

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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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.

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There is a minute in the Minute book of the City Council recording the receipt of a petition from numerous citizens protesting against the removal of the post office and its establishment at so inconvenient a location. "Out in the woods."

6 JULY 1931 - SPRATT'S ARK, EARLY CANNERY IN VANCOUVER.

Spratt's Ark, a very early cannery in Vancouver, was located just west of Burrard Street; a sort of floating cannery, sometimes used as a wharf. Another very early cannery was at the foot of Burrard Street on False Creek—a small one. The largest cannery, the English Bay Cannery, stood a little to the east of the foot of Trutch Street—on English Bay. There was another, the Great Northern Cannery, almost opposite across the bay on an unnamed shore and in an unnamed district, now West Vancouver.

ENGLISH BAY CANNERY.

Of the English Bay Cannery, Lieutenant Colonel W.D.S. Rorison, M.C., V.D., son of R.D. Rorison, and member of the firm of R.D. Rorison and Company Limited, Dominion Building, formerly owners of the Royal Nurseries at Royal on the Eburne-Vancouver interurban line, now of Cambie, Lulu Island, said:

"We must have built our house at 3148 Point Grey Road in 1908. I think I lived there from 1908 to 1911 inclusive. Yes, we did buy the lumber of the old cannery, and used a lot of it in building our house; our rafters, and such heavy timbers; the outside lumber of the cannery was no use." (Note: it would be interesting to examine those timbers to see how they have stood the ravages of time.) "I have heard it said that when Mr. Alexander's house at the Hastings Sawmill was pulled down after the Great War, that the timbers were in excellent preservation, and they must have been placed there in the 1860s. There were fourteen rooms in our house, and it had a sort of peaked tower. It faced north."

As late as 1928, that is, roughly 25 years after the old English Bay Cannery ceased operations, a heap of rusty red iron stood, like an island, on the shore of Kitsilano waterfront under the old cannery location. It was the remains of the old scrap tin heap. In the earlier days, and after 1900, salmon canners of the British Columbia coast made their own cans. A large amount of sheet tinned iron was used, and there was much waste in cutting out the round tops and bottoms from flat sheets. The waste clippings were shot through the cannery floor into the water beneath; it did not pay to save it.

6 JULY 1931 - SPANISH BANKS. "COLUMBIA RIVER" SALMON FISHING BOATS.

Prior to 1900, and for some years afterwards, the lights of the fishing boats, twinkling on the summer sea off Spanish Banks made a pretty evening sight for spectators on the shore of English Bay. Each boat was necessitated by law to carry two lights; one on the fishing boat, the other on a float at the end of the net. We were still in the sail age—there were gas engines, but few were used. The sails were stowed whilst fishing, and the hundreds, literally hundreds, of tiny lights flickering in the distance, the last light from the sun which had set, the smooth sea, made an enchanting summer's scene.

At that time, Spratt's Ark had long since disappeared, the cannery on False Creek was canning, without success, clams, etc. The fish caught off Spanish Banks and Point Grey were delivered for canning to the English Bay Cannery, the Great Northern Cannery, the cannery in a bay beyond Point Atkinson—around the corner of the lighthouse at Point Atkinson, and to North Arm and Fraser River canneries.

THE GREAT SALMON YEAR, 1900.

Bathing on the beaches of Vancouver was almost impossible for most part of a month in the summer of 1900; dead salmon lay on the shore in thousands. The ebb and flow of each tide