

Early Vancouver

Volume Two

By: Major J.S. Matthews, V.D.

2011 Edition (Originally Published 1933)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected During 1932.

Supplemental to volume one collected in 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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Suntz: a Squawmish village, actually a barren rock, page 442.

Chants: a Squawmish village, actually a rock and cave, page 87.

Chalkunts: a Squawmish village, no such place, page 87.

Koalcha: should be Kwahulcha, not "Coal."

and many others.

"Hill-Tout in Rep. Brit. A.A.S. 1900" is quoted as authority, and appears to have been so used by someone who could not understand Prof. Hill-Tout's phonetics. See Prof. Hill-Tout's Report on the *Ethnological Survey of Canada*, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Bradford Meeting, 1900, pages 472-3.

ALEXANDER McLEAN, OLDEST LIVING PIONEER.

First saw Burrard Inlet, 1858. Died 26 August 1932, 14 days after he gave this story.

As narrated by this venerable gentleman of 81, in the presence of Mrs. McLean, whom he married in 1876, grandchildren and others, at 205 15th Avenue West, 12 August 1932. A jovial, happy pioneer with white hair, beard, ruddy complexion, and stocky, sturdy frame of medium height, he must have been a powerful man once; "not very well" last winter.

"It must have been 1853, perhaps 1854, that Father, who had been the first wood, water and ?" (with a laugh) "whisky too, merchant in San Francisco, decided that he had got money enough, and set sail in the three master schooner *Rob Roy*—she was a good, big boat which could carry 250 cattle—for the north. Port Townshend was already a port; Seattle was just starting. We stopped at Seattle, oh, perhaps two weeks; it was a little bit of a place; they were clearing the forest off—a company had it, and had 250 men there clearing off the forest. The town was down near the flats; they avoided the big hill on the north.

"Well, after we had stayed there a while, we set sail for Whatcom, and stayed there a year or so, built a fine house on the shore and—no, I don't know what nationality Father was, British or American, I imagine American. Anyway, we stayed there a year and then went to Point Roberts where we remained a year or more. Father built a fine hotel and a private house. One day we found seven men dead on the beach, murdered. We buried them, and then set off for Seattle to let the consul know. We slipped off in the dark, father and myself. I was not very big, but big enough to hold a rope. We rowed all the way; it took us two and one half days."

Note: refer "Indian Villages and Landmarks," comment by Chief Matthias Capilano re murders. Haxten, aged Indian woman states one "bad Squawmish man" killed "forty whitemans"; the Indians shot him themselves as an outlaw for he was killing both whites and Indians.

"Then our hotel at Point Roberts was burned down; one of my brothers was burned in the fire; the other brother, Duncan, escaped. Then Father decided on the move which brought us to British Columbia.

"He took the *Rob Roy*, and we started to collect cattle. We got some one place and some another, great fine beasts they were, and then made for the Fraser River with about 250 head on board. As we sailed up the Fraser, I never saw so many Indians in my life; both sides—shores—were lined with them.

"When we were above New Westminster, at a place they call Port Coquitlam now, it was, as I first saw it, a great big prairie, but now it is all covered with trees, some perhaps four or five feet thick. There we put the cattle ashore, but the Indians shot a couple of them, and father decided that that was enough, so we got the remainder which had been put ashore back on board. We had no knowledge that the tide went so far up the river, and had calculated without it, and it was with much difficulty that the shore cattle were got back, through the mud, on board again.

"Just then, Governor Douglas came along in the old Hudson Bay steamer *Beaver*, and he boarded us. He told Father to go to Pitt River, and thither we went. It looked a nice flat prairie country, and the cattle were turned loose.

“But we had not reckoned with the summer flood. The first year the water came up and began to flood the land, then it came up some more, and finally it began to flood the house; the cattle took to the hills. Things looked pretty gloomy; our crop of potatoes was under water. However, the water finally receded; we planted another crop of potatoes and vegetables, and they grew so well that we harvested them, and then Father and others, including myself, set out on a five ton sloop to find a better, drier spot on which to establish. I was just a boy.

“We sailed down the north arm of the Fraser River, and somewhere just near the mouth ran aground, but got off again, and sailed into English Bay. We made for the Narrows; the Indians did not see us, or they might have stopped us; we were careful about that. Up about where Lynn Creek is now, we saw a big, flat stretch of country, but we sailed on, and when we were well up the inlet, turned into another arm. Father was looking to see where it led to, but of course we ran into the end and turned back—there was nothing up there, only hills and woods—so we went back to Pitt Meadows and decided to try there again. We thought for a while to establish with Brighthouse at Sexsmith. There was nothing on Burrard Inlet then; John Morton had not arrived.

