

## **Early Vancouver**

### **Volume One**

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

**2011 Edition (Originally Published 1932)**

*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 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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J.S. Matthews

GOD SAVE THE KING.

### **TESTING THE FIRST FIRE ENGINE.**

Vancouver News, August 2<sup>nd</sup> 1886

Made on the evening of August 1<sup>st</sup>.

Fire brigade hauled it to Cambie Street wharf where there was no boardwalk. Planks were laid down. Water gotten from the Inlet—no tanks then.

### **3 JULY 1931 - EARLY FIRES. FIRE ENGINES AND “M.A. MACLEAN.” THE “COFFEE BRIGADE.” WATER.**

“I remember the water tank at the corner of Dunsmuir and Granville, but I do not remember the one on Carrall Street,” related Mr. Geo. L. Schetky, at one time president, about 1887 or 1890 (see Vancouver directory) of the Vancouver Fire Brigade. “There was a tank at the junction of Water and Cordova, opposite Kelly, Douglas and Company’s present warehouse, and a few yards from Spencers Limited. I am glad you have found a photo of the first fire engine, the “M.A. MacLean.”

“That reminds me of a fire which occurred at the corner of Howe and Hastings streets, where Macaulay, Nicolls and Maitland are now—the real estate people. We got the water at the tank at the junction of Water and Cordova streets; we had two thousand feet of hose, and we laid it up Richards and Hastings streets.”

Query: What sort of fire was it?

“Bush fire, July 1887. It was where Father Clinton lost his hat. All the ground up there at that time was just like any other cleared ground, dried decayed wood, dried leaves, and sticks; you would put a fire out, and in ten minutes turn around and find it all aglow again; the smoke was pretty thick; you could not see. The engine was down at the tank on Cordova Street. The ground was all afire, and burning like a punk stick; you could not stand it long, so when they relieved me I took a walk back along the hose to see how it was standing it, and if there were any leaks at the joints. I went down to the engine. ‘Daddy’ Cameron was there, and I said to him, ‘How’s things?’ He replied, ‘All right, but you had better not stay here.’ I said, ‘Why?’ He replied, ‘Look at the gauge.’ I looked at the steam gauge; it was 160 pounds, and the water gauge showed 250 pounds on the hose—pumping uphill. However, she stood it, and I went back.

“Just as I reached there, out of the smoke came a man—I never found out who he was. He handed me a bill, a two dollar bill, and said, ‘Buy the boys a drink.’ Somewhere about three in the morning we had the fire out, and as we passed the Dougall House, I said, ‘Come on here, boys, let’s have a drink of beer.’

“We went in, and I laid the two dollar bill on the counter, but the barkeeper said, ‘No use here,’ and added, ‘Anytime you fellows want a drink you don’t need that,’ and he pushed it back.

“When we got back to the fire hall we found the women had all turned out, and had hot coffee and sandwiches for us. That was the start of the ‘Coffee Brigade.’ After that the women always turned out and had coffee and sandwiches for us when we got back.”

### **FATHER CLINTON.**

“Father Clinton, who was helping us, lost his hat in the fire. He never found it. But about twenty years after, about, I think it was at the Strathcona Hotel, we presented Father Clinton with a new hat. Oh, yes, it was a volunteer fire brigade.

"One day, I don't just recall when, we were having a calathumpian parade or something, and all the parsons in the city took part. They were to ride in carriages, and Father Clinton got in with them. We went after him; he was seated in a buggy. We shouted, 'Hey, aren't you coming to pull the hose reel?' He got down out of the buggy, deserted the parsons' brigade, and took his proper place at the hose reel."

(Above was read to Mr. J.A. Mateer, who confirms it as correct.)

**NOTE ADDED LATER:**

Mrs. S.H. Ramage, 27 September 1937: "Mr. Schetky is perfectly correct; that was the start of the "Coffee Brigade." I was only in my teens then, but when they got back from the fire, we were there awaiting them. Oh, we had good times in those good old days."

J.S.M.

### **3 JULY 1931 - THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886. FATHER CLINTON.**

"When the big fire broke out" (13 June 1886), "I was over at the Indian Mission," continued Mr. Schetky, "across the Inlet in Arthur Sullivan's sailboat; just for a sail; we left about half past one, and it took us about half an hour to go over to the Mission—a good breeze. We had just got there, and signaled for an Indian to bring a canoe, and Sullivan had just got ashore, when someone came running along the shore, and said the city was on fire; we started right back.

"The fire looked as though it was Joe Manion's place, and Sullivan had his mother stopping there; we raced back, and although she was a half decked sailboat, she was shipping water over the bow. Presently Sullivan said there was nothing for it, but we had to take in sail, so I took in the jib, and with some help, managed to put two reefs in the main sail, and even then I have heard it said that it took us just twenty minutes from the Mission to Hastings Mill.

"We tried to make for Carrall Street, but the wind was so strong it blew us down to the Hastings Mill, and we landed on the slab pile"—at this point, Mr. Schetky pointed to the smoke coming from the slab pile on the point, where for many years the Hastings Mill burned their slabs—see photo, "Before the Fire"—"and went through the Hastings Mill yard. After we got through, the first thing we saw was Father Clinton on top of Mr. Alexander's house throwing water on blankets which had been laid on the roof to catch the sparks. The fire had run right up to Mr. Alexander's house. There were four little cottages just close to Mr. Alexander's house, with white roofs. They do not seem to show in this photo. It looks as though this scratching has scratched out Mr. Alexander's house. And then, whether it was the big stump, or a change of wind, I do not know, but the fire went off in a southerly direction for a space, and then came back. It just curved around Mr. Alexander's house, burned up three out of the four cottages, and left Mr. Alexander's house, and one of the cottages—the one Joe Coldwell" (or Caldwell) "lived in—untouched. Mr. Alexander's house was just before you came to the mill property.

"Harry Hemlow was keeping the Sunnyside Hotel at the time of the fire.

"It was just after that parade that we had a fire up here, just about fifty yards or so from this office," continued Mr. Schetky, whose office is in the Royal Trust Building, Pender Street West, when I showed him a photograph of soldiers in procession on Cordova Street, Dominion Day, 1887. "We had quite a scare for a while. They were clearing land at the corner of Howe and Pender streets, and the fire got away from them; the clearing was all dry debris; it burned some houses."

Mr. Schetky was shown the photograph of the arrival of the "First train in Vancouver."

"This little tower is the tower of No. 1 Fire Hall after the fire. The building stood on Water Street, south side, about fifty feet west of Carrall Street, next to the Alhambra Hotel."

(Note: the tower can be seen about one and three quarter inches to the left of the right edge of the photograph, and in line with the top of a tall thin black stump.)