

Early Vancouver

Volume Seven

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2011 Edition (Originally Published 1956)

Narrative of Pioneers of Vancouver, BC Collected between 1931-1956.

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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Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 7 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

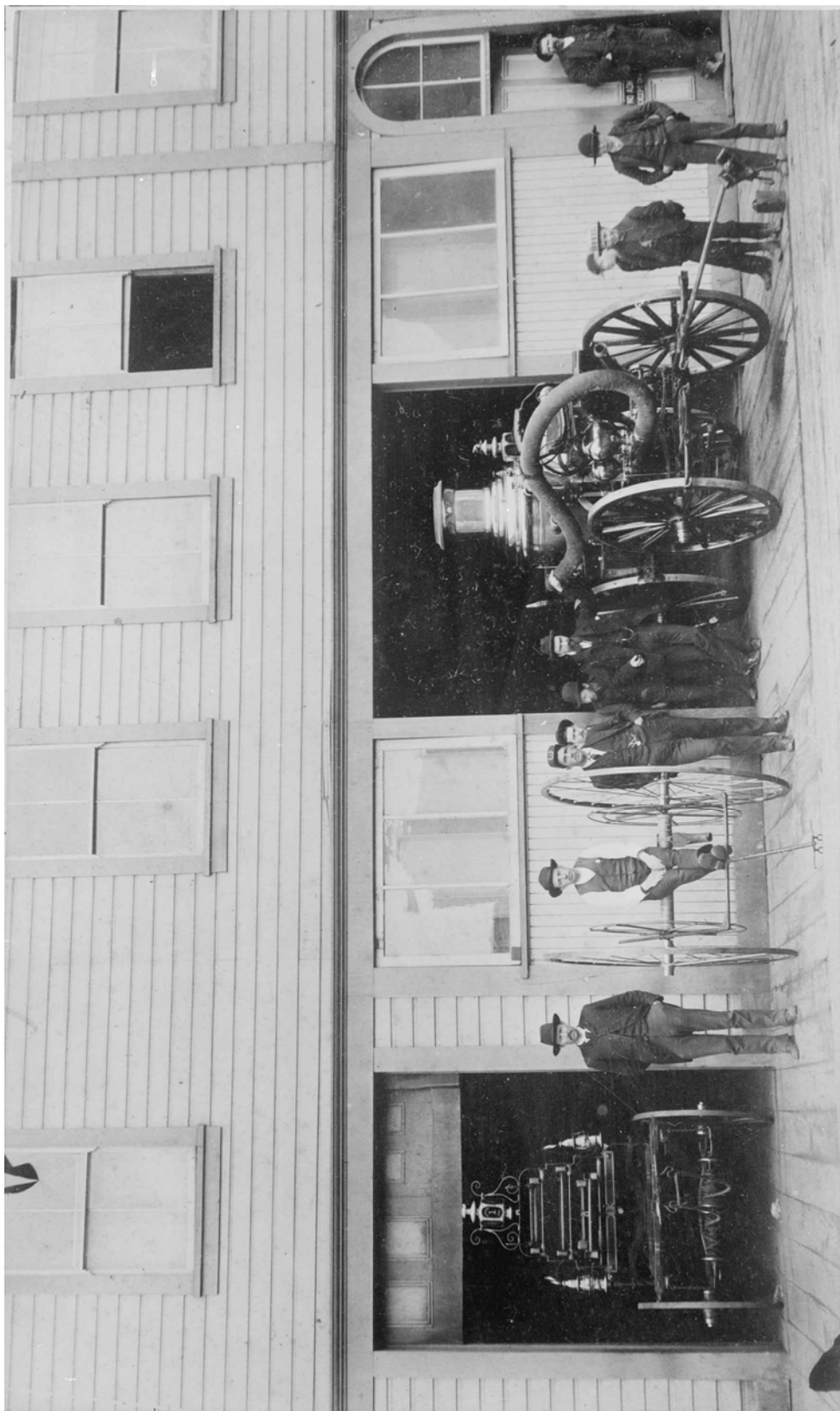
Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 7. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

