

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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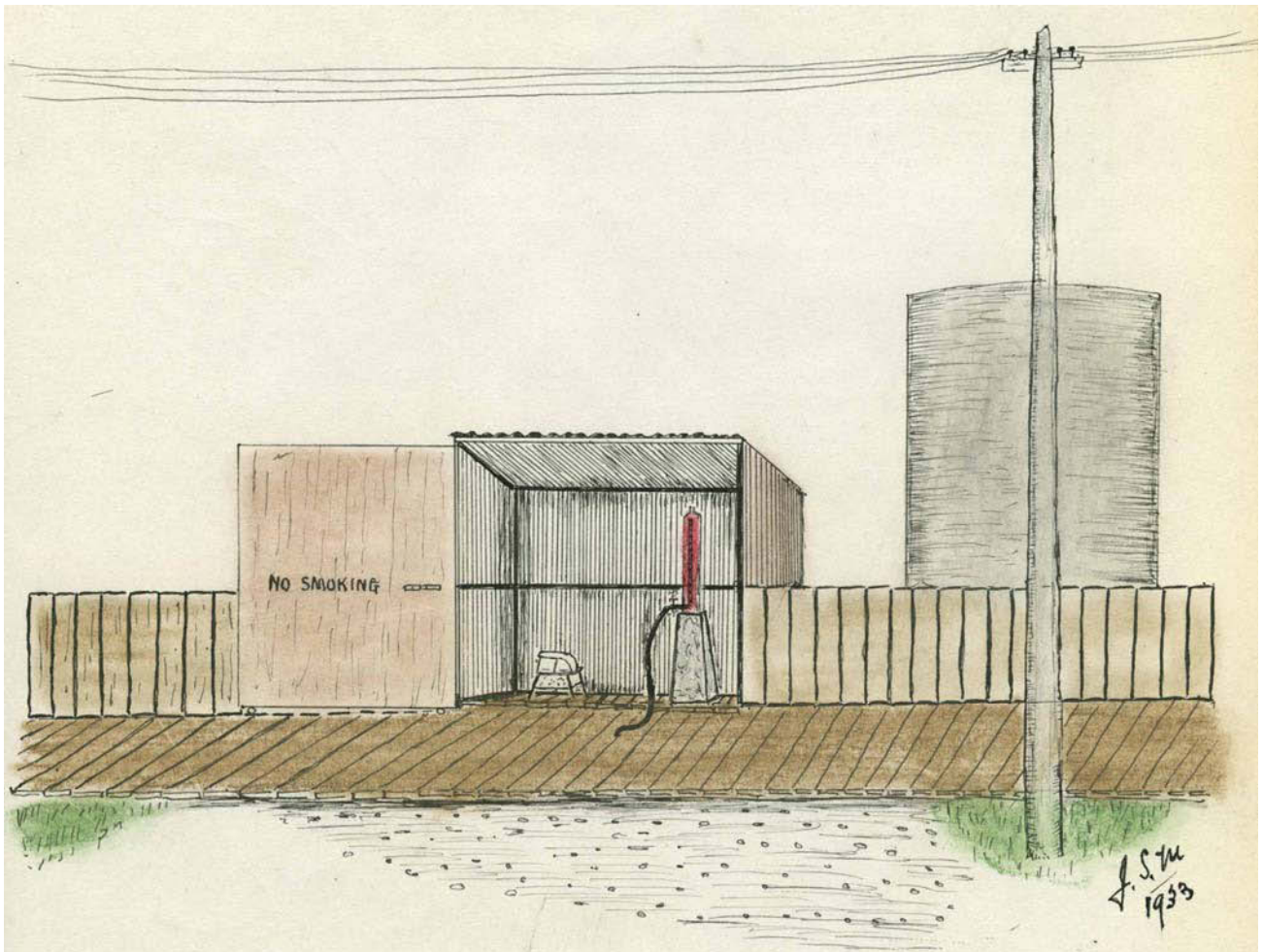
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Contact Information

City of Vancouver Archives
1150 Chestnut Street, Vancouver, B.C. V6J 3J9
604.736.8561
archives@vancouver.ca
vancouver.ca/archives





FIRST GASOLINE SERVICE STATION IN CANADA
 (perhaps in the World)

A corrugated iron shelter erected in 1908 by the Imperial Oil Company Limited at the south east corner of Cambie and Smythe streets, Vancouver, consisting of a thirteen gallon kitchen tank with gauge glass added, and then mounted on concrete pedestal, a plank floor, ten feet garden hose, and a bar room chair

After serving the few automobiles of Vancouver for about two years, it was removed, and a structure of exactly similar design, slightly larger, of concrete replaced it, and a concrete wall replaced the wooden fence. The new structure was opened Aug 8th 1916.

