

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.

Copyright Statement

© 2011 City of Vancouver. Any or all of *Early Vancouver* may be used without restriction as to the nature or purpose of the use, even if that use is for commercial purposes. You may copy, distribute, adapt and transmit the work. It is required that a link or attribution be made to the City of Vancouver.

Reproductions

High resolution versions of any graphic items in *Early Vancouver* are available. A fee may apply.

Citing Information

When referencing the 2011 edition of *Early Vancouver*, please cite the page number that appears at the bottom of the page in the PDF version only, not the page number indicated by your PDF reader. Here are samples of how to cite this source:

Footnote or Endnote Reference:

Major James Skitt Matthews, *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2 (Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011), 33.

Bibliographic Entry:

Matthews, Major James Skitt. *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2. Vancouver: City of Vancouver, 2011.

Contact Information

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



THE GREAT FIRE.

Pioneers have never ceased to argue as to where the Great Fire started, a question which 47 years still leaves unsettled. [In] *Early Vancouver*, Matthews, Mr. Gallagher states, "a strong rising southwest wind."

Theodore Bryant, Ladysmith, 13 April 1932, writes, "I was at Sumas on that memorable day. I was on my way home from church which was held in the old red schoolhouse, when about four o'clock a big cloud of dark smoke came over Sumas Mountain." Mrs. Ruth Morton, second wife of John Morton, said, 7 May 1932, "We were living at Mission then, we saw the smoke in the sky." Rev. C.M. Tate, Indian missionary at Chilliwack, relates that burned cinders dropped in Chilliwack. The three statements give a good idea of the direction of the wind, and its force.

EARLY VANCOUVER.

Geo. L. Allen, 29 March 1932. "The best way to describe Vancouver as I first saw it on 25 May 1886 is to describe it as a whole lot of fallen trees, cut down, tumbled over one another; there were no streets. Save for a few buildings around Water and Carrall Street—Water Street was of course planked between Carrall and Abbott streets, bridged as it were over the hollow of the shore; there was nothing else. There were a lot of shacks of rough lumber around.

"Vancouver had been incorporated as a city about three weeks when I arrived, but was still a rather wild looking place. At that time Hastings and Granville streets were merely hewn out of the standing timber; the cleared timber from these streets was heaped up in large piles for future burning. The Great Fire started originally from one of these burning log heaps about where David Spencer's store stands." (Note: others say a little to the east, 100 yards or so.)

THE GREAT FIRE OF 1886. THE FIRST FIRE CHIEF OF VANCOUVER.

"I came here from Emerson, Manitoba," continued Mr. Allan, now resident at 1465 West 15th Avenue, and one of the earliest pioneer business men of Vancouver. "I was born in Perth, Ontario, 28 May 1857, so that I am now 74. I came via Emerson, Manitoba to Minneapolis, from there by train to Tacoma, where I boarded a small steamer for Victoria. I spent the Queen's Birthday in Victoria, and then came on to Gastown by an early sidewheel steamer piloted by Capt. John Irving, still living. I went to work for Sam Pedgriff and his wife, who had a general store—sold everything—on Powell Street between Carrall and Alexander streets; that was how it was that when the Great Fire came three weeks later I got Mrs. Pedgriff out of danger.

"Mrs. Pedgriff was in her bath when the alarm of fire came that Sunday afternoon. I ran and knocked on the bathroom door with all my might, and told her she would have to get out, and get out quickly. Perhaps I should be more truthful if I said that Mrs. Pedgriff was in her little cabin at the back of the store, having her bath. She answered back that she was 'in her bath.' I told her it did not matter what she was in, she would have to get out, and quickly too, or she would be burned up. Then, and not until then, did she come out, and off she ran up Powell Street to get the children, who had gone to the Presbyterian Sunday school. That was the last I saw of Sam Pedgriff, the first fire chief of the city of Vancouver.

