

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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EYE GLASSES.

Davidson Bros., Jewellers, advertised “Spectacles, spectacles,” *World*, 10 April 1889, page 2.

How our aboriginal Indians did for eye glasses when their sight grew poorer, I don't know—did without I suppose. I know that I have been told—by Khahtsahlano—that old Chief Ki-ap-a-lano (Capilano) was almost blind when he died.

Then came the first white men. What they did I don't know, but imagine they did nothing, because they could not. I do know that we have an old spectacle case made out of a horn of some animal in one of our show cases. It is crudely made, but must have taken much pains on the part of someone. I presume that when eye glasses were required by a pioneer, he had to sent to San Francisco or Portland—or even England—and take what was sent; sent from his description of his deficiency in sight.

What I do recall—from actual knowledge—that when George E. Trorey had his jewellery store on Cordova Street, south side, just west of Abbott Street—before he moved to Hastings Street and sold out to Henry Birks and Sons—that he had a tray of eye glasses—all sorts—on the counter and a person requiring a pair just tired on one after the other until he got what he wanted. He, or she, just picked out one as a man picks out a smoking pipe today; the one which suited his taste and fancy. There were few, if any, of the pinz-nez (sic) type. They were all “spectacles” with folding “arms” to go behind the ear. I have no recollection of what they cost, but I do know that in one old newspaper I have seen them advertised—about 1890—at 15 cents and 25 cents per pair. But, I rather think that Trorey charged more than that, and as high as \$5.00 per pair.

The first optician I recall was a man who called himself “Doctor” Jordan. We winced a little at the “doctor” part. He, apparently, had come from the United States and was rather startling in his up-to-date methods. What intrigued us most was a machine—common now—which he set up in his ground floor office or store in the new DeBeck Building, about half way between Hamilton and Homer Street, south side, about 1899—early in the year. He had his reception room all carpeted, and a few plants, or palms, scattered about. It was a revelation to us. He had one arm and, of course, he charged according to the grandeur—grandeur to us who had seen eye glasses picked out of a tray at Trorey's. However, he was well patronised and stayed in business for some years. There is something written about him in his docket, I think. But, he was undoubtedly the first optician to attract special notice. There may have been earlier opticians, but they were associated as an adjunct to a jeweller. It may have been that Lyttleton Bros., jewellers, had an optician on their staff. There were so few who required glasses. All Vancouver was comprised of young men and women. There were few grey hairs in the city.

Of course, in time, qualified eye specialists set up in business in office buildings. That would be about 1903 or 1904. I forget the name of the first one, but his office was on the west side of Granville Street, just south of the Post Office on the corner of Pender Street. He did well. He did not make or sell glasses, but simply prescribed what was wanted. I know he charged about \$10.00 for prescribing a tiny glass for rifle shooting purposes on the rifle range, and the glasses themselves cost \$5.00 thereabouts. But all this is changed now, 1949. Opticians are everywhere, and their prices run from \$20.00 upwards.

J.S. Matthews

31 December 1949.