

# **ESQUIMALT FIRE DEPARTMENT HISTORY**

## **1912 to 2003**

### **Before Incorporation**

The Village of Esquimalt was policed by Royal Naval Patrols long before the Provincial Police were organized.

In 1912, as a Provincial Territory, before the municipality was incorporated, there was one Provincial Policeman, Constable Edward Conway, stationed in Esquimalt. He resided on Wharf Street in the Village and his beat extended as far north as Shawnigan Lake. In effect, residents policed themselves.

The first patrol wagon consisted of a wheelbarrow used for conveying intoxicated persons to the street car and out of the District.

Street fights and disorders in front of the saloons usually resolved themselves.

### **After Incorporation**

The first Chief Constable was John Gray, who was assisted by Constable William Saddler and Robert Nunn acting as Poundkeeper.

Police patrol was done either on foot or street car.

The Poundman provided his own horse and was a very busy man, because, prior to this, cattle had roamed at large in the District and cattle owners resented any form of control.

Esquimalt was serviced by a combined police/fire department following its incorporation in 1912. The combined force developed over time to cope with the changing needs of its citizens and society as a whole.

Up until 1950, the employees of the department functioned primarily as fireman or policemen, providing dual functions only in times of emergency. While there was an obvious specialization of services at this time, both fire protection and policing were run out of the same building and under the authority of a single fire/police chief.

The challenge to dual capacity came after World War Two, when increased unionization pressured the combined force to separate. In response to this pressure, Esquimalt Council created a fully amalgamated force, with employees trained in both fire protection and policing, thus undermining the need for a separate fire department.

Dual capacity was subsequently reinforced by the existence of a single Police Union after 1957, which represented all employees within the department.

The effort to maintain dual capacity was largely fueled by the desire to save money. However, it was not finances alone that predicated an amalgamated force; the unique existence of the Naval Base, which had always assisted in fire protection, undermined the need for a separate Esquimalt Fire Department.

In 2003, the Esquimalt joint Police-Fire Department ended operations. 33 members joined the Victoria Police Department, which assumed responsibility for policing, and 13 members stayed behind to form the new 26-member stand-alone Esquimalt Fire Rescue Department.