

Early Vancouver

Volume Seven

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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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VISIT OF T.R.H. THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF CORNWALL AND YORK (KING GEORGE V AND QUEEN MARY), SEPTEMBER 1901.

According to Alderman James Edgar Elkins, of Vancouver, who was one of the cavalry escort, of the North West Mounted Police with 55 horses and men, trained at Calgary for some time prior to the Royal visit of their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, afterwards King George Fifth and Queen Mary. The escort reached Vancouver by train about two hours ahead of the Royal train. They disembarked, saddled up, and took part in the procession through Vancouver streets; then got on the Victoria boat with their horses and went through the same ceremony at Victoria. After the Royal visitors returned to Vancouver they remained in Victoria for some days and then came back to Vancouver and entrained for Calgary.

He speaks of it as a “wonderful trip” for a young man from the prairie, who was accustomed to flat land. The mountains were superb, the ceremonies exciting and so forth.

J.S. Matthews

28 March 1935.

TALES OF ENGLISH BAY.

On the evening of 14 July 1951, at a carnival held on the sand of English Bay bathing beach by the Canadian Legion, West End branch, Major J.S. Matthews, City Archivist, was invited by Noel Robinson, Esq., one of the members of the Legion, to tell a short tale about English Bay in response to Mr. Robinson’s questions.

Mr. Robinson: “Who, Major Matthews, was the first white man to set foot on English Bay bathing beach?”

Major Matthews: Jimmy Seivewright, a Cariboo miner and his companions. They had built a poor boat in Victoria, crossed the Strait of Georgia in it, and entered the Fraser River on the way to the mines. They found the Fraser River in flood—the banks were awash. They could not find a dry place to camp and the mosquitoes were in awful millions. They retreated downstream and came over here to camp to await a more favourable opportunity. My contention is that here, at English Bay, they established the first tourist camp in British Columbia.

Two years later, in 1859, H.M.S. *Plumper*, Capt. Richards, after whom Richards Street is named, made the first chart of the waters of the bay. Those jack tars off the sailing warships probably came here too—to stretch their legs.

In 1862, less than 90 years ago, John Morton, with an Indian, landed here. Morton was looking for pottery clay. He had come out through the First Narrows in a dugout, but the tide was running out and the waters so swift they could not go back that way, so they came here. The Indian dragged the canoe up the beach, hid it in the bushes, and the two of them made off through a narrow trail wide enough for one man—now our Denman Street—and were soon back in Coal Harbour where they had started. Morton, and the other two preemptors, called by the people in New Westminster the “three greenhorn Englishmen” because they took up land twelve miles away in the forest, acquired all land in the West End west of Burrard Street, 550 acres, for \$550. Morton named the West End the “City of Liverpool,” and rejoiced in his little beach here, which he called “my little Blackpool,” after the famous seaside resort in England.

Mr. Robinson: “Who were the first white men to live here?”

Major Matthews: It must be remembered that, at the time you are speaking of—ninety years ago—all Vancouver was hidden beneath a dense forest towering 250 feet to the skies. Along the shores where we are now sitting the waters, at high tide, lapped the lower branches and, again, this beach was covered with large and small boulders, the

remains of which you see on my right. These boulders were covered with sharp mussel shells which cut the bare feet. They have long since been removed.

Now, there were 3 to 5 thousand Indians living on English Bay. They were canoe Indians—their home was the sea and the shore. To make a canoe they had first to cut down a cedar tree in the forest, and do it with stone hammers and stone chisels. It took a year or two years to make a canoe. They also made ropes of cedar bark to tie those canoes, and took as much care of their canoes as a whiteman takes care of his horse. In order that the sharp rocks and [see "*Conversations with Khahtsahlano*," *Matthews*] shells should not damage the bottom of the canoes, or cut the cedar bark ropes, the Indians cleared a short stretch of beach, about 150 feet wide, for a canoe landing. It was at the mouth of a small creek, which provided fresh water, down at Gilford Street. They called it "Ay-yul-shun." "Ay-yul-shun" means "soft under feet," or "sandy place."

Later, when the loggers cleared off the forest, now our West End, they built their camp on the little cleared place the Indians had used, and their oxen dragged the logs down the hill to the sea.

Then the loggers went away, and little Miss Mackey, a girl of thirteen, came with her ailing mother who hoped to restore her health here. Miss Mackey, now Mrs. Percy Nye, cooked her mother's meals on the top of a huge flat rock down at the foot of Denman Street. They lived in the shack the loggers had vacated. Later, with her own hands, little Miss Mackey built a tiny shelter on the beach with boards which had drifted in. It was our first bathing pavilion. She also built herself a swing—our first public playground. For the use of the shelter as a bathhouse she charged individuals five cents and families ten cents, and that summer saved enough money in this way to buy herself a watch.

Mr. Robinson: "What are the particulars, Major Matthews, of the 'Great English Bay Scandal'?"

Major Matthews: I am surprised, Mr. Robinson, that, in the mellow judgment which your grey hairs give, you should ask such a question. The "Great English Bay Scandal" was a shocking thing. It shocked all Vancouver. Of course it was reported in the press, editorials were written, and I think it ultimately reached the City Council. It happened in this way.

When old Joe Fortes was first self-appointed beach guard here at English Bay, there was a huge boulder at the foot of Denman Street—big as a house—and all women bathed to the west of it and all men to the east. Woe betide any smart-alex man who intruded westwards. The women called, Joe came running and chased the intruder away. But, as time went on, women became bolder and invaded the men's part, but still retained their old style bathing suits, which were more like dresses with flounces around the middle hanging like mudguards on a motor car. It was a wonder they were not drowned. They also wore stockings and sandals; they looked very nice, too.

Then one day one impertinent hussy, bolder than the others, went in bathing without her stockings. She was as sight to behold—she was bare naked right up to her knees. The Women's Christian Temperance Union wrote to the press about it and what they wrote about the bold woman was published in the newspapers. She sued the W.C.T.U. for libel. The case went to court and she got damages. And, if you don't believe it, go down to the Police Court and see the records.

Of course, the old heavy dress bathing suit had its merits—it did leave something to the imagination. But, nowadays, the girls leave nothing at all to imagination.

Mr. Robinson and Major Matthews withdraw.