

**Early Vancouver**

**Volume Seven**

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

**2011 Edition (Originally Published 1956)**

*Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected between 1931-1956.*

**About the 2011 Edition**

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**Contact Information**

City of Vancouver Archives  
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9  
604.736.8561  
archives@vancouver.ca  
vancouver.ca/archives



**CONVERSATION, 25 MAY 1948, WITH MR. AND MRS. VAN DUREN, OF NORTH BEND, OREGON, WHO ARE ON A VISIT TO VANCOUVER—ARRIVED ON THE EVENING OF 24 MAY (1948)—AND ARE STAYING AT THE CASTLE HOTEL.**

I forget his initials, but she is the celebrated “Klondyke Kate,” the former Miss Kate Rockwell, and is still known as Mrs. Kate Rockwell Van Duren. I had invited them to have lunch with me in the City Archives, but they arrived about 11:00 a.m. saying they had just had breakfast. They remained until about 2:00 p.m. Before departing I took them over the City Hall, showed them the Mace, the City offices, and accompanied them to the bus stop on Cambie Street, but they said they were going to walk back to town so that they could see something of Vancouver. Mr. Van Duren is less tall than Mrs. Van Duren, and is elderly and very quiet. They have been recently married—she for the third time—and their visit here is really the end of a long honeymoon. I gathered Mr. Van Duren was an old “Sourdough” friend she had known in her early days. He is very quiet, and had little to say, even when I repeatedly addressed him.

**MISS KATE ROCKWELL. “KLONDYKE KATE.” GENEALOGY.**

Major Matthews: (addressing a tall, distinguished lady followed by a shorter gentleman) Mrs. Van Duren.

Mrs. Van Duren: “Yes, and this is Mr. Van Duren.”

Major Matthews: Come and be seated. I want to know all about you.

Mrs. Van Duren: (after much conversation not worth recording) “Yes, that’s right, I’m a ‘sourdough,’ and proud of it. I am the only daughter and second child of Martha Alice Rockwell, née Murphy, of near Louisville, Kentucky, U.S.A. My father, Mr. Jay Rockwell, was from Chester, England. They were married at Junction City, Kansas, where I was born, We lost Mr. Rockwell in 1882.” (Note: not by death.) “I was educated in Spokane, Washington, and various boarding schools and convents. It was considered the proper thing in those days. Mother, of course, was American. Father’s full name was Jay Will Rockwell.”

**HER EARLY DANCING.**

“As long as I can remember I loved to dance. Never in my life have I had a dancing lesson. Even as far back as I can remember I used to dance. I used to go out in the orchard under the plum trees in blossom, then shake the tree and the blossom petals would fall in a shower, and I danced among them as they fell. I used to pretend to myself that I was dancing among the stars.

“At first I danced in New York—on the stage—then I came west, and at the time of the Klondike Gold Rush—spell it ‘dike,’ not ‘dyke’—at the time of the Klondike Rush I was in Victoria.”

**FIRST MOVING PICTURE IN VICTORIA. BIOGRAPH MACHINE. ORPHEUM THEATRE. JOHNSON AND TRACEY. PANTAGES.**

“I had the first moving picture in Victoria. As I told you, I went to Dawson, Yukon Territory, in 1900, and was ‘outside’ once or twice before leaving in 1904. The theatre I had in Victoria was the ‘Orpheum’ and the moving picture machine was a silent machine called a ‘Biograph.’ It was at about 67 Yates Street. The entertainment consisted of one act vaudeville, and the biograph machine. Admittance was 10 or 15 cents, and there have been times when I have seen only two people as audience. We also had items of illustrated song.”

Major Matthews: Ulcerated song!!

Mrs. Van Duren: (laughing) “Yes, ulcerated song.”

Note: “Ulcerated” song was a soloist, usually, who sung sentimental songs, usually about “Mother” or “Way down East,” to the accompaniment of coloured lantern slides, depicting love-sick maidens leaning over the rail of some bridge beneath which a stream flowed. “Ulcerated” song was “awful,” but the “boys” liked them.