"I was staying at the Burrard Hotel," (northeast corner, Hastings and Columbia) "at the time of the Fire. David Evans" (well-known tailor) "and I were in our room together when the alarm first came. We packed our clothes, etc., as quickly as possible. I helped Dave carry his trunk out and then went back for mine. Just then a wagon came driving by, and I asked the driver if he could take a trunk; he said, 'yes, but be --- quick about it,' but before I could put my trunk on his wagon he was gone, and my trunk burned in the middle of the street. All I had left on my feet was a pair of slippers."

THE FALSE CREEK TRAIL AND BRIDGE.

"To save myself I went off down the trail which then ran diagonally across Hastings Street, and down to the edge of False Creek near the gas works now, and then ran off through the stumps to the False Creek bridge, but I had not gone far when I caught up with a woman with four children flying for their lives. After that, of course, I could not run for I had two babies in my arms; she took the other two. I told her I was heading for False Creek and that she would find me there, but believe it or not, I was glad from time to

time to put my nose down in the dust of the trail for fresh air; rather what I thought was fresh air; anyway, it was fresher than what I was getting."

THE TOLL OF DEAD.

"After I came back up again from False Creek I went over to where the Burrard Hotel had stood on the northeast corner of Hastings and Columbia streets. Across from the Burrard Hotel, on the southeast corner, was a sort of furniture factory; a high building for those days, and I presume it had given me some sort of shelter, a breath of fresh air to those in the path of the blast, but what I actually saw on my return was the bodies of six or seven persons, beside the building, in a sitting posture—I could see their watch chains dangling—but quite dead. They looked like persons, sitting motionless, leaning over. I believe they were afterwards identified by their watch chains. Oh, yes, there were six or seven of them; I could not stand that sight; it was too terrible.

"Mrs. Strathie—she still survives—now Mrs. Emily Eldon, and active in the Pioneers Association, was living on Water Street, opposite what was afterwards Fred Allen's feed store." (The Old Methodist Hall.) "She was 'a brick of a woman.' She lives at 1150 Alberni Street now.

"That night Dave Evans and I slept together down by the Bridge Hotel; we divided between us a sack of oats for a pillow."

THE FIRST BOOT AND SHOE STORE IN VANCOUVER.

"As I have said, the Pedgriffs had a store, but they knew very little about storekeeping; Mrs. Pedgriff was supposed to be boss of the store; I had had experience in a shoe store back east. So after the fire—the Pedgriffs had gone—I thought I would start my own. First I bought a lot on Hastings Street, the lot where the C.P.R. Telegraph now stands on the south side of Hastings between Richards and Homer, but I never built on it; two or three years later I sold it for \$7,000 cash; that was just a speculation. But one day, when I was poking around Cordova Street, Robert Grant came along and I asked him if it was a store he was putting up. He replied, 'yes, it was stores.' Ed Cook, still living, was the contractor and architect, and the outcome of it was I soon purchased it from Robert Grant, paying down as a deposit \$500, put in a stock of boots and shoes, the first real boot and shoe store in Vancouver; it was just around the corner from Carrall Street, on the north side of Cordova Street. You can see the sign over the sidewalk in that old photograph of Vancouver, Dominion Day, 1890, and the first street car coming down Cordova Street; the Dunn-Miller Block was across the street."

CITY HALL. MAYOR'S OFFICE. MAYOR MACLEAN. CHURCH SERVICES AFTER FIRE.

"The story of the church service held in my store the Sunday after the Great Fire, and while it was in process of erection—it may not have been the Sunday afterwards as Mr. Gallagher states—is quite correct; I was not there, but I heard about it. Mayor MacLean, who attended the service, afterwards had his office, at least his first office after the fire, and one which he used as the 'Mayor's Office,' in my building. There was an outside entrance to the upstairs, and both Mayor MacLean and John A. Evans, life insurance agent whose office is now across the street on Hastings Street from the Strand Hotel, were my tenants. Where Mayor MacLean's office was before the fire I do not recollect; perhaps Sunnyside Hotel, for his wife had not arrived at the time of the fire, and the city had been incorporated, or organized but a very few days."