“The next year, the floods were not so bad; we stayed there for many years. We had 600 acres at first; afterwards we got another 600. Finally, I sold my share in the estate, went to Kamloops, to” (Blackpool) “thirty years ago.

“The River Indians were not so bad, but the ‘saltwater’ Indians were ...”

Mrs. McLean interjects, “I have heard Mr. McLean’s mother say that she always gave the Indians something when they asked for it; small allowances of tea, sugar, etc. I have heard Mrs. McLean” (senior) “say that she has actually seen the Indians spit in the frying pan when meat was frying in it.”

Question: Did not know any better?

Mrs. McLean: “Did not know any better? Dirty!”

Note: doubtful that the Indians did not know any better; the surmise is that it was to assure obtaining the contents of the frying pan.

Mrs. McLean (senior) had told Mrs. McLean (junior) that she used to wrap some food in a paper and give it to the Indians.

“I don’t know exactly when the Indians ceased putting their dead in the trees,” continued Mr. McLean, “of course, after they stopped the tree burials, they wrapped them in blankets. I remember one time when they were building the C.P.R., I saw a lot of men coming towards what we called afterwards Westminster Junction, now Coquitlam Junction, and wondered what the hell they were doing; they were loaded down with blankets. The beggars had been robbing the blankets off the Indian dead. The Indians used to wrap the dead bodies in about *twenty* blankets—anyway, a lot of blankets—and these white railroad fellows had been digging the Indians up—they were down in the ground about six inches only, and until they got too ‘bad,’ had peeled the blankets off the dead Indians. The Indian houses were all made of cedar, hand split cedar shakes, and a large number of families living in the same house.”

Note: Mr. McLean made some remark about the “Chinamen were here before the white man.” My note is incomplete—he spoke very fast, too fast to get it all down, and now he is dead.

Mrs. McLean said that about a month before they were married in 1876, Mr. McLean and she drove over from New Westminster to the “end of the road” at Hastings (Geo. Black’s). When they got to Black’s there was no room in the boat, and Mr. McLean said he was going to walk to Hastings Mill where there were sports being held, and which they wanted to attend, and she would have to wait until the boat came back (approximately two and half miles each way.) She asked, “How far is it?” and Mr. McLean replied, “Three miles,” and she answered, “Then I’ll walk with you.” When they got to Hastings Mill, they put up at “Alexander’s,” that is the Mill hotel, and, said Mrs. McLean, “I thought it the funniest thing, but the door was made of plain flooring.”

TWO WEEKS LATER.

City of Vancouver crest

1 September 1932

Dear Major Matthews.

I am directed by the Mayor to thank you for your kindness in representing him at the funeral of the late Mr. Alex McLean, and to assure you that he is deeply appreciative.

George Fitch

Secretary to the Mayor (Louis D. Taylor)

Mr. McLean died on 26 August at Vancouver, and was buried at New Westminster 30 August. The Mayor of New Westminster, members of the Council, Senator Taylor, and other distinguished men attended. At the time of Mr. McLean's death, he was the oldest living pioneer in Vancouver—some say in British Columbia.

Excerpt from letter, 16 May 1932, by W.H. Keary, former mayor of Westminster:

"My dear Alex, I saw the old muzzle loading gun your father brought from Australia in '56 or '57. I also saw your photograph in highland costume; I thought you must have been in the Russian war by the medals you had on."

Note: one of these two small cannon was in the basement of Mr. McLean's residence, 205 15th Avenue West, in 1932; it is stated that the other is in the Vancouver City Museum. A small gun about 24 or 30 inches long, muzzle loading, and with a bore about big enough to drop an apple into.

Letter, W.H. Keary, 21 May 1932: "After reaching here in the spring of 1858, June gave a very high water, Capt. McLean moved to Douglas Island at the mouth of the Pitt River, and they never moved from the ranch that they first located on when they came round Point Roberts from Bellingham then called Watcom on Semiamho Bay."

NOTE ADDED LATER:

T.W. Herring, who came to New Westminster, 1858, told me 15 February 1936 (now very old, feeble man) that the *Rob Roy* went to pieces on river bank at McLean's farm—just rotted. He said she was "a bit of a thing; not very big." Herring says McLean came "round the Horn."

J.S.M. 17 February 1936.

ALEXANDER MCLEAN.

