

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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The store was heated with an oil drum placed flat on sand and bricks; had a hole in the top for the stove pipes, and a hinged door for firing with mill wood, which was always in liberal supply. It was a crude though cheap and efficient home made heating system.

ROYAL CITY PLANING MILL COMPANY.

This went on until 1890 when the Royal City Mills bought the Hastings Sawmill mill property. One day, Mr. Beecher of the Royal City Planing Mill Company, walked into the store and said, "Do I understand the men shake dice for cigars and other things?" The reply was "Yes." He said it was a form of gambling and objected to it. I said "All right. It will be stopped," and took the dice home with me, and still have them. It is quite a relic; the case is battered and the dice yellow with their eighty year age.

23 September 1950:

I forgot to mention in previous sheet that the clothing had a separate room in the store; also at back of store was a stairway leading to the upper floor. When the new store was built alongside the old one, the stairway was moved to the front of the old store. During the fire of 1886, a woman and a boy who had sought shelter in a water well to escape the flames, were brought to the store. The woman was badly burned; she was taken to a spare room in one of the mill cottages; a mattress was provided; their burns covered with lint soaked in carbolated oil from the store. Poor thing, she did not recover, and made one more to the victims of the Great Fire. On the day of the Fire people were clamouring for food, so the store was opened, and not closed night or day for two or three days. All the bread and canned meats were soon cleared out. There were lots of soda crackers, hardtack, and cheese. One man told the writer he never wanted to see another cracker as long as he lived. The rats were so bad around the store that the small addition you see in the picture I am giving you had to be tinned to stop them from destroying flour we had stored in the addition.

C. Simson.

CONVERSATIONS WITH KHAHTSAHLANO, PAGE 287.

Conversation with Mr. Calvert Simson, 1890 Barclay Street, former storekeeper, Hastings Sawmill, from about 1884 to 1891, who kindly called at the City Archives, and remained to talk, 14 October 1952.

THE LAST POTLATCH. INDIAN RANCHERIE, 1884. HASTINGS SAWMILL. DUNLEVY AVENUE.

Mr. Simson said: "I was at the last potlatch on the site of Vancouver, down at the Hastings Sawmill, just east of it. They had a huge shed, made of cedar slabs, and a great big fire in the middle of it, and they pushed away a few of the boards in the roof to let the smoke out, but" (significantly) "there was lots of smoke left. I stayed a little while but I could not stand the smoke; the smoke got in my eyes."

Major Matthews: Mr. Simson, was that building an old one made of split cedar slabs, or was it just a new one of sawn boards?

D.L. 196.

Mr. Simson: "It was old. There long before the Hastings Sawmill. There was a lot of Squamish buildings right on the foreshore where they used to haul up their canoes. It was on land adjoining the sawmill property; just east of it—on the beach—just past the log chute at the sawmill. It may have had a few sawn boards in it, I don't know, but it was old. That was in 1884. I rather think the rancherie must have been put up to suit the Indians working in the mill; I don't know. You could tell the exact location of it, first, because it was on the shore, and secondly, because it was on the eastern boundary of D.L. 196. The potlatch lasted several hours. They gave me a stick to beat with on the boards."

SEE-AHM, SEE-AHM: A CHANT.

"They started with a chant, see-ahm, see-ahm, see-aaaahm. At first in a low tone, and slowly, then faster and faster, until they got into a high tone pitch, and worked themselves into a frenzy. See-ahm, see-ahm, see-ahm, faster and faster and higher and higher in tone. One man pretended it was shooting a deer. He stooped down, and pretended he was pointing his rifle—taking a bead on—a deer. They were all seated

around a big long building. I don't recall how long, or how the light got in. Some of it came from the fire in the middle."

Note by J.S.M.: This was the Indian village which Lady Dufferin, wife of His Excellency the Governor General—the first one to visit Burrard Inlet—1876, wished to visit after the Vice-Regal party had been welcomed formally on the Hastings Sawmill store wharf. She was escorted up a narrow sinuous trail through the stumps, wide enough for one person to pass along, and met an old Indian woman, bent and mostly skin and bones, known locally as "The Virgin Mary." To the chagrin of the local elite, Lady Dufferin shook hands with her.

ROYAL CITY PLANING MILLS. HASTINGS SAWMILL CO. B.C. MILLS, TIMBER AND TRADING CO.

"They formed the Royal City Planing Mills and took over the Hastings Sawmill, and then the B.C. Mills, Timber and Trading Co. was formed. John Hendry had no plans; he just said, 'Put one machine here, and put that other machine there.' They got into financial trouble. Sweeny, manager of the Bank of Montreal, was one of the directors. They wanted to get rid of R.H. Alexander, but Mr. Sweeny said "No" and "So long as you have an overdraft Alexander must remain on the board"; he had confidence in Alexander. If it had not been for Sweeny the mill would have collapsed."

CALVERT SIMSON.

"I came here in 1884. I left London in November 1883, and reached Victoria in May 1884. I was in Port Chalmers, near Dunedin, New Zealand. Then I reached San Francisco on the ship *Zambesi*, and went down the States to Arizona and all around, and then up to Bend, Oregon, and Walla Walla, Washington. The way I know, roughly, the dates is that I had a draft for seventy pounds, £70, and I cashed ten pounds, £10, in Portland, Oregon, and have the date. I was up the Columbia River, and recall watching them make the loggers take off their boots, and they gave them slippers. The loggers' boots had iron spikes in them, and that ruined the decks. After I reached Victoria in May 1884, I went over to New Westminster, and got a job as night watchman at one dollar a day. The chief night watchman was also a cook, and he used to cook salmon, with all the trimmings, parsley sauce and so on, for our midnight meal. In England we got salmon once a year, and then at two and six a pound, but here the mill hands were fed on it, and that surprised me. I worked for the Dominion Sawmill."

BEN WILSON, 1884. GRANVILLE, B.I., 1884. JOSEPH MANNION.

"Then I got a job with Ben Wilson, storekeeper on the beach, now Water Street, at Granville, now Vancouver. I got sixty dollars a month and found. I stayed at Joe Mannion's Granville Hotel, and Ben Wilson paid Mannion ten dollars a month for my board and room, and the hotel took it out in groceries."

HASTINGS SAWMILL STOREKEEPER.

"Then I went over to the Hastings Sawmill as storekeeper, and continued as such until 1891. But I never did find out the exact date of my arrival at New Westminster."

CONVERSATION WITH MR. CALVERT SIMSON, PIONEER, FORMER STOREKEEPER AT THE HASTINGS SAWMILL, VANCOUVER, WHO CALLED THIS AFTERNOON AT THE CITY ARCHIVES, 9 NOVEMBER 1953.

Mr. Simson came to Burrard Inlet about 1884—sixty-nine years ago—and is now showing signs of becoming frail; he must be nearing ninety.

CAPT. GEO. MARCHANT. S.S. BEAVER.

Major Matthews: Mr. Simson, did you know Captain Marchant of the *Beaver*? What sort of a man was he?

Mr. Simson: "An old drunk. They were all drunk the night the *Beaver* went on the rocks. He used to live at the City Hotel; you know the City Hotel down on Powell Street; third or fourth rate place for those who fitted it. He was drunk most of the time."

Major Matthews: Well, what was the end of it?

Mr. Simson: "His friends supported him."