“We advertised an afternoon matinee, too. But it was my money which supported it. I pawned my diamonds for three hundred and fifty dollars with Mr. Aaronson, the pawnbroker—borrowed it with my diamonds as security, and then bought out Johnson and Tracey, who had been operating the theatre. The purchase included the biograph machine, the benches and some white curtains on the stage—side

curtains. Johnson and Tracey had started it but did not take care of it. What they were doing I don't know—perhaps drinking—anyway they were not looking after it, so I bought them out. I saw that the biograph moving picture had a future, but it was very hard to convince anyone else.

“Then Mr. Pantages came over from Seattle, and that was really the beginning of his circuit—it was his first start. I had known him in Dawson in 1900. He was a waiter in the theatre at Dawson—the Savoy.”

J.S. Matthews

**CONVERSATION WITH MRS. WILLIAM WALMSLEY, NÉE HOUSLEY, NOW OF 2313 ASH STREET, WIDOW, WHO KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS AFTERNOON, 22 NOVEMBER 1954.**

**CHARLES HOUSLEY, PIONEER, 1886. WILLIAM WALMSLEY.**

Mrs. Walmsley: “My father was Charles Housley. He came from Winnipeg to Vancouver before ‘The Fire.’ I forget how it was, but it was the time of the North West Rebellion. He was not in the rebellion. He came here for his health. Mother had a general store in Winnipeg and came later, after ‘The Fire,’ with my brother Charlie and myself. Walter came from Winnipeg, I fancy, by himself. He was a boy and I think Father met him. Make it clear—my father and Walter were here before ‘The Fire.’ The rest of us in July 1886 after ‘The Fire.’ I do not remember the trip. Walter was the eldest; then Charlie, who died about eight years ago; and then myself. At the time I was about a year old, and in Mother’s arms.”

**OPPENHEIMER STREET SCHOOL. STRATHCONA SCHOOL. WATER FROM WELLS. MAYOR DAVID OPPENHEIMER.**

“I went to the Oppenheimer Street” (Cordova East) “school for part of a day—they were too crowded—but later I went to Strathcona School. We lived next door to the Oppenheimers on Cordova Street, and also right next to the school. Mother supplied the school with water. Father dug a well in our back yard. I don't know how deep it was, but to me, a little girl, it seemed very deep—might have been twenty-five feet; I don't know. We had a hand pump outside the house, and when we pumped with a handle the overflow water dropped back into the well. My mother used to draw water in a jug, and my brothers used to carry it over to the school. Or they may take it in a bucket. The school boys used to come over and pump water, but they broke the glass, and after that we gave them a cup.”

**S.S. ARROW. ROBERTSON AND HACKETT. B.C. COOPERAGE.**

“Father had a boat called the *Arrow*. He used to run it across, like a ferry, to North Vancouver or Port Moody. She was a steam boat and was wrecked in the Second Narrows. Father was a marine engineer and worked on boats. He had a little factory on Seymour Street—made sashes and doors and interior fittings for houses. He sold out to Robertson and Hackett. He was killed in 1904 at the B.C. Cooperage on Cambie Street; an accident putting the driving belt on a fly wheel. He died on 17<sup>th</sup> March, 1904, at the City Hospital, Cambie Street. Father and Mother (who was Miss Sarah Bailey) were married in Bristol, England. Brother Walter was born in Coburg, Ontario, and is the eldest. At one time we lived on Prior Street.”

**THORPE’S SODA WATER.**

“I was married in Vancouver, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1910, at our home, 773 Beatty Street. Our old home is still there. It was next door to Thorpe’s soda water factory. I have two children; Samuel William is married, lives in New Westminster. He was in the last war, is working for a water supply company, and has two boys, John Robert and William Carl. He was in the Canadian Air Force (I think radio or wireless operator) for two years. Then he was a prisoner of war in Germany for three years. Elizabeth, my daughter, is Mrs. William Morrison and is in Toronto. She is a musician; no children.”