

Early Vancouver

Volume Seven

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

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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Victoria. The rocks tore a hole in her about thirty feet long—just crumpled her bottom up—and I had the job of helping to put the pipes in again. The job was done by the Albion Iron Works.”

Major Matthews: We have a photo of her in the Esquimalt Dock being repaired. I must send you a copy of it.

Mr. Wilkes: “We took the copper pipe out of her. Her bilge keel is in the Victoria Museum—in the Government Buildings, Victoria. About thirty feet long was the hole.

“Then I came over to Vancouver in 1897, went up to Trail, was in Trail, B.C. until 1900; then took a trip to the Old Country, May to September, 1900; then to the C.P.R. Shops in Montréal; then to C.P.R., Revelstoke in December, 1900, and there until 1906 when I came to Vancouver for good.”

FIRST MRS. C.J. WILKES. FIRST REFRIGERATOR, ICE. B.T. ROGERS. ROSS AND HOWARD.

“I was married in Victoria in 1889. We celebrated our golden wedding in March, 1938. Mrs. Wilkes died two years ago last November—then I married a second time.

“I helped to put in the first private refrigerator in Vancouver. It was electrically driven; anyway, they told us it was the first. Ross and Howard put it in the B.T. Rogers’, of the B.C. Sugar Refinery, house on Davie Street—now the Angus Apartments. That was in 1906. It was not one of the fancy refrigerators they have now for houses. It was an old style affair—two separate parts, compression and ammonia—and he had a little electric motor to drive it. It was for the private use of his household.”

GRANDVIEW IN 1906.

“Grandview is all settled up, houses and streets now; but do you know, in 1906 I walked from the head of False Creek right through by some trail to Douglas Road, and on to New Westminster. It was just a trail through the forest. I hardly know where the trail was, but it seems it was over in the direction of Hastings Street, but, somehow, I started at the head of False Creek.”

CONVERSATION WITH MRS. GEORGE WILKS, WHO VERY GRACIOUSLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS AFTERNOON AND STAYED FOR A CUP OF TEA AND CAKE, 27 FEBRUARY 1947.

She came alone, but her sons will call for her and take her home. Mrs. Wilks is eighty-one but very active physically and alert. She has a good memory.

GENEALOGY.

Mrs. Wilks: “I was born in Brassington, Derbyshire, March 29th, 1866. My father was John Fearn, and my mother, Ellen Fearn, née Brittain. We were a family of two boys and two girls. Sam, who was in the North West Rebellion in 1885, came to Canada, and William Henry. He came too—he is up at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, now. Sam died here and is buried here. It was his youngest baby, Ralph, who was in here the other day. My sister, Elizabeth Ann, did not come to Canada. I am the youngest, Jane. I haven’t any grandchildren.

“My brother Sam’s children are, the oldest was Eddie, they call him Samuel Edward; Harold, who is doing well up at Gibson’s Landing. They are all doing well for that matter. Ed is a steward on one of the C.P.R. bigger boats. And there is a daughter—she is living in Seattle—Mary Evelyn, and then the youngest is Ralph who called in here the other day. But Sam was married before.” (She did not wish to say more.)

“My husband’s mother was a Miss Ellen Brittain, a relative of Sir Harry Brittain, London, England. Sir Harry was her cousin. He has eleven initials after his name.”

WHITEWOOD, SASKATCHEWAN.

“The two boys came to Canada about 1882, and they wrote back wanting the family to come. Then they got a soldier’s land grant, 320 acres each, side by side, 640 acres, between Winnipeg and Yorkton. It was a wild country. I was attending school, and they wanted a housekeeper so they sent for me. My sister would not come as she was organist in a big church, so I came. I came on one of the Allan Line boats. It was in April, 1886. I had my trunk packed a year but on account of the Riel Rebellion I could not come. It was a wild place in those days.

"I used to walk about four miles to get the mail and the *Free Press* from Winnipeg—to a house where the mail was left. The C.P.R. was twenty miles away. The air was so clear you could just hear the engine bell tolling on a frosty day. The name of the place was Whitewood. In the early days my brothers Sam and William were working in Manchester, and they did not get very big wages so they decided to strike out for a new world."

WOLVES. OX WAGONS.

"I got off the train at Whitewood, and my brothers were there to meet me with four oxen and a wagon. They had brought in with them two loads of wood, hoping to sell it, but no one wanted it so they dumped it on the street. We had to stay one night on the prairie on account of the wolves. We had to light a fire to keep them away. I only saw one pack of wolves but they frightened me."

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH. FIRST SERVICES. GEORGE W. WILKS.

"Then, after I had stayed there about three years, I felt I would like to go back to England. It was a wild place, and not much of a place for women. So I went to Winnipeg, and was going to take a few days holiday there; then I saw an advertisement in the paper. Peace" (or Police) "Commissioner Wrigley" (sic) "wanted a ladies' maid. I went and applied for it and the young maid who received me said that she was getting married and when could I come. I told them I was taking a few days holiday. While there I attended the Congregational Church and that was where I met George. The minister was talking one night and they said Vancouver was a wild place—hadn't any streets, only trails. Mr. Wilks came out here in 1888, a year before I did. I did not come until 1889. He sent me a ticket and I came out and we were married by the Rev. Mr. Pedley in the Congregational Church on Georgia Street by Richards. The church was not built—they had the foundation but the roof was not on properly."

"Before we had services in the new Congregational Church we had services on Carrall Street, upstairs. There was a dance hall—we were over a store and there was a dance hall above us. They used to go up and ask them not to dance so loud as there was a service going on below."

