

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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How recent it all is. There lives within a mile of you an old man, John Scales, who saw the spot where you are sitting as dark damp glade in the giant forest towering to the skies, and but three small cabins on all our harbour shores. Last Monday, in my office, we entertained at tea the sole surviving pupil of the first class in the first school. Today there are over 50,000 school pupils and 9,000 students at the University.

We must accept the Almighty or deny him. There are no half measures about that—it is all or nothing. Did all this just happen—like the wind. Was there no great plan, no master architect. Wave not a flag in the street, nor utter boastful shout, but in a quiet closet and on bended knee, remember Him through Whom all things first were made, Who knows when a sparrow falls, and give thanks for our good fortune to Him who has directed it.

Her Majesty the Queen, Elizabeth of Canada, said:

“Women of all lands yearn for the day when it will be possible to set about building a new and better world.”

That was in wartime, and now that peace has come, that is precisely what the Altrusa Clubs are doing—building a new and better world. May our Heavenly Father shower his blessing upon all whose motto is “Vivre pour autres”—“Live for others.”

WESTERN GATE LODGE, No. 48, A.F. & A.M. WORSHIPFUL MASTER VERNER FRANKLIN ABLESON.

Notice. A regular communication will be held in the Chapter Room, Freemasons Hall, Tuesday, November 15th, 1949, at 8:00 p.m.

Business. To receive bequest of Brother J.S. Matthews, presenting his personal service sword as a gift for the use of the lodge.

Arthur Graves, P. M. Secretary.

Brother Matthews: Worshipful Master. May I approach the east for the purpose of preferring a request?

Worshipful Brother Ableson: Please do.

Brother Matthews: Worshipful Master and Brethren. Many years ago, 55 precisely, the defence of the western shore of Canada, especially the terminus of the Canadian Pacific Railway and the new city and port called “Vancouver,” was occupying the attention of the Canadian Government. A company of one hundred volunteer soldiers and about eight volunteer officers was formed from the citizens. They trained on two muzzle-loading cannon now standing in front of the Drill Hall on Beatty Street; were armed with rifles using lead ball, and fired with black powder and a cloud of white smoke. The few officers carried swords; this is one of them. The letters “V.R.I.” are upon it—the initials of Victoria, the Good, Queen and Empress.

Time passed, and then, one day, my commanding officer called me aside and handed me a parchment which, indirectly, came from the King and upon which, in engraved words, I read:

“To our trusty and well beloved James Skitt Matthews. Greeting. We, reposing especial trust and confidence in your loyalty, courage, and good conduct, do constitute you to be an officer in the Militia of the Dominion of Canada.”

All officers carried swords as symbols of their authority. I required a sword; an elderly officer of the early volunteer soldiers gave me his. There may be Vancouver swords which are as old; there are none older. It has been in the service of five sovereigns—one queen and four kings.

More time passed, and with 1914 came war. With my Brother Taylor, here in tranquil peace beside me, I went to noisy war in France. The sword was left behind. Together we were present at the defence of Ypres, 1916, and at that awful bloodbath, the Battle of the Somme, which continued night and day without cessation for six months, and left one million and a quarter

human beings lying killed or wounded on an area of ground no larger than the city of Vancouver. Both of us were wounded, and it is due to his gallantry that I am here tonight. The names of the actions at which we were present have been engraved upon the hilt.

But swords are no longer carried, and perhaps never will be again. At the divine service parade at the Cenotaph last Remembrance Day not one officer of many carried a sword. The day of the cavalry charge is gone. Men fight from Jeeps, tanks, aeroplanes, and in narrow passages underground, or with rifles which kill at a mile. Swords would be an encumbrance to be entangled in the machinery.

For an officer to surrender his sword can be a dire disgrace. But the years have taken my strength. His Majesty no longer needs my services. I was retired—retaining rank. This evening I desire to surrender mine—not to a foe, but with fond recollections, to friends, brothers of the Masonic Order for which, save alone the Christian Church, I hold nothing in higher esteem.

Worshipful Master. With its point turned towards me and away from you, I surrender an old treasure, my sword. Will you do me the honour to accept it?

LATER.

Brother the Tiler is admitted to lodgeroom.

Brother Matthews: Brother Tiler. If you would be so good as to refer to your bible, New Testament, Matthew, Chapter 10, verse 34—I am indebted to Worshipful Brother Graves for assisting me to find the chapter and verse—Matthew, 10:34, you can read that when Christ was addressing his disciples He said this:

“Think not that I come to send peace on earth; I come not to send peace, but a sword.”

It would be impertinence on my part to attempt to elucidate what Christ referred to. You know, and all freemasons know, briefly, to crush the evil; crown the right.

By permission of our Master, I entrust to your tender keeping this sword; the symbol used by Christ, whose example we emulate.

PIONEERS OF VANCOUVER, 1886.

In compliment to the Pioneers of Vancouver and vicinity who were resident here in 1886 or earlier, a banquet was tendered by the Board of Park Commissioners, and held in the Stanley Park Pavilion on Monday, 9 April 1951, at 6:00 p.m.

Vancouver was incorporated on 6 April 1886, and the banquet was held on the nearest convenient date to the sixty-fifth anniversary.

Commissioner Arnold presided.

The City Archivist (Major Matthews).

Mr. Chairman, Your Worship, Ladies and Gentlemen:

A sense of deep humility, amounting to almost reverence, is the emotion which overwhelms me as I stand before this assemblage of Pioneers of Vancouver. Here, before and about us, is a remarkable scene, unique in that it cannot be duplicated in the wide, wide world. In the years to be this evening will be a tradition to those of Vancouver who follow us.

These few ladies and gentlemen gathered here have lived in Vancouver since the hour of its birth. They are among the last of the Founders of Vancouver, a great city and a great port. They were the genesis of a community now spreading thirty miles wide by twenty deep. They are the symbol of great men, great events and great achievements. They are some of the original builders of Canada of which our city is part.

As young adventurers, with rosy cheeks and full of vigour, they came to the wilderness on Vancouver Harbour where, at high tide, the waters lapped the lower branches of the forest which