"WRECK" OF *CUTCH* ON WATER STREET.

"The pioneer gulf steamer *Cutch*, belonging to the Union Steamship Co., did attempt to reach Water Street," Mr. Allan smiled. "That's quite true. It was very foggy and she was trying to make the Union Steamship Dock at the foot of Carrall Street. She must have been coming at a pretty good clip—perhaps half speed—I don't know exactly, but she crashed her nose through the C.P.R. trestle some yards west of the Sunnyside Hotel. She might have hit the old Hotel itself. The C.P.R. trestle was pretty close up to the Sunnyside Hotel; the waves, at high tide, used to dash against the lower boards of the Sunnyside. I would not say that the old *Cutch* actually pushed her nose into Water Street, but it was not very far from it. She lay there part of the day—until the next tide—and then got off. I don't recall seeing Capt. Johnston after that." (See Capt. Nye.)

THE OLD CITY WHARF.

"What I do recall about the old City Wharf is, after the fire, seeing the City Council holding their meetings in an open tent close beside the wharf at the foot of Carrall Street. There is a well-known photograph of the scene, the city wharf beside the tent, Gibson, of Gibson's Landing, on the wharf; no wharf to boast of, but a place to tie up to. It was a case of catch the tide, get in, and get out again before the tide went out. The old *Senator* took the mail once a day from there to Moodyville."

THE FIRST BRICKS.

"No, I do not recall a schooner load of bricks upsetting the first Union Steamship Co. wharf; perhaps they did," (see George Cary) "but what I do know is that the first bricks used in Vancouver came from Bowen Island where they were made for Joe Mannion of the Granville Hotel long before I came in 1886. They were not used for buildings, they were experimenting with them, perhaps they used some for chimneys. I could show you the exact place where they were made; it was about two hundred feet from where the Union Steamship dock at Snug Cove, Bowen Island is, on the north side of the cove; Andy Linton knows all about them."

THE CAMBIE STREET GROUNDS—OUR FIRST PLAYGROUND. AL LARWELL.

"Cambie Street grounds was undoubtedly our first playground, or park, as they call them now; certainly before Stanley Park; there was no Stanley Park then. What you have said about Al Larwell is perfectly true, but you have not said half enough. He was the first 'caretaker' at Cambie Street grounds; I don't think he was a paid official; sure he was not, but he was the first 'park superintendent,' and lived in a little shack on the northeast corner. He was an exceptionally fine good man; you could have gone much farther in what you have said about him and still not exaggerated. If he saw a boy smoking or chewing tobacco, or telling improper stories, he would say, 'Boys, you cannot do that in my presence.' He was strict, but they loved him all the same. Many a boy I have seen him send away from Cambie Street grounds for some infringement of his rules. Then again, he looked after our mitts and bats; he was without doubt the first playground caretaker, or park attendant, in Vancouver, and honorary at that. I think it would be a nice tribute to that splendid man if some memorial could be erected to him. Joe Reynolds will tell you all about Al Larwell."

"I suppose, in the first place, I came to Vancouver for a bit of adventure. Years afterwards, in 1898, I walked into Atlin—that was the last gold discovery—opened a general store there and remained two years. Mrs. Allan, who was Miss Maud Sharpe of Perth, Ontario, and I were married at Rat Portage, now Kenora, Ontario; she came to Vancouver in 1900, before our marriage; our son is Lawson M. Allan."

Geo. Allan died 24 December 1933.



