

Early Vancouver

Volume Six

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1940-1945.

Supplemental to volumes one, two, three, four and five collected in 1931, 1932, 1934, 1939 and 1944.

About the 2011 Edition

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ENGLISH BAY BEACH.

Major Matthews: What were you going to English Bay for?

Mrs. Mills: "To take a dip; go in swimming, of course; had a little grip with our bathing suit in it; they had more clothes on when they went bathing in those days than they do now. I knew old Joe Fortes.

"But I do like Vancouver, and I have always like it, and there is no other place I would prefer to live. With all its rain. The rain doesn't bother me; I go out rain or shine, and I am now 75; born 29th March; I shall be 75 next March 29th" (1942.) "And I have always been blessed with very good health; never had any sickness to speak of. Hadn't time to be ill with twelve children to look after. Our first home was on Seymour Street, 1300 block; from there we went to Mount Pleasant, corner of 11th Avenue and Quebec, next door to Mayor Bethune. In those days there wasn't much up there. Mayor Bethune was on the corner; we were next to him."

CONVERSATION WITH MR. TADA ICHI NAGAO, SUITE 4, 157 WEST 2ND, WHO KINDLY CALLED, AT MY REQUEST, AT THE CITY ARCHIVES THIS MORNING, 8 APRIL 1942, FOR A CHAT.

I offered Mr. Nagao a cigar, and said, "Smoke."

Mr. Nagao: "Some time ago, Mr. Justice Morrison, he and I went to an assize court in Nanaimo. During the recess of the court, the Justice sent the sheriff to me to come to his private room. Well, he was smoking; he said, 'Don't you smoke?' I said, 'Thank you, my Lord.' Of course, I expected him to give me a cigar. But the cigar was not forthcoming. The Justice said, 'Why don't you smoke?' I said, 'I thought you would have given me one.'" (Cigar.) "Well," he said slowly, 'I'm very sorry, but'" (holding up a cigar in his thumb and finger) "this is the only one I've got." (And Mr. Nagao laughed. But how like the kindly Chief Justice.) "I knew him pretty well. I liked him; nice old man. I often went into his room and chatted with him; knew him for a long time."

Major Matthews: When did you come to Vancouver, Mr. Nagao?

Mr. Nagao: "November 1st, 1886. I came from Seattle, not from Japan. Washington was not a state at that time; Washington was a territory. I came to San Francisco from Japan in 1884. I was born in Japan, forty miles northeast of Tokio, October 4th 1866. My father and mother were samurai, that is the same thing in Japan as a soldier family would be in England. You see, we had a civil war in Japan, and that revolutionised the whole system of the country. Before the revolution, the shogun had the entire power to govern my country, and after the revolution, the Emperor was reinstated, and governs the country now. And his policy was to adopt the western ways, so young men who wanted education in a foreign country were allowed to go anywhere. That was why we came out. That was how it came that, about 1884, educated young men, students, came to North America; no labourers at all, and I came with them; I was one of them, and came to San Francisco on a steamer.

"When I got to San Francisco I went to school. We had a mission school there conducted by the Presbyterian Church. I stayed at the school about eighteen months, learning the English language and other things, and then I was sent by a Japanese exporting house in San Francisco to Tacoma, Washington with Christmas goods. We opened a store, and I was in charge of it. Mr. Kai, of Kai and Co., and the store was on" [blank] "near the Hotel Tacoma. I stayed there during the holiday season, and then closed up the store and the goods were sent back, and I went to Seattle, Washington. I stayed in Seattle for a few months, and then came to Vancouver, 1st November 1886."

HASTINGS SAWMILL. TROUT LAKE. WATER FROM FLUME.

"Well, you know Vancouver, I suppose. The first place I went to when I got to Vancouver, I came via Victoria as there was no direct line here then from Seattle, I went to the Hotel Europe on Alexander Street. After a time I got a job to work in Hastings Sawmill, of course, it was 1887 when I joined the Hastings Sawmill. I was a young man, strong, and I was a lumber marker. I got a dollar a day with board, and the company gave us the shacks to live in, and we went over to the cookhouse for meals. There was no water works in those days; the company got water for the boiler from Trout Lake. The company built a small flume to get the water from that lake, and when we had it very cold, it was all frozen up, and in that case the company sent the water scow to Moodyville to get water. Trout Lake was much higher then than

it is now. You see, they made a deep cut to run out water; that is why the level of the lake dropped. I was often up there, at the small lake near Commercial Drive. There was a winding trail, but the flume was already built, and we walked up the flume. We do not see any wild animals, but all kinds of fish, salmon, trout.

"You see, those days salmon were so plentiful in any creek about Vancouver. I don't know just exactly how to describe it, anyway, well, but I have experience two seasons in fishing on the Fraser River for the Phoenix Cannery at Steveston."

SHAUGHNESSY. GRANVILLE STREET SOUTH. "THE STEEP HILL." ROYAL MAIL STAGE.

"I walked to Steveston; walked, all the way, by what is now Granville Street; no street car, no paving. The Shaughnessy Heights hill was then a very steep hill; they have cut it down a very great deal, it is nothing like as steep now as it was. Very dusty. When we came to the foot of the hill, about 16th Avenue now, where the shops are now, the old stage drive gave command to the passengers to get out; we all got out, and the horses drew the empty stage to the top of the hill." (Looking at photo C.V. P. Str. 156, N. Str. 102) "I remember this. You see, every summer there was a fire in this forest from Point Grey to New Westminster. That destroyed so much valuable timber. But the people think nothing of it."

FOREST FIRES. LOGGING OFF THE FOREST.

