

**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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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**VANCOUVER NEWS-HERALD, THURSDAY, 11 MARCH 1954.**

ARCHIVIST TO TELL STORY OF CITY TO VANCOUVERITES.

City Archivist, Major J.S. Matthews, 76, is stepping up his lecture engagement schedule "because it's time I opened my mouth."

Surrounded by the city's 163-year history crammed into the ninth floor of City Hall, Major Matthews said, "I'm not going to give up—not while I live, but some day I'll pop off, and who will take care of all this?"

"All this," consists of thousands of articles, filing cabinets, documents, newspaper files, old photographs—an almost month-by-month record of the "greatest city in the west."

Cornerstone of Major Matthews' archives is a carefully-preserved letter written in 1792 to England by Captain George Vancouver.

The age-stained parchment starts a carefully-documented trail to such recent and memorable civic milestones as the opening of the new Granville Bridge.

Major Matthews wants to tell people of the value of his work, and his ultimate aim is a separate archive building.

He says the Park Board has offered land for a building in Stanley Park or on Little Mountain, but, as yet, City Council can't see the point in spending the money.

"Mind you, I am not blaming them, or Mayor Hume, who got my archive grant boosted from \$6000 a year to \$12,000. I can get along here, but is the greatest city in the west to be forever without a permanent record office?"

Major Matthews draws \$300 per month, "and I spend about half of it buying things for the archives."

He has one assistant, Mrs. Jean Gibbs. Both work limitless hours a week, and the major is most indignant about the provincial archive setup in Victoria.

"They get \$60,000 a year to work with, have about 13 employees, yet the bulk of the history of BC is centred in Vancouver. About half their staff over there does nothing but look after Victoria," he said.

**LETTER FROM MAJOR MATTHEWS TO MRS. R.C. BURKE, WHOSE HUSBAND IS MANAGER OF DOMINION OXYGEN Co.**

Oct. 25<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

Dear Mrs. Burke:

The delay in sending you what I promised is due to the impossibility of giving attention to all the demands made upon us, hence much of our work is done in the evening, and I have had to await a week end to attend to matters arising out of our telephone conversation. This is written at my home, Saturday morning, as the City Hall is closed.

In 1933 the City Council granted my application to call myself "City Archivist." I was working at my home at the time, and to my surprise they also allotted me a small disused office in the Temporary City Hall, and, better still, added a gratuity of \$25 a month to cover "salary" and expenses.

Today, the City Archives occupies one whole floor of the City Hall; has done so since 1936, and our monthly grant is \$1,000. I have never asked for an increase in annual grant; it has been given by the Council without being asked for.

There must be some good reason why successive Councils, for 18 years, permit one whole floor of a public building where accommodation is limited, being occupied for archival purposes, and why they increase the annual grant from \$25 to \$1,000. One would assume that we have filled some useful purpose. What that function is it is impossible for me to explain as it is too voluminous, but in a general way I can say that there is no firm, establishment, institution, journal, nor private individual in or about Vancouver who has not, at some time in some way, felt the influence of the City Archives. We have become the most active archival institution in western Canada. We serve not only the City of Vancouver, but the City of North Vancouver, and the four surrounding municipalities of West Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, Burnaby and Richmond. And, of recent years, have been more or less taking care of Fraser Valley cities and the peoples of Howe Sound and Powell River, etc. There is a continual constant stream of visitors from all over the world. Last month I lectured to one group of about 100 from New Zealand and Australia. One of our publications was translated and printed in Italian at Rome. ("The North-West Passage" by Sergeant Henry Larsen, F.R.G.S., see [reference below].) Yesterday we had a long distance call from San Francisco. All historical enquiries received by our Board of Trade—from all over the North American continent—are sent to us to answer. We make no charge for any service; have never done so. We know no office hours, and as much or more work is done after the office closes as while it is open. I have been at my desk every day since 1936. Someone might explain what the word "holiday" means.

Our accommodation 20 years ago, when we moved to the present City Hall was, as I have said, one whole floor. There was enough spare room to hold a dance. Today we are so confined that we can hardly move about. It would be useless to add to our staff as there is no room for additional staff to work and no place to put what extra staff might produce. There has been comment that the weight of our material is becoming too much for the structure to bear; too heavy.

In 1932 I was faced with two problems. One, whether to devote my energy to securing suitable accommodation, such as our own building, or spend every effort in securing the story of Vancouver from those who could tell it before old age took them beyond our reach. I adopted the latter course. Had I not done so the people of Vancouver, and, of course, that includes all Canada, would not have had the chronicle of our early days. Today it could not be obtained at any price. No sum, however large, could buy it. Most of those who told their stories are now dead. Consequently, it was most gratifying to me when the Librarian, Parliamentary Library, Ottawa, wrote that he knew of no city in Canada which had a more perfect record of its early days than had Vancouver.

