

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1933-1934.

Supplemental to Volumes One and Two collected in 1931-1932.

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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Mr. Bursill: "No, I didn't. I haven't had eggs for three weeks."

Another story is that at the start of a journalists' picnic to Bowen Island, and before the vessel left the dock in Vancouver, the burned out stub of a cigarette butt, a fragment of discoloured paper and frayed tobacco—fell from his lips and lodged in his whiskers—it was said, with laughter, that a bush rat would some day jump from those whiskers—and was still so lodged when the boat reached Bowen Island an hour later.

A kindly, good old soul, careless of his appearance, but who wrote probably the most beautiful poem ever composed in Vancouver. He died in almost abject poverty.

**MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH R.D. RORISON OF R.D. RORISON AND SONS,
DOMINION BUILDING, HASTINGS STREET, 3 JULY 1934.**

ENGLISH BAY CANNERY.

"We purchased the English Bay Cannery in October, 1905, for \$7,350. We purchased it from, according to the deed, dated the 14th of October, George Benjamin Dodwell, Exchange Chambers, St. Mary's Axe, London, Merchant; Oswald May Malcolm, of 27 Lombard Street, London, England; Hubert Cecil Harold Cannon of Vancouver, and Alexander Stewart of Tacoma. The purchasers were actually our firm, but the deed was made out in the name of my son, W.D.S. Rorison. The vendors had had the property mortgaged to the Imperial Bank of Canada. T.H. Calland & Co. were the agents for the vendors, and the first payment of \$700 was made on the 25th of October, 1905.

"The property we bought included the cannery, wharf, and cannery cottages, and lots 31, 32, 33, 34, Block 4, D.L. 540, and lots 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, Block 14, D.L. 540, all excepting a portion of the building known as the 'Fish House,' and the machinery, both of which they intended to move to some other point on the coast." (See photo No. ?)

"The following year, about May, one of the buildings on the south side of Point Grey Road was damaged by fire. The cannery we dismantled in 1906, and used part of the timber to repair cottages on the shore and also to build in part a residence on lots 4, 5 and 6, Block 13, D.L. 540.

"A pile of rusty iron on the beach marked—I believe to this day—the exact spot; it is the remains of cuttings of tin used when making salmon cans, and which was swept through a hole in the cannery floor."

**CONVERSATION WITH JOHN INNES, HISTORICAL SCENIC PAINTER, AT HIS OFFICE, 602
PROVINCE BUILDING, HASTINGS STREET, 23 JUNE 1933.**

VANCOUVER? WHERE IN HEAVEN IS THAT?

"Some fellow rode up on a horse and blurted out, 'Vancouver has been destroyed by fire.'

"I asked him, 'Where in heaven's that?'

"He replied, 'Oh, some place over the mountains.'

"That was the first time I heard of Vancouver. In 1886, I had a horse range ranch on the prairies, a good many miles south of Calgary, away out on the bald prairie, miles from anywhere. One day this fellow rode up to my ranch house on a horse. Visitors were few in that remote place, so I went over to see who the fellow was, and see what news he had. That was the first time I heard of Vancouver."

1 OCTOBER 1933 – DAVID AND ISAAC OPPENHEIMER.

John Innes, celebrated historical scenic painter, laughed—he is a gay old "sport"—then he chuckled:

"Did you ever hear the yarns they tell about Dave and Ike Oppenheimer. Dave and Ike used to peddle—sure they did—in the Cariboo. They say, one time, Dave took one side of the creek and Ike took the other. They had their bundles of pins, needles and such stuff over their shoulders. They tell the yarn that once Ike went up one side of the creek with his outfit, and a big miner fellow wanted to buy a darning

needle. Ike said, 'Be fi' dollars, very good darning needle, I sell it for fi' dollars; it worth ten dollars, but' (confidentially) 'I sell it to you for fi' dollars, but don't tell Dave; Dave got bad heart; he die if you tell him.'"

"Another one is about Dave, Ike and some other fellow playing poker.

"The other fellow: 'Who shuffled?'

"Dave: 'Ike.'

"The other fellow: 'Who dealt?'

"Ike: 'Dave.'

"The other fellow: 'Pass.'"

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH JOHN INNES, CELEBRATED CANADIAN PAINTER OF HISTORICAL SCENES, APRIL 1933.

BELLA COOLA. INDIAN HOUSES.

"The diagrammatic drawing of an Indian Community Dwelling at Bella Coola is made from rough sketches made in my notebook when, in company with Mr. Harland I. Smith of the Victoria Museum, Ottawa, in September 14-15, 1924, I visited there. The totem poles in the drawing were added to the drawing for decorative effect; they did not exist in reality.

"We had some difficulty in getting into the old building, as someone had fitted a modern door to its only entrance, and the door was padlocked, and the key in the possession of an old witch doctor, goodness knows how old he was, he was very old, very grumpy, hates white men, and claims to have killed six white men by his magic. 'Stikine Joe' was his name. He finally opened it.

"The building was old and decayed, quite empty, could not be lived in, nor was there sign that it had been occupied for years, very gloomy and dark inside, we could hardly see all of it, but it was all there, all the floors were in place, and many of the relatives' cubicles.

"The aged Indian lit a fire, just an act of hospitality, I suppose, and the smoke went out of the roof openings, and then he explained to us how each portion of the building was occupied and used, the chief at the far end, then his relatives, and the servants, and slaves, in that order, towards the entrance.

"I was able to make a few notes of the construction, but with difficulty, as it was so dark inside. The roof was of thick cedar boards, hand-split shakes, with a sort of dormer over the central part, with openings to let the smoke out. The posts, also cedar, were trimmed and adzed around, not very sound, and I supposed may have been replaced as the earlier ones decayed, although cedar is very lasting. There was no ornamentation on them, nor anywhere else in the building. The walls of horizontally laid cedar boards, split and adzed, unpainted, and without nails; they were tied with roots to the upright posts. The wall boards had bored in them small holes through which the roots passed. There were no chinks, the wall boards fitted very close; I don't know how they built it, but the boards were a beautiful fit. Perhaps the walls were double; I could not see in the darkness, and there was no time to bore through them, as the old Indian was anxious to get rid of us. The dancing floor was split and tooled-adzed-timber, and in the centre was an oblong of earth floor in the centre of which was a concave hole, say nine inches deep, in the middle, where the fire was burning.

"The cubicles were about six feet deep, five feet wide, open at one end, and roofed over at about five feet high, and goods stored, so we were told, on the roof. Not much imagination is needed to conceive the weird spectacle an Indian dance around that fire must have been; the flames, the masks, the shadows, the reflection on the masks; it must have been a weird performance." (The drawing is in Provincial Archives; photo copy in City Archives.)