Item # EarlyVan_v2_088



Item # EarlyVan_v2_089

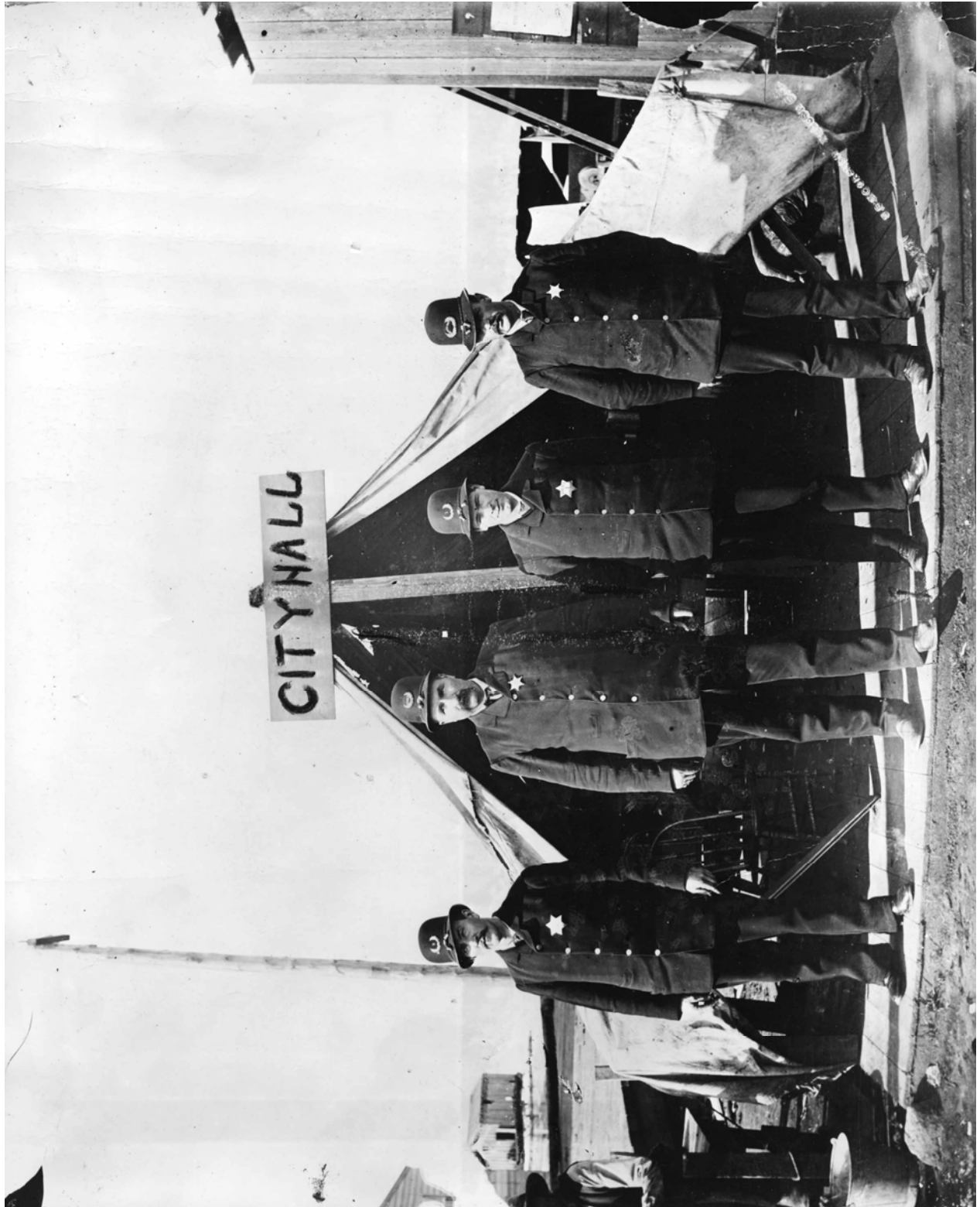
Residence, first Mayor, 1886 (as in 1932)
S.W. cor. Dunlevy and Oppenheimer sts.



