

Early Vancouver

Volume Three

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

2011 Edition (Originally Published 1935)

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 3. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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He was born 31 May 1858, at Loch Lomond, St. John, New Brunswick. His ancestors fought for England in War of Independence, and went to New Brunswick afterwards (V.E.L.). His mother was a daughter of John Jordon, physician, stipendiary magistrate, and member of Parliament, Fredericton, New Brunswick (died [of] pneumonia).

CONVERSATION WITH MR. R. HEMPHILL, FIRST POUNDKEEPER OF CITY OF VANCOUVER, ON BOARD *PRINCESS JOAN* DURING VANCOUVER PIONEERS' PICNIC TO NEWCASTLE ISLAND, NANAIMO, WEDNESDAY, 14 JUNE 1933.

Mr. Hemphill now spends the winters in Pasadena, California, and the summers in Vancouver. He is 81 years old today.

POUNDKEEPER. CITY HALL. JAIL.

Major Matthews: What's this story about your appointment as dogcatcher for the city of Vancouver, which Mr. W.H. Gallagher tells? (See *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 1, 1931.)

Mr. Hemphill: "Dogcatcher? Dogcatcher? Oh, poundkeeper! Oh, that was not until after the fire. I didn't know anything about it; they had to fill in the charter; there were certain offices to be filled; city solicitor, city clerk, and I suppose they had to have a poundkeeper, so they appointed me, but I knew nothing about it. I was just one of the boys around town, didn't care for anything or anybody just then—young, looking for fun or trouble, whichever came first; I didn't care which."

(Laughing) "Westminster Avenue across the bridge was awful up the hill; just a trail, and slippery, gosh, going up the hill you'd slip back further than you went up, so the city council ordered it planked, you know, about twelve feet wide; Jerry McGeer's father, Jim McGeer, had a ranch up there—milk ranch."

Major Matthews: Along Kingsway?

Mr. Hemphill: "Yes, off that way."

Major Matthews: As far as the Tea Swamp? (Fraser Avenue.)

Mr. Hemphill: "No-o-o-o! Not that far; just up there, on the top. Jim's cows got out, and came down the plank road, new planks, easy walking, came right down; came across the False Creek bridge, and you know Sentell's place?"

Major Matthews: Up by Grove Crescent? (South end Jackson Avenue and False Creek.)

Mr. Hemphill: "Sure, along the beach. The cows went along the beach, and got into Sentell's cabbages, and what they didn't do to those cabbages—oh, boy. I was working down by the Hastings Mill, and Sentell came running down, and said, 'Say, here, you, you're poundkeeper; you're not doing your duty,' and I said, 'Like hell I am,' and I took a swipe at him. I was big and strong. Anyway, I went down to the old City Hall on Powell Street, the one Sentell built, and old John Clough with his one arm was sitting out in front, just beside the door, with his old clay pipe stuck in a corner of his mouth, and I said to him, 'Who's poundkeeper around this town?' John said, 'You are, Bob,' kind of slow like. So I says, 'All right.' So off I go, and get my boy, and Stuart's boy—no, not Stewart, Stuart—Stuart that used to be purchasing agent for the city—and we rounds up the cows and takes them down to the City Hall. There wasn't no pound, no place to put them, so we put them in the jail" (yard.)

Major Matthews: However did you get them in?

Mr. Hemphill: "Get them in? Why, through the City Hall, and oh boy, didn't they make a mess. What with the cabbages and the parsnips and the running, say, lad, it was awful. We got all around them, and in through the door they went, and down the corridor, and out into the jail yard. Great big fence, sixteen foot high, around the jail yard, we put them in that, but, oh boy, what with the cows, and the cabbages and the running you ought to have seen that corridor after they had got through."

Major Matthew: How many?

Mr. Hemphill: "Nineteen. We'd just got them in nicely, and I was coming out of the door, when along comes Jim McGeer, madder than blazes. Jim says, 'You're poundkeeper, aren't you?' and I says, 'Looks that way,' and with that—Jim always carried a big black thorn, carried it under his arm like a sergeant-major—Jim whips out the black thorn, and wipes it across the back of my neck, and with that I go at him. Jim was a big fellow, too, bigger than me, but I was young and strong, and I knocked him into the gutter, and we went at it. Then I put him in a cell, and locked him up."

MAYOR MACLEAN.

"So then they went down to the Bodega" (saloon) "for" (Mayor) "MacLean, and up he comes, and Jack Boulton" (magistrate) "and J.J. Blake, city solicitor, with him. So MacLean starts to hold court right away. Jim McGeer wanted his cows. Jack Boulton defended Jim, and Blake acted as prosecutor. Jim was all covered with gore and dirt after the tussle in the gutter, but he admitted it all right, so MacLean draws himself up, pompous like, and says like a judge, very serious, 'I fine you twenty-five dollars for obstructing an officer of the la-a-a-w,' that's me, 'in the execution of his dooty, and two dollars each for the cows.'

"Jim up and say, 'All right, I'll pay, but I'll get even with you.' So Jim paid up, and we all went down to the Bodega and ginned up." (See J.W. Sentell's comment.)

JIM MCGEER, FATHER OF "OUR OWN GERRY," G.G. (HIMSELF) MCGEER.

The story goes that, as Jim stepped on the platform of the old People's Theatre, Pender and Howe streets, a big wooden barn of a place, to advocate the candidature of Geo. R. Maxwell, about 1900, for M.P., a peal of cowbells tolled to the measured time of "Old Strawberry's" leisured tread, accompanied by a few sonorous bawls imitative of an unhappy calf, greeted him. It was all very polite, subtle in its inference; the crowded audience chuckled.

CITY POUNDKEEPER. FIRST CITY COUNCIL. OLD COURT HOUSE.

"I don't know where the first meeting of the City Council took place. I was not there. I did not know anything about being appointed poundkeeper. I remember the little old court house on Water Street, no road in front of it, just dirt, part of the beach. I think there were a couple of little balsams in front of it; John Clough planted them, I believe; there might have been a bit of grass in front of it."

HASTINGS MILL. GREAT FIRE.

"You see, Goldie MacCullough of Galt, Ontario, sent me out here to help put new boilers in the Hastings Mill. We were doing that when the Great Fire came along, and tore down through the city 'til it *stopped at the ravine*." (This is the first time a reasonable explanation as to why it stopped where it did, has been given.) "I was just a young fellow, itching for devildom, and I wasn't interested in where they held the city council meetings or if they held them at all."

FIRST CITY HALL. MARKET HALL.

"I helped build the chimneys in the old wooden city hall; the chimneys were Hong Kong brick, so was the old City" (Market) "Hall. The bricks came over here as ballast in a sailing ship coming to the Hastings Sawmill for lumber, and we bought it for seventeen teals, that is about 97¢ per 1,000 brick; it cost me about \$1 a thousand by the time I had 'ginned up the crowd.'"

Major Matthews: Is it true that the chimneys in the old City Hall on Powell Street and the whole building known as the Market Hall were built out of Chinese bricks which came over as ballast in some sailing ship from Hong Kong, as Bob Hemphill says?

Mr. Sentell (who built the Powell Street City Hall): "I don't know."

Note: most, perhaps all, bricks came from the Bowen Island brickyard, owned by David Oppenheimer et al. See W.A. Grafton, and other narratives.