

Early Vancouver

Volume Six

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

2011 Edition (Originally Published 1945)

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

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 6 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

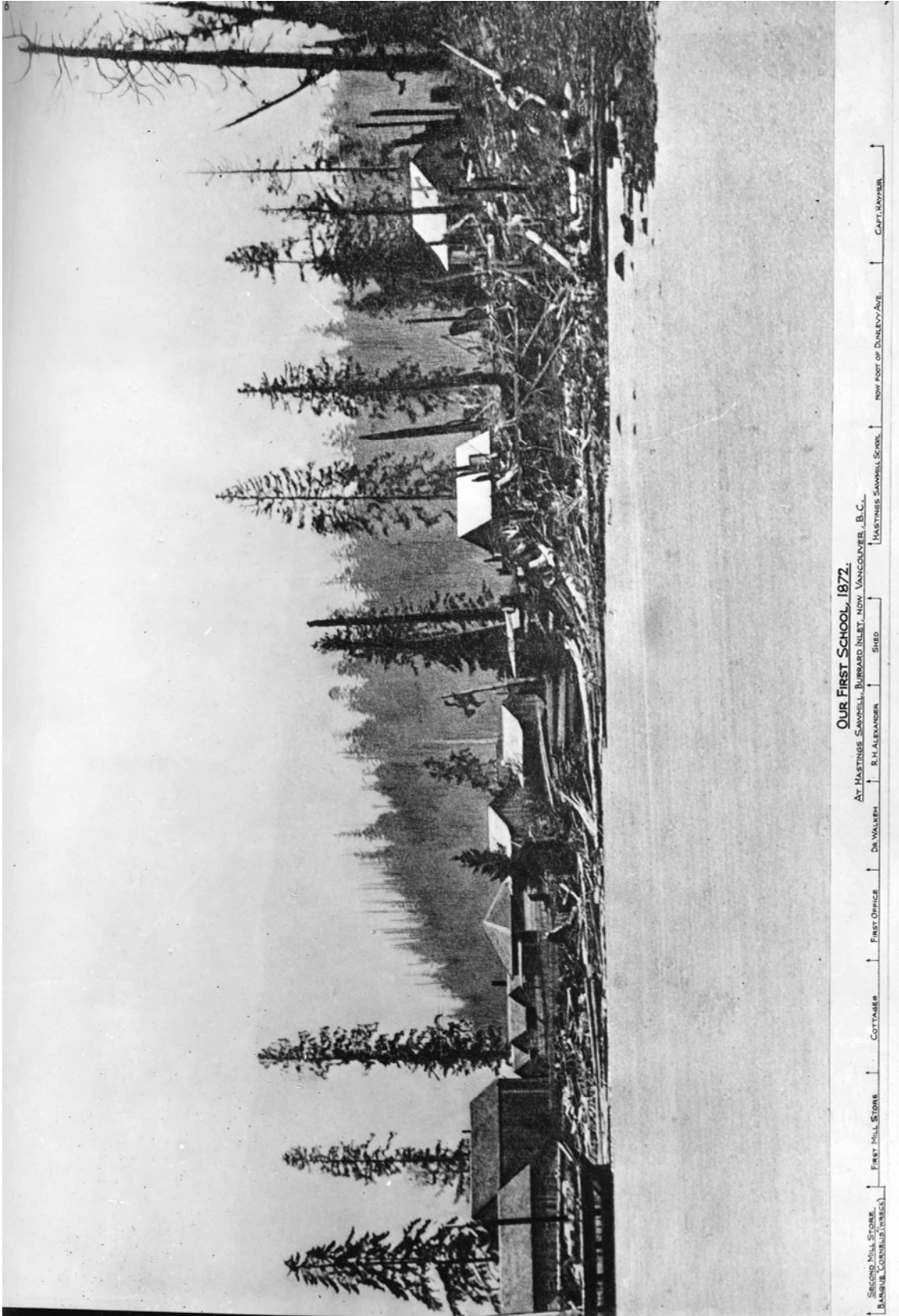
Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 6. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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Item # EarlyVan_v6_009

[photo annotation:]

Our First School, 1872.

At Hastings Sawmill, Burrard Inlet, now Vancouver, B.C.

Second Mill Store

First Mill Store

Cottages

First Office

Dr. Walkem

R.H. Alexander

Shed

Hastings Sawmill School

Now foot of Dunlevy Ave.

Capt. Raymur.

Barque "Cornelis" (wreck)

City Archives, 1936

This negative is consequent years of endeavor—it is worth what it cost. J.S. Matthews, 1936

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MISS ESTHER J. CUMMINGS OF SANTA PAULA, CALIFORNIA, 2 JULY 1941.

An attractive lady, becomingly attired, who together with her sister-in-law, Mrs. Victor Cummings, widow, and her daughter Miss Irene, aged about 13, of Saticoy (Indian name), California, called at the City Archives, City Hall, Vancouver, B.C., accompanied by Mr. K.A. Waites of King Edward High School.

