

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

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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HERMIT ISLAND AND MICKEY ISLAND: NAMING OF, IN WHOSE HONOUR, WHEN, AND BY WHOM.

Conversation, over the phone, with Mrs. S.F.C. Sweeny, née Isabel Bell-Irving, of 2595 Bellevue Avenue, West Vancouver, 22 October 1951.

Major Matthews: Mrs. Sweeny, I have just received a letter from Mr. W.H. Hutchinson, Chief Geographer, Department of Lands, Victoria. May I read it?

(Reads, that on 4 October 1951, the Canadian Board on Geographic Names, Ottawa, had authorised the names “Hermit Island” and “Mickey Island,” in place of Golby and Weyburn. The islands are at the west entrance to Howe Sound.)

Mickey Island it is, Mrs. Sweeny.

Mrs. Sweeny: “I’m thrilled. Mickey Island *it is*.” (Short conversation follows.) “And I suppose you know how Hermit Island got its name. Mickey” (Malcolm McBean Bell-Irving, D.S.O., her brother) “and I named it.”

Major Matthews: How long ago would that be, Mrs. Sweeny?

Mrs. Sweeny: “Oh, let me see. Forty, forty, at least forty years ago. Mickey and I used to go over from our Pasley Island and visit the old hermit; so we called it “Hermit Island.” I don’t know his name. He was a great big man about six feet three, and about seventy-five or eighty years old. He had lived there for perhaps thirty years. Wonderful old man. He lived in a shack built by himself; it was no bigger than a big dog kennel. And he had seal skulls arranged all about it in order. He had a dugout canoe he had made himself. He used to catch seals. He killed the seals, ate the flesh, put the skulls around his cabin, and put the oil in his canoe, with the result that one could smell his canoe ‘a mile away.’ He came from Norway. He was a very definite personality. Mickey and I used to go over and visit him. We made friends with him. He was very shy—like a wild thing—but he did not mind us. We made friends with him and he used to bring us—to our island” (Pasley Island) “—all kinds of fish. I don’t know where he got them; red cod, and other kinds; all prepared ready to eat. Once only did we get him to have a meal with us; just once we succeeded, but he did not enjoy it; he was not happy.”

HERMIT ISLAND. MICKEY ISLAND.

“He had been a clergyman in Norway; a young clergyman; had had a sad love affair; came away and never went back. He must have been an enormous man when he was young. He was all bent when we knew him, but he was still over six feet.

“His canoe was a dugout, but he could sail it, and when he could not sail it he stood up and pushed it with a sweep” (oar) “so that he could see where he was going. I think that is a Norwegian custom. He used to sing Norwegian songs as he pushed along in his canoe. I am sorry I never learned his name.

“He made his money, whatever money he needed for groceries and other things, by trapping mink on the islands at the west entrance to Howe Sound.

“During the first war” (1914-1918) “his body was found on the shore of Ragged Island. He had been drowned.”

Note: after being typed, this was read, over the phone, to Mrs. Sweeny, and approved.

22 October 1951. J.S. Matthews