

Early Vancouver

Volume Seven

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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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PROVINCE, 10 NOVEMBER 1949.

“MOURN NOT.”

When I arose each morning
The day seemed long and drear,
My sleepless night were filled
With grief and fear.
And then—I felt your presence,
Heard your voice,
And this is what you said:
Mourn not for me, because, you see,
I am always with you dear.
Though in soil my body rests,
My spirit lives, I am not dead.
So cast away your grief and fear
Ever remembering that He said,
I, AM THE LIVING AND THE DEAD.
As you continue on through life,
At times, the toil and strife
May seem hard.
Hold your head high.
Keep your faith strong.
Keep that smile that I love
As you go along,
And, when your journey on earth is through
I shall be waiting for you.
So, no more grieving.
No more tears.
God is with you always,
And I am near you dear.

Clara Fogg Lobban, Vancouver.

REMARKS BY MAJOR J.S. MATTHEWS, V.D. TO THE LADIES OF THE ALTRUSA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, APPROXIMATELY 150 MEMBERS OF THE ALTRUSA CLUBS OF IDAHO, OREGON AND WASHINGTON, U.S.A., AND BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA, AT 9:15 A.M., SATURDAY, 15 MAY 1948, HOTEL VANCOUVER.

Madame President and Ladies:

The greeting which comes to you this morning from the multitude—half a million citizens of Vancouver—is to congratulate you upon holding the first Altrusa International assemblage in Canada; is to welcome those from afar to our City and Dominion; to compliment you upon your laudable endeavours, and to predict that what you have inaugurated this morning will be maintained and grow stronger and stronger in the years to be. I have been allotted a few moments in your programme; must hurry, and presume to present an epitome of altruism and Vancouver as it appears to me.

May we imagine it is the year 1492—four hundred and fifty years ago—and you and I are standing upon the surface of the moon looking at a great ball, called the “Earth,” much larger than the moon appears to us, floating in the heavens above. Through our telescope we see the pyramids of Egypt; the caravans of camels, crossing the desert sands of Arabia. We see hoary old Europe with its ivy-mantled castles. Then, far to the west, the hordes of Asia are lining those age-old shores. In between sandwiched between two oceans which we now call the Atlantic and the Pacific, lies a great, and as yet nameless continent, covered with a green carpet of forest, stretching from pole to pole, silent, still and empty, and we wonder why, through the countless

centuries since the dawn of time, the Almighty has reserved North and South America to be the new home of the European people.

A young man named Columbus suggested to the merchants of Spain that by going the other way he could reach the same place. The merchants grasped the idea; it was splendid. If he could they would not have to pay the heavy tolls levied by the potentates of Arabia and Egypt for the passage of goods through their lands; the freight cost would be less. So they gave Columbus three ships and he sailed away, found land, returned and told the Spanish king, who sent more ships which sailed north and sailed south, but never reached India; ever there was that barrier of land. Then Bilboa crossed at a narrow place we call Panama, and saw there was an ocean on the other side. How to get into it was a problem. Magellan found a crack in the wall, sailed through, discovered an immense ocean we call the Pacific, but the Magellan straits were too far to the south. Gallant navigators by the score tried to reach China by sailing around the north and lost their lives in the ice.

For nearly three hundred years the Pacific Ocean lay, as it had always lain, unknown until the British sent Captain Cook to the top part, where we live, to find out what was there. He returned to say it was mountains, not sea. So the British sent Captain Vancouver to find a channel through those mountains, and to sail from the Pacific to Hudson's Bay, the Atlantic, and a short way home to the British Isles. Captain Vancouver was trying to find a waterway to your Chicago and our Toronto when, in 1792, he was the first European to peer into our beautiful harbour—a forgotten haven in an old and densely populated world.

May I read from his letter:

“Nootka, Oct. 2nd 1794. We arrived here this day month, all in high health and spirits, having truly determined the non-existence of any water communication between this and the opposite side of America beyond all doubt and disputation.”

So, instead of the “Western Sea” as old charts showed, it was land to form our states of Idaho, Oregon and Washington, our Province of British Columbia, and we had to link the Atlantic to the Pacific by building the Northern Pacific Railway to Tacoma, the Great Northern to Seattle, and the Canadian Pacific to Vancouver. Five million people lived on America's eastern shore, not one of whom knew whether it was land or water in the west.

Captain Vancouver died one hundred and fifty years ago next Tuesday, 18th May 1798.