Major Matthews: (after formalities of introduction) Where have you been all this long time?

Miss Cummings: "I was born and raised and have always lived in California, but this is my eleventh trip to Canada, always to Vancouver and Victoria. We drove up and are staying at an auto court; we are going over by Steveston auto ferry to Victoria tomorrow. Mother was Miss Georgia, *not Georgina*, Sweney; that is the proper way to spell it, Sweney. She was the first school teacher at the Hastings Sawmill and so the first in Vancouver. That was in 1872. She moved from there to San Francisco; I don't know why she went. Whether she had an attraction or not I don't know, but she found one; very quickly, she married my father, John Franklin Cummings, in the early eighties; the wedding was in a pioneer community church in Santa Paula, and they had eight children, four boys and four girls, not all living now.

"Mother came to British Columbia from New York when she was an infant. My grandfather was a mechanical engineer, and he worked under the British flag as the Chief Engineer on some steamship, and this steamer came to Burrard Inlet to be loaded. Then Mother was educated in Victoria and was a graduate of the Girls Seminary at Victoria. And had come back home, to Hastings Mill, when she was asked to be the school teacher at Hastings Mill if they would build a school for her to teach in. Mr. Sweney was mechanical superintendent at the Hastings Sawmill at that time. Her father had been chief engineer on the boat, and was at sea about three fourths of his time, and my grandmother was living on Burrard Inlet. Mother died, Santa Paula, September 4th 1940.

"Father was born in Ohio; his father was James Cummings, we never met him; my grandmother's name was Christina Cummings. He came from Mansfield, Ohio; he had one brother, Wilson Shannon Cummings, and three sisters, and Father used to tell us when we were children that his father was a pioneer settler and owned several tracts of land in Ohio. When my father was eighteen years old he wanted my grandfather to give him a tract of land which he could have for his own, and my grandfather thought he was too young and would not give it to him. Just about that time some pioneers from California came to buy some horses from my grandfather, and my father heard them tell the wonderful story of California, so that night he challenged my grandfather, and told him that if he could not have the land for himself he was going back with these men to California; so he went to New York with these men, and came to California by boat to Panama and across the isthmus and up to San Francisco.

"Father died twenty-three years ago, 13th May 1918.

"Santa Paula has now about 11,000 people, but when Mother and Father first went there, it was a wild land. Everything came from San Francisco, it came down by boat; there were no railroads there, and Mother went there because Father was already there; he was interested in agriculture; he found it was such wonderful rich land that he just bought; then he bought large tracts and developed it, by plowing it up and planting it in orchard, principally *English* walnuts. Today, the largest lemon ranch in the world adjoins our old family home. When they bought the property only the surface rights were given in the deed, and since then the owners have had to pay extra to get only a part of what is underground; the mineral rights—oil mostly.'

"At first Father was living in a cabin, but when Mother went, he had a two-storey house, the first in the Little Santa Clara Valley, the first two-storey, built for her, and she had the first piano in the valley; she was very musical, and played and sang. Father gave her a piano as the first gift after they were married. All the children were born on the old home. And they still own the property, which is now planted to walnuts and oranges.

"Father was not a public man, but always kept extremely busy, and was a great fancier of horses. He had some of the very finest horses in the country; in fact, he had the first Arabian horses there were in the valley, and also owned a great many cattle, specialising in Jersey milk cows.

"The greatest memory I have of him is of always being good to people who lived around us; he was always helping people, particularly widows and orphans. He belonged to the Community Church; you see, when they went to live in Santa Paula, down there it was much the same it was up here; when they held church in Mother's little old school house at Hastings Sawmill, and everybody regardless of denomination attended it; they had the same thing down at Santa Paula, a community church; although Mother belonged, in Victoria, B.C., to the Church of England. Mother was the soloist over at the 'iron church' in Victoria.

"Father and Mother had, as I told you, eight children, not all living; in seniority of age they are:

1. Ada, died unmarried in 1940 at Santa Paula.
2. Madge, now Miss Madge Cummings, in Santa Paula.
3. Walter Wallace, married, and has four children, three girls and a boy. Also living at Santa Paula.
4. Esther Julia, that is myself, at Santa Paula.
5. Janette, now Mrs. F.W. Marsh, of West Ninth Street, Los Angeles; no children.
6. Victor Edwin, married, died in 1939 at Saticoy, California, and has two children, Paula, and Miss Irene, here with us today.
7. John F., junior, unmarried, at Santa Paula.
8. Wilson Shannon, unmarried, Santa Paula.

"My mother, then, had six grandchildren, and one great-grandchild, Christine Hall, daughter of my brother Wallace's oldest daughter, Caroline."

Approved by Miss Esther J. Cummings, her letter, 21 July 1941.

J.S.M.