

Early Vancouver

Volume One

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

2011 Edition (Originally Published 1932)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1931-1932.

*A Collection of Historical Data, Maps, and Plans Made with the Assistance of
Pioneers of Vancouver Between March and December 1931.*

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.

Copyright Statement

© 2011 City of Vancouver. Any or all of *Early Vancouver* may be used without restriction as to the nature or purpose of the use, even if that use is for commercial purposes. You may copy, distribute, adapt and transmit the work. It is required that a link or attribution be made to the City of Vancouver.

Reproductions

High resolution versions of any graphic items in *Early Vancouver* are available. A fee may apply.

Citing Information

When referencing the 2011 edition of *Early Vancouver*, please cite the page number that appears at the bottom of the page in the PDF version only, not the page number indicated by your PDF reader. Here are samples of how to cite this source:

Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

Contact Information

City of Vancouver Archives
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9
604.736.8561
archives@vancouver.ca
vancouver.ca/archives



"At the time, someone told me that a great tongue of flame burst forth from the Deighton House, and leaped in a great arch of fire and flame, clean over Carrall Street, and just licked up Scuitto's bake shop on the sharp corner where the Europe Hotel stands now—the apex of the triangle of Alexander and Powell streets. The Maple Tree, of course, was destroyed, and it was a big, old tree, probably two feet through."

JSM

21 DECEMBER 1931 - THE FIRST VANCOUVER-WESTMINSTER ELECTRIC RAILWAY. CAPTAIN E.S. SCOLLAR.

In a long conversation in the Vancouver Public Library today with Captain E.S. Scoullar, he said:

"The Westminster-Vancouver Electric Interurban railway, now the B.C. Electric Interurban, was the first electric railway built on the Pacific Coast, and the second electric road in Canada; the first was at Ottawa. San Francisco had horse and cable cars."

NOTE ADDED LATER:

Canada Year Book, 1932, page 559, says St. Catharines, not Ottawa.

"We were an ambitious, progressive lot in New Westminster; our idea in building it was to build up New Westminster, and to build up the country. Sir Charles Tupper made a speech at the old Colonial Hotel in New Westminster, and to a 'crowded house.' I remember his words well, 'The C.P.R. will never go beyond Port Moody,' he said, and that was how my partner and I put \$10,000 apiece into Port Moody real estate, and ... lost it.

"At the time we organised the interurban electric railway, there were only eight of us in the company. Mayor Oppenheimer, Benjamin Douglas, New Westminster, Harry Elliott and John A. Webster, also New Westminster, Henry Edmonds, and Samuel McIntosh, who was secretary, and of course myself. I forget who the eighth man was, perhaps it was John Hendry of the Hastings Mill. Edmonds owned all the land about Mount Pleasant, from the bridge up—about 640 acres.

"We had quite a time negotiating for the property for the right of way, but we finally got it, for nothing; they gave it to us. T.J. Trapp or Geo. Gibson, or both, were our agents for buying the right of way.

"The first track ran up Columbia Street, new Westminster, to the east, not to the west as now, and then turned north, then west towards Vancouver. We had to go that way to get up the hill; we had not the power that is supplied now; the cars used to groan as they started and gathered speed, and they were very slow at that.

"On the top of the hill our line ran through the Clarkson Gardens—we paid \$35,000 for the Clarkson Gardens—we simply ran the line through our own property. Then we had 100 acres just outside the city limits; we spent \$100,000 clearing that 100 acres.

"If Mr. McCraney did say that there were only three houses between Vancouver and Westminster at the time we ran our line through, then he is wrong; there were more than that; probably what he said was that there were only three stops. Our line ran up hill and down dale, a regular switchback through the forest. After leaving the Westminster city limits, I think the first stop was the power house. The car barn was at the power house, and there was a big boarding house there where all the men boarded, right on the job, and the cars were brought back there for the night. The second stop was, I think, Central Park. The third and last stop was the old city limits of Vancouver, 16th Avenue, and then our track came on through the city almost exactly as it does now, down Park Drive" (Commercial Drive), "Venables Street and Campbell Avenue, and west along Hastings Street.

"Our power was steam, generated at the Burnaby Power House. The rails were very light, just thirty-five pounds; I think we ran hourly. Some of our cars are still here.

"Then we bought the Vancouver city electric lines, and paid \$85,000 for them, and then the bank closed down on us."

21 DECEMBER 1931 - BURRARD INLET AND WESTMINSTER TELEPHONE COMPANY. CAPTAIN E.S. SCOULLAR.

Continuing the conversation today, Captain E.S. Scoullar said:

"The Burrard Inlet and Westminster Telephone Company was incorporated in 1885, just before Vancouver was incorporated. Joseph (Joe) Armstrong, who owned a half interest, was president up to the day he died; others were Albert Armstrong, Lieutenant Dorman—he was a lieutenant in my 'Westminster Rifles'—and myself; I am not sure, but I think there was just the four of us. After I had been in it for about three years, I sold my share for \$16,000.

"The first line we ran from New Westminster to Port Moody for Onderdonk. In 1886, in the fall, we ran a line from Westminster to Vancouver.

"We brought the line by the 'New Road'" (Westminster Road) "because it was the most direct and the clearer. Douglas Road was like going through a 'cutting,' a slit in the forest, forest on both sides. The 'New Road' was clearer; a fire or something had run through it; the bushes were smaller.

"From the 'New Road' the line came down Westminster Avenue, and then ran to Tilley's, who, after the fire, had a stationery and book store on Cordova Street. There were no private house phones, just one line from Westminster to Port Moody, and one line from Westminster to Tilley's at Vancouver. We charged a toll. Our first agent in Westminster was Chas. Pittendrigh, son of the magistrate.

"We rented our first phones from a telephone company in the United States; we had to pay \$85 for each telephone, and then a royalty each month. Dorman said, 'it could not be done.' So we bought a lot of telephones in Germany.

"There was no phone in Vancouver in June 1886 at the time of the fire; Geo. Black's place at Hastings was not connected with a phone at the time of the fire." (Accuracy of this remark [is] most doubtful.)

"At the time of the fire, it had been a very warm spring; no rain for about two months. The clearing operations were in full swing; the land was covered with big high piles of roots, forty or fifty feet high.

"I was returning from Westminster by the Douglas Road, my wife and I driving a horse and buggy. The fire was so bad that we had to retreat, turned around, went right back, left my wife in Westminster, and came back with my brother-in-law via the 'New Road.' We were alarmed; my brother was in Vancouver, but he had got on a raft and went up to Port Moody on it; there was a westerly wind blowing, blowing great guns.

"There is a point which I would like to make and that is that my building, which was destroyed in the fire, was on the west of the Regina Hotel.

"The dynamite which Mr. McCraney took down to the Hastings Sawmill, we afterwards threw overboard, and it floated around the harbour for a couple of days. You see, the C.P.R. were building the line along the shore from Port Moody, and I was supplying them with large quantities of construction material."

(The B.C. Directory, 1885, states: "British Columbia Telegraphic System, Granville to New Westminster, 25¢.)

(Also see J.Z. Hall and J.W. McFarland re telephone, Westminster to Vancouver, before fire.)