



The Builders of Vancouver

by William H. Gallagher, last survivor of the first City Council, on the inauguration of civic government, 10 May 1886.

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THE FIRST COUNCIL MEETING was held in the sitting room of the Old Court House, which faced the sea, on Water Street, where the Number 1 Fire Hall was afterwards. The building stood back about ten feet from Water Street; the front door and sitting room windows faced Water Street. The interior of the sitting room was about ten feet wide and twenty feet long, was lined with plain cedar V-joint, and lighted at night by a large coal oil lamp. Four doors in a row took up most of the long side opposite the windows, and opened into four prison cells.

At the appointed hour, the Mayor and Aldermen-elect, and some others, I think in all about twenty-one—more could not have found

standing room—crowded into the small sitting room. The poll clerk, Mr. Charles Gardner Johnson, and his Worship-elect took the head of the table. Mr. McGuigan sat on the poll clerk's left; I stood at Mr. McLean's right, and was about the only person present not in some official capacity. I stood close to His Worship's elbow.

Mayor MacLean and I had met before we came to Vancouver. He had been purchasing agent for the government in the North West Rebellion, 1885; he employed "a thousand" teams. I had horse feed for sale and was buying wheat at Wolseley, thirty miles east of Qu'Appelle. Mr. MacLean had been exceptionally courteous and considerable then, so that, afterwards, when we were both in Vancouver and he was candidate for mayor, I naturally desired to return the compliment. He had little of worldly goods, scarcely a week's board, so that the opportunity was open to me to show my appreciation of past kindnesses. I had also had previous experience in the establishment of civic government at Wolseley, Assiniboia, North West Territories, and so was more or less familiar with the procedure. Thus it was that I was at Mr. MacLean's right hand when the initial meeting of the City Council of Vancouver took place.

At the head of the table sat Mr. MacLean and the late Major Charles Gardner Johnson, the poll clerk. Mr. Gardner Johnson administered the oath of office to His Worship, and then His Worship swore in the aldermen, and all seated themselves around the long table. Among the few present were Mr. John Boulton, Mr. G. F. Baldwin, Mr. J. J. Blake, Mr. John Stewart, Mr. Jonathan Miller, the jailer, and Mr. T. F. McGuigan. I do not recall the others, though doubtless there were others. I stood, as a sort of godfather, at His Worship's right.

I doubt if any of the aldermen were experienced, and after they had been sworn in and sat down, someone asked, "What do we do next?" I said, "If you wait a moment or two I will show you," and I went out, around the corner, to a little stationery and book store, Tilley's, bought a pad of writing paper and a pen, some ink, and wrote "City of Vancouver" at the top of the sheet, and then suggested that they should now appoint a City Clerk.

Someone moved that Mr. Thomas F. McGuigan be appointed City Clerk, and after his appointment passed, I took pen and pad of paper and placed it in front of Mr. McGuigan.

The second appointment was G. F. Baldwin as City Treasurer, but they had not, as yet, twenty-five cents of civic funds for him to take care of. The appointments continued. Mr. J. J. Blake was appointed City Solicitor. He was a fine lawyer of sound judgement, and never known to make a mistake. Mr. John Boulton was appointed Police Magistrate.

Opposite

In 1936, Vancouver City Archivist Major James S. Matthews commissioned John Innes to paint a 5 x 10-foot canvas depicting the first meeting of the first city council that was held in a primitive building known as "the courthouse in Granville." By doing so the Major was not only preserving early city artifacts but also creating them.

- 1 John Leask, later City Auditor
- 2 Joseph Mannion, pioneer in 1865 and colloquially known as the "Mayor of Granville"
- 3 J. B. Henderson, one of the first three School Trustees
- 4 John H. Carlisle, Chief of Volunteer Fire Brigade (after the fire)
- 5 John Boulton, first Magistrate
- 6 Malcolm A. MacLean, first Mayor of Vancouver
- 7 William H. Gallagher, Electoral Campaign Manager and later Alderman
- 8 Dr. W. J. McGuigan, Coroner
- 9 C. Gardner Johnson, Poll Clerk
- 10 John W. Stewart, first Chief Constable
- 11 Jonathan Miller, Returning Officer, Jailer, and later Postmaster
- 12 Dr. Duncan Bell-Irving
- 13 J. R. Northcott, Alderman
- 14 Joseph Griffith
- 15 Joseph Humphries
- 16 Thomas Dunn
- 17 Lauchlan A. Hamilton
- 18 George F. Baldwin, first City Treasurer
- 19 Thomas F. McGuigan, first City Clerk
- 20 J. J. Blake, first City Solicitor who drafted city charter
- 21 E. P. Hamilton
- 22 Charles A. Coldwell
- 23 Harry Hemlow
- 24 Robert Balfour
- 25 Peter Cordiner