

**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**

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## **FROM *EARLY VANCOUVER*, VOL. 4: "ARCHIVISTS WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD."**

### **SIR ARTHUR CURRIE.**

About April 1932, Gen. Sir Arthur Currie passed through Vancouver on his way from the Orient to eastern Canada, and was, one afternoon about four, informally entertained by a large assemblage of ex-overseas officers who had gathered together to shake hands, chat, and drink a cocktail in the "Oval Room" of the Hotel Vancouver.

Prior to 1899, a large wooden shed served as the first drill hall in Vancouver, and General Currie, as former Corporal Currie of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Canadian Garrison Artillery, Victoria, had once entered it on a holiday event when the Victoria battalion had paid a visit to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion in Vancouver. In 1931, the many regiments of Vancouver subscribed together to erect a memorial to mark the site of the old drill shed, and General Currie was invited to unveil the bronze tablet, but being indisposed in health, he declined, so the memorial was taken to the Oval Room for him to see. The shining new bronze tablet, bearing in part the words, "HERE STOOD THE DRILL SHED," was suitably placed upon an easel, and conducted by a group of senior officers. General Currie was escorted across the spacious room to view it; Major Matthews, City Archivist, Vancouver, long known to General Currie as a collector of military relics and records of British Columbia, as well as an old friend of many years, was among them, and had been responsible for the proposal, creation and design of the tablet.

The general stood in front of the tablet for a moment or so, gazing and reading, and then, placing his hand on Major Matthews' shoulder, said with much feeling, "Gentlemen. Men like Matthews here are worth their weight in gold."

He then continued with some reminiscences, etc., etc.

"Men like" an archivist must naturally include all archivists.

Just why Gen. Currie expressed himself thus must forever remain unknown, but it *might* have had something to do with his then recent unfortunate experience when he had to defend himself in the courts against unjust and libellous statements that "he sacrificed his men," and that the records fortunately kept—as all military units have to keep—served in some especially useful way to vindicate his actions in the Great War.

## **THE RETURN OF GENERAL CURRIE TO VANCOUVER, 4 OCTOBER 1919.**

### **A CURSORY MEMO BY J.S. MATTHEWS.**

Written following a letter, dated 13 February 1941, from Colonel Willis O'Connor, Office of the Principal Aide-de-Camp, Government House, Ottawa. (His Excellency the Earl of Athlone.) As Major O'Connor he was with General Currie the day he returned to Vancouver. Col. O'Connor's letter says in part: "*It's hard for a great man to be a hero in his own country. He played too straight a game.*"

My recollection is that, news being that General Currie would reach Vancouver in the morning—I think by C.P.R.—I arose earlier than usual and made my way downtown. I found portions of Granville Street roped off, lamppost to lamppost, with a thick rope, about one inch, from Hastings Street to the old Hotel Vancouver on Georgia Street. I waited, as I was too late to reach the station.

There were few people on the streets; fewer than usual. The ropes hung bare; none were near them; it seemed queer to see streets roped off for a crowd, and a few stragglers only on the sidewalks. It seemed ominous.

However, presently, the procession came up the street. I forget just what, but a few motor cars, and it hurried onwards; there was scarcely a cheer. I do not recall hearing one. I hurried on down to "The Arena," on Georgia Street West, at Denman, and walked in just as the procession arrived.

The inside of the "Arena," since burned down, was not especially prepossessing. It "sat" about 5,000, but was gaunt and bare; tier on tier of seats—bleachers—high up to the roof. All were empty; not a soul sat in them. The interior was poorly lighted in daytime, better at night, and this was daytime. In the centre of the

large wooden floor was a platform, perhaps forty feet wide by twenty feet deep, and a lot of chairs ranged in rows.

As soon as the procession arrived, all those who entered seemed to go up on the platform and take seats; General Currie and others of his party, excepting Major O'Connor, among them. Major O'Connor stayed on the floor and I spoke to him. I had met him in Ottawa during the war. There were more people, it seemed, on the platform than on the floor as audience.

I whispered to Major O'Connor, "This is awful."

Major O'Connor replied, "Never mind; he's living it down."

Poor Currie; it was a terrible welcome; heartless, thoughtless, cruel, and undeserved. I was ashamed of Vancouver that day.

#### **HERE IS PART OF COL. O'CONNOR'S LETTER, 13 FEBRUARY 1941.**

I can remember the day that General Currie went to the old arena; it wasn't a very friendly reception. It is hard for a great man to be a hero in his own country. He played too straight a game for the politicians, and would not be under their thumbs.

Willis O'Connor.

#### **CANADIAN CUSTOMS AT VANCOUVER AIRPORT. AS TOLD BY [MRS.] FRANK WAY, 5576 OAK STREET, VANCOUVER, 25 MAY 1956.**

##### **CUSTOMS. EARLY LANDING PLACES. DOMINION AIRWAYS. AIRLANDS MANUFACTURING COMPANY. MINORU PARK.**

Mr. Way joined the Federal Customs and Excise Department in February, 1926, when Mr. G.A. Allen was Collector of Customs at Vancouver. He recalls when he (Mr. Way) used to go out to meet small aircraft at three different landing places—Minoru Park (now Lansdowne), Dominion Airways, in False Creek (near where Crystal Pool is now at the foot of Nicola Street) and Airlands Manufacturing Company on the Middle Arm of the Fraser River.

##### **CORPSE FLOWN BY AIR. RUNWAY LIGHTED FOR FIRST TIME.**

I, myself, remember Mr. Way coming home one evening and telling me of the exciting time he had had at the airport that day. He was working on a gasoline tanker anchored in the Fraser River at the Dominion Oil Company, near Marpole, checking the unloading of gasoline. Mr. Louis Deither was then head of the Dominion Oil Company. The then Superintendent at the Wharf Customs office in Vancouver (on Pier D), Mr. Isaac McKay, phoned him to say there was a plane on its way to Vancouver from Seattle. A reporter flew to Vancouver because he had heard that the body of Will Rogers, celebrated humorist and actor of stage and screen, was at the Vancouver airport. This was true, but the news was kept secret. Will Rogers died in the north country when he flew there in a seaplane with his pilot Wiley Post. Another pilot flew the body to Vancouver where it was held in the locked hangar till it could be flown south. The reporter from Seattle arrived after dark, before night flying had been authorised here, and of course, there were no lights. He had a small plane and could not go back to Seattle that night, so he had to be brought down somehow. It was Mr. Way who obtained flares and lined up every available automobile along the runway and had them turn on their lights, outlining the landing strip. The plane landed safely. To Mr. Way's knowledge, this was the first time automobiles were used to light the runway.

##### **FIRST TAXI TO AIRPORT. DAN MACLURE.**

In the beginning, pilots would send word ahead of the time they expected to arrive in Vancouver. On receipt of such information Mr. Way would go out to meet the plane. He always had to carry all his papers with him and travelled by taxi out to Sea Island (or wherever the plane was to land) to meet the pilots. This was when he first met Mr. Dan MacLure, the "pioneer taxi man and airline director" mentioned by Mr. Templeton in his report, "Vancouver Airport and Seaplane Harbour,