

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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It seems that fate was determined that this municipality should be called "Richmond."

It is said that it would have been "Delta," from the Greek letter D, the shape of the two islands, but the municipality of Delta, that is Ladner, which was formed the same year, 1879, got ahead of them.

Then there is a Richmond, near Sydney in New South Wales, and that must have been named in honor of Richmond in Yorkshire where Mrs. Boyd was born, or after Richmond in Sussex, where Captain Vancouver died. In any case, Hugh McRoberts, who was the first settler on Sea Island, lived near Richmond, Australia, before he came to British Columbia. The name "Richmond" for his farm was used as early as 1862. So that you can not only claim kinship to Yorkshire, to Sussex and Australia, but even to Northern Ireland for Mrs. Boyd's home at Bangor is called "Richmond."

We now come to her last letter of April 28th. Here it is as I hold it in my hand.

"If I were a few years younger I would come out and see you all, and you could take me to see the wonderful improvements since we left our old farm."

At the very moment that old lady of ninety-three was penning those lines, there arose in the air from her former fields, now the Vancouver Airport, a giant airplane carrying thirty passengers. Thirty-eight and one-half hours later it descended from the skies in Auckland, New Zealand, on the other side of the world. Such are the wonders of the age through which Mrs. Boyd has lived.

(Next: Read the deed of gift.)

(Next: Read the resolution of thanks, March 18th, 1947, to Mrs. Boyd for her gift, passed by the Council of Richmond.)

Reeve Grauer and Councillors and people of Richmond:

I request your permission to cable, tomorrow morning, to Mrs. Hugh Boyd informing her that her gift has been safely delivered into your hands.

Note: the two portraits are preserved in the City Archives, Vancouver. J.S.M.

PRESENTATION OF PORTRAITS, REEVE AND MRS. HUGH BOYD, 23 MAY 1947.

21st June, 1947.

Dear Mrs. Boyd:

The scene was your little island in the west; Sea Island, at the mouth of the mighty Fraser River. The day was the eve of the great queen's birthday, Victoria, the Good, 23rd May, and the time exactly sixty years after your dear husband won the medal in London for the best wheat grown in the British Empire.

It was a beautiful evening at the end of a perfect day. The setting sun shone brilliantly, and the emerald green trees cast long shadows as cool summer zephyrs gently touched their verdant leaves. Off to the side a group of youths were playing football in the field; off to the left, Jersey cows were munching grass; high in the sky came a solitary airplane coming to the Vancouver Airport, once your old pasture. In the centre of the level land a great building stood alone like a pyramid of Egypt in the desert; high, massive, the gymnasium of the Richmond High School. A few motor cars came, some stopped, some passed on. And from other directions came people—fathers, mothers, sons and daughters of the community—strolling up the long straight highway without hurry or haste, just coming to the gymnasium to hear a message from the first lady of Richmond in Northern Ireland far away.

The Reeve of Richmond was there early, Reeve R.M. Grauer; so was the Municipal Clerk, Mr. R.C. Palmer, and the members of the Council. But I was first, and had to wait until someone came to open the door. Then we carried the portraits, in their boxes, inside and up to

the platform. The scores of chairs for the audience were not rightly placed so the Reeve and Council and Clerk started to move them while I, on the platform, was unpacking the portraits from their protecting blankets. Then I placed them on their two easels and covered them from sight with two hoods. Soon the great hall began to fill. The choir took their seats; the Reeve and Council took their places on the platform. I was invited there too. Mrs. Matthews sat in the front row. They hooked up the loud speaker and the recording discs.

The Reeve spoke first and asked the audience to sing "O CANADA." Then he said something else—I forget what—and then the choir, comprised of the maiden daughters of the cottage settlers which surround the High School, sang some sacred oratorio under the direction of a conductor who needed a shave. But he knew his music, and the singing was very beautiful, sweet, wholesome and comforting. Then the Reeve called upon me to speak.

I spoke for about twenty minutes or more. I tried to tell of early days, and of you, at that moment away off afar in Ireland and thinking of us. I told of Mrs. Alex. Boyd, of Winnipeg, coming, all unknown, to the City Archives, and how I found out where you lived from her; of the correspondence which followed; of the socks which you sent as my Christmas present, and which I held up in their case with the medal, for the audience to see; of how you had offered the portraits to the metropolitan archives of Richmond and Vancouver; of how Lord Granville had called upon you to accept them for us from your hands; of how they had reached Vancouver. I read your deed of gift, and also read the Council's letter of thanks. Then, removing the hoods which had hidden the portraits from the sight of the audience, I requested the permission of the Reeve, Council, Clerk, and People of Richmond to cable you in the morning that the portraits had safely reached their destination and that my duty had been performed.