There are certain ethics which an archival institution must observe. One can be illustrated by saying that no man can be compelled by law to love a woman. It must be voluntary, and the longer that love continues the more intense it becomes, until, ultimately, the parting which old age must bring, inevitably, becomes almost a terror. It is the same with a mass of citizens. The more they know of and the longer they live in a city the greater their affection for it. If a person does not love their home, what hope is there? My belief is that I could cure half the juvenile delinquency in this city if I could only tell the young rascals of the gallant blood from which they have sprung. Another feature is the insatiable thirst which youth has for knowledge, and the anxiety of parents about the education of their offspring. So long as these two factors exist there will be use for records. It is sometimes amusing when some child, no higher than a counter, and with tousled hair, comes in here with a stub of a pencil and a crumpled scrap of paper, and says, "Mister, teacher says I've got to write the history of Vancouver." It is hard to keep a straight face.

The sum total of it all is that, if you do not keep records, books cannot be made. Without books we should be without schools and libraries, and, then, civilisation, as we know it, would cease. There would be no enlightenment; we should return to the darkness of the savage who scratched signs on rocks.

May I conclude by telling you what I remember of a conversation with August Jack Khahtsahlano (Kitsilano). He said:

“Indians mans jes as anxious hees boy have education as whitemans hees boy go to university, but hees got no pencil. So tell him. When Indian mans go fish young man paddle, old man fish; canoe go slow past places. Lots time tell what happened there. Old Indian tell young Indian; then make young Indian say it back sos he gets it right. Then tell him again. Some boy no listen; hees no good. Noder boy he listen; say it back; gets it right; hees good boy. When he grows up peoples ask him; he knows lots. May be, some day, make him chief.”

I am grateful for the opportunity to lay my troubles before you, and for your graciousness in permitting it.

With my deep respects

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews

Mrs. R.C. Burke,  
5976 Alma Road,  
Vancouver 13.

P.S. Printed material sent under separate cover.

Note: many pamphlets have been published by the City Archives. “The North-West Passage” by (then) Sergeant Henry Larsen, F.R.G.S., Commander of the R.C.M.P. schooner *St. Roch* was distributed to schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and Québec. Many more were also distributed to all naval colleges in England and one in northern Ireland by Mr. McAdam, Agent-General for British Columbia, London, England.

A.W.

**THE ALL RED ROUTE BY AIR. AUSTRALIAN-CANADIAN AIR SERVICE INAUGURAL FLIGHT REACHED VANCOUVER 17 SEPTEMBER 1946. AEROPLANE WARANA. 19 SEPTEMBER 1946.**

This afternoon while I was speaking to Mrs. John Williams, 2050 Macdonald Street, seated at my desk, the door to the City Archives opened, and Mr. Chas. Sutherland, Mayor’s Secretary, unexpectedly appeared, followed by Commander Taylor of the Australian National Airways Skymaster Aeroplane *Warana*, three officers and two men attired in civilian garb. The officers wore khaki uniforms with gold rank badges and arm rings etc. They were a brilliant looking group.

It was all very unexpected and hurried. They remained perhaps ten minutes during which time I spoke rapidly. I took the telescope given by Lord Nelson to Sir Harry Burrard in 1805, and Commander Percival T.L. Taylor looked at the City through it. Miss [blank] rushed to get photos of C.P.R. Locomotive 374, which inaugurated the “All Red Route” by land in 1887, and I explained that yesterday, 17 September 1946 was a very auspicious date in the history of the British Empire; the occasion of the inauguration of the “All Red Route” around the world *by air*, and that we had not overlooked the significance of the extraordinary, almost marvellous achievement.

In a fleeting sweep through the centuries I explained the history of North America from its discovery by Columbus in 1492; showed them maps of one hundred and fifty years ago when British Columbia was thought to be the “Western Sea”; how Captain Vancouver tried to find a passage by water from the Pacific to the Atlantic; how the Canadian Pacific Railway linked the Atlantic to the Pacific and established the first “All Red Route” around the world; gave each a copy of my “Linking the Atlantic to the Pacific,” and it was all in great haste, smiles and good humour. They shook hands, departed through the door and disappeared from sight. I shouted after them “Advance Australia” (the Australian motto.)

The Mayor’s Secretary was kind enough to phone his thanks and commented, “You did splendidly.”

J.S.M.