

## **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 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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**CONVERSATION WITH MR. W.H. GRASSIE, PIONEER WATCHMAKER, CAMBIE STREET, OFFICIAL WATCHMAKER TO C.P.R. AND C.N.R.**

**BIG TREES.**

**Georgia Street Tree.**

"I came to Vancouver 4<sup>th</sup> July 1886; Mrs. Grassie" (née Charlotte Fowler) "came two weeks later. We were photographed—one on each side of the big tree stump—the following winter by one of the Bailey Bros." (See Bailey photo No. ? and note plank ditch at northeast corner, Granville and Georgia.)

This is the same tree as the "Vancouver Lots for Sale—Real Estate, J.W. Horne." Mr. and Mrs. Grassie both living in 1934.

**Princess Louise Tree.**

The Great Fire so injured this tree—about the foot of Gore Avenue—that it had to be cut down. J.S.M.

**THE BIGGEST TREE.**

**BY J.S. MATTHEWS.**

**UNPUBLISHED AS AT MAY 1934.**

Imagine a British Columbia Douglas fir tree 417 feet high, and 25 feet diameter. Such a giant is reputed to have been felled by George Cary in Lynn Valley, North Vancouver, in August 1895. Who can prove it?

A tree 417 feet tall would rise into the sky as high as the Marine Building, which is 304 feet about Hastings Street, and then tower on up above the equivalent of a ten-storey building; two motor cars, one behind the other, could stand upon its base of 25 feet. Did such a monster ever grow? Or is its story a myth?

J.A. Macdonald, in responding to "Lumberjack's" enquiry re big trees, quite correctly quotes the *Western Lumberman* has published a photograph and exact details of the great tree, and further, in October 1922, page 1081, the *Illustrated Canadian Forestry Journal* copied illustration and details, and so have several other journals of repute. The circumference was 77 feet, the first limb at 300 feet; at 207 feet its diameter 9 feet, and the bark 16 inches thick. (See *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2.) The photograph indicates the tree was felled by sawing as well as chopping, and "George Cary, who is seen upon the ladder."

Diligent search by officials of the Provincial Forestry Department, by the Forest Laboratories, U.B.C., and others, have never established where, when, and by whom this tree was felled; old loggers scoff at the story. The late Duncan Macdonald, who arrived at Moodyville in 1873, worked in the woods for the Moodyville Sawmill Co. all his life, and who died two months ago, the oldest living white inhabitant of the North Shore, says he never heard of it, and that the biggest tree he ever saw was up the Lynn Valley, about ten miles; the stump of the tree probably there yet, and was nine feet diameter by careful measurement.

"I doubt if any such tree ever grew near Vancouver or anywhere else in B.C.," asserts James McWhinney, who logged on the site of our commercial section, and was for many years logging superintendent of the Moodyville Sawmill.

But the most severe rebuttal of all comes from George Cary himself. Mr. Cary arrived in "Gastown" in 1884, says he cut the first trail—about where Lonsdale Avenue is—back to the hills, says he never felled the tree, and that he is not the "George Cary seen upon the ladder." There are many "Carey's" in British Columbia, but few "Cary's," and only one George Cary.

The photograph shows it was felled by sawing; no ordinary cross-cut saw could cut far into wood which had a diameter of twenty-five feet. By what method would a log 25 feet high, 25 feet wide, as big as a house, be moved? Its weight would play havoc with a skid road; it would not pay. Assuming the smaller top sections only were taken out; the huge butt end left, then, where is the butt now, where can the stump be seen? All trace cannot surely have vanished, but no one seems to know. It is suggested that the illustration is of a California redwood, a tree of enormous base dimension.

"The biggest tree I have ever seen," says George Cary, "was the big tree on Georgia Street; it stood where the Strand Theatre now stands; the stump is probably under the theatre yet. I measured it many times. It was fourteen feet four inches at the widest part. It was cut up in sections; part went to Queen Victoria's Jubilee Exhibition in London, part to Toronto, and a piece stood on Hastings Street for years." (See A.W. Ross.) "Then when the clearing operations started they tried to burn the log, but it just burned the centre out, and left a shell in which J.W. Horne set up a show real estate office, just an advertising stunt, not a real office, depicted in the well-known photograph 'Vancouver Lots for Sale.'"

The Georgia Street big tree also has legendary dimensions; it was said to have been 325 feet high, taller than the Vancouver Block, but "The truth is," says Pat Myers, octogenarian, who logged on the Brighthouse estate (West End) and whose log dump was beside the bathhouse at English Bay, "The truth is that the top had broken off, and the giant stub was merely eighty feet high.

"When we were logging the West End we got over the line" (Burrard Street); "I 'skidded up to'" (built a skid road) "the big tree, but we decided the tree was too big, it would break up our skid road, so we left it." (See Vol. 3.)

Later, when clearing the stumps and debris off the land about Robson, Dunsmuir and Burrard streets, H.P. McCraney, who built our first street car lines, cleared the log away. To W.H. Gallagher, sole surviving witness in Canada of the meeting of our first City Council, we are indebted for the photograph of the great stump. All of these pioneers are still residents of Vancouver. (See W.H. Grassie.)

That a great fire swept through the forest between Vancouver and New Westminster some two or three hundred years ago is the interesting theory of Mr. Myers. He bases his assumption on the "patchiness" of the forest in certain sections; that of the West End and Shaughnessy having trees of enormous size and prolificacy, while that of parts of Hastings, Central Park, and near Ontario Street on the North Arm of the Fraser was "second growth stuff with pin knots." Mr. Myers declares that the fire not only destroyed the forest, but burned the land bare of humus. "You can see what I mean, even today, in that bit of forest at Central Park; those trees have grown up since the fire; poor bits of things, no humus in the soil, just bare stone and earth." The forest about Granville Street and the West End and Shaughnessy was one of the finest stands of timber in the world.

Support to this contention is given by a correspondent replying to "Lumberjack," who narrates that when clearing his lot in Hastings East, he removed a log embedded in the soil, overlain with moss and humus, and straddled with a stump three and one-half feet thick which had grown over it, and found the log beneath to be charred by fire.

## **14 DECEMBER 1933 – MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH GEORGE CARY.**

(See *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2, 1933.) He came to Granville in 1884.

### **INDIAN VILLAGE IN STANLEY PARK.**

Major Matthews: What about that Indian village in Stanley Park, the one on the First Narrows?

Mr. Cary: "I don't think it was a permanent place; just a stopping place, to fish. You know, the Indians don't always stop at the same place as they go to fish." (See old charts.) "The same thing at Buccaneer Bay. I was along there one and there were ten or fifteen huts, but there was no Indians living there. I know it was that way; just temporary shelters when they came down to fish for dogfish.

"They had a little potlatch over there once; it was never much of a village; just a few shacks right there some place. They have put up some totem poles in Stanley Park, but that's not where the shacks I knew were."

Major Matthews: Well, there was a big village over there at one time; that's what the Indians say.

Mr. Cary: "May be; not in my time; the path along the shore up and down the shore of the Narrows was just wide enough to let one man through at a time; Indians always travel single file anyhow; I'm speaking now of the prairie Indian, not shore Indians; shore Indians don't travel much through woods. All these Indians here on this coast are canoe Indians. Shoes, what shoes? Oh, they sometimes wore moccasins, not bare feet always, but I must tell you about old Capilano, old Capilano Joe, the chief over there."