

**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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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# Vancouver News-Herald

VANCOUVER, CANADA, SATURDAY MORNING, OCTOBER 24, 1953

## Honor Is Due Him

MEMBERS of the Kitsilano Rate-payers' Association under President F. M. Scudamore are moving to have Major J. S. Matthews, C.D., City Archivist, honored with the Freedom of the City in recognition of his long and eminent service to the community.

Their case could not be better stated than it has been by R. Rowe Holland, former park commissioner, who puts it this way:

"I have worked with Major Matthews for many years as chairman of parks and subsequently as trustee of Vancouver city Archives. I am familiar with his initial enthusiasm to gather together, with his late good wife, documents and information through many years at a great expense to himself.

"I know he went to work as a voluntary public officer and virtually without pay to establish the archives. During the years since I have been familiar with his almost incredible patience and devotion in generally building the Archives de-

partment into one of the most valued departments of the City Hall.

"His has been a dedicated life ever since he returned from the first great war with a reputation as a courageous and skillful fighting man and soldier. Only when his name becomes history, perhaps will the Vancouver public awaken to an appreciation of the invaluable results to them of his life's work.

"He has contributed not only his inspired and indefatigable time and effort to the creation of the Archives, but has literally sacrificed every material thing he had in the world to the achievement of his great objective.

"If anyone deserves to be granted a singular honor being made a Freeman of the City of Vancouver, it is Major Matthews. This is something we can do for him while he is alive to appreciate it."

With all that, everyone will heartily agree. We know that everyone will support the move for the suitable honoring of this devoted public servant.

Item # EarlyVan\_v7\_054

# 'Mr. History' Given Key to Vancouver

## City Archivist Major Matthews Fifteenth Person So Honored

"Mr. History" has won another spot for himself in the history of Vancouver.

City Council on Monday ordered that the key to the city be given to Major James Skitt Matthews, V.D., 75-year-old city archivist, an honor bestowed on only 14 other men.



MAJOR J. S. MATTHEWS  
... honored by city

Vancouver News-Herald

Tuesday, Nov. 17, 1953 3

## City Honors Archivist For Long Service

City Council honored 20 years of service by city archivist Major J. S. Matthews Monday, unanimously voting him the "freedom of the city."

The honor was given Major Matthews in "recognition of faithful and loyal service to city council." He was appointed city archivist June 12, 1933.

Council heard letters of endorsement submitted by the Kitsilano Ratepayers Association from:

BC Towboat Owners Association, Park Board, School Board, Community Arts Council, Holy Name Society of St. Augustine's Church, Kitsilano Chamber of Commerce, Lions Gate branch, Canadian Legion No. 79.

Kinsmen Club of Vancouver, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, Burrard Lions, Business and Professional Women's Club, Vancouver Council of Women, Women's Canadian Club, and the Women's University Club of Vancouver.

The move to name "the Major" as a freeman of the city was sparked by the Kitsilano Ratepayers' Association and supported by at least 15 other organizations.

The honor was "in recognition of faithful and loyal service rendered by him to Vancouver City and council, citizens and many others since becoming city archivist June 12, 1933."

Born in Wales and schooled in England, Major Matthews came here in November 1898 from New Zealand and soon after became seriously interested in his hobby of collecting relics and records of early Vancouver.

Under his persistent and untiring hand—often times with direct opposition from city councils—he has built up a piece-by-piece record of Vancouver's history from the day in 1792 when Captain George Vancouver first entered Burrard Inlet.

In 1929 his hobby grew to a full-time job at his home, and in 1931 the public library provided an attic room over the old city market at Hastings and Main. Here the city archives was born—with its founder getting no salary, no expenses and no official standing.

In 1933, he received official recognition, was given an honorarium of \$25 a month, and was permitted to move his archives to a small room on the tenth floor of the Holden building. The archives are now on the ninth floor of City Hall.

The bestowing of freedom of the city is considered a great honor, but under the new city charter actually grants no special privileges.

Under the former charter, a freeman automatically had a civic vote, was placed at the top of the voters' list, and was granted qualification to run for any civic office.