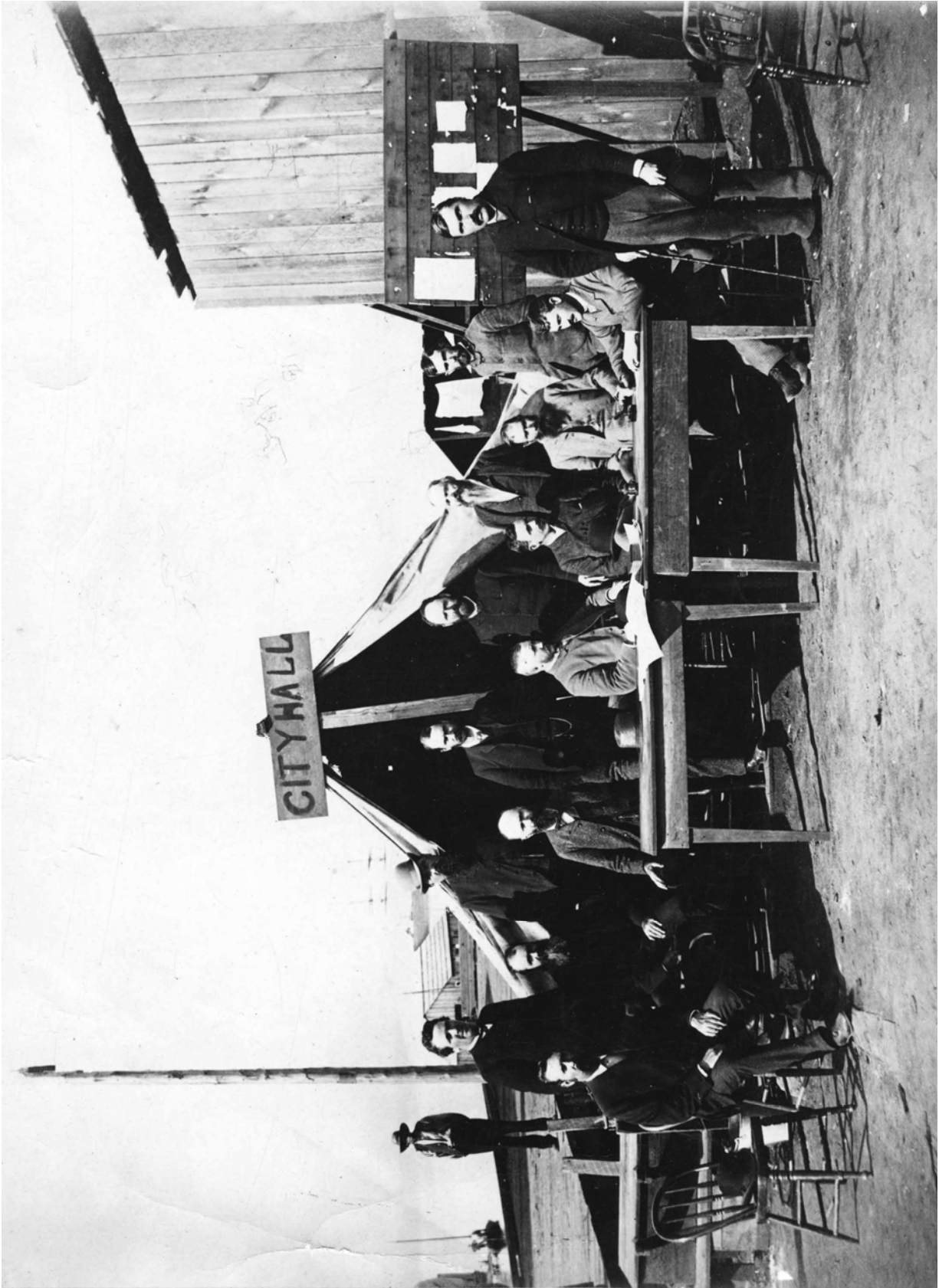
The home of the first mayor of Vancouver. (Mayor M.A. MacLean)

see back.

Item # EarlyVan_v2_090



Item # EarlyVan_v2_091



Item # EarlyVan_v2_092

“He was, it seems to me, one who, more preeminently than others, envisioned the growth of our city, our harbour, and especially our foreign trade, as it has actually taken place since.”

