

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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[LETTER FROM R. ROWE HOLLAND.]

City Hall
10th April 1948

CITY ARCHIVES
1948
A report

Gentlemen:

A comprehensive report on the City Archives for 1947 would require too many pages; brevity is preferable.

1. Mention of the City Archives, Vancouver, can now be found in the leading libraries throughout the British Commonwealth.

A Canadian Metropolis, emulating our example, started their City Archives last year.

A librarian, renowned in Canada, recently wrote: "I cannot find words to express my appreciation. I doubt if the history of any city in Canada has been so well covered." Numerous high compliments from the eminent and responsible have been received.

2. Major Matthews notifies us that, after 13th June next on which date he completes fifteen years without a day's vacation, that he no longer intends to attempt the impossible of working all day without lunch hour at the Archives; four or five hours each evening at home; all week ends and public holidays, as he is finding an eighty hour week, year after year, a little exhausting. All Vancouver dailies published, a year ago, news items that, henceforth, he was to receive \$300 a month salary, and he was widely congratulated. Actually, during a portion of last year he received no salary at all, as after all accounts were paid there was nothing left. He tells us that, last year, the City Archives cost him \$600 from his own pocket, and does not desire reimbursement. We have no debts—save those of gratitude for stimulating encouragement from many.
3. In respect to an understudy. Qualified men are so rare that we have not found one. The pressing need at the moment is a clerk-stenographer and some equipment. Our equipment still consists of some cardboard boxes and discarded furniture. In respect to aldermanic representation on the trust. What is more desirable is more frequent visits from Council members.
4. We, the Trustees, are honorary and voluntary. The evidence that the citizens want an archives is abundant, and equally evident they don't want it for nothing. To expect one archivist and one assistant to meet the flood of demand arising in a metropolis of almost half a million people is hopeless. To relieve the burden we tried curtailment, which promptly provoked unjust complaint. If the City Archivist does, actually, restrict himself to the hours most of us keep, there will be more curtailment still. And, if he becomes ill, or was hurt in an accident, confusion would follow.
5. Our request is that the grant for 1948 be ten thousand, (\$10,000), no more and no less; a sum no greater than that of more than one City Hall official's salary, and, in addition, may we have your assurance that immediately we advise you we have engaged an understudy that an extra \$3000 will be available for his salary.

In conclusion may we remind you that the Council of 1933 did remarkably fine work in instituting the City Archives, something of which all Vancouver and all Canada has reason to be proud. Generations come and generations go, but the soul of Vancouver goes on forever, and the Archives is where the soul is kept.

Respectfully submitted,

R. Rowe Holland

TRUSTEE.

The Chairman and Members,
Finance Committee,
City Council
Vancouver.

[LETTER FROM J.S. MATTHEWS TO F.A. HARDY.]

1158 Arbutus St.,
Kitsilano Beach,
Vancouver, B.C.
29th March, 1948.

“CITY OF VANCOUVER”
“Council Minutes”
May 10th 1886 to
July 4th 1887.

Dear Mr. Hardy:

I asked the City Clerk—in 1933—if I might see the first Council minute book; he smiled. Presently he came back, would I mind calling again this afternoon—the clerk in charge was absent. So I called. They apologised, it had been mislaid, would I call again. I did so next week. They had not been able to find it. Three months later I enquired “Did you ever find those first minutes?” “No,” they had not. Then I told them what I had known all along, and, gracious, didn’t they “fly.” It was back, and I had it in “no time.” Someone had loaned it to a newspaper reporter; the newspaper reporter had died, and it was lying in a heap of ‘rubbish’ papers at his former home, most of which, I imagine, ended in the furnace. The City Clerk’s office had loaned it—months and months, perhaps years—and forgotten all about minute book or the borrower.

I determined that, should that ever happen again, we should have, at least, a copy. So I had it typed, and bound, first making an index which the original book has not. We copied it precisely as written. For instance \$2700 means \$27.00.

Unfortunately, the then City Clerk was not especially considerate to me, and when it was finished did not receive a presentation copy from me. The copy which Mrs. Matthews and I ask you to accept is the only copy not in our home.

It shows how a city on paper, the actual site then being covered with towering forest, a city without a Council, without a voters list, without an assessment roll and without five cents in the bank (without bank to bank in); with no other meeting-place save the constable’s dining room, rose up like magic and grew into the third greatest city in Canada and a world port into which, last year, 27,000 vessels great and small, coastwise and deep sea, entered at H.M. Customs, ten miles wide by five deep; the happy home of a benevolent and enlightened citizenry—one of the great achievements of men of peace.

With best wishes

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews.

F.A. Hardy, Esq.,
Parliamentary Librarian,
Ottawa, Ont.