

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

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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MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH MR. JAMES ERRINGTON, 356 EAST SIXTH AVENUE, WHO KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES SOON AFTER THE OFFICE OPENED THIS MORNING, 2 JULY 1941, USING TWO CRUTCHES; A SOMEWHAT FEEBLE OLD MAN, NOT LOOKING VERY WELL, AND WHOM I HURRIED TO MAKE SEATED.

JAMES ERRINGTON. CITY HALL. BLACKBERRIES. C.P.R. CONSTRUCTION.

Mr. Errington: "I used to pick blackberries right here, right here where this City Hall is."

Major Matthews: How long ago was that?

Mr. Errington: "I came to Vancouver in June 1887, a year after the Fire, I think the first week in June. I came from Revelstoke to here. I had been working on the bridges of the Canadian Pacific Railway, erecting bridges; Stoney Creek, Mountain Creek, Surprise Creek and Cedar Creek."

THE FIRST TRAIN, 1885. W.C. VAN HORNE. LAST SPIKE.

"Well, now. I worked on the last culvert to let Mr. Van Horne's train pass, to cross over to drive the last spike. I could not see the spike as it was being driven, but it was only a few yards away, just by. We were working good and hard to get the culvert finished so that the special train with Mr. Van Horne and his party could cross. Then, after that culvert was done—the bridge work was all completed then—then I went to Revelstoke and stayed there until next June, 1887, and then I left for Vancouver, and landed at Port Moody, and came on to Vancouver on the old stern wheeler, *Princess Louise*."

HASTINGS MILL WHARF. GRANVILLE HOTEL. TOM CYRS.

"We landed at Vancouver a little after one o'clock at the old Hastings Mill wharf, the only wharf there was, and I grabbed my grip and went ashore with everybody else, and of course I did not know where to go, and I was hungry, so I went to the Granville Hotel on Water Street, old Tom Cyrs" (proprietor.) "Anyway, I got my dinner, came out, and gave him fifty cents. There were no chairs then in the dining room, just a long bench along the side of the wall, and sitting a few feet from me was a logger, half drunk, and Tom Cyrs was behind the bar. Tom walked across to where the logger was sitting, and put his hand out, and grabbed the logger by the hand, and he" (Tom Cyrs) "said to the logger, 'Hello, you s— of a b—,' and hauled off and smashed the logger in the face. Then Tom Cyrs went back to the bar. I cleared out, and said, 'This is no place for me.'"

CITY HOTEL BARROOM.

"I went to the City Hotel at the far end of the block from where the Europe Hotel is nowadays. There was a big hall, great big beer hall, great big place; you could go clear through from Powell Street to Alexander Street. I stayed there.

"Then I said to myself, 'You have go to get out and get a job,' and it struck me that the steadiest job in British Columbia was in a sawmill. So I went to the Royal City Planing Mill at the foot of Carrall Street, and asked if there was a chance of a job. The man said, 'Come at one o'clock.' I asked, 'How long will the job last,' and he said, 'As long as you fill the bill,' and I stayed with them for about twenty-five years."

HARRISON MILLS.

"Then I switched off and went up to Harrison Mills at Harrison River; I was a sawyer, and earning good money. I was not at the Royal City Planing Mills very long until I got to be sawyer, because I was ambitious, and they tried me on the re-saw first, I made it stick. Finally, the R.C.P.M. sawyer was quitting, and they put me on the head saw, and I remained there after that.

"After Harrison Mills I went to Cariboo, Quesnelle Forks, and put up a small sawmill for the Bullion Mining Company, right over to the south fork of the Quesnelle River—about four miles east of Quesnelle. Then I quit, and for a time stayed home in Vancouver, and the next year I went up to the Yukon—that was before the Great War" (1914.) "I was at Lake Klulernie, up in the White water country, different direction from Dawson, and I put up, I was in full charge—another small sawmill for W.L. Breeze, a young American educated in England. His father had left him several million dollars, and he was not to get it until he was thirty-five. He had an income of \$20,000 a month. I had no trouble at all up there, but the job finished and I left."

