

## **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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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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.

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### **THE GIANT TREES.**

"The timber on the higher levels, that section centred about the Hotel Vancouver and 'Hudson's Bay' was the choicest stand of timber I have ever seen; it was very heavily timbered with enormous trees. One tree which stood on Georgia Street between Granville Street and Seymour Street was thirteen feet thick at the stump; even at two hundred feet from the butt it was three or four feet in diameter. It is the same tree which is shown in the well-known photograph of a real estate office, with a placard "VANCOUVER LOTS FOR SALE"; it never was a real estate office, that was merely a joke. The hollow butt, which forms the shelter of the supposed office, was burned out in the fire of 1886. The burned butt was cut off—there is a photograph extant showing what was cut off; also one of the stump, which I have—and the remainder cut up into sections so that they could be put together again, the sections shipped to the Old Country, where it was put up in some gardens for exhibition.

"When the tree fell, it fell along Georgia Street—northwest and southeasterly.

"The men who cut down the forest where now stands the most important business section of our city—that is, roughly from Cambie Street to Burrard Street, north and south between creek and inlet—adopted the expedient of cutting the backs only of the smaller trees, and then let a big tree down upon them; the whole thing would go down with a crash, like a lot of ninepins. After the first attempts at this system were proven successful, they enlarged it, and as the falling progressed southwards towards Davie Street—they had started from Burrard Inlet and worked south—a whole section of ten or more, perhaps twenty acres, would go down with one great grand sweeping crash. The axemen cut down the firs and cedars only; the smaller trees were knocked down, crushed, smashed. There were great numbers of vine maple, and many of them were bent down, only to spring back and stand erect again. When the fire came, the Great Fire, it was largely through this abundance of slashing fallen earlier in the summer, and very dry, which caused the fire to rage so fiercely. At the time of the fire, the trees were cut down at least as far as Drake Street, with the exception of a clump east of Homer Street where the C.P.R. had a reserve, of which more by and by.

"People of today may gather some conception of the general appearance of all that tract mentioned if they will imagine brush, limbs and timber to the depth of ten feet or more deep, lying strewn over the ground in an almost solid mass in every direction; a dry spring and especially with a little wind; an ideal setting for a gigantic fire.

"Reverting back to the big tree on Georgia Street: there is extant a photograph of the butt section of that tree showing two men in front, and a shed behind. That photograph must have been taken some time after 1886, for there were no sheds up there until the land was cleared; then there were several sheds in which the workmen kept their tools and supplies, and where a saw filer worked. You will notice in that photograph there is no sign of the greater part of the great trunk of the tree, just the butt length with burned butt. The probability is that the photograph was taken in 1887 or 1888, after the smaller but more perfect sections had been shipped to England, and while the sheds used in clearing the land were standing. The burned cavity in the butt was not more than five or six feet deep.

"I have heard that Mr. Devine, who has that photograph, says that the butt section was nine feet diameter at the small end, and was thirty feet long, and that the tree was shipped, in 1886, to the Indian and Colonial Exhibition."

### **THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886.**

It was remarked to Mr. Gallagher that the *Sun* newspaper had published an article on a Great Fire anniversary some four or five years ago, in which was stated, and had never been denied, that the Great Fire started in the neighbourhood of Hastings Street, say, from Seymour to Hamilton Street.

"The fire broke away before ten o'clock that morning," resumed Mr. Gallagher. "I was there and saw the fire myself. It was down near Drake Street that the fire started, along near Homer Street, west of False Creek. On several occasions, articles have been published, notably Major C.