"Of course, timber was very cheap those days; there was too much of it, and people did not value it; only five dollars per thousand feet for logs delivered in the mill. In those days the measuring of logs was done by top measurement; that is, you see, the butt is bigger than the top; when you take the diameter of top you multiply it by the length of the log, then the content of the lumber would be very small comparing to what we do now. You see, what I mean is, the present way of measuring is not done by measuring the small top end. They do it now just about the middle of the log from both ends. That's to be fair. But all the old measuring was done on the diameter of the small end; the large butt end was disregarded.

"You see, Major, the present way of measuring logs would give to the mill owner from fifteen to twenty per cent of board measure for nothing. I remember once, I was interpreter on the Queen Charlotte Island timber case. The plaintiff came from Japan, the defendant from the United States, and the case tried in a Canadian court; that is why it is very interesting; international interests, and it was proven by the evidence given by lumbermen that fifteen to twenty per cent of logs accrued to the mill owner for nothing."

JAPANESE PRISONERS.

"I started as a court interpreter here a long time ago, first under Judge Bole, County Court, New Westminster, and I have been at it ever since; been on hundreds of cases. You see, queer thing was, the Japanese prisoners, nineteen in number, taken from Steveston to New Westminster about forty-five or fifty years ago, before the Steveston fish riots, the sheriff asked for their names but he could not spell them, so he gave each a number; they were tried by their individual number. In those days that sort of thing was allowed, but not now."

TWELVE JAPANESE HERE 1886. FIRST JAPANESE WOMAN.

"You see, when I came to Vancouver, there were just twelve Japanese here. One of the twelve was a woman, and was married to a Scotch engineer, George Taylor, who was engaged by the Japanese Government before they came here; she was Mrs. George Taylor. They went back to Japan, and both died. The other ten were mostly sailors and mill workers; none of them were educated men."

Major Matthews: Are you a Christian?

Mr. Nagao: "Yes. I think I am. I'd better tell you how I became a Christian when I was young. I was baptised when I was fourteen in Japan. During the summer recess of high school in Japan, there came a strange missionary. He started a small mission station, but his Japanese speech was not very perfect, so he showed us what he meant to tell. Town people grew to dislike him; broke his windows, doors, with stones. But he stick to his 'guns,' and he found two or three followers, and I was one of them. I went to him every day, and he described us" (touching his chest) "how happy are Christians, and he described their way of living in his old country, France—he was French—and all Christian countries, and we believed what he told us. But my people, my father and mother, didn't like to be baptised, but I was, and Father and Mother objected, and when I returned to the dormitory in the high school, my fellow

classmates never spoke to me, yet I prayed to God as all Roman Catholics do. That was a hard thing for a young kid, only fourteen, to go through."

Major Matthews: Are you a Roman Catholic?

Mr. Nagao: "Yes. Four years later, I left Japan for San Francisco, and I found the social condition of the American people, although they claimed they are Christian, were not so good as I was told by the missionary, and I found many points which were much worse than in Japan, so I had to change my mind. I have changed my mind altogether now."

Mr. Nagao partook of such humble food and a cup of tea as I was able to offer from my luncheon parcel. We ate at my desk. I suggested that sometime, perhaps, long years in the future, the hatred which, due to war, existed between his nation and mine would disappear.

Mr. Nagao: (fervently) "I hope so." Then continuing: "I came to North America expecting to find Christians living in peaceful happiness together, but I found out that what the French missionary in Japan had told me was not entirely true.

"There is much to be commended in the Japanese system of government, and some that is not, and the same thing here. My opinion is that it is about fifty-fifty" (equal.)

"I used to be a partner in a mine with Mr. Corbould, the lawyer, of New Westminster. I am in hopes they" (the B.C. Security Commission, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police) "will leave me here in Vancouver. I like Vancouver. But, if I must go away, then—I must go, that's all there is to say about it. I have not long to live. I am 75. I am not enjoying perfect health.

"Mrs. Nagao came from Japan; we were married here, no children. She has not been very well for nearly ten years, and does not leave our home.

"I am not a Japanese subject any longer. My sister in Japan is dead, and I have no other relative there.

"I have been away from Japan over thirty years, and am scratched off their records now. If I went back there, they would say, 'Who are you?' They would say, 'We don't know you. You are presumed dead.' I should have to be brought to life again, to be born again, as it were, before I could be a Japanese subject."

Mr. Nagao rose to keep an appointment downtown. And a very courteous kindly gentleman departed, promising to come again.

MEMO OF CONVERSATION WITH AUGUST JACK KHAHTSAHLANO, SON OF KHAY-TULK ("SUPPLEJACK") OF CAPILANO INDIAN RESERVE, FIRST NARROWS, WHO VERY KINDLY CALLED THIS NOON, 15 MAY 1942, AND SHARED MY LUNCH WITH ME AT MY DESK.

CEDAR BARK ROPE, THREE EIGHTHS INCH, THREE STRAND.

Note: I explained to August that, due to the capture of the Philippine Islands by the Japanese, there was a shortage of manila fibre for making rope, and that someone had suggested we make some in British Columbia from cedar bark as the Indians did before the whiteman came. That Mr. B.W. Leeson, formerly of Quatsino, now of Point Grey, had loaned me a twenty-five foot length, three eighths, three strand, and I got it from the glass case and handed it to him to inspect. I told him that we had had it photographed, that the negative was in the cabinets, and that it had been published as an illustration in the *B.C. Lumberman* monthly magazine a month ago. JSM.

Major Matthews: August. Who made this rope?

August: "Oh, women folks make it, make it fine, make it small, make it big, all sizes; it's wet when they are working. Women roll the strand from cedar strips, roll it on their knee with the palms of their hands; just same you roll things."