

Early Vancouver

Volume Two

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1933)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1932.

Supplemental to volume one collected in 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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SEVENTH AVENUE WEST.

The full reason why Seventh Avenue West was the first street cut through from Westminster Avenue (Main Street) to Centre Street (Granville Street south of False Creek) are not completely known, but those who recall Mount Pleasant and Fairview in early days tell of the very swampy nature of the land (see Capt. Nye, *Early Vancouver*, 1932) between Westminster Avenue and Bridge Street (South Cambie Street). Just west of Bridge Street stood the Leamy and Kyle Lumber Mill almost on a level with Fifth Avenue; the road to North Arm, and the "New Road," or Westminster Road, branched off at Seventh Avenue to the east; Seventh Avenue was the logical street to cut out and clear; there would be no sense in going up to Ninth Avenue, or Broadway at that time, but which street, after the carline was laid down, became the most important of the two thoroughfares.

West of Bridge Street is Ash Street, and just west of Ash Street a creek came down the hill, and entered False Creek exactly at Sixth Avenue; an arm of False Creek indented as far as Sixth Avenue exactly, and, at that point on Sixth Avenue a bridge two to three hundred feet long would have been needed, whereas the bridge on Seventh higher up was a very short one comparatively. Passing still further westward, the shore of False Creek approached the line of Sixth Avenue so closely, and the land dipped down so near to sea level, that Sixth offered no attractions for the site of a rough road over which horses were to draw loads. Seventh was infinitely a more level, less expensive prospective route, and was, in addition, a familiar route to pedestrians who always take the easiest level, because there had been an old trail, a man's width wide through the forest, for years from Gastown, via the False Creek Bridge to Snaug (False Creek Indian Reserve), Greer's Beach, and on to the logging camps of Jericho.

EXTRACT FROM *THE DAILY PROVINCE*, MONDAY, 31 JULY 1933.

PHILLIP OBEN, PIONEER

by J.S. Matthews

Phillip Oben has gone, aged 78, and the "builders of Vancouver" are one fewer.

What did he build? He cleared the ground—or at least some of it; he swept away the forest that we might have a street, a home, a lawn; he banished age-old shadow; he let the sunlight in.

Come to the West End, and there, from the brow of the hill which slopes gently westwards towards Stanley Park, gaze over the panorama of a splendid homes which cluster, row upon row, between the waters of English Bay and Lost Lagoon, there, all below Nicola Street, Oben first labored.

Peer into the past, and see the sights that Oben saw; the towering forest, dark and damp; feel the solitude, glimpse the hastening deer. Or, listen for the sounds that Oben heard; the slow measured chock, chock, chock of the woodsman's axe; hear the long swish as falling trees sweep earthwards, the dull heavy thud as great trunks bump to ground.

Then, phantomlike, slide down to the bunkhouse on Coal Harbor, near the Park entrance. Watch the cook draw his water from a spring, or "haul off" and with iron bar strike the steel triangle; a piercing ring, metallic, musical, stings the ear, and serves as dinner gong to call weary men to supper. Here comes the tired bull puncher and his eight yoke of oxen—hauling forest debris into heaps, for burning is hard work—and following down the skidroad plods "the boss," Oben.

The Royal Engineers, who in 1863 first surveyed the "Brickmaker's Claim," i.e. the West End, wrote across their map "heavily timbered land, very swampy in places," and so it was; old logging bosses say "the finest stand of timber I ever saw"; old sportsmen shot wild duck in the swale below the Courthouse. Then Morton, Hailstone, Brighthouse, the original pre-emptors, who got their land title at "our Government House in our city of New Westminster," from "Victoria by the grace of God ... and of the Colonies in Europe, Asia, Africa, America and Australasia, queen," sold some logs to Moody's Mill (North Vancouver), more logs to Captain Stamp's Mill (Hastings Sawmill) and the "Oregon pine" lumber went to foreign parts by sailing ship. Solitary axemen hewed octagonal spars for the British navy.