In that very same year, 1798, a baby was born to grow to a man whose philosophy was destined to have a wide influence for good upon the millions of future America. As one door closed another opened. Andrew Comte, the French philosopher, was the originator of a thought and the inventor of the word “altruism.” He motto was “Vivre pour autres,” or “Lives for others.” Here in this room, and all about us, we see the fruits of altruistic endeavours. Without Columbus, Magellan, Cook, Vancouver, you would not have had your happy homes, nor we ours. There may not have been a Canada; a City of Vancouver; a Vancouver Island; nor Altrusa International without Comte.

Each year upon her birthday, 27th April, we send to the Mayor of Vancouver, State of Washington, or sometimes Portland, Oregon, a large birthday cake all decorated and adorned with icing and pink rosettes, and inscribed, “GREETINGS TO MARGARET McNEIL FROM THE CITY OF HER BIRTH,” and we request him to present the cake with ceremony to the first little cherub born in the city of Vancouver, Canada. Last year 10,091 little babies were born here. Miss McNeil, doyen of them all, is 62. In the short span of her single life, a great metropolis and port, Vancouver, ten miles wide by seven deep, with 150 churches, 100 parks, 70 public schools, and 900 miles of streets, has risen like a magic thing out of a wilderness of forest and swamp—the mighty monument to the achievements of men and women of peace. There is no blood upon the escutcheons of our Pacific Coast cities. Your pioneers built not forts, but gardens on the shore.

At one school here in Vancouver the children of thirty nationalities play happily together, and the school secretary is a negro. There are three monuments only to our citizens—one honours a darkie, another a Jew, the third is to an Indian.

How recent it all is. There lives within a mile of you an old man, John Scales, who saw the spot where you are sitting as dark damp glade in the giant forest towering to the skies, and but three small cabins on all our harbour shores. Last Monday, in my office, we entertained at tea the sole surviving pupil of the first class in the first school. Today there are over 50,000 school pupils and 9,000 students at the University.

We must accept the Almighty or deny him. There are no half measures about that—it is all or nothing. Did all this just happen—like the wind. Was there no great plan, no master architect. Wave not a flag in the street, nor utter boastful shout, but in a quiet closet and on bended knee, remember Him through Whom all things first were made, Who knows when a sparrow falls, and give thanks for our good fortune to Him who has directed it.

Her Majesty the Queen, Elizabeth of Canada, said:

“Women of all lands yearn for the day when it will be possible to set about building a new and better world.”

That was in wartime, and now that peace has come, that is precisely what the Altrusa Clubs are doing—building a new and better world. May our Heavenly Father shower his blessing upon all whose motto is “Vivre pour autres”—“Live for others.”

WESTERN GATE LODGE, No. 48, A.F. & A.M. WORSHIPFUL MASTER VERNER FRANKLIN ABLESON.

Notice. A regular communication will be held in the Chapter Room, Freemasons Hall, Tuesday, November 15th, 1949, at 8:00 p.m.

Business. To receive bequest of Brother J.S. Matthews, presenting his personal service sword as a gift for the use of the lodge.

Arthur Graves, P. M. Secretary.

Brother Matthews: Worshipful Master. May I approach the east for the purpose of preferring a request?

Worshipful Brother Ableson: Please do.

Brother Matthews: Worshipful Master and Brethren. Many years ago, 55 precisely, the defence of the western shore of Canada, especially the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the new city and port called “Vancouver,” was occupying the attention of the Canadian Government. A company of one hundred volunteer soldiers and about eight volunteer officers was formed from the citizens. They trained on two muzzle-loading cannon now standing in front of the Drill Hall on Beatty Street; were armed with rifles using lead ball, and fired with black powder and a cloud of white smoke. The few officers carried swords; this is one of them. The letters “V.R.I.” are upon it—the initials of Victoria, the Good, Queen and Empress.

Time passed, and then, one day, my commanding officer called me aside and handed me a parchment which, indirectly, came from the King and upon which, in engraved words, I read:

“To our trusty and well beloved James Skitt Matthews. Greeting. We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage, and good conduct, do constitute you to be an officer in the Militia of the Dominion of Canada.”

All officers carried swords as symbols of their authority. I required a sword; an elderly officer of the early volunteer soldiers gave me his. There may be Vancouver swords which are as old; there are none older. It has been in the service of five sovereigns—one queen and four kings.

More time passed, and with 1914 came war. With my Brother Taylor, here in tranquil peace beside me, I went to noisy war in France. The sword was left behind. Together we were present at the defence of Ypres, 1916, and at that awful bloodbath, the Battle of the Somme, which continued night and day without cessation for six months, and left one million and a quarter