

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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Contact Information

City of Vancouver Archives
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9
604.736.8561
archives@vancouver.ca
vancouver.ca/archives





JOHN INNES

How to Pronounce "Burrard"

Burrard Inlet, Burrard Street, Burrard Bridge

ON Prospect Point in the evening glow
Of the sunset's mirrored glory,
I glanced above where an ancient crow
Was telling a bedtime story.

Perched on a bough, this jolly old bird
Recalled—for a young relation,
What a hundred years ago he'd heard;
And seen from his lofty station.

"June, ninety two. Ah, then I was young
As I sat in this tree in the gloaming.
A queer sort of fish, with fins outflung,
In from the sea came roaming.

"I know better now, for the fish was a boat,
And the fins were the oars to move her;
There jumped ashore in a bright blue coat
A man they called Captain Vancouver.

"I flew quite near as he spoke to the mate,
Or, as sailors say, 'came furrard,'
He'd name the place I heard him state
For his friend Sir Harry Burrard.

"Now, I'm getting old and my hearing's hard,
So it may be I'm mistaken,
But you'd better look out if you say Burrard
Or George from his grave will awaken."

HERBERT BEEMAN.
Circa 1920.

HERBERT BEEMAN, born Lewes, England. Came Canada 1898; in 1908 was the first Municipal Clerk and Assessor, Municipality of Point Grey, at Eburne, now Marpole; a member of Christ Church, he was also a founder of St. Augustine's Church at Eburne, and of St. Mary's Church, Kerrisdale, where a plaque commemorates his devoted services. Married, 1904, Miss Elsie Machin, daughter of James Edwin Machin, second librarian, Vancouver Public Library, and Mrs. Machin. Died 18 August, 1931.

The name "Burrard" is, properly pronounced to rhyme with mustard and custard. "Jumped ashore" is poetic license, as Captain Vancouver passed by Prospect Point, and landed near Ioco, B.C.

Major Sir Gerald Burrard, Bart., D.S.O., Willow Lodge, Hungerford, Berks., England, an officer of the Royal Artillery, who lost a leg at the Battle of the Somme, 1916, is the present baronet.

City Archives, City Hall,
Vancouver, January, 1951.

Item # EarlyVan_v7_021

[LETTERS FROM J.S. MATTHEWS TO SIR GERALD BURRARD.]

City Hall
Vancouver
3rd Jan. 1948.

Dear Sir Gerald:

A thought came to me a moment ago, and I am tapping it down before I forget. In your letter, Dec. 12th you mention that you were wounded in that valley below, to the south of Ovilliers, or Ovilers. (Battle of the Somme, 1916.)

One day, long after the war, I was talking to my old friend Sir Arthur W. Currie, who commanded the Canadian Expeditionary Force. He was a Victoria, B.C., man and in pre-war days was a lieutenant in one volunteer regiment in Victoria while I was a sergeant in a Vancouver volunteer regiment. By and bye he got to be captain and I got to be lieutenant. We knew each other very well and used to go rifle shooting together. Well, Sir Arthur was talking to me one day in the Hotel Vancouver here and telling me about re-visiting the Somme Battlefield.

He said that at Alber (Albert) the Mayor had taken him for a drive over the old battlefield and as they were driving up the Bapaume Road, he said to the Mayor beside him in the motor car:

“And where is O-vil-liers?”

The Mayor looked puzzled, muttered to himself “O-vil-liers, O-vil-liers,” then scratched his head. He didn’t know where O-vil-liers was.

So, Currie pointed, and said “It used to be over there.”

Then the Mayor’s face brightened. He looked relieved and “intelligent,” and ejaculated:

“Oh, ho, ho. Ovia, Ovia.” (O-vee-ay.)

And that’s the end of the story. General Sir Arthur W. Currie, G.C.M.G., didn’t know how to pronounce O-vil-liers from “a hole in the ground.” And, Currie laughed and laughed.

Best wishes,

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews.

24th Jan. 1948.

Dear Major Burrard:

I was putting this sheet in my typewriter—in my attic office at home—two moments ago when a call from below by Mrs. Matthews came up the stairs: “Mr. Larsen wants to speak to you.” I went down, and he said “I got your letter. I’ve been up at Abbotsford—got back last night.” I asked “What do you think of it” (my letter.) “Pretty good.” Then he told me that he was going to be in Vancouver for a week before going back to Victoria, where Mrs. Larsen lives, and wanted to come up and see me before going back so that we could discuss “it,” (my letter.) We arranged that he was to telephone me about 11:30 one morning next week when he could get away, in order to give me time to have lunch prepared for him in my office at noon; just lunch for myself besides Mr. Larsen on a polished oak table I have in a corner.