From recollections of W.H. Gallagher in *Early Vancouver*, 1931.

NOTES OF AN INSPIRING PIONEER SPEECH.

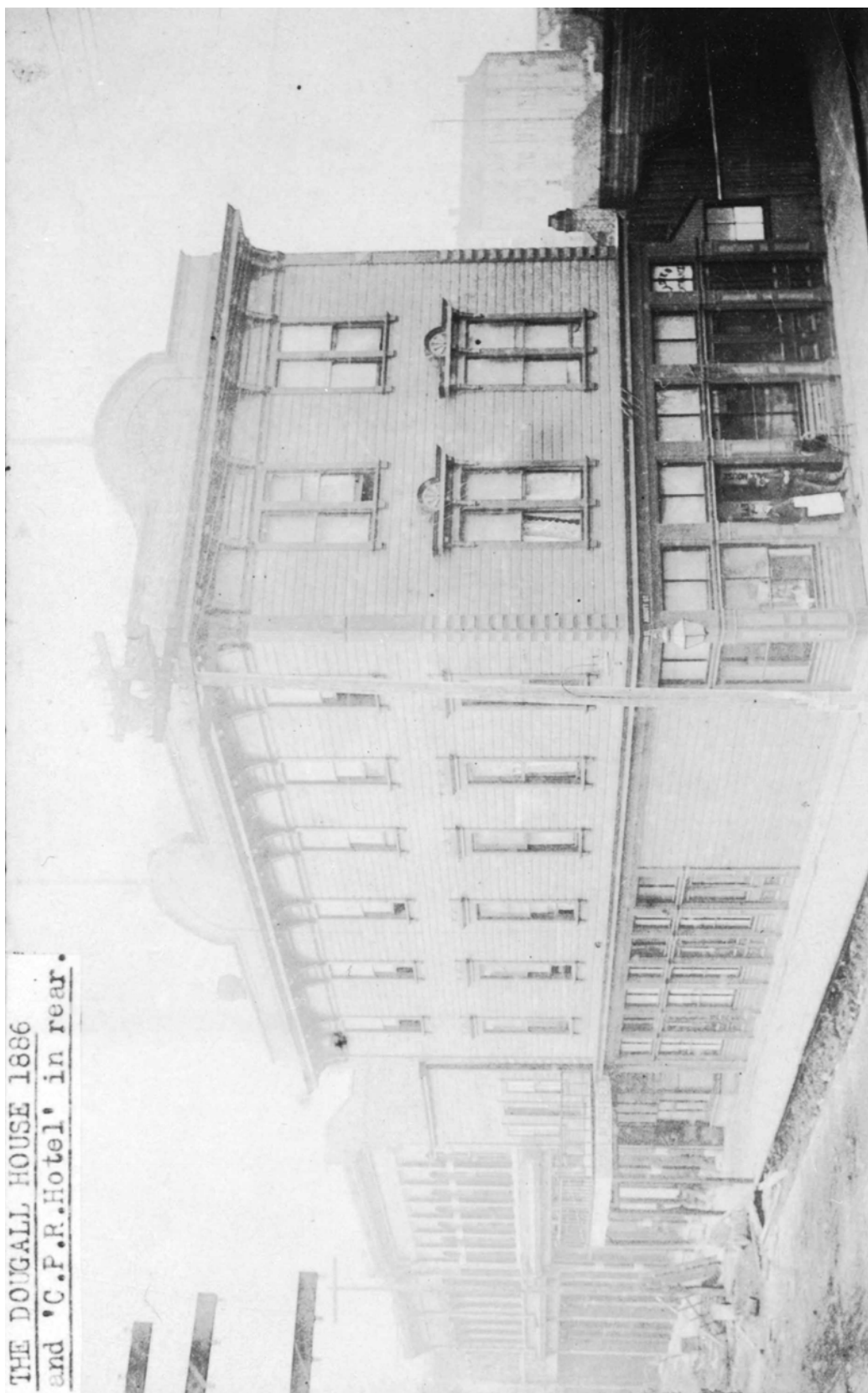
(presumed to have been delivered at a New Year's Even banquet—31 December 1886—at the Dougall House, corner Cordova and Abbott streets, Vancouver)