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THE FIRST GASOLINE SERVICE STATION. J.C. ROLLSTON.

The first gasoline station in Canada, possibly in North America, for the delivery of gasoline from a filling tank through a hose pipe to motor cars was started at the southeast corner of Cambie and Smythe Street, approximately after June 1908. The circumstances which suggested it were these. In order to give a more graphic outline in detail it is necessary to go back years.

The first intimation that a fuel for the use of internal combustion in motor cars, or as they were first called, automobiles, was received over the telephone of the Imperial Oil Company Limited, then having a monopoly of the sale of gasoline in Vancouver, by J.S. Matthews (Major), then a clerk in their office. The company was small at the time, its office staff was a manager, a travelling salesman and clerk-stenographer. The voice stated that Mr. Hendry, manager of the Hastings Sawmill, to whom the Imperial Oil Company Limited sold considerable petroleum lubricating oil, was in need of gasoline for his automobile; had they any in stock. The clerk explained that while they could get it in barrels—wood barrels; it was before the steel barrel was thought of—the barrels would have to be brought from the east; were very unsatisfactory as the gasoline escaped, more or less, through the wood. The voice asked if it was the gasoline used in automobiles; the clerk replied he had no knowledge, presumed it was; they sold it to drug stores for cleaning gloves, and to plumbers for fire pots. He also said they had benzine—a name subsequently forbidden by law to be used, as it was a misnomer—which they sold to salmon canneries for use in dissolving the solid lacquer to be applied to canned salmon to prevent the cans rusting. They could get 76 degree Baume gasoline in cases from the east; that was used once in a while for “Moore” hanging lamps, an early system of gasoline vapour lighting, the new system of lighting country hotels, halls, etc., by putting the 76 gasoline in a small tank, pumping an air pressure of about 10 or 15 lbs, which forced the gasoline vapour through a tiny pipe running like a wire to the burning lamp and its net mantle.

The outcome of the conversation was that a case of “D.S. Gasoline” (deodorized stove gasoline) used by plumbers was sent to the Hastings Mill; no more was heard of it, and further supplies were made later.

A week or so later the same voice asked the same clerk if they had any lubricating oil for automobiles. This was a more difficult problem for the clerk, who had never seen a motor car, but had read of them, and knew that if they burned gasoline there must be considerable heat somewhere. He sparred for time to see what they had; actually, he knew nothing of the subject. He decided that he would have to “take a chance,” so after considering all the physical conditions he judged might exist where gasoline was burned, etc., etc., he sent down a four gallon can of “Atlantic Red,” in a blank can. *It worked.* In fact, it worked so well that, under another name, millions upon millions of the same oil has since been marketed under fancy names and at fancy prices.

The Atlantic Red Engine oil was the same oil that the Hastings Sawmill had been buying in large quantities in barrels for use on their planing and other fast running machines. They paid 30 to 32 cents per imperial gallon in barrels, wood barrels.

THE FIRST GARAGE.

It was soon afterwards that the first garage or repair shop appeared, started by a Mr. Annand of a bicycle repair shop about fifty feet east of the southeast corner of Hastings and Columbia Avenue; later the West End Garage started at 924 Granville. Both institutions were primitive; Mr. Annand’s bicycle business was gradually supplanted by the increasing automobile business; the West End Garage had started as a repair garage for cars. The “Vancouver Garage” and the “West End Garage” soon became rivals; they also began introducing special oils for motor cars, and this fact precipitated trouble for the Imperial Oil Company Limited, and led to the introduction of the filling station. How this came about is as follows.

The clerk Matthews had been promoted to half-time city salesman, and on a visit to the Annand Garage one day was given a “terrible dressing down” by Mr. Annand because his employers were selling lubricating oil to automobile owners, to wit, the manager of the Hastings Sawmill. It appears that Mr. Hendry’s car had needed some attention, had been taken to Mr. Annand’s bicycle shop, Mr. Annand had put some lubricating oil in it, and charged \$1.50 per gallon. Mr. Hendry’s office man had “kicked” at the