5 October 1859. He purchased Section 18, Blk 6 north, Range 1 East, 158 acres @ 10/- per acre.

5 October 1859. He purchased Section 19, Blk 6 north, Range 1 East, 28 acres @ 10/- per acre.

20 December 1862. He purchased Section 17, Blk 6 north, Range 1 East, 91 acres @ 4/2 per acre.

20 December 1862. He purchased Section 8, Blk 6 north, Range 1 East, 160 acres @ 4/2 per acre.

25 April 1860. Preemption record 142, 160 acres. D.L. 231.

28 April 1884. Crown Grant, 168 acres. D.L. 231.

The People's Safety Valve

THE RACE ON THE FRASER.

Editor Province.—In the notice of the late Alex McLean's death in a recent issue, your obituarist made a slight inaccuracy which it might be of interest to correct, in the statement: "In the nineties he (deceased) rowed against Ned Hanlon, world's champion, over the Burrard Inlet course."

The aquatic records, I think, will be searched in vain for any such race on the waters of Burrard Inlet. McLean did meet Ned Hanlon in a unique race on the Fraser River at New Westminster, in September, 1891, in connection with the international regatta which was the outstanding sports feature that year of the Provincial Exhibition—celebration of the Royal Agricultural and Industrial Society of British Columbia.

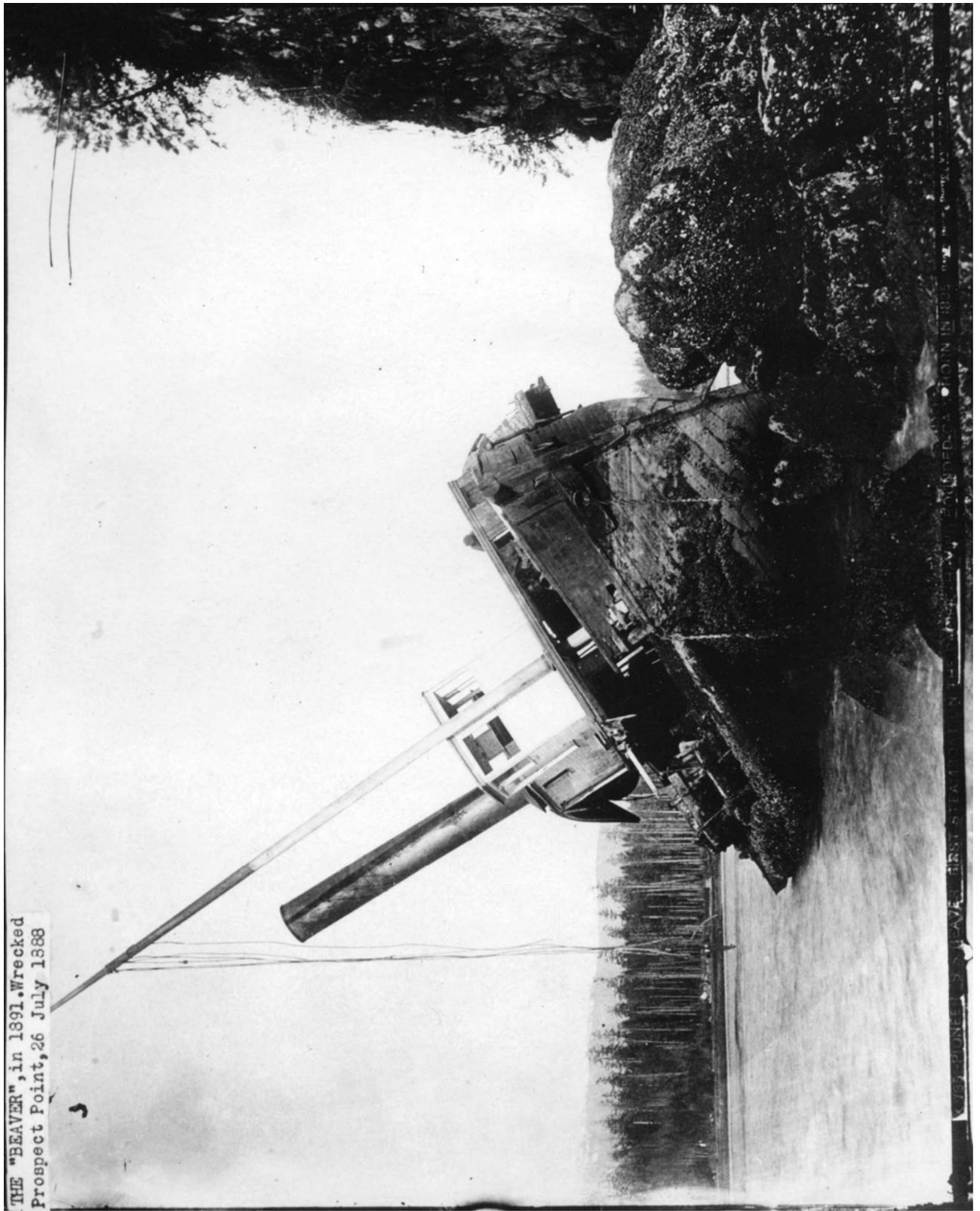
The star aquatic event on that occasion was the three-mile single-scutt race, September 24, 1891, between William O'Connor, champion of America; Ned Hanlon, ex-champion at the time; and Dutch and Stephenson, Australian champions. They finished in that order, O'Connor's time being 20 minutes 55 seconds, with Hanlon three lengths behind at the finish, Dutch eight lengths, and Stephenson twelve lengths.