FIRST WEDDING.

"The room where the first services were held was on the west side of Carrall Street between Cordova and Water Street. Then we left that place and went to the new church on Georgia Street and I think we must have been the first couple married there. I don't know how it would have been possible for any bride and bridegroom to have been married before us as the church wasn't finished."

"I was on the first train all right, but not the one which came into Vancouver. The train in those days stopped at Gleichen, near Calgary."

W.D. BURDIS. HARRIS STREET, 1889.

"I have had trips to England—the longest I stayed there was six weeks—but all the rest of the time I lived in Vancouver. At first we lived on Harris Street, but it was only a trail and there was but one house further along. The road was so bad—Captain Bogart was the house beyond ours—but you could not take the rigs beyond our place. Sunday night, Mr. and Mrs. W.D. Burdis" (he was secretary to Mayor Oppenheimer; they lived on Campbell Avenue), "my husband and I would go down there to spend the evening and we'd take a lantern to light us home. Mr. Burdis used to make all the speeches for Mayor Oppenheimer. My oldest son, Howard, went to the Oppenheimer Street school, the first school. He was not quite six, but they took him. Gregory Thom was the teacher."

WATER FROM WELLS. R.M.S. ABYSSINIA.

"Water!! We got it from the ditch. All our neighbours across the road got it from the ditch until my husband dug the well. I helped him. It was good water. There was a spring across the road and we had to wait a while to fill our pails. The well we dug was pretty deep. We just threw a pail down with a rope and pulled it back by main force. Do you remember the time? It came in very handy—our well came in very useful. It was on the first of July—the pipeline across the First Narrows was broken and there was no water. I think it was the *Abyssinia*. It was a terrible time—there was no water or soft drinks, and it was a holiday, the first of July. A cart came around every day and they would let you have a small pail full, but our neighbours got it from our well. The Hotel Vancouver looked after the firemen" (with drinks) "—the firemen kept them well supplied. Not everyone had a well and the cart came around to those who did not."

FEW WOMEN.

“One Sunday night in Pedley’s Church” (Congregational) “there were three hundred men and ten women; so few women in Vancouver at that time.”

MAYOR FRED COPE. “SOAPY” SMITH.

“The bodies of Mayor Cope of Vancouver who was drowned in the Klondyke, and ‘Soapy’ Smith, the notorious desperado who was shot in a gun battle up north, came down on the same boat and they got the coffins mixed. Mayor Cope was given a civic funeral. I was at it—one of my children was in a perambulator and the other was walking with me. They had a band. Mayor Cope is buried in Mountain View Cemetery, but when ‘Soapy’ Smith’s coffin arrived at Seattle, two women wanted to see the remains—wanted the coffin opened. It wasn’t ‘Soapy,’ it was Mayor Cope. So the coffin was sent to Vancouver and the other was exhumed. The two coffins were quietly changed. But it was ‘Soapy’ who got the grand funeral.”

As told to me.

J.S. Matthews

27 February 1947.

CONVERSATION WITH MRS. JANE WILKS, PIONEER, 7826 CARTIER STREET, KERR. 4340L, AT THE CITY ARCHIVES—A SURPRISE VISIT—ON THE AFTERNOON OF 27 JANUARY 1949; WIDOW OF GEORGE WILLIAM WILKS WHO DIED 1940.

Mrs. Wilks is a very active lady for her age, though, of course, showing visibly the ravages of time. She walks, talks and moves rapidly. There is no sign of senility. She lives with her son, Mr. Edgar Wilks, at 7826 Cartier Street, Kerr. 4340L. We talked of many things, quickly, and then she hastened off.

MISS BOWES. WOMEN’S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION. YOUNG MEN’S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION. MRS. HENRY MUTRIE. MUTRIE AND BROWN. VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES. ROBERT LEATHERDALE. CHAIN GANG. JOHN CLOUGH. CHRIST CHURCH.

Mrs. Wilks: (commenting as we jumped from one subject to another) “The chain gang. Robert Leatherdale, brother to Dan, used to drive the chain gang wagon when the gang went off from the Gaol on Powell Street to work on the rough lanes and streets. They used to mow the lawn of the City Hospital, too, and kept it in beautiful shape—flowers too. The men rode in the wagon, seated in rows. I have read some extraordinary stories in the newspapers recently about the chain gang.” She looked, significantly, and then added, “*They didn’t look very savage.* John Clough was in charge. One day I watched them opening that street—what do you call it—the one Christ Church is on—Georgia Street is close by, either Howe or Hornby, they were opening it. Christ Church at that time was just a hole in the ground just below where they were working.”

“GOOD CHEER” PAMPHLET. W.J. TRYTHALL.

“Miss Bowes was an active worker. She published a little pamphlet, ‘Good Cheer’; fifty cents a month, printed by W.J. Trythall. We had many meetings of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in the upstairs of the Young Men’s Christian Association—their first wooden building on Hastings Street. The Y.M.C.A. borrowed money from the Grey Nuns of Montréal, and they could not pay it back so they lost the second building, the brick one next door.”

MISS HILL, FIRST V.O.N. NURSE.

“Mrs. Henry Mutrie” (of Mutrie and Brown, her husband was) “was quite a worker in the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Miss Hill, the first Victorian Order of Nurses nurse, lived with them on Cambie and Dunsmuir for a time, when she came first.

“I used to go to the Y.M.C.A. building once in a while—take a cake with me. We had lots of meetings in that building—W.C.T.U.”