Who do you suppose I have been talking to? Sub-Inspector Henry Larsen, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, master of the R.C.M.P. Schooner “St. Roch,” now in the ice at Herschel Island, North West Passage, the first man in the history of mankind ever to take a ship from the Pacific Ocean via the North West Passage to the Atlantic Ocean, 1940-1942; the second man to navigate a ship from the Atlantic to the Pacific by the same route, and the only man ever

to make the return trip, Pacific to Atlantic and back, 1944. Capt. Vancouver came here for the express purpose of trying to find a water route across North America. We have a letter at the City Hall in his handwriting in which he says that he has proven beyond all possible doubt within the limits of his investigation that there is no waterway between the opposite sides of America. Hudson, Franklin, scores of sailors lost their lives trying to find the North West Passage. Larsen, who has just hung up the telephone, and who honored me by calling me to it at my home, was the first from the Pacific to the Atlantic, and the first there and back. (Of course, Amundsen, in the "Gjoa," was the first to get from the Atlantic to the Pacific—about 1906 I think, may be 1903.)

[Note: Amundsen made it in 1903-1905 in the Gjøa. A.W.]

So, some day next week (this being Saturday evening) a man whose name must, forever, interest the navigators of all nations, will have lunch with me. I hope he behaves himself better than he did last time. Last time was June last year and cherry time, and he ate all the cherries on the table. At lunch I passed him the plate of cherries; he took one. Then I passed it again and suggested he take more; he did, and those disappeared; so I passed it again and by that time the plate full was getting smaller, so I set the plate in front of him and he "polished off" the lot. He told me that what they miss most in the North is fresh fruit there in the half-twilight all winter, except for an hour at noon, and nothing save ice as far as the eye can see. So when he left here on June 30th last I went down with ten pounds of cherries just as they sailed away from the dock.

At that time he gave me a "chunk" or piece of Australian gumwood, or ironbark, cut from the hatchway of the "St. Roch" when they were making repairs. I went to put a metal plate on it, such as the one you had made for the telescope, and drew up the inscription and sent it to him to approve of. That is what he is speaking of when he says he got my letter and thought it (my draft) was "pretty good." At the same time, June 30 last, he gave me a huge lump (it must be 100 pounds) of pure native copper, which he himself took from the bed of the Coppermine River in the Arctic. It is a ragged looking shapeless mass of solid pure metal—copper—and he told me he got it just as it is from the bed of the river where there was plenty more like it. What a story could be built around that lump of pure copper now in City Hall. The Indians of Canada had copper tools before the whiteman came. So, next week, Inspector Larsen and I shall discuss commemorative plates, their inscriptions, and I shall undoubtedly ask him if he would like it to be similar to the matchless one you designed after composing—one of the finest plates of its kind I have seen.

[Note: this refers to the telescope Lord Nelson presented to Captain Harry Burrard. J.S.M.]

Now, the next thing. The prints arrived. I chose the frames, or rather the moulding. Black and gold, about one and one half inches wide. I left the mounts almost exactly as you saw them. One was just a little out of proportion so I trimmed it, but the mat on both remains about three inches. I had the frames made with double wooden backs and placed thick sheets of white paper between the prints and the wood so that there would be less chance of the wood discolouring the prints, a very unlikely thing as the wood is bone dry, but to take no chances. Then I sealed all cracks with book binding tape so that no dust can get in through the back. The wooden backs fitted very neat and tight—there was barely space to get in the edge of a razor blade—still I covered it with tape to be sure. The two prints look very nice and I am very proud of them. They have been much admired by those who have seen them, but few have. Hardly a soul in Vancouver knows we have them—as yet.

[Note: this refers to two framed engravings, coloured, of Admiral Burrard in action with the French fleet. J.S.M.]

Before putting the prints in their frames I had printed a long strip on which there is a short explanatory narrative. The mats have gold stripes, single and double, and one was about half an inch apart. The long strip was designed to match the length of the inscription on the prints themselves, and fitted in the narrow space between two gold stripes, and thus harmonises with the rest of the lettering, etc. I asked the printer to print me 75 of these little stripes, though all I wanted was two; it was not much trouble to run off the rest when the type was set. So I now am able to enclose you a dozen. The remainder I shall just put away in the "BURRARD" docket for use some future day.

As yet I have said not a word to Mrs. Hamber. She is back from Princess Elizabeth's wedding. She was one of the few of Canada who got an invitation to it, and I think the only woman who did. I have not told her because, next week, I hope to send both pictures down to the photographer to be photographed. THEN, when I can give her a print of both to take back with her to her home, I am going to invite her down to tea in my office some afternoon.