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Vancouver Fire Brigade, 1895. No. 1 Fire Hall, south side Water St. about 66 feet from Cortall St. On the site of the Granville Townsite "Customs House" and "Court House". The steam power fire engine, known as the "M. A. Maclean" in honor of the first Mayor of Vancouver. It reached Vancouver soon after the Fire of 13 June 1886, and all firemen gathered around it, lifted it up in the air, while Mrs. J. H. Carlisle, wife of the Fire Chief, broke a bottle of wine over it, and named it. At the first test, with sea water on the Cambie street wharf, a stream from the nozzle struck his Worship and Alderman Thomas Dunn, chairman of the Fire Committee. Quite accidental, of course; all firemen were volunteers. Hugh E. Campbell, living in Vancouver 1956, is seated on the hose reel with which Vancouver volunteer firemen won the championship of the Pacific coast hose reel speed tests at Tacoma in 1889. Fire Chief Carlisle standing by hose reel; Wm. Mc Girt (whiskers), by engine (see companion photo) City Archives d5m.

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[photo annotation:]

Vancouver Fire Brigade, 1895. No. 1 Fire Hall, south side Water St, about 66 feet from Carrall St. On the site of the Granville Townsite "Customs House" and "Court House." The steam power fire engine, known as the "M.A. MacLean," in honor of the first Mayor of Vancouver. It reached Vancouver soon after the Fire of 13 June 1886, and all firemen gathered around it, lifted it up in the air, while Mrs. J.H. Carlisle, wife of the Fire Chief, broke a bottle of wine over it, and named it. At the first test, with sea water on the Cambie street wharf, a stream from the nozzle struck His Worship and Alderman Thomas Dunn, chairman of the Fire Committee. Quite accidental, of course; all firemen were volunteers. Hugh E. Campbell, living in Vancouver, 1956, is seated on the hose reel with which Vancouver volunteer firemen won the championship of the Pacific coast hose reel speed tests at Tacoma in 1889. Fire Chief Carlisle is standing by hose reel; Wm McGirr (whiskers), by engine (see companion photo) City Archives. J.S.M.

GABRIEL ("GABY") THOMAS, SON OF GABRIEL THOMAS, PIONEERS, 1886.

On 25 August 1950, "Gaby" Thomas, the son, known as "Gaby" to distinguish him from his father, Gabriel Thomas, called at the City Archives and told me he was living "at the same old place," 114 North Springer Street, Burnaby. He gave me two or three old photos—one of himself, as a young man of 18, in the uniform of the Vancouver Volunteer Fire Brigade, 1889; one of the Oriental Hotel, Water Street, in which his father was part proprietor, and one of the Alert Hose Reel Team, taken September 1889, of the Vancouver Volunteer Fire Brigade, which made so splendid a name for itself at the International Fire Tournament, Tacoma, 16 to 19 inclusive, September 1889. He also gave me a gold medallion, presented to the team by the people of Vancouver, on the back of which is engraved, "TACOMA. G. THOMAS. 1889."

25 August 1950.

GABRIEL THOMAS. "GABY" THOMAS. ALERT HOSE REEL TEAM. VANCOUVER VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADE. TACOMA, WASHINGTON.

"Gaby" Thomas: "I reached Victoria on the *Queen of the Pacific*, and she stayed there. We came on to Vancouver on the *Yosemite*, and got here 21st September 1886. I was sixteen years old. Mother and my sister, Mrs. Crean—her name was Elizabeth—she married John Crean afterwards, and is still living, down in California at Hollywood. Father came here just after the 'Fire,' 13th June 1886. He came before the other three of us."

ISAAC JOHNS. KURTZ AND CO., CIGARS. CHRIS BEHNSEN.

"Father and I went down Abbott Street to get our furniture cleared through the Customs. Old 'Ike' Johns was collector. My father saw a sign next door to where we went—it read 'BOY WANTED.' I got the job and worked thirty years for Kurtz and Co., cigar makers on Abbott Street. They moved to Cordova Street afterwards. Chris Behnsen was manager.

"I was married to Miss Emma Wise—Holy Rosary Church. I forget the priest—something like Sayward. It was not Father Fay. We have five children living. Mrs. Wise died about thirty years ago. Two sons and two daughters all living in Vancouver. William is quite an artist. He was with the Capital Theatre for about twenty-five years. Norval!! I don't know where he is. The eldest girl is an invalid now. She is Mrs. Buss; she had five boys. The second girl is Alma—Alma Gerrard now. She is a widow; two children—John Gerrard, the singer, and Doreen, she married. The third daughter is married. She has two boys. Her name is Mrs. Gallie.

"So that, all told, I have eleven grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren."

ORIENTAL HOTEL.

"About these photographs. This is the Oriental Hotel on Water Street; next door west, south side, to the old Regina Hotel which escaped the 'fire,' on the southwest corner of Cambie and Water Street. John Crean and Gabriel Thomas (that's my father), proprietors. Father is on the balcony with his hand resting on the railing knob. John Crean is in front of the halyards of the flag pole. I don't know who the man in the middle is."

HOTEL BUSSES. HORSE-DRAWN BUSSES. JAMES EDWARDS.

“Jimmie’ Edwards drove the bus—horse-drawn bus. Met every C.P.R. train and boat, and also Evans, Coleman Evans to meet the *Joan* coming from Nanaimo. That was all the trains and boats there were to meet in those days. The bus used to be crowded sometimes and sometimes had to return for those they could not pick up the first trip.

“The first Oriental was the tall building in the middle with gable end roof; then it was extended to the west, but, on the east side, what appears to be an extension is actually only a store front—a blank wall for show. The lower part is the saloon, what we call beer parlour now.”

VANCOUVER VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADE, 1889. ALERT HOSE REEL TEAM.

“This is the Alert Hose Reel Team, Vancouver, Volunteer Fire Brigade, which went to Tacoma and ‘licked’ the whole world in the speed test. There were four races. We won two firsts and two seconds. The manager of the team was Mr. McKenzie. He is the man with all the whiskers. The captain was Tom Lillie, on the extreme right holding the horn. Jim Moran, at the other end, was ‘swamper’” (man of all jobs.) “The Fire Hall is No. 1 Fire Hall, built in 1886 on Water Street, south side, just west of Carrall. I was the youngest member of the team. There are two only of us left now—Hugh E. Campbell and myself. We all got gold medals when we came back.”

“GABY” THOMAS. THOMAS LILLIE. HUGH E. CAMPBELL. ALERT HOSE REEL TEAM UNIFORM.

“This last photo is of myself, one of the two survivors of the lots. Hugh Campbell is the other. I was eighteen then.

“The cap had a peak, and was blue. The shirt was dark blue—the braiding was white. It was Billy McGirr’s ‘outfit’ which had red shirts. That was the Hook and Ladder Team, but we were Hose Reel, and our shirts were blue. You can see my watch chain hanging in my belt. A nosegay is pinned to my breast. I don’t know what the buttons were.”

ALERT HOSE REEL TEAM AT TACOMA, SEPTEMBER 1889. HOSE REEL.

“The hose reel had two hundred and fifty feet of two and one half inch hose—cotton covered. There were four races at Tacoma. They were:

1. Wet test: Run 200 yards, lay 250 feet hose and fill with water. Take the time from when the water shoots from the nozzle.
2. Dry test: Same thing without water.
3. Speed test: Run two hundred and fifty yards without laying hose. That’s what we broke the world’s record on.
4. Championship race: Run two hundred and fifty yards, lay three hundred feet of hose and draw water. Cut off water. Take joint next to the nozzle back to the hydrant and fill with water. Let me explain. In two hundred and fifty feet of hose there are six joints because the hose is in fifty foot lengths. The idea is to uncouple the length near the nozzle, take it back to the hydrant, and put the length from the nozzle in its place. Then take the hydrant length and put it where the nozzle length came from. Then you have your three hundred feet of hose all complete again, but one length has been altered, back to front and front to back.

GOLD MEDALLION.

“This gold medallion with ‘TACOMA, G. THOMAS, 1889’ was given to us publicly when we got back.”

J.S.M.