

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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Why either should have visited the Japanese ships in uniform at all was never understood. Why they should have preceded the official party was also never understood; and they did not receive invitations to attend the official dinner at the Vancouver Club.

I was one of the visiting officers of the 6th Regiment, and must admit I was “shocked” when I saw the two coming down the flagship’s gangway as we were approaching—a most extraordinary caper.

J.S. Matthews.

JAPANESE SHRINE.

On 23 August 1950, two gentlemen called at the City Archives and asked if we had any record of a Japanese cemetery said to have existed in early years—about 1905 or 1910—on the northwest corner of Cordova and Dunlevy Avenue. We replied that, years ago, we had been told that something in the form of a shrine had been there; but when, about 1935, we had looked, we saw nothing save a garden overgrown with grass. We pointed out that, circa 1913, a Japanese Church was on the southeast corner of Jackson Avenue and Powell Street—about one block away—and that it was possible such a shrine had something to do with cremation of the Japanese dead. One of the gentlemen said that Japanese frequently cremate their dead. They repeated that the place they referred to was on the *northwest corner of Cordova and Dunlevy*, and surrounded by a metal fence. It is true that in 1913 this corner was one of the few vacant lots in the neighbourhood. I am fairly certain it was still vacant in 1933 or 1935. I know that about that time I was told of something peculiar of like character to be seen in that neighbourhood. I went down but all I could find was a garden gone to ruin—on a corner—but whether it was that corner or some other corner I could not remember.

I told the two gentlemen (one from Los Angeles) that if ever I found out I would let them know, and they gave me this address: Walter Bertram, c/o 185 West 23rd Avenue, Vancouver.

J.S. Matthews.

CONVERSATION WITH MR. WALTER KEAMO, 760 POWELL STREET, VANCOUVER, WHO VERY KINDLY CALLED AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS MORNING, 18 APRIL 1952.

JAMES KEAMO. HAWAIIANS.

Mr. Keamo: “My father was James Keamo. The white people pronounce it Kee-mo, but the proper way is Ky-am-mo. My mother was Annie Nelson, daughter of Mr. Nelson of Maple Ridge. He died before I knew him—perhaps before I was born—anyway, I do not remember him. He was a Scotchman so far as I know. He had a fruit ranch at Maple Ridge. I think she was born at Port Hammond on the Indian Reserve. Her people came from the Katzie Indian Reservation, but I don’t think she had an Indian name.

“James Keamo was a full blood Hawaiian from Honolulu. He came up here on a sailing ship. He just came for the trip and stayed here. I have always understood he came here alone, by himself. The only job he ever had, so far as I know, was at the Hastings Sawmill. What he did there I don’t know. I don’t know when or where he married, but there were about four children older than I am and I was born at New Westminster, July 24th, 1889. There were three children after me.

“Sometime before I was born, Father and Mother went to live at New Westminster where Father fished salmon—flat bottom cannery skiff. I went to the West End school in New Westminster. At the time I was the only one of the family going to school—the others were too young. In a family of ten children there were Grant, Phil, Walter, Harry and Alfred. And the girls were Laura, Emma, Josephine, Edith, and a little baby girl, born before me, who died. I am the only boy living. The rest have died. Grant married and had four children—one dead, three living—and they all live at 2162 East Hastings Street, and are listed in the telephone directory as ‘Campbell, J. Grant, 2162 East Hastings.’ Harry married and is buried in the United States. He had one girl and I suppose she is living in the U.S. I married, had two children—both dead.

“Now about my four sisters. Miss Jose Campbell and Mrs. Emma Rogers are living in San Francisco. Edith died in a monastery in the States and Laura, married in New Westminster, died. She was Mrs.

Vianna" (sic) "and had three girls and a boy. Father and Mother are buried in the Roman Catholic Cemetery, New Westminster. Father died in 1905, and Mother six or seven years later."

KEAMO BECOMES CAMPBELL.

"I am not the only descendant of James Keamo who is using the name Keamo. In the telephone directory you will see 'Campbell, J. Grant, 2162 East Hastings,' but in the city directory, 'Keamo, E.G.' lives at the same address. I have no children to carry on the name, but Grant, who is dead, had two sons, Elmer and James. Elmer is the 'E.G. Keamo' who lives at 2162, and is about 40. James is two years older. James is married and has a son, Don or Donnie.

"I served in the 47th Overseas Battalion, C.E.F., Colonel Taylor. Went overseas in 1916—in action at Vimy in 1916, November I think it was, and left Vimy in March 1917, before the assault. Deaf in one ear; stayed in France until the Armistice, 1918, and came home in 1919. Harry went overseas in some other unit. Nothing happened to him. When I joined the 47th I took my own name, Walter Keamo, and I think Harry did the same—Harry Keamo."

J.S.M.

(Note: the Hudson's Bay Co. had ships making frequent trips between the Hawaiian Islands and Pacific Coast of America and used Kanakas both as seamen and as employees at their forts. J.S.M.)

ANOTHER INACCURATE STORY ABOUT START OF FIRE, 1886.

"JOHN MOLE KEEFER PASSES. STARTED FIRE OF 1886."

Caption to obituary of John Mole Keefer, of Chilliwack, published in *Province*, 1 April 1953.

The obituary quotes the late Mr. Keefer as saying:

"After this we went to our camp in Stanley Park, and had our dinner. We had found a site for a camping spot on English Bay, and burned a quantity of dry brush which they feared might be a fire menace. The cook called us, and the fire was out of control. A strong wind was whipping it towards the city. Only when the sun went down and the wind with it were we able to go back to the city, or the place where the city had been. When we realised to the full what we had done we shook hands, all three of us, and vowed we would never divulge anything whatever about setting that fire. And, until late years I do not think any of us ever did."

MR. KEEFER'S ILLUSION.

The facts are that both Mr. George Keefer, his brother, and Mr. John Keefer have, of recent years, sought a little dubious publicity for doing something they had little or nothing to do with. And, for these reasons:

1. The fire did not burn west of Burrard Street. Old photographs show a virgin forest along Burrard from False Creek to Georgia Street—*after the fire of 1886*.
2. No clearing was being done west of Burrard Street in 1886 and there was no need for them having a camp there.
3. The nearest creek was at the foot of Gilford Street. There were no creeks to the east until almost Cambie Street was reached on the shore, where a creek from about St. Paul's Hospital ran down Nelson Street into the sea, its mouth at foot of Nelson Street.
4. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1, Matthews, records W.F. Findlay, journalist, telling J.S. Matthews, 17 October 1931, that Frank Gladwin started the fire. "He had orders to," said Mr. Findlay. "Five or six men up there" (presumably about Pender and Richards) "were up there doing clearing work." Findlay charged Gladwin personally, and Gladwin did not deny it, but it is equally untrue.
5. W.H. Gallagher, in *Early Vancouver*, says the fires of the clearing were smouldering—it was Sunday, and the men not working. The big wind fanned the embers in scores of places, *and the fire broke out in a dozen places at once*.