

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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THE NAME “VANCOUVER.”

Kissimmee, Florida.
30th April, 1934.

Dear Major Matthews:

You have come to the right place for information regarding the naming of the City of Vancouver. Sir Wm. Van Horne had several conversations with me regarding the name.

All through he stuck firmly to the name, even when Parliament at Victoria discussed the inadvisability of calling the terminus by that name, and showed their opposition to it; making the claim that calling a city which was on the Mainland, and not on the Island, would lead to confusion. We realise that the two names by which “Gastown” and “Granville” both smacked rather of the village than of a great city. His argument was if called by any of these names, the people, especially those residing in the Old Land wouldn’t have the faintest idea where the place was, but if called Vancouver, they would know at least it was on the Pacific, and at or near the Island called by that name.

“Hamilton,” he said to me, “this eventually is destined to be a great city in Canada, and we must see that it has a name that will designate its place on the map of Canada, and, Vancouver it shall be, if I have the ultimate decision.” I think he had a prophetic eye as to its future, and the desirability of giving it the proud name it now bears. I stood God Father when I laid its foundation post.

Yours very truly,

L.A. Hamilton

See letter, 4 October 1929, re survey, also Vol. 2, *Early Vancouver*.

Lachlan A. Hamilton, born Penetanguishene, 20 September 1852, son of Wm. Basil Hamilton, first mayor of Collingwood, Ontario, grandson of James Matthew Hamilton of Ulster, Ireland, captain 5th Foot Regiment, served in Europe and Canada, and, retiring from army, received a large block of land in Simcoe County, Ontario, for services. His grandson, L.A. Hamilton, graduated from Military School of Instruction, 1870, was a civil engineer and land surveyor.

He was on the staff defining the 49th parallel boundary between Canada and U.S., from the Lake of the Woods to the Rockies, 1872-3-4; selected twenty-five million acres of land for the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Canadian Northwest, and three million acres in British Columbia, selected sites of numberless towns on C.P.R. line including Vancouver, Calgary, Moose Jaw, Swift Current and Regina.

He laid out first street system of Vancouver, starting survey at post with nail in top at southwest corner of Hamilton and Hastings streets. He was General Land Commissioner, C.P.R., senior alderman on First City Council of Vancouver, 1886 and 1887; in 1934 was only surviving alderman of this council. Among other numerous associations of consequence was his selection of Vancouver’s first park, the Cambie Street grounds.

During Great War he was chairman of Canadian Red Cross Society at Toronto, also Patriotic Society and Judge under Conscription Act. Is still treasurer of Anglican Synod of Canada, Toronto.

Owner of a large fruit farm and golf links at Lorne Park, Ontario, and also 640 acres farm and golf links at “Oak Tree House,” Kissimmee, Florida.

He married (first) Isobel Leask at Toronto, September 1879, sister of John Leask, first City Auditor of Vancouver; one child, Isobel Ogilvie Hamilton, born at Ottawa, 3 October 1880. And (secondly) Constance Bodington, daughter of Dr. George Bodington, M.D., at St. James’ Church, Vancouver, 10 April 1888.

His sister, Isabelle J. Hamilton, married John Leask (born Toronto, 18 September 1848, son of James and Joan Leask) at St. James' Church, Vancouver, 28 August 1888, and their daughter Isobel Jessie, married Chas. Thompson. She died 1913, leaving one son, Charles Hamilton Thompson, of Collingwood, Ontario, where he still resides. Mr. Leask was C.P.R. accountant, and first City Auditor of Vancouver. Mrs. Leask became the first Alderwoman of Toronto.

Lorne Park,
3rd Oct., 1934.

Dear Major Matthews:

Yours of the 19th inst. received. I would have answered it sooner but for the fact that I was away from home attending the meeting of the General Synod of the Church of England in Canada. You may possibly have seen that I resigned my position of Treasurer of the Synod after having filled that position for 17 years. It will give you some idea of the progress, in a financial way, of the Church of England in Canada when I say that during my term of Office the General Funds of the Church increased from \$1700 to the large sum of two million seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$2,750,000). To mark the appreciation of my work I was presented with a gold watch suitably engraved, on my 82nd Birthday, 20 September. The presentation was the first official act of the newly elected Archbishop Owen of Toronto to the highest position in the Church, the Private of the C. of E. in Canada.