Do not imagine, as you read of my associations with the eminent, that my pocket bulges with gold. Sometimes I am myself amazed that so penniless a fidget is honoured by the patronage of the great. I have not had my salary for December yet; no funds to pay it, and last year I had to dip heavily into my private purse to pay the expenses of the City Archives. However, the City Archives is now getting so full that one can hardly squeeze into it; we occupy one whole floor of the City Hall. And THIS IS THE "BEAUTIFUL" PART. In 1938 I, or rather Mrs. Matthews and I, made a "Deal" with the City that if they would provide accommodation, we would present the city with the collection in our home. They are BOUND BY WRITTEN AGREEMENT, signed by Mayor, by order of Council, to provide me with accommodation, so THEY CAN NOT GET ME OUT. But, all this will right itself. Next week there is to be a grand review of the whole situation by all the "crowned heads." And, from what I heard, there will be a marked increase in our annual appropriation in 1948.

Now, lastly, I smell cooking, and must soon leave for dinner, but before I go I must tell you about the robbery. I am in "mortal terror" every moment that a voice will call, "Jimmy! Have you been in the pantry?" And, of course, I shall assume an injured pose; deny that so respectable a person as I am could be guilty of so despicable an act. The last time it was "Jimmy!" Have you been feeding the cats sweet potatoes?" "Oh, no ma'am." (The cats "love" sweet potatoes.) But, the trouble with these parcels is that the box is too big or the contents too small, and if a parcel is not packed solid it does not travel well. The post office is always complaining about the trouble poorly packed parcels give them. So, I had to do something, and I robbed the pantry. If she finds out, you'll hear the disturbance in Hungerford. But, I didn't take much; the parcel had to be wrapped up, and now it is wrapped up, and it would not have been, and, on Monday I'll take it, and my hope there is naught in it distasteful to Lady Burrard.

[Note: during and following the war, 1939-1945, Major Matthews sent Major Burrard many parcels of food.]

I have your letter of 16th November. There is nothing requiring an answer. But, what does require an answer is the receipt of an illustrated journal about the Princess Elizabeth wedding. We heard the whole ceremony in Westminster Abbey here in our dining room (radio) as clearly as if we were in the Abbey. Your journal has been put carefully away, in the box which is kept for all such illustrated journals; one of the funeral of Queen Victoria; the marriage of our present King and Queen; the coronation of King Edward VII; they are all there; scarcely one missing of events of that sort. They are very useful at times when people want to know about crowns and things.

No. Don't forget the portraits, but take time; all will be well. Life becomes to me more mysterious as the years pass. I see about me a great city now approaching half a million people, and recall the day when a cat could steal across a street junction, with its tail in the air and unperturbed, not a soul in sight, picking its way as cats do, where today the surging host waits for the traffic signal to turn and then bursts hurriedly across, jostling, hastening—a multitude hurrying to the other side before the traffic signal changes. Twelve years ago we had to walk three blocks from the street car to the City Hall. Today the busses pass, crowded—standing room only—our front entrance, and, last fall, or autumn as you call it, a traffic policeman was, for the first time, posted where, on Saturday afternoons about 1900, I used to hunt in the clearing.

I'm going for an evening walk along the beach with Mrs. Matthews. She hasn't found out yet (about the robbery in the pantry.)

My deep respects to Lady Burrard, and to you.

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews.

Major Sir Gerald Burrard, Bart., D.S.O.
Willow Lodge,
Hungerford, Berks,
England.

ADMIRAL BURRARD'S PORTRAIT.

Major Sir Gerald Burrard, Baronet, D.S.O., of Willow Lodge, Hungerford, Berks, England, in the summer of 1952, presented an engraving of Admiral Burrard Neale, engraved about 1820, to the citizens of Vancouver as represented by the City Archives. Major Matthews, City Archives, had a polished mahogany casket made to contain it, then took both to a meeting of the Mayor and City Council and requested that they give formal thanks to Sir Gerald. This they did through the City Clerk.

The following is a copy of the letter received by the City Clerk from Sir Gerald in reply to the letter of thanks:

Willow Lodge
Hungerford
Berks
3rd Oct. 1952

Dear Sir:

I feel that I must really send you a brief line to try to thank you so very sincerely for your charming letter of September 9th.

The Members of the Council are so very generous in their kind appreciation of these small mementoes which I have ventured to offer to their City. In these days there is very little chance of any possessions of this sort being retained in the family for more than a generation. Death duties, and conditions of life have changed everything, and so I felt it would be nice to know that these little mementoes were housed in a permanent home. I owe you and your Council a debt for accepting them so generously and so graciously.

Yours truly,

Gerald Burrard.

NOTE BY J.S. MATTHEWS.

The letter of the City Clerk to Sir Gerald was very badly worded. He was not accustomed to composing suitable letters in such circumstances. It read much as a letter to a ratepayer would read, saying that his road or sidewalk would be fixed up. And, of course, Sir Gerald has replied in kind. Even the copy sent to the City Archives by the City Clerk's Office does not show to whom the letter was addressed, and I doubt that it is a correct copy.

Sir Gerald—when given half a chance—can write an admirable letter.