Groups supporting the freeman honor were B.C. Towboat Owners' Association, Park Board, Community Arts Council, Holy Name Society of St. Augustine's Church, Kitsilano Chamber of Commerce, Lions Gate Branch Canadian Legion, Kinsmen Club of Vancouver, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Board of Trade, Burrard Lions, Business and Professional Women's Club, Vancouver Council of Women, Women's Canadian Club and Women's University Club.

School Board, Kitsilano  
Ratepayers Association.

**FREEDOM.**

Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>, 1953.

Dear Mr. Scudamore:

Please may I give to you and your associates of the Kitsilano Ratepayers my most ardent assurance that I am not unmindful of their great kindness to me. It is a great reward to me to learn that those whose friendship I have enjoyed for many long years, and who should be acquainted with all my shortcomings, are so generous as to overlook them and still retain a measure of confidence in me.

I assure you and them that it is a matter of much comfort and consolation to reflect that, perhaps, their tribute means, actually, a recognition that I have tried to do justice to the great trust the people of Vancouver reposed in me.

To me, the most appealing feature is the remarkably good example the Kitsilano Ratepayers have set for the people of Canada to emulate. It may be, perhaps has been already, noised abroad, near and far, that the Citizens of Vancouver take such pride in their beautiful home that they confer high honor upon the keeper of their story. It may induce other great cities through the Dominion to ask themselves, if a record office in Vancouver is held in such high esteem, why is their own city without one.

With my grateful thanks and deep respects

I have the honor to remain,

Your humble servant

J.S. Matthews

City Archivist

F.M. Scudamore, Esq.,  
President, Kitsilano Ratepayers Assn.  
Vancouver.

CITY  
CLERK'S OFFICE  
RONALD THOMPSON, J. P.  
CITY CLERK  
DOUGLAS H. LITTLE  
DEPUTY CITY CLERK



TELEPHONE EMERALD 1313

453 W 12TH AVENUE  
VANCOUVER 10, B. C.

November 18, 1953

Major J. S. Matthews,  
City Archivist,  
City Hall

Dear Sir: Freedom of the City: Major J.S. Matthews

I wish to notify you of the following resolution passed by Council of the City of Vancouver on November 16, 1953:

"THAT the Vancouver City Council bestow the 'Freedom of the City' on Major J. S. Matthews, V.D., in recognition of the years of faithful and loyal service rendered by him to the Vancouver City Council, the Citizens of Vancouver, and many others, since appointed to the position of City Archivist on June 12, 1933, and further

THAT the letter submitted by the Kitsilano Ratepayers' Association with attached letters from the following Organizations, in support of the bestowing of the Freedom to Major Matthews, be received:

B. C. Towboat Owners' Association  
Board of Park Commissioners  
Board of School Trustees  
Community Arts Council of Vancouver  
Holy Name Society, St. Augustine's Church  
Kitsilano Chamber of Commerce  
Lions Gate Branch, Canadian Legion No. 79  
The Kinsmen Club of Vancouver  
The Vancouver Junior Chamber of Commerce  
Vancouver Board of Trade  
Vancouver Burrard Lions Club  
Vancouver Business & Professional Women's Club  
Vancouver Council of Women  
Women's Canadian Club  
Women's University Club of Vancouver."

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "D. H. Little".

ACTING CITY CLERK

CLowery:sw

Item # EarlyVan\_v7\_056

City of Vancouver



**FREEDOM** conferred by order of the City Council on the sixteenth day of November, nineteen hundred and fifty three. His Worship Fred J. Hume, Mayor, presiding.

**To Wit: Major**

**James Skitt Matthews, V.D.**

was admitted into the Freedom of the City of Vancouver the sixteenth day of November, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and fifty three, and in the second year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth the second.

Moved

That the Vancouver City Council confer the Freedom of the City on Major James Skitt Matthews, V.D., in recognition of the years of faithful and loyal service rendered by him to the Vancouver City Council, the Citizens of Vancouver, and many others, since appointed to the position of City Archivist on June the twelfth, nineteen hundred and thirty three.

Carried Unanimously.



In Witness Whereof the Seal of the City of Vancouver is hereunto affixed the day and year above written.