You ask me as to the naming of Beatty Street. This was named after Henry Beatty, father of the President and Beatty of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Mr. Beatty and I were appointed by the company to proceed to Vancouver and Victoria and there to compute all matters pending between the Govt. of B.C. and Canadian Pacific R.R. Owing to the opposition in the Provincial Parliament, a long delay took place. Mr. Beatty, after remaining some time, was obliged to return to Montreal, leaving me behind to conclude the terms of settlement not only with the Govt. but with private citizens of Victoria that owned property on each side of the Government reserve. Final settlement was hung up by reason of the 85 acres lying between the Granville Place and the Hastings sawmill property not being included in the settlement. Hence the name of the "85 acre steal," as it was commonly known at that time. Finally, after 6 months delay, this tract was included in the deal on the same terms as were agreed upon for the remaining properties owned by private individuals.

I may say that Mr. Beatty was one of the owners of the Beatty steamship company, was considered an expert on matters of ship building and navigation. For this reason he was appointed by the C.P.R. as manager of their steamship interests. He was well known in the early days of the gold mining excitement in Cariboo, having gone into the country with a hardware supply, also because owner of a valuable claim in the gold fields which he sold for a good figure. In the properties laid out for the C.P.R. south of False Creek, I gave the avenues numbers and called the streets after the various trees of Canada. No doubt this system was extended to the subdivisions east of the company's property. If you could see the large plan which I made under the contract between the Government of B.C. and the C.P.R., you will see how the streets were named and numbered. This plan which formed the foundation for the City of Vancouver was registered in the Registry Office in Victoria. This is the plan as authorized under the contract between the Govt. and C.P.R., and is the one which no doubt all later plans were based on. A copy of this ought to be in the Archivist's Office as it is really the foundation of the city.

Yours truly,

L.A. Hamilton.

30 St. Joseph St.,
Toronto.
12th Nov. 1934.

Dear Major Matthews:

Pardon the delay in not answering your letter of Nov. 3 much before this. Delay was due to our breaking up the house in the Country and moving into Toronto.

NAMING OF FAIRVIEW AND MOUNT PLEASANT. EARLY C.P.R. OFFICES.

I am afraid I cannot give you any answer as to the naming of Fairview and Mount Pleasant as the naming of those subdivisions took place after I left Vancouver. As to the plans, we had two offices, one at Port Moody and one at Vancouver. The former in charge of H. Abbott and the latter controlled by myself. The big plan you refer to was no doubt made at Port Moody; it had to do with certain formalities in connection with the right of way and the water front lands that the Co. secured under their contract with the Canadian Government.

FIRST MAP OF VANCOUVER.

The large plan of the City was prepared by myself in the Office of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway. Mr. Dunsmuir, the head of that Corporation, was good enough to give me room in their Victoria Office. Preliminary plans dealing with the laying out of the streets and blocks were made partially in the Ferguson Block but were all destroyed in the fire.

THE GREAT FIRE.

I lost in that fire all the photographs that I had taken previous to the fire. The heat was so great when I escaped from the building that a number of valuable documents were burnt in my arm, and all glasses in the levels were cracked in the surveying instrument I was carrying over my shoulder.

As I explained in my previous letter the final plan, as approved by the Company of the city was deposited in the Registry Office in Victoria.

I am looking up some water color sketches stowed away here and intend to send them on to you by mail. They are not highly artistic and were made under difficulties at the time but they will give an impression of the Country as it was when I commenced to make the first survey of the city.

Sincerely yours,

L.A. Hamilton.

SURVEY OF VANCOUVER, C.P.R., 1885.

Hotel Vancouver
Vancouver, B.C.
4th Oct. 1929.

J. Alex Walker Esq.,
Town Planning Commission,
Vancouver, B.C.

Dear Mr. Walker:

I was most gratified in returning to the store to find your note and the Book "of a Plan for the City of Vancouver."

I am sorry that I have to leave tomorrow by 9 a.m. train as I know I would have enjoyed a chat with you. I cannot say that I am proud of the original planning of Vancouver. The work, however, was beset with many difficulties. The dense forest, the inlet on the north, and False Creek on the south, the receding in of the land at Carrall Street. A registered plan on the East and