

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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[T.P. Wicks.]

“Skookum Tom” (Big Tom), or T.P. Wicks, was never in school. He taught himself to read and write. His boast was that no school roll in the world listed his name. J.S.M.

Box 248,
Nanaimo, B.C.,
July 30/46.

Major J.S. Matthews,
City Archivist,
City Hall,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Major Matthews:

I have read your speech and can only think in amazement, what wondrous things education makes a man capable of. How contact with men of letters, used to giving expression to their thoughts, in a simple manner, that all can understand, can reach the mind of the most unlettered. With a few words you express your ideas of the greatness of the events, that led up to the birth of a great city, telling us of the strides, progress has made in the last sixty years, far less than the span of my short life.

I can remember how on my nineteenth birthday, May 1st, 1887, a fellow workman and myself, desiring to ride on that first train into Vancouver, went to an Indian settlement near Marpole and purchased a dilapidated Indian canoe, which we repaired, sufficient to make the journey up the Frazer river, to old man Hicks' ranch, for whom I had worked at one time, near what is now Waletze Indian reserve, six miles up the river from Agaziz, who's wife was an Indian woman of the Waletze tribe. Hicks had arrived at this out of the way place, by way of the Omaha, Salt Lake City and California trail, before the Carribou rush and had settled in this out of the way place. Some have associated him, with things other than he was, however may that as it be, Hicks Lake in that neighborhood was named after this self-same man.

On a granite bluff, at what is now the far end of his holding, is the graves of members of his family who died before the C.P.R. was dreamed of and for whom he chizzled, with his own hands, marking stones, for their graves.

He was a strongly built man, with brownish-red whiskers, which he wore in a wild and ungainly fashion and was not in the least particular about the appearance of his clothes.

The days were never long enough to satisfy him in the amount of work he could do. From the crack of day, till the stars came out his voice could be heard, as he worried his prong-horned oxen, to and fro, to make one of the loveliest ranches in that part of the country; and so that is the pen picture of this squaw-man and early pioneer, that we were going to meet, as we felt sure number 374 would stop there, to replenish her fuel, at his ever-ready wood-pile.

So we arrived at Hick's ranch. He was busy hauling wood, with the oxen, to the place, where he figured they would stop. All help and ours' were welcome, so we dug in and camped near the wood-pile.

There was great expectance, but how the time dragged. Finally track workers comming along, said she will go by here, in three to five hours and the listening started. What appeared to be a much longer time, far up the canyon there came, a faint sound, like the hoot of a distant owl and the cry went up, “She's comming.” Indians crawled out of their sleeping positions, where they lolled here and there as time had tired them, native women with their papooses, single ones, hanging onto one anothers' arms and jabbering away in their native tongue. They crowded down, as near to the rails as they dared and set down on their haunches, to await the comming event. Myself and friend and Hicks stood by ourselves, just back of the crowd, when around the bend, with a screech, that split our ears, came old 374 with a string of cars. Every window and every

platform had its quota of heads and arms and swinging hats. Everyone was yelling. The engineers shuts the engine off, and I thought she was going to stop, but just as he got to us, he opened the cylinder-cocks and the steam shot clean up to the feet, of the waiting natives. With one hand, he pulled the throttle wide open and with the other the whistle hard-down. What a frightened bunch of people. There was no stopping that crowd, from getting away from that monster. I myself was frightened. I slipped and fell and over the top, bollus-bollus, went the whole crowd. Thank God, they were bare footed. I struggled to my feet, to find myself in the embrace of that wonderful man Hicks, while he yelled in my ear, "Didja see-er." "She's come." "She's gone." "She went out of here like Hell beatin' tan bark."

Yours truly,

T.P. Wicks.

Dear Major Matthews:

While I have my daughter here, I will use her, once a week, to pen my letters, to you. I am asking only one favor of you and that is, under no condition, allow our friend, the sidewalk historian, to partake of these remembrance notes and use the contents of them, to make saleable filling, for his stories of early days. I never did like that featherless biped, in spite of hiss quill. I wish I had control of grammar, like you have.

Tell me what do you do, with these worthless things I write you, after you read them? Do you throw them in the waist-basket, to be used as kindling, for the furnace?

Just write me a short note, to let me know you got it and what you'll do with it.

Yours truly,

T.P. Wicks.

COPIES OF LETTERS BY "SKOOKUM TOM," ALIAS "THOMAS P. WICKS," P.O. Box 248, NANAIMO, CANADA.

Note: "Skookum" boasts no school roll on earth ever included his name. As he approached 78, he was almost blind. An operation has restored his sight. His nerves have something wrong with them; his hand is almost constantly shaking. When writing he takes a large sheet of paper, a blunt lead pencil, and "goes at it." It is my claim that I am the only person living who can decipher his manuscript. J.S.M.

(Typed as written)

Jan. 1948
Nanaimo, B.C.

Just back from Victoria and find your letter of the 6 of Jan I would like to meet that wise bird that longs for a controversy and whence cometh he not from the east for he giveth no words of wisdom neither doth he carry mirth or the insence of the gods but rather he is haughty and his mouth is filed with the bitter alloes veraly I say the knave knows more about that than what else I do not nor never did like shadow boxing who is this rat that knows so much some decadent preacher or sectarian that sees nothing but himself.

We all know that Captain Oliver did not pass deeds to the soul he followed but he gave his time and yoused his boat that the gospel he lived might go to those before that same gospel came to him until he or his boat he yoused was wrecked then the Mishion by subscription built him another to carry on the work and he took charge.

My knowlage of Capt Oliver ended 1915—33 years ago, and our friendship for around thirty years before that was very satisfactory. I am not *[too much for me, but may be "deserting"—JSM]* deserting my old friend long dead with this man.