I had my address more or less prepared in typescript. I do not read my speeches, but in this case it was necessary to prepare something which could be handed to the newspapers if they asked for it. The two portraits had previously been photographed. We have the negatives and can give you all the prints you desire. I handed Reeve Grauer photographs of both; gave more to the newspaper reporters and also gave the "Marpole-Richmond Review" a typescript of my address which, in their issue of June 18th, they print in part but have left out a very great deal—they hadn't sufficient space. They left out the wording of the deed of gift. It is my hope that what I said will meet with your approval.

Then the choir sang another fine anthem. Then there was a presentation to a Mrs. McMullen, widow of a Pilot Officer killed in England during the war and sent by the people of Darlington to be presented to his widow. I don't know where Darlington is, but it seems the pilot's airplane was in trouble. He had been shot down or something and his plane was on fire, I think, and instead of jumping and saving his own life he stayed with the plane and took it away from Darlington and landed it in fields where it could do no harm. The people of Darlington raised a large sum of money for the widow on Lulu Island, but she declined it and asked them to use it to make two hospital wards, so they sent her an engraved rose bowl of silver instead. I had remarked in my address that so long as we have such men as Pilot Officer Hugh Boyd Gilmore and Pilot Officer W.S. McMullen there was no fear for Canada. Then, the choir and audience sang "O God Our Help in Ages Past," and then later "Abide With Me." Then with "God Save the King" we closed and all went home pleasantly tired, and to bed. I'll wager they slept well for their minds were at peace.

In no sense was the ceremony a divine service. It was just that pure wholesome men and women preferred the beautiful music of those grand tunes. It was a happy, quiet, placid formality. It had a simple pomp; was as orderly in its sequence as a parade. There were no heroics. It was the tribute to you from men and women who are close to their God and the soil.

I left the portraits, and the glass case with the socks and the medal within, with the Municipal Clerk; just walked off and left them in his care. It would not have been seemly for me to ask to have them back to take to the City Hall. So, what I have heard is that they are now in the Municipal Hall and that next week they will be sent to our City Archives, City Hall, Vancouver. I did not want it to appear that I feared to trust them. And then, too, it is nice that they have been

hanging in the Municipal Hall, Brighthouse, Lulu Island. That they would take the greatest care I know, because someone told me that Reeve Grauer had said that if any harm came to those two pictures there would be "murder" on Lulu Island.

The next thing I did was write Lord Granville and enclose in the letter two photographs of the portraits. I felt that was the proper thing to do. You see, you presented the pictures to Lord Granville on our behalf and it seemed proper that I should first report to him that I had carried out the responsibility you clothed him with; therefore it was proper he should hear first, so that he could report to you that the duty had been performed. Perhaps a little military or naval, but Lord Granville is an admiral, and I am a major, both accustomed to what is known as "the chain of responsibility."

The "Vancouver Daily Province," largest newspaper in western Canada, published illustrations of the portraits on Saturday, June 14th.

On the platform Reeve Grauer handed me a letter of thanks, dated June 12th, from the Council and himself. I had the letter photostated, and send you herewith the original letter and one photostat. I also enclose you some clippings, a copy of the "Marpole-Richmond Review," June 18th, and, under separate cover, two photographs of the oil paintings.

You will notice at the foot of each painting a white strip on which is writing so tiny that it can be read only with the aid of a microscope. The reason is that when people come to the City Archives they want to know "Who's that?" and even if we try to tell them, we forget to tell them what should be told. We cannot always think of it, so that the best thing to do is to have it all down in writing, properly prepared, and then, when a photograph is given away, the story, with all particulars, is right on the photograph for them to read, and not make mistakes about. People are so careless with their "facts" sometimes.

I have sent "Marpole-Richmond Review" to Mrs. Appleby in Kelowna, Mrs. Grant in New Westminster, Lord Granville in Ireland, Mrs. Alex. Boyd in Winnipeg, and, in addition, have kept a small stock of a few extra copies for your records here in case someone in the future asks for one. As for your photographs, all they have to do is tell us how many. There is a Mr. Moore—I think that's his name—who is interested in such things.

It is all very extraordinary, very admirable, and leaves me humble and thankful that the Almighty has seen fit to select me to be the medium and the servant through whom these things have been performed. Sometimes I wonder if it is all true, or am I just dreaming. In the short span of a single life, there has arisen out of the wilderness of forest and swamp, like a magic thing, a great city; a metropolis and world port of monumental buildings, luxurious offices, beautiful homes and green lawns; the happy home of a benevolent and enlightened people.

My gratitude to you for having made this delightful incident possible is boundless, and, with bended knee, I kiss your hand, and will say good luck, good-bye, and good night.

With my deepest respects,

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews

CITY ARCHIVIST

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