McLean's race with Hanlon during the same regatta was a specially arranged race over the same course for \$400 a side—McLean rowing in an outriggered skiff (he drew the line at shells) and Hanlon (who gave McLean a start of 500 yards, figured at the time as being equivalent to 1¾ minutes) in his regular racing shell. After an exciting struggle before some fifteen thousand spectators afloat and ashore, the gallant McLean won by three lengths, in the recorded time of 19 minutes 20 seconds, Hanlon's time over the full three-mile course having been recorded at 20 minutes 28 seconds—a record at the time.

GEORGE KENNEDY.

New Westminster.

Item # EarlyVan_v2_015



THE "BEAVER", in 1891. Wrecked
Prospect Point, 26 July 1888

Item # EarlyVan_v2_016

Wreck of first steamer on
Pacific Ocean at Chaythoos.
(Prospect Point) July 1888



Item # EarlyVan_v2_017

ALEXANDER MCLEAN.

Letter, dated 3 May 1932, (dictated) by Alex. McLean to Major Matthews:

I was born in San Francisco on 3 June 1852. In April 1858 our family, father, mother, brother and myself, came to British Columbia and settled at Pitt Meadows.

My father Captain McLean had a sailing vessel named the *Rob Roy*, and while sailing up the Fraser River the Indians would not allow us to land, so we turned back, and on the way down we saw a boat called the *Beaver* which came from Victoria, B.C. Governor Douglas was on board the *Beaver*, and as the *Beaver* came alongside of our vessel, my father went aboard the *Beaver* and talked to the governor, who recommended us to go to Pitt Meadows.

We took up farming and lived there a number of years.

In the year of the high water, 1894, my wife and my children and I left for Kamloops and settled there in the farming districts.

We lived in the Kamloops district about thirty years, and then came down to Vancouver again where we have been living ever since.

My father and mother stayed on the farm (at Pitt Meadows) until their deaths, and are buried in Sapperton Cemetery. I would be very pleased to see you as I can tell you much more than I can write; also I would like to show you a cannon which was on our sailing ship, the *Rob Roy*, and which we fired [with] at the Indians at Cape Flattery.

Yours sincerely, Alexander McLean.

(Written and signed by his daughter.)

Letter, dated Kamloops, 15 May 1932, written by C.W. Johnston "for Mr. and Mrs. McLean."

Re Alexander McLean. Mr. McLean, who was only six years old at the time, accompanied his father, who settled on land at Pitt River, in the spring of 1858, but owing to the high water their place was flooded, so they boarded their five ton sailing sloop and went in search of drier quarters on which to farm.

They cruised all around where the present site of Vancouver now is, and up as far as where Port Moody is now located. They spent most of their time on the sloop, and landed a few times only, but there is no doubt in his mind or of Mrs. McLean's who has heard them speak of it often that he was actually standing on the site of the present city of Vancouver. They know of no actual witness now living, but remember Mr. Ed. W. Atkins, who worked for them in 1865. Mr. Ed. Atkins was a well known resident of Coquitlam.

In a set of books of the history of British Columbia (biographical) Mr. Donald McLean, Alexander's brother, made a mistake when he stated he came in 1859, it should have been 1858. This book gives a good account of D. McLean, and may prove interesting to you, although Alex. is not mentioned in it. Mr. McLean is in very poor health at present; if you wish to know more, refer to ex-mayor Keary of New Westminster, or Bob Johnston, oarsman of Vancouver. Mrs. McLean attended the celebration in Gastown on the 1st July 1876 in company with Mr. A. McLean. Also refer Mrs. T.E. Thomas, 205 West 15th Ave., who can supply you with photo of Mr. McLean's father and mother.