by

His Worship Mayor M.A. MacLean
First mayor of Vancouver
1886

These notes, after careful preservation for over forty-five years, were loaned for copying in February 1932, to Major J.S. Matthews by his widow, Mrs. Margaret A. MacLean; they are on stationery headed “MAYOR'S OFFICE, VANCOUVER, B.C. ... 1886,” (no crest).

The original house, the first home of His Late Worship Mayor and Mrs. MacLean, built out of relief funds sent from all parts of the world to Vancouver at the time of the Great Fire, 1886, still stands at the southwest corner of Cordova Street East and Dunlevy Avenue. His Worship lost all his possessions in the Great Fire.



THE DOUGALL HOUSE 1886
and 'C.F.R. Hotel' in rear.

Item # EarlyVan_v2_093

(On City of Vancouver stationery, no crest, probably the first letterheads printed, and before adoption of first civic crest.)

MAYOR'S OFFICE
Vancouver, B.C. ... 1886.

(His Worship's own handwriting.)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF METROPOLITAN CENTRES IN THE NORTH WEST AND BRITISH COLUMBIA

The British provinces of Manitoba, and the territories of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Athabasca comprise a vast area much of which possesses superior agricultural resources.

Half a century is but a little while—in history; yet even a quarter of a century has wrought appalling results in the development of our Northwest. One hardly dares conjecture what marvels fifty years may work in the wilderness to the northwest of the Canadian Pacific Railway. Fifty years ago there was not a steam railway nor an electric telegraph in this world, today there are over 100,000 miles of railway on this continent alone, and more than half a million miles of telegraph. Fifty years ago there was not an ocean steamship afloat; now there are over ... plowing the waters of the different oceans of the world. Fifty years ago the population of the Dominion was ..., today our population is ... Fifty years ago the population of the United States was 13 millions; today their population is 60 millions. Fifty years ago there was not a friction match, a revolver, a breech loader, a percussion cap, or a sewing machine, etc., etc., etc.

Ten years ago Dakota was for the most part howling desert; five or six years hence Dakota will have a million inhabitants. Two or three generations hence there will be millions of sturdy Anglo-Saxon people living west of Winnipeg and north of the Canadian Pacific Railway. In the newer northwest it is likely that the next important urban growth beyond Minneapolis and St. Paul will be at Winnipeg.

DESCRIPTION OF THIS PROGRESS

Five hundred miles to the northwest of Winnipeg is the vast and fertile plains of the Saskatchewan Valley, and still further in the same direction are the great Athabasca and Peace Rivers, and the broad basin drained into the Great Slave Lake. The Peace River Valley is as far northwest of Winnipeg as Winnipeg is north west of Chicago. Someday there must be, in the nature of things, a new northwestern metropolis in the Saskatchewan region, and eventually there will be a city somewhere below the Great Slave Lake; and still the illimitable Northwest stretches on and on. From the Great Slave Lake to the Alaska boundary is nearly another thousand miles.

Through this region passes the broad MacKenzie River on its journey of a thousand miles to the Arctic Ocean, and parallel with the McKenzie, some three or four hundred miles further westward is the upper stretch of the Yukon in our own British Columbia. Between these streams are the ranges of the Rocky Mountain system containing without a doubt the gold and silver of another California.

Who can foretell the possibilities of the northwest portion of our own British American Empire; stretching as it does more than 3,000 miles from Winnipeg to Bering's Straits?

These far north western regions, it is true, are not the most favoured and genial on the globe, but they have vast and material resources, and are capable of sustaining a large population; they await a prosperous future. Their high altitudes are tempered by the warm Pacific currents from China and Japan. The Saskatchewan Valley is in the same latitude as Central and Northern England; the Great Slave Lake is on about the parallel of Stockholm, Christiana, and St. Petersburg; Sitka is not much further north than Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Cincinnati was the metropolis of the North West of two generations ago; Chicago has become the centre of a greater north west lying beyond; Minneapolis and St. Paul are assuming large proportions at the head of the Mississippi Valley as the commercial centre of still another and more extended northwest. The process is to be repeated (in our own Northwest).

INTERPROVINCIAL TRADE

(First page missing)

The resources of British Columbia thus briefly enumerated, being of just the very kind in which so large a portion of the North West Territories are conspicuously deficient, will find a home market by means of the railway. Calgary, Regina, Qu'Appelle, Brandon, Winnipeg may before long draw their chief supplies of lumber and coal from the Pacific Slope, while fresh salmon and other fish from the Fraser River and the Gulf of Georgia, together with such fruits as cannot be grown to advantage in the prairie region will, in a few years, be articles of common consumption in the Territories and Manitoba.

In return the prairie farmer will be able to furnish the hardy miner, the industrious lumberman, and the skillful fruit grower of British Columbia with the staff of life in highest perfection, together with pork, beef, hides and wool.

Interprovincial intercourse will thus become highly advantageous, and should do much, not only to stimulate the development of the latent resources that Canada possesses in such great variety, but to increase the home and foreign trade of her merchants.

JSM 1932

OUR FIRST MAYORESS (MRS. MALCOLM A. MACLEAN).

Memorandum of an evening spent with Mrs. M.A. MacLean, first mayoress of Vancouver, who, tomorrow, Easter Sunday, 27 March 1932, will be 84. She is a very gracious lady, mentally alert, and with a sweet smile, but feeble and not very well, but sufficiently active to participate in a quiet birthday party with a few relatives and friends, including her son (only), two unmarried daughters, Dr. Perry, a nephew, Mr. Tom McInnes, the historian, and his sister Miss McInnes.

Mrs. MacLean was charmingly gowned in a mauve satin dress of mid-Victoria design which, purchased in Toronto about 1882, lace V front and cuffs, its longish train supported by an ornamental rope slipped by a loop over her left wrist, and so well preserved as to appear almost a new dress. She made a delightful picture of old fashioned grace and graciousness.

During short bits of conversation Mrs. MacLean said:

"I was not in Vancouver at the time of my husband's election, nor at the time of the Great Fire; we came here in the fall of 1886, that is, the children and I, came by the C.P.R. to Port Moody and thence down the inlet by the old *Princess Louise*. There were but five passengers on the train. Mr. Melville Thomson of the Thomson Stationery Co. was one, and there was a woman who got off at Port Moody, I forget her name, her husband worked there.

"The train trip to Vancouver was terrible; the worst of it was the trains did not connect, they were short of rolling stock or something. We had to go through the United States, and at some place, I forget where it was, we had to walk through a field of snow, one of the children clutching my dress, the other on one hand, and the third in my arms. At some place we stopped one night at a hotel, and the snow came into our room. There were just five of us on the train, that is, adult passengers; we got off at Port Moody and came down the inlet on the *Princess Louise*.

"On my arrival, of course, Mr. MacLean was mayor, and we had such a busy time. Mr. A.W. Ross, M.P., my sister's husband, was away in Ottawa, so at first we went to live with her in some rooms over a store. Then we went to stop at the Gold House on Water Street; it was just finished and was so nice. I must try and think who were stopping there. Well, there was Mr. and Mrs. H.T. Ceperley," (Note: of Ross and Ceperley and the Ceperley Playgrounds, Stanley Park) "and, oh, I forget! After we built our own place on Dunlevy Avenue, but I have not seen the old home for years; they tell me it is almost falling down now." (See photograph taken in 1931.)

"Those were the *busiest* times, so much entertaining, so many dances, so difficult to get help in the household. White help at any price was almost impossible, and the Chinamen were so independent; if