

**Early Vancouver**

**Volume Seven**

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

**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 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the City's founding. The project was made possible by funding from the Vancouver Historical Society.

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Matthews had not had time to look up old newspapers, so Mr. Buchan volunteered to do it for him. Major Matthews adds a footnote:

Small, upstairs hall, Pender Hall, south west corner Howe and Pender streets. Capt. Hart-McHarg and Lieut. James Sclater, and a Mr. Milne sang. I was present.

J.S. Matthews.

**[LETTER FROM P.H. BUCHAN.]**

5762 Cypress St.  
Vancouver, Canada

14 July 1947

Dear Major Matthews,

You have done a fine job, and Mr. Allen and I can well be proud to have had a hand in it.

The "O Canada" booklet shows good taste throughout. Justice has been done in a worthy cause, well deserved honor has been paid to the memory of my excellent father and history has been written in indelible ink. It has been by the hand of Providence that we, under your able guidance, have been the instruments whereby this work has been well and truly performed.

I personally am very happy and contented, the more so because of your thoughtfulness in presenting me with the first printed copy, and for your very kind remarks written therein.

Thank you!

Sincerely yours

P.M. [H.] Buchan

**"O CANADA."**

31<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1948.

Dear Mr. Henstridge:

Through the courtesy of Mr. C.A. Sutherland, Mayor's Secretary, I am privileged to read your article on "CANADA'S NATIONAL FLAG" in "The Municipal Review of Canada," July-Aug. 1948, page 12.

After reading it, it suggests itself to me that I should send you a pamphlet, prepared on this desk, on our national hymn, "O Canada," the words of the "Buchan version" having been written in Vancouver. (I had the pleasure of being present at the first public singing.) The pamphlet deals with facts, with facts alone—expresses no opinion. It is contrary to archival ethics to express opinions. Our duty is to furnish correct, full and all facts. You can rely, absolutely, upon the accuracy of the facts in this pamphlet. They are from original documents here.

Your article commences by saying that you have been interested in heraldry since 1921; it ends by saying that "by getting a flag that is acceptable to the majority of Canadians . . . . presenting it to Ottawa for acceptance."

I have extended you the courtesy of listening attentively to your written argument; it is not, I presume, too much to ask you to listen to mine. My representation is that it was an admission that you are a novice. Men spend their lives on heraldry, and at the end are not so sure they understand it fully. About 1921 I published "HONOURS OF THE EMPIRE AND WHAT THEY MEAN," but, gracious, what I don't know about heraldry would fill a library. In this great city of Vancouver, 400,000 people or more, I know of no qualified herald, but there are "millions" who think they are.

But, the gist of your whole article is condensed into that final sentence commencing “by getting” and “to the majority.” What about the minority? And, answering my own question I send you the pamphlet “O Canada.” In Vancouver our people will not sing the Weir version—they think it is gibberish—and one officer, rank of General, commanding Canadian troops in France in the late war, said to me, “Imagine asking soldiers to sing a thing like that?” But, in eastern Canada, and I think on the prairies, they won’t or don’t sing the Buchan version. So, there you are, and this being a free country we are not allowed to take a buggy whip and make them. So one sings “At Britain’s side,” and the other “stands on guard.” I think it is rather an advantage to have two versions because in Canada we have a choice of what we sing, whereas in the British Isles they must sing “God Save” whether they like it or not. They haven’t an alternative.

Now, if you cannot get the people of Canada to agree upon a national hymn, how do you expect them ever to agree upon a national flag? We are of BRITISH Columbia and proud of it. Our old capital was New Westminster, our present one is Victoria, after Victoria, the Good. Vancouver faces English Bay. It backs on a good Scottish name, Fraser. Mt. Crown looks down on Vancouver from the mountains across the harbour. Our streets are “Imperial,” “King Edward Ave.” Our parks are “Queen Elizabeth,” and our schools are “King George High” and “Queen Mary.” All our history is interwoven with the Union Jack. It was the first flag to fly over our local waters—the flag our Larsen flew when he took our ship “St. Roch” through the ice of the North West Passage, the first ship ever to sail from Vancouver to Halifax around the north of the American continent as, in 1513, Magellan was the first to sail around the south of it. Every school in British Columbia flies the Union Jack. It was the flag of our grandfathers, of our fathers, and the only flag we, this generation, have ever known. It is the most respected flag on earth.

A flag is a symbol designed to a certain pattern, and the colors usually include red, white and blue. If that pattern comprises bits of colored cloth sewn together into stars and stripes it makes the American eagle scream. If it is sewn to another pattern—the same bits of colored cloth—into the form of a Union Jack it makes the Scottish, English, Welsh glow with pride. In both cases the symbol is nought more than bits of colored rag, but the pattern of the emblem reminds us of our tradition, and a national spirit is nothing more than tradition. In so far as the British Empire is now concerned, tradition is about all there is left of it.

What I cannot understand is how it is expected that Canadians can suddenly forget all the tradition, folklore, and all that we have held dear since we were children and transfer it to some design, no matter how pretty, we have never seen, which means nothing. A man cannot be made to love a woman by law. So, if Ottawa says “you must,” and we say “we won’t” i.e., majority and minority, where does the “national” come in? We are back to “O Canada,” and the devil himself cannot make our people sing the Weir(d) version, nor can the Union Jack be obliterated. To my knowledge, for sixty years the flag question has been argued, and we are no further ahead than we were in 1888.

With best wishes

Most sincerely,

J.S. Matthews

CITY ARCHIVIST

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per courtesy Municipal Review of Canada.