C.W. Johnston.

Writing this for Mr. and Mrs. McLean who supplied information.

Letter received 5 June 1932 from J. Johnston, grandchild.

When Mr. McLean first reached Vancouver in 1858 there were no houses belonging to white people, but there were rancheries belonging to Indians. These rancheries were constructed on posts, and were covered on roof and sides with split cedar, and were continuous like one long

shed. The Indians lived in banded groups like one large family, and for this reason their buildings were called rancheries.

There were tribes situated along Burrard Inlet, the Narrows, the north arm of the Fraser, in fact, they were scattered all over the districts joining Vancouver.

Mr. McLean's father was a sea captain sailing out of San Francisco. He became interested in farming, and being considered wealthy, was able to take his boat loaded with 300 head of cattle and enough provisions to start a large store, and set sail for Watkum [*Whatcom*]. He stayed at Whatcom a couple of years freighting with his boat, then came to Pitt Meadows, now known as Coquitlam. They were going to stop at the mouth of the Coquitlam River, and when unloading the Indians shot a steer, so they moved farther up the river. On the way they met Governor Douglas, and he directed them to Pitt Meadows, where Mr. McLean's father lived until he died. They sold the boat, and Mr. McLean still has one of the cannons off the boat at his home in Vancouver. The boat was called the *Rob Roy*.

Mr. McLean was an all round athlete, and took an active part in all sports. He was well known as a rower, and was in a good many boat races both in Canada and in the United States. He rowed against Hanlon in San Francisco, Vancouver and New Westminster, winning two. He went with Bob Johnston, T. Stevenson, and another man by the name of McLean to San Francisco, and took part in the boat races there. I believe Mr. Bob Johnston is still a resident of Vancouver. He was well known for his feat of crossing the Fraser River in a wash tub. He was very good in field sports excelling in running, jumping and especially in the pole vault. He was a very strong swimmer and I believe he was life saver at English Bay in 1920 and 1921.

He was right at home in the water, taking after his father, and was able to trace currents in a stream, and I have often heard him say he could trace a body in the water as easy as a man could follow signs in the woods. For this reason he was often called upon to reclaim bodies from the rivers, and in early days was never known to fail.

MRS. ALEXANDER McLEAN.

NOTE ADDED LATER:

Born 9 March 1859, died 19 February 1937 at Vancouver.

"I came from Madot, Ontario via Chicago and California and landed in Victoria on Christmas Day in 1872. My father had friends in New Westminster and we settled in Sapperton. I went with Mr. McLean to Hastings town site, the end of the road at that time, Dominion Day, 1876. We walked three miles to Gastown, where Mr. McLean took part in the sports. We were in Vancouver a good many times before the fire. I lived in Vancouver, and my children, namely Mrs. W.H. Johnston, Blackpool, 1877, Mr. John McLean, Sapperton, 1878, Mr. James McLean, Seattle, 1880, and Mrs. T.E. Thomas, Vancouver, 1882, all went to school there before the fire." (The dates given indicate year they were first in Vancouver.) This list of children is as follows: Elizabeth (Mrs. W.H. Johnston), Blackpool, B.C., born at Sapperton, 9 April 1877; Donald (John), Sapperton, 17 March 1878, James Alexander, Seattle, 28 March 1880, Esther (Mrs. T.E. Thomas), Vancouver, 28 February 1882, all born at Sapperton. Grandchildren—all born in B.C. Children of Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Johnston: James, Clarence, Earl, Myrtle, Elsie, Elizabeth, Alexander, Stanley, Florence, Helen, 10 in all. Children of Mr. and Mrs. John McLean: May, Ella, Calvin, Doris, Ardith, Ray, Donald, 7 in all. Children of Mr. and Mrs. T.E. Thomas: Hazel, Thomas, Dorothy, Olive, William, Lillian. Also grandchildren, see letter.

NOTE ADDED LATER:

Mrs. McLean was born 9 March 1859, died 19 February 1937 at midnight at home of daughter Mrs. T.E. Thomas, 1031 West 10th, Vancouver. Buried at New Westminster beside her husband.

Mrs. T.E. Thomas, in 1937, at time of Mrs. McLean's death, had 6 children. In all, Mrs. McLean left 4 children, 23 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren.