

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 7 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 7. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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lines its shores. They came with vision, energy and courage, with the power of justice and the patience of strength; with faith in their God, their country, their fellows and in themselves. A rare opportunity lay open and they seized it for themselves and for us. They were men and women of peace, and they laboured to create. There is not a single spot of blood upon our escutcheon. They were among the principals in one of the great incidents in the chronicle of mankind, one which, forever, must interest the peoples of all nations. They saw Vancouver before it had any civic administration at all. They saw the first train arrive—the train which made Canada whole.

Canada is not so many square miles of earth. Since the dawn of time Canada has always been three thousand miles from sea to sea, but it was empty, silent and still. They made it live; at least, this part of it. Canada is the blood and bone of its people. Canada is men and women. Here, seated about it, is the living genesis of our great metropolis, and the vast empire which lies about us. Their greying hairs are dear as a reminder of the effort which they made; each wrinkle of their cheeks is beautiful to our eyes for it is the mark of a tribulation overcome. Nobility is not a clanking sword nor brilliant coronet. Nobility is laudable conduct, however lowly, and some of their tasks were necessarily humble. The majority have departed. If you would see their monument, go forth and look around. These precious few remain. If, as has been said, the secret of happiness in old age is the contemplation of one's own work and to see that it is good, then, in all faith, Mr. Chairman, you must be presiding over one of the happiest groups of persons in all Canada.

May I be privileged to remind the pioneers themselves that it is due to the gracious thoughtfulness of the Board of Park Commissioners that this pleasurable compliment to you is being paid by the people of Vancouver. It is characteristic of the Commissioners, for as representatives of all Vancouverians, they have ever taken occasion by the hand whenever they could find excuse to give visible evidence to you of the esteem and affection in which you, our pioneers, are held by the citizenry. In this particular instance, the Board and Mr. Stroyan, the Superintendent, astutely recalled that last Friday, April 6th, was the anniversary of our incorporation as a city, a mere legal term and form, but which, interpreted, means that sixty-five years ago you were all busily engaged in laying our civic corner stone and with precious little mortar to do it with. Mr. Campbell, seated here, was actually present at the first meeting of the first City Council.

For generations, perhaps centuries, all those who come after will admire your noble work, and hold you in fond recollection. Figuratively, in one loud united accord, they will acclaim, "Bravo; bravo; our beloved pioneers."

May God bless you all.

REMARKS OF MAJOR J.S. MATTHEWS, V.D. AT A BANQUET GIVEN BY THE WESTMINSTER REGIMENT IN THE ELKS HALL, NEW WESTMINSTER, WEDNESDAY, 23 MAY 1951.

Colonel Cummins and Gentlemen:

Time is short, and, if I may be excused, we will dispense with the customary pleasantries.

1. The authority upon which I speak:

I saw your soldiers depart for and return from the South African war, 1899-1902.

I have worn his Majesty's uniform in Vancouver for 48 years.

In 1907 I wrote the history of your regiment to that year.

Until 1910 I wore the same regimental uniform as your officers did. I was one of them.

You are a machine gun regiment. I was the first volunteer officer in B.C. to be authorised by Ottawa to conduct a machine gun school, and it was in your regiment.

Your regimental badge, a maple leaf before a setting sun, is derived from my family coat-of-arms.

2. In August, 1858, Queen Victoria proclaimed that "*the wild and unoccupied territory on the north west coast of North America shall henceforth be known as British Columbia.*" Three months later, October 29th 1858, Captain Parson and 20 men landed in B.C. and took possession of a "wild and unoccupied territory" as big as the British Isles. They established a camp up Columbia Street, near the Penitentiary, and they made New Westminster the capital of the colony. They remained three years, and when they departed, October 1863, only one-third of the 160 men went back to England. Seven days later, the 130 who remained formed themselves into the "New Westminster Volunteer Rifles," and wore the uniforms and used the equipment left behind by the Royal Engineers. The proof is that I hold in my hand some of it, and I have seen your Captain Bole, i.e., Judge Bole, wearing the uniform of the departed Royal Engineers.

From that day to this Her Majesty's or His Majesty's soldiers have served in New Westminster without a break of a single day, and son followed father and grandson followed grandfather.

