to North America expecting to find Christians living in peaceful happiness together, but I found out that what the French missionary in Japan had told me was not entirely true.

“There is much to be commended in the Japanese system of government, and some that is not, and the same thing here. My opinion is that it is about fifty-fifty” (equal.)

“I used to be a partner in a mine with Mr. Corbould, the lawyer, of New Westminster. I am in hopes they” (the B.C. Security Commission, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) “will leave me here in Vancouver. I like Vancouver. But, if I must go away, then—I must go, that’s all there is to say about it. I have not long to live. I am 75. I am not enjoying perfect health.

“Mrs. Nagao came from Japan; we were married here, no children. She has not been very well for nearly ten years, and does not leave our home.

“I am not a Japanese subject any longer. My sister in Japan is dead, and I have no other relative there.

“I have been away from Japan over thirty years, and am scratched off their records now. If I went back there, they would say, ‘Who are you?’ They would say, ‘We don’t know you. You are presumed dead.’ I should have to be brought to life again, to be born again, as it were, before I could be a Japanese subject.”

Mr. Nagao rose to keep an appointment downtown. And a very courteous kindly gentleman departed, promising to come again.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH AUGUST JACK KHAHTSAHLANO, SON OF KHAY-TULK (“SUPPLEJACK”) OF CAPILANO INDIAN RESERVE, FIRST NARROWS, WHO VERY KINDLY CALLED THIS NOON, 15 MAY 1942, AND SHARED MY LUNCH WITH ME AT MY DESK.

CEDAR BARK ROPE, THREE EIGHTHS INCH, THREE STRAND.

Note: I explained to August that, due to the capture of the Philippine Islands by the Japanese, there was a shortage of manila fibre for making rope, and that someone had suggested we make some in British Columbia from cedar bark as the Indians did before the whiteman came. That Mr. B.W. Leeson, formerly of Quatsino, now of Point Grey, had loaned me a twenty-five foot length, three eighths, three strand, and I got it from the glass case and handed it to him to inspect. I told him that we had had it photographed, that the negative was in the cabinets, and that it had been published as an illustration in the *B.C. Lumberman* monthly magazine a month ago. JSM.

Major Matthews: August. Who made this rope?

August: “Oh, women folks make it, make it fine, make it small, make it big, all sizes; it’s wet when they are working. Women roll the strand from cedar strips, roll it on their knee with the palms of their hands; just same you roll things.”

Major Matthews: Yes, but that's the strand; there's three of them; how do they put them together; doesn't the strand unravel and get all over the place. Have they got a post or something they tie it to, to keep it tight so that it does not unravel.

August: "They's got baskets; the" (rolled up) "strand falls into a basket beside them when they sitting down rolling it. Then they put the baskets over there, and they's got a knothole high up above them, and they poke three strands through it, and it comes down onto their knee and they roll the three strands together just same way as they roll threads into a strand; they's got no post; just a knot high up where the strands come through from the basket other side."

Major Matthews: Well, don't they keep the rope tight while they are rolling; doesn't it all get messed up and tangled?

August: "Oh, the childrens keep pulling it away.

Major Matthews: Is it any good? Would it wear out if it was run through a block in a pulley, a pulley block?

August: "Indians got no pulley block."

Major Matthews: How long do the women make the rope?

August: "As long as they want it."

Major Matthews: How long is the thread; that's the strip of cedar bark. When do they get the bark? In the fall or spring?

August: "The cedar strip may be eighteen inches, maybe three feet, maybe four feet; they get the bark in the spring when the sap is running; bark no good in the fall."

Major Matthews: What did they use it for? To hang people with (joking)? Didn't it wear out; it doesn't seem it would wear very well, not like manila.

August: "What does anyone use rope for. Indians not use it to hang people with. It's whitemans what hangs people; Indians don't hang people. Use the rope for anything you want; tie canoe to beach. It not wear out if you are careful. Old Indians very careful. When canoe come near beach, bow man jump out, pull canoe on beach very carefully so as not to damage it. Same with rope. Old Indians awful careful with rope and canoe."

Major Matthews: The Japs captured the Philippine Islands and we cannot get any manila fibre to make rope for ships. Some whitemans say, "Make cedar bark rope, same as Indians"; how about that?

August: "Where's you going to get your cedar bark. Whitemans cut down all the cedar trees; all gone; no cedar trees."

INDIAN LAW AND ORDER. PUNISHMENTS. HANGING.

August: "Are they going to hang four young men for killing a Japanese?"

Major Matthews: I don't know. When four men go into a store, and one has a revolver, if storekeeper gets killed, that's murder; somebody going to hang.

August: "Indian not do that. Suppose two Indian fight; they's quarrel first, then fight; one gets scratched nose, gets his hair pulled; other man gets him down, gets on top; Chief comes along and stops it. The man who wins got to pay. He's got to give man what's beat a present, maybe paint his" (the loser's) "face for him. Man what wins got to pay" (the loser.)

Note by JSM: August is a splendid character, and that is about as fine a thing as I ever heard him say. He has not full command of English words, and the proper interpretation of his meaning comes by inference to those familiar with Indian life.