A HAZARDOUS TRIP IN MID-WINTER OF 150 MILES.

“The only thing which excites me, and it makes me sore, is when I read about fellows freezing to death. Now, I came out between Christmas and New Year, and I came out by myself, all alone, one hundred and fifty miles, and all I had was two loaves of bread and a bit of butter, some tea and sugar, and no blankets; could not pack them; too much snow, but I had a small hand axe. The first day I walked twenty-four miles through the snow. Towards evening I was getting pretty hungry and thirsty, so I had this tea and bread.

“I hustled into the bush, made a fire in the wind—it was blowing hard—I had no kettle, but I had a big tin cup. I scooped up some snow with my hand, filled the cup with snow, put it on the fire; the snow melted. I put in the tea, and thought I had a nice cup of tea. I did drink it until I got to the bottom, and it got too thick. Wait. I’ll tell you the rest; yes, too thick to drink. When I got down that far in the cup I discovered that it was dirt” (rabbit’s dirt); “that’s the truth. The way it happened was that the dirt was in the snow, and I did not see it in the bad light and it being covered with snow, when I put it in the tin cup to melt and I did not notice it when it was melted until I had drunk the top off. That’s true.”

NORTHWEST MOUNTED POLICE. GIDEON’S ROADHOUSE.

“Well, it was getting dark, darkish and cold, and I was without blankets, so I said to myself I might as well walk as cut wood all night to make a fire, so I started to walk another twelve miles to where there was a summer stopping place, but nobody there in winter. So I walked about two miles, and then I met a Northwest Mounted Policeman going in with the mail to the place I had left. He asked me where I was going. I said, ‘To Gideon’s roadhouse tonight.’ There was nobody there, but they used to leave the kitchen door open, and there was a stove and a bunk with a mattress. He said, ‘You had better come back; you’ll never make Gideon’s.’ I determined to go on. He said, ‘Which way are you going?’ I said, ‘I’ll take the new road.’ Well, I kept a-going in the night, all night work, and finally I got to the end where the new road joined the old one, and I knew I had about two miles to go.

“There was a low log about twelve feet long alongside the road, and I sat down on the log to take a rest. I had just sat down when I went sound asleep. I don’t know how long I slept, but I woke like a shot out of a gun. I was scared to death, and I was cold by that time, and afraid I would freeze to death; my, but I did go after that.” (Men going to sleep in the cold are liable not to awaken.) “When I got to Gideon’s that night, there was somebody inside, and the door opened, and a man named Ernie Johnson, prospector, had a big fire, and pot of tea on the stove. Boy, I was in bad shape by that time, clothes all frozen, and he gave me a shot of hot tea, rolled me in blankets, put me in the bunk and he dried my clothes, and the next morning I started out for ‘Shorty’ Chambers’ place; everyone in the Yukon knew ‘Shorty’ Chambers; he used to ferry the men across the Yukon at ten dollars each.”

GENEALOGY.

“I was born in the county of Cumberland, England, August 19th; will be 78 in August 1941. Came to Canada on the old *Sardinian* when I was 19. My father was James Errington of Penrith, Cumberland, and my mother Jane, she had been a Miss Galbraith, born in Scotland. My grandparents were David and Jane Errington. When I left the Old Country, I was three days out of Liverpool, and I made my resolutions. I was leaning over the side of the boat, and three things came to my mind; I don’t know why, but I have remembered them. One was ‘to be a good citizen,’ and the other was ‘not to be a charge on the government of Canada,’ and the other was ‘to adopt myself to the ways of the country.’ Those were the three things. I don’t know what put them into my head.

“When I left Liverpool, I had no idea where I was going, except that I was going to Canada.”

An appointment necessitated a conclusion of our conversation. The old gentleman hobbled with some difficulty as we went to the elevator, promised he would come again soon.