

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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SOUTHLANDS.

The selection of this name for the district in the neighbourhood of the corner of 41st Avenue West and Dunbar Street, came about in the following manner.

At the amalgamation of the City of Vancouver with the Municipality of South Vancouver and Point Grey, 1 January 1929, to form the city of Greater Vancouver, the city was divided for electoral purposes into twelve wards, each electing one alderman to the City Council, and certain of these wards were long and narrow in shape, extending from English Bay to the North Arm of the Fraser River. At the north end there had long existed a very influential ratepayers association, the Kitsilano Rate-Payers Association; nothing of the sort existed at the south end, so, emulating the example, a ratepayers association was formed at the south end, the inaugural meeting being held in a new but empty store at the corner of 41st Avenue West and Dunbar Street. A name was required for the association. The district was growing rapidly, and a little village of stores was in process of creation at the corner.

Several names were suggested, but the one more favoured was "Southlands." The fact that the residence of His Worship W.H. Malkin, first mayor of Greater Vancouver, was nearby and was so named "Southlands" influenced the decision, made by a few at a ratepayers meeting, and carried in the face of stout opposition.

Major Matthews, City Archivist, submitted "Musqueam," the name of the nearby Indian settlement, so known even as far back as 1808, when Fraser, discoverer of the Fraser River, mentioned it in his diary. Major Matthews vainly pointed out that South Vancouver, South Hill, South Shore, and Southside, already existed on the southern slope; pointed out that the Indian name of Kitsilano was unique and distinctive, and Musqueam would be similarly so, but his suggestion was not considered meritorious. Protests to the Town Planning Commission brought the answer that they had no jurisdiction. Actually the name was chosen by one or two men, whose aggressiveness carried the day. It was unfortunate, and not generally approved. J.S.M.

7 OCTOBER 1933 – MAYORS, SYSTEM OF ELECTION. LOUIS RUBINOWITZ.

A very severe commentary on our system of electing our chief magistrate is the case of Mr. Louis Rubinowitz, an elderly Jew, who in 1926 and 1928 twice contested for the office of Mayor of Vancouver.

Mr. Louis Rubinowitz came to Vancouver in 1892, took some interest in Jewish affairs, but never took an interest in civic or public matters; it is difficult to find what he did take an interest in—in a public way. He had a small general store at Steveston, and also one in Vancouver, both queer places, an assortment of goods scattered aimlessly about after the manner of a secondhand store. He was a very elderly man when he decided to contest the office of Mayor. He wore his hair in a most noticeable manner. A long flowing grey beard, almost to his waist, and the long, almost white hair of his head hung over his shoulders as far as his shoulder blades. Sometimes, on Jewish ceremonial days, he wore a long black morning coat and a "stovepipe" tall silk hat, and had a rather venerable appearance, somewhat akin to a Jewish patriarch. He presented an odd and eccentric appearance as he walked down the street. He was by no means uninteresting to converse with, very polite, and minded his own business. His son was a barrister, one of the first Rhodes Scholars to Oxford University, and was subsequently defense counsel for the miners arrested at the Nanaimo coal strike of August 1913.

CONVERSATION WITH TOM EVANS, OF EVANS AND HASTINGS, PIONEER PRINTERS, 3 OCTOBER 1933.

City Archivist: There goes Mr. Rubinowitz.

Mr. Evans: "I've known him a long time. He came to me once and asked me to endorse him for mayor; to sign his nomination papers. I said to him, 'Mr. Rubinowitz, you know you've no chance of being elected; you haven't one chance in a million' (he got a few votes out of thousands afterwards); 'you're wasting your time. I regret it, but I must decline to put my name on your papers.' The old gentleman replied, 'Thank you very much all the same.' He had a bit of an old store down on Hastings Street somewhere, with a few tables in it and goods scattered all over the tables, and a great big sign outside in front, 'THE RUBINOWITZ DEPARTMENTAL STORES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, LIMITED.'"

This is an instance of how democracy operates. Here was an irresponsible, kindly gentleman, physically quite incapable of the onerous duties of mayor, who had never taken an interest of scarcely any sort of public affairs, quite out of touch with civic matters, somewhat eccentric, no money to speak of, a very indifferent business man in his own trading, and operating a third-rate retail store which looked more like a museum than a store, legally able to have his name placed on the voting ballots at a civic election involving many thousands of votes, and in company with two or three names of the highest standing in the community. His candidature was a joke—all knew that—yet such is our system of electing our governing officials that such debacles as the above are possible.

JEWISH SYNAGOGUE.

A memo of conversation with Mr. Rubinowitz, dated 2 October 1933, records that “my great-grandfather, after whom I am named, was a native of Ponemon, across the River Nemo from Kovno, Lithuania” (formerly Poland Russia) “and lived to be 107 years old.

“I am probably the only survivor of the original Jewish congregation which 42 years ago assembled in the first Jewish house of worship; not a synagogue, just a small hall, or large room upstairs in the Dunn-Miller Block on southwest corner of Cordova and Carrall streets.” J.S.M.

Note: in his mayoralty contests he received:

In 1926, 197 votes out of 15,972;

In 1928, 236 votes out of 36,809 cast.

J.S.M.

GREAT DEPRESSION.

EARLY DAYS.

The first evidence of the “Great Depression” became visible in the spring of 1931, but went unrecognised by the general public. There were features not dissimilar to those in the earlier days of the Great War. In both cases, British Columbia was unprepared; an appreciation of the situation was lacking; neither officials nor the general public comprehended; there was no system of method whatever to control it, and, as in the case of the Great War, most persons said it would end “in three months.”

The year 1929 had seen its stock boom in which all, from capitalists to stenographers, indulged. Life was worth living, a dollar invested today became two dollars overnight. During the year 1930 sufficient time had not elapsed for the penalties of the wild speculation to reveal themselves; people still had resources on which to live; some were suffering, some were grumbling, the public was hibernating—like a bear dened up for winter, and “living on its fat.” Then came 1931 and its spring; the slacking up of industry—and idle men were numerous as flowers in spring and summer, periods when labour should ordinarily be at a premium.

THE JUNGLES OF 1931.

Suddenly the newspapers reported in striking headlines the fact that men were living in “Jungles”; the public was politely interested, a curiosity to see what a “Jungle” looked like evinced itself; few bothered to go and look. Pictures were published; it was all very interesting. Few realised what was coming; a few of the more charitably inclined who came in personal contact with the “rod riders” (men who rode freight trains) started relief measures (see Col. Williams, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1), and interested themselves in the unfortunate “Jungleers,” but after the first flush and flash of interest had passed, the general public took not notice, and questioned each other, “Don’t you think business will improve next month?” A few said, “Recovery will take some time, perhaps two or three years,” and such as did were promptly branded pessimists to be shunned.

Even the men in the “Jungles” were not at all certain that the deplorable situation in which they found themselves was not due in some measure to their own individual deficiencies; they had been extravagant when they should have saved—which was perhaps quite true in most cases; they had always been unfortunate, they chided themselves; they had lost opportunities when they were young, had defied