

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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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH EX-SERGEANT CLAUDE H. WILLIAMS, FORMERLY OF B.C.B.G.A. AND 6TH REGIMENT D.C.O.R., VANCOUVER, 1 MAY 1935.

SHAM FIGHT IN WEST END.

"It was, I think, after Queen Victoria died; it was July 1st, Dominion Day, and I think 1901, that we had the sham fight in the West End. Colonel Worsnop was in command; Tite was captain, I think, at that time.

"The 'enemy,' which was the Navy and the 5th Regiment C.G.A., Victoria, went ahead of us; they were supposed to have landed at English Bay; we followed. We went down Georgia Street, and turned south through the clearing. I recall we had one gun with us, which we fired at the enemy as they approached through the rough clearing of shrubs, stumps and holes. It was not much of a show to look at, as in those days there were only four companies of about forty or less men in each company—the only troops of any sort, volunteer or otherwise, in Vancouver.

"They say that afterwards we went to the Hotel Vancouver, and beer and biscuits were brought out to us, but I forget."

(Captain N.M. McNeill, M.D., late of 102nd Battalion, C.E.F., and also Prince Rupert, confirms this. J.S.M.)

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR. 4 AUGUST 1914. 6TH REGIMENT D.C.O.R.

The command of the contingent from the 6th Regiment D.C.O.R. devolved upon Major W. Hart-McHarg, second in command of the 6th Regiment. In a subsequent conversation with Captain W.H. Forrest, paymaster of the 6th Regiment, and a close friend of Major McHarg's, he reports Major McHarg as saying to him, "I can't understand Hulme." (Lieutenant Colonel Hulme commanded the regiment; McHarg was his second-in-command.) "Here he has got the chance of a lifetime; why doesn't he take it? But with me it is different. I have only a couple of years to live in any case." Major Hart-McHarg had for years suffered from indigestion, and once told me that about all he ate was "biscuits and milk." He was a man of five feet ten or eleven inches, but weighed 145 pounds only; his large head belied the fact that very slender legs supported a large frame. A conversation I once had with this remarkable personality is illuminating; it was concerning his more youthful days.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL MCHARG.

"I cannot fathom the young man of today," he said (about 1912.) "When I was in Winnipeg all I got was \$25 a month and lived on it" (he was a law student); "but today, a young man gets pretty much what he wants and spends it; I don't know how they manage it."

How did you live on \$25 a month? I queried.

"Well, I walked to the office, wore celluloid collars, and washed them; and as for going to a theatre, why, that was beyond my wildest dreams."

Captain John McMillan, quartermaster, both of the 7th Battalion C.E.F. and 6th Regiment D.C.O.R., told me that McHarg sat up all the night awaiting news of the outbreak of war, and was "bleary eyed" when, next morning, about 10 a.m., a few of the officers of the 6th Regiment D.C.O.R. met at the Drill Hall. There were present Colonel Hulme, Major Hart-McHarg, Captain Gardiner, adjutant, Captain McMillan, and others.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL H.D. HULME.

But, in relinquishing the command of the first troops to leave Vancouver, Colonel Hulme, commanding the Sixth, was actually self-sacrificing, and logical. Major McHarg had had war experience in South Africa as a sergeant; Colonel Hulme had no war service at all, and at that time, and to soldiers especially, war service was considered far more essential to command than, later, when all manner of business men rose to high military station and rank. Major McHarg was without ties of business or family; he was unmarried; had a business partner of repute. Colonel Hulme was married and had three children approaching their 'teens, and his business affairs included trusteeships, etc., which he could not drop at a moment's notice without injury to others. To let Major McHarg take the first body of men to the front was proper to a logical mind. But it brought unkind thought, and some criticism from the less thoughtful.

Colonel Hulme afterwards commanded the 62nd Overseas Battalion, the third battalion to leave Vancouver.

“ARCHIVISTS WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD.” SIR ARTHUR CURRIE.

About April 1932, Gen. Sir Arthur Currie passed through Vancouver on his way from the Orient to eastern Canada, and was, one afternoon about four, informally entertained by a large assemblage of ex-overseas officers who had gathered together to shake hands, chat, and drink a cocktail in the “Oval Room” of the Hotel Vancouver.

Prior to 1899, a large wooden shed served as the first drill hall in Vancouver, and General Currie, as former Corporal Currie of the 1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, Canadian Garrison Artillery, Victoria, had once entered it on a holiday event when the Victoria battalion had paid a visit to the 2nd Battalion in Vancouver. In 1931, the many regiments of Vancouver subscribed together to erect a memorial to mark the site of the old drill shed, and General Currie was invited to unveil the bronze tablet, but being indisposed in health, he declined, so the memorial was taken to the Oval Room for him to see. The shining new bronze tablet, bearing in part the words, “HERE STOOD THE DRILL SHED,” was suitably placed upon an easel, and, conducted by a group of senior officers, General Currie was escorted across the spacious room to view it; Major Matthews, City Archivist, Vancouver, long known to General Currie as a collector of military relics and records of British Columbia, as well as an old friend of many years, was among them, and had been responsible for the proposal, creation and design of the tablet.

The general stood in front of the tablet for a moment or so, gazing and reading, and then, placing his hand on Major Matthews’ shoulder, said with much feeling, “Gentlemen. Men like Matthews here are worth their weight in gold.”

He then continued with some reminiscences, etc.

“Men like” an archivist must naturally include all archivists.

Just why Gen. Currie expressed himself thus must forever remain unknown, but it *might* have had something to do with his then recent unfortunate experience when he had to defend himself in the courts against unjust and libellous statements that “he sacrificed his men,” and that the records fortunately kept—as all military units have to keep—served in some especially useful way to vindicate his actions in the Great War.