

Early Vancouver

Volume One

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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 125th 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 2nd 1886

Made on the evening of August 1st.

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.