*F. J. Hume* Mayor

*J. H. Little* Acting City Clerk

Item # EarlyVan\_v7\_057

**RESPONSE OF MAJOR J.S. MATTHEWS, V.D. UPON BEING PRESENTED WITH AN ILLUMINATED SCROLL CONFERRING UPON HIM THE FREEDOM OF VANCOUVER AT A BANQUET HELD IN THE PAVILION, STANLEY PARK, VANCOUVER, MONDAY, 5 APRIL 1954.**

Mr. Chairman, Your Worship, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am deeply grateful to you, a representative group of the Citizens of the Corporation of Vancouver, for the honour you have conferred upon me, and especially to His Worship the Mayor for his complimentary remarks. My prayer is that you may never have cause to regret it.

A telegram has just been received from New York. It reads:

“Best wishes to the Pioneers of Vancouver. Marian Hirsch.”

Miss Hirsch is the only grandchild of Mayor Oppenheimer [*applause*], who opened Stanley Park in 1888, and whose bronze memorial adorns the Beach Avenue entrance to it.

Will you please join with me in a consideration of the circumstances under which this cherished dignity has been conferred. May I explain it to you as I see it.

Twenty years of endeavour by many, and not without its trials, has resulted in the Freedom of Vancouver being conferred upon a public servant. It began with the City Council of 1933, who granted my application to be allowed to assume the title of “City Archivist,” and, upon the proposal of the late Alderman Twiss, accommodation was provided in a small vacant room, ten feet by twelve, in the Temporary City Hall. I took a plain white envelope, wrote “City Archives” upon it, and stuck it by its gummed flap to the door. The Council also granted three hundred dollars a year.

Three years later, in 1936, the new City Hall was opened, and, as there was no immediate use for the whole of the ninth floor, the “City Archives” took possession. At that time it was accepted that we were to be a strictly Vancouver institution and were not to concern ourselves with what happened beyond the city boundaries.

What, then, is the situation today? One whole floor of the City Hall does not provide sufficient accommodation. We are no longer a local institution. We have become metropolitan. We know no boundaries for we serve West Vancouver, City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, and the Municipalities of Burnaby and Richmond. Correspondence comes from the United States, Australia and the British Isles. A congratulatory telegram has just come from the Hudson’s Bay Company, Winnipeg. Our publications are in the schools of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Québec and Nova Scotia. One of our pamphlets was translated at Rome into the Italian language. Successive Councils have gradually increased the annual grant, and the erection of a building for the exclusive use of records is being discussed. Our staff is overworked and keeps abreast of the demands by working in the evening and on holidays. The Librarian of the Parliamentary Library at Ottawa wrote that he knew of no Canadian city which had a more complete history of its early days than has Vancouver. Lord Tweedsmuir, greatest historian of his day in the British Commonwealth, on viewing your record office, exclaimed, “This is admirable work—just what I have been urging.”

In 1933 the opportunity lay open and we seized it. If such a position can be reached after twenty years, and under the difficulties of establishing something new and little known, what may we expect, now that we have gathered some momentum, during the next 20 or 40 years?

All this has not been the work of a single individual. Pioneers, alas many no longer with us, have helped, and there can be scarcely man or woman in this room who has not, at some time and in some way, made their contribution. Those to whom we are indebted for stimulating encouragement are so numerous that their names are legion. The later Alderman Twiss moved the resolution in the Council that the “City Archives” be instituted. The late John Hosie, Provincial Archivist, Victoria, when I was faltering with discouragement, angrily shouted in my ear, “Don’t quit now, man. Keep on, keep on!” That little lady, Miss Giles, just out of school, worked for almost two years at a salary of \$12.50 a month and then, after nine years with us, married and

went off to Edmonton with a gilt gold purse full of crisp bank notes in her hand, and established an archives in that city. I doubt very much if His Worship, Mayor Hume, fully realises how immeasurable his help has been, so I take this opportunity to declare it. Then there is our present Assistant Archivist, Mrs. Gibbs, who always finds expedients for difficulties. And, lastly, the gentlemen Commissioners and Staff of the Park Board, to whom we never appeal in vain.

