

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1931-1932.

*A Collection of Historical Data, Maps, and Plans Made with the Assistance of
Pioneers of Vancouver Between March and December 1931.*

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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VANCOUVER'S FIRST CIVIC ELECTION, 1886.

"It was the men falling the forest who elected our first mayor, His Worship Mayor M.A. MacLean, in April 1886," continued Mr. Gallagher. "They were slashing trees up around the Hotel Vancouver, where it is now. The late Major C. Gardner Johnson was poll clerk, and the balloting was done at the little old Court House, a small wooden building on Water Street, next to Gassy Jack's Deighton Hotel.

"The printed booklet *Voters List, City of Vancouver, 1886*, frequently accepted as the first voters list of Vancouver, was first used at the election of 1887, not the first election of 1886. It was made up during 1886, after the first election. There was no voters list for the first election; the list of those who voted at the first election was made up with a pen, while the election balloting was in process, from those who voted, and was being added to even up to within ten minutes of the close of the poll.

"The voting was more or less open, and continued all day. Those presenting themselves to vote were asked, 'How long have you been here?' and 'where do you live?' and the replies were such as, 'I live at the'—naming the hotel—or 'I have been here,' mentioning the time. That was sufficient, but of course during the conversation, those gathered within hearing—and there were many—could make a fairly good guess as to how he would vote.

"The men from the woods used to sleep at Tom Cyrs' 'Granville Hotel,' so they went to him, and he would give them a slip of paper saying that the man slept in Room No. 20 or 21, as the case was, and the man voted on that." And Mr. Gallagher laughed heartily.

"One man had a lease to a portion of a building on Cordova Street, and came down to vote with the lease in his hand, and voted on it. Mr. MacLean's committee persuaded him to leave the lease with them; it was drawn up on the usual form with a space for the name, and I think fifty men must have voted on that lease. After one man had voted, the next voter's name was written on a slip of paper, and pasted in the space on the lease where the name appeared, and so continued until there was a tier of slips, when they were removed and a fresh start made."

A brother of Chris Benson, cigar maker, now (1931) of Haro Street, had lease to portion of Robert Clark's building at corner of Carrall and Cordova Street.

"About 11:30 a.m., the old paddle wheeler *Yosemite* drew in from Victoria with about one hundred and twenty-five voters on board, and after she passed Brockton Point the band on her deck began to play 'Hail the Chief,' but the chief they hailed was Mr. R.H. Alexander of the Hastings Mill, who was defeated, not Mr. MacLean, the successful candidate.

"The Hastings Sawmill, of which Mr. Alexander was manager, was owned by Victoria and San Francisco people, and about midday the mill people sent up fifty or sixty Chinamen to vote. Charlie Queen, who drove the New Westminster-Gastown tallyho, afterwards alderman and subsequently since the war drowned on a C.P.R. *Princess* steamer, got up on a stage coach in front of Mr. Cyrs' hotel on Water Street and made a speech blaming the Hastings Mill people for sending the Chinamen up. The crowd grew hostile, started to drive the Chinamen back to the mill; the Orientals took to their heels, and the crowd took after them down the Hastings Road.

"The opening of the ballot box was a strange proceeding," and here Mr. Gallagher laughed again. "I'm afraid they were not familiar with election procedure, but we had lots of fun." (Partaken liberally of "flowing bowl.")

"Mr. Alexander was defeated, but not fairly. Several of those who helped to defeat him, including myself, called upon him subsequently and asked him to become a candidate for mayor. He said he could not possibly spare the time for the mayoralty, but he would serve as an alderman, and afterwards did. He was a splendid alderman, too, a far sighted, hard headed business man; he served our city well.

"It was first the strike, then the 'North American Chinaman' incident, and finally the Victoria crowd and the band playing 'Hail the Chief,' which incensed many and, together with the loose voting, all

combined to defeat Mr. Alexander. It was also the first time there was any open display of ill feeling between Victoria and Vancouver, an ill feeling which did not die down until after the defeat of the Victoria oligarchy by Mr. Semlin of Cache Creek.

“There were some wonderful men on our earlier councils—not all on our first council—and head and shoulders over our parliamentary legislators at Victoria. A few I can hurriedly recall were MacLean, Oppenheimer, Alexander, Hamilton, Lefevre, Dunn, and Templeton, besides others. They all served without remuneration. MacLean did not even take his postage.”

THE FIRST COUNCIL MEETING.

“The first council meeting was held in the sitting room of the old Court House, which faced the sea, on Water Street, where the No. 1 Fire Hall was afterwards, and now the site of a storage garage. The building stood back about ten feet from Water Street; the front door and sitting room windows faced Water Street. The interior of the sitting room was about ten feet wide and twenty long, was lined with plain cedar ‘V’ joint, and lighted at night by a large coal oil lamp. Four doors in a row took up most of the long side opposite the windows, and opened into four prison ‘cells.’

“At the appointed hour, the mayor and aldermen elect and some others, I think in all about twenty-one—more could not have found standing room—crowded into the small sitting room. The poll clerk, Mr. C. Gardner Johnson, and His Worship-elect took the head of the table. Mr. McGuigan sat on the poll clerk’s left; I stood at Mr. MacLean’s right, and was about the only person present not in some official capacity. I stood close to his Worship’s elbow.

“Mayor MacLean and I had met before we came to Vancouver. He had been purchasing agent for the government in the Northwest Rebellion of 1885; he employed ‘a thousand’ teams; I had horse feed for sale and was buying wheat at Wolseley, thirty miles east of Qu’Appelle. Mr. MacLean had been exceptionally courteous and considerate of my interests then, so that afterwards when we were both in Vancouver, and he was candidate for mayor, I naturally desired to return the compliment. He had little of worldly goods then, scarcely a week’s board, so that a good opportunity was open to me to show my appreciation of his past kindnesses. I had also had previous experience in the establishment of civic government at Wolseley, Assiniboia, N.W.T., and so was more or less familiar with the procedure. Thus it was that I was at Mr. MacLean’s right hand when the initial meeting of the City Council of Vancouver took place.”