Our forefathers had had experience in the loss of the British territory now known as the State of Washington. Later we were to lose the San Juan Islands. I ask you, for what reason did the British War Office send the Royal Engineers to occupy a "wild and unoccupied territory" which three months before was without a name.

3. In 1858, October, the Queen's soldiers stepped ashore right here where we are sitting.
In 1863 they formed a volunteer company, the only defence to British Columbia, as the Royal Engineers had gone.
In 1865 they entertained the British Navy at a rifle match on a range up by Queens Park, sailors and soldiers both wearing uniforms. About the same year they volunteered for the Chilcote War, and some took part.
In 1866 they organised the Seymour Volunteers as a defence against the American Fenians.
In 1867 the British War office supplied them with muzzle loading cannon. A British warship brought the two guns and on the Queen's birthday they fired a salute across the river.
In 1872 they had rifle matches on the Peele rifle range at Sapperton.
In 1873 Ottawa authorised two groups of soldiers, the Seymour Battery and the New Westminster Rifles, both in New Westminster.
In 1882 they went to the Wellington coal strike on Vancouver Island to aid civil power.
In 1883 they became No. 1 Battery, the senior battery in British Columbia's first regiment.
In 1886 the riflemen and gunners of New Westminster were the first troops to tread the streets of Vancouver.
In the earlier '90s Captain Scoullar chartered a ship at his own expense and took the soldiers of New Westminster to Victoria for a trip.
In 1894 Senator Taylor, i.e. Col. Taylor, of the *British Columbian* newspaper, was commissioned as a lieutenant, and your regiment sent riflemen to the Dominion rifle matches at Ottawa.
In 1898 they were the guests, as a regiment in uniform, at Seattle, of the United States government.
In 1899 they sent a detachment to the South African war and your men were present at the Battle of Paardeberg and the Surrender of Cronje.
In 1909 they were again guests at Seattle of the American people at the A.Y.P. Exposition.

In 1910 they became a regiment, the 104th Westminster Fusiliers, with two companies at Chilliwack.

Now the questions I ask to submit to you are:

Why not carry the battle honour, "South Africa 1899-1902," when all other Canadian regiments who contributed men do emblazon it as a regimental honour.

Why does the "Militia List" or "Defence List," published by the Department of National Defence promulgate to all Canada, and even beyond, that "The Westminster Regiment" was organised in 1910, and that your seniority amongst Canadian regiments is 71st; that is, that 70 Canadian regiments have had longer service than you have. Captain (Judge) Bole told me fifty years ago that you had the longest service of any regiment in Canada.

4. If the descendants of early Ontario soldiers are known as the Royal Hamilton Regiment, and those of Manitoba as the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, one would think that the descendants of the Royal Engineers who took possession of a "wild and unoccupied territory" 300 miles long by 300 miles wide for the British crown, and who live in the Royal City, would be worthy of being known as the Royal Westminster Regiment.

From whence do the eastern Canadian regiments derive the honourable appellation of "Royal"? Why are the services of the soldiers of Upper or Lower Canada acknowledged and recognised while those of the Crown Colony of British Columbia are not?

May I read to you from the roll of seniority:

1. Governor General's Foot Guards	1872
2. Canadian Grenadier Guards, Montréal	1859
3. Queen's Own Rifles, Toronto	1860
4. Halifax Rifles	1860
5. Victoria Rifles, Montréal	1862
6. The Black Watch, Montréal	1862
7. The Royal Rifles, Québec	1862
8. The Volunteers of Canada, Québec	1862
9. The Royal Regiment of Canada, Toronto	1862

Now, please listen.

56th The British Columbia Regiment, Vancouver 1883

In 1883 all Vancouver was forest. The first soldiers in Vancouver were formed in 1894.

71 st The Westminster Regiment	1910
72 nd The Seaforth Highlanders	1910

For nearly twenty years I have been trying to convince Ottawa of your long service—all to no effect. Statement after statement has been submitted. They are very polite, but persist in some ruling that ignores all services prior to 1910. Your Member of Parliament, Mr. Mott, has tried but without success. Of course they are, in one respect, handicapped, as they have no records prior to 1871 when British Columbia entered the Canadian Confederation.

Such are my representations, Colonel Cummins and gentlemen.