Sixty or seventy years ago all Vancouver lay hidden beneath a great forest, green, dark, silent and still. You were young and vigorous, young adventurers full of vision, energy and courage, whom no difficulty could dismay, and ill content to remain on the old farm down east. You hastened west, built wooden streets and sidewalks, dug wells for water. All courage is not of the battlefield, nor fame of marble halls. Vancouver was not built by the government. Vancouver was created by adventurers and it will only hold its place by adventurers. If you would see the splendour of the handiwork of which you were the genesis, go into the darkness outside and gaze upon the lights of a metropolis and world port; a community twenty miles wide by thirty long, of 150 schools, 300 churches, and 2,000 miles of streets, the happy home of a benevolent and enlightened people. Our pioneers marched in front. They were the van in Vancouver, and, as they weakened, others took their places. The whole constitutes our tradition.

And what is tradition? All that we are and all that we ever shall be we owe to those who have preceded us. Canada is not merely 3,000 miles of land and water from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Canada is men and women, some gone, some here now, and some the millions coming in the years to be. There is but one way by which we can repay our indebtedness, and that is by so conducting ourselves that our posterity will, in turn, be equally indebted to us. But we shall not do that if we destroy our tradition by throwing our records on the rubbish heap. Soon there will be no tradition to sustain and to guide us at all. We would return to the dark days when men could neither read nor write and all trace lost after three or four generations.

Upon mature reflection I believe you will agree with me that the dignity of Freeman which has been conferred upon me has a much wider implication than the mere bestowal of rank upon a single individual. The gentlemen of the Council, urged by the Kitsilano Ratepayers and other groups who supported them, desire to give wide public expression to their views.

First, to declare to all those of Vancouver, of British Columbia, and even across the Dominion, that we of Vancouver so highly esteem the achievements of our founders that we have conferred high honour upon the keeper of the story of those achievements.

Secondly, to express by inference, gratefulness to all those who have helped in the preservation of our relics and records.

And, lastly, to inform, by polite implication, all other communities, wherever and whoever they may be, that they, too, might find profit and pleasure in emulating the good example of the City of Vancouver.

These three declarations, to my mind, constitute leadership beneficial to the whole Canadian nation.

To do all this, and do it with dignity, a symbol was needed, precisely as when a regiment distinguishes itself in battle some mark of honour is bestowed upon one of its soldiers, usually the commanding officer. In this instance, the chief keeper of the records appeared to be an appropriate symbol, and the honour of Freeman fell upon me. Rank has no longer much appeal to me, but I think you will agree that the effect of elevating your recorder is an inspiration stimulating to others, and especially to those youthful historians who are following.

What then is our position and our future. We have maintained a record office for twenty-two years. It is quartered in the main civic building, the City Hall. It has an assured allotment of funds. Its usefulness has been proven by the encouragement received from the clergy, the photographer, the journalist, the tourist, the student, business firms, and all manner of organisations.



Much remains to be done, but perhaps it would be best if we who are older should rest awhile and be content. We shall not see the summers we have seen—others are now taking our places. That we can trust them we know, for they are our own flesh and bone.

If there is one emotion which should transcend all others this evening, it is thankfulness for the good fortune which has been ours, and gratitude to the Great Architect who has directed it.



The Freedom of Vancouver was conferred, by resolution of The Mayor and Aldermen, upon Major James Skitt Matthews, V.D., City Archivist, on November seventeenth, 1953, but the presentation of the illuminated Scroll was deferred until the annual complimentary banquet, given by the Park Commissioners to the Pioneers of Vancouver, "here before the train," at the Pavilion, Stanley Park, Monday, April 5, 1954. In the presence of eighty pioneers and one hundred citizens., His Worship Frederick J. Hume, Mayor, presented the Scroll, and offered congratulations.

Item # EarlyVan\_v7\_058

*[photo annotation:]*

The Freedom of Vancouver was conferred, by resolution of The Mayor and Aldermen, upon Major James Skitt Matthews, V.D., City Archivist, on November seventeenth, 1953, but the presentation of the illuminated Scroll was deferred until the annual complimentary banquet, given by the Park Commissioners to the Pioneers of Vancouver, “here before the train,” at the Pavilion, Stanley Park, Monday, April 5, 1954. In the presence of eighty pioneers, and one hundred citizens, His Worship Frederick J. Hume, Mayor, presented the Scroll, and offered congratulations.

### **1 DECEMBER 1954 – THE CITY WITCH.**

Major Matthews at telephone: “May I speak to Mr. Galloway, please?”

Sweet Voice: (pause) “He’s not in his office. Who shall I say called?”

Major Matthews: “The City Archivist.”

Sweet Voice: “The City which?”

Major Matthews: “I’m not the City Witch—I’m the City Archivist.”

Sweet Voice: “What’s that?”

Major Matthews: “Some fellow on the ninth floor.”

# The Vancouver Province

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PHILIP S. FISHER  
President

A. W. MOSCARELLA  
Vice-President and Publisher

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1955

## Time to honor Major Matthews

Vancouver has come to take its archivist, Major James Skitt Matthews, V.D., altogether too much for granted. For years we have gone to him whenever we wanted anything pertaining to Vancouver's history. He has enthusiastically dug up for us old pictures, documents, dates, anecdotes — practically anything we wanted.

For more than 30 years this valiant old soldier has spent his time, his prodigious energies and often large sums of his own money in gathering for the city the story and relics of its beginnings and its growth — a story marvelously complete.

This has not been allowed to become a musty collection of curios. Anyone who visits the archives must be impressed at the orderliness and comprehensiveness with which they have been organized, and the many demands made upon them hourly by people from all walks of life.

Through Major Matthews' tenacious efforts—and only through those efforts—this city now possesses a magnificent record of its past that it will treasure for generations to come.

Now Major Matthews is in his seventy-

eight year. His voice is still strong; he is as keen as ever on the trail of an old manuscript or faded photograph. But he realizes that he cannot forever keep watch and ward over his beloved archives.

"Some Monday," he tells his friends a little sadly, "I will not be here."

Vancouver should do two things for the man who has recorded this city's story:

We should take steps to establish the archives on a basis that will guarantee their preservation and public accessibility for all time to come.

We should commemorate the selfless efforts of "The Major" so that those who come after will be able to understand in some small measure what he has contributed. It would not be amiss formally to name the archives "The Matthews' Archives" and commemorate the major's name and work in brass or stone above the files on which he has labored so long.

And we should do it now, while the major is still with us.

The man who recorded the achievements of so many of our pioneers should not himself remain unhonored and unsung.

THE VANCOUVER PROVINCE,  
Friday, September 23, 1955

## Tribute to archivist

Sir: Nothing which has appeared in the Vancouver press for a very long time has touched me so deeply as has the editorial about Major J. S. Matthews (Sept. 20).

Major Matthews is a sturdy man, of deep convictions. He is intensely loyal to Vancouver and has so steeped himself in the intimate history of the city that he has almost made himself Vancouver's memory.

I first knew him in World War One, when he served in France under my command. As a soldier I respected him. Since our return to Vancouver I have watched his progress with ever growing admiration.

My pride in his character and accomplishment make me welcome your suggestion that the city archives, which he has salvaged and arranged in order, be put on a permanent and substantial footing and that hereafter they be known officially as the Matthews Vancouver Archives.

I would go even further. Major Matthews has not only given his time and his energies to the service of the city, but he has also spent much of his own money. What he has done should be recognized by a special generous honorarium, one large enough to compensate him in part for his inestimable contribution. Only an inspired zealot could do what Major Matthews has done.

Without him, Vancouver's archives would still be a chaotic mess.

Vancouver VICTOR W. ODLUM

\* \* \*  
Sir: I certainly am in favor of commemorating the selfless efforts of Major Matthews, city archivist.

We all benefit from the fruits of his labors and many of us know of his patience and kindness in dealing with individuals interested in his work.

I am very much in agreement with the fact that steps should be taken to commemorate the major's name and work as suggested in your editorial.

MARGARET E. W. HUTTON  
North Vancouver.

Item # EarlyVan\_v7\_060