

### In this Issue

[Mathison the Printer](#)  
[Pacific Steam Laundry](#)  
[Rare Books](#)

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## April: Vancouver's Colourful Printing Past

Multiple bold fonts printed in green, red and gold, lavish embellishments, clever mottos and an entrepreneurial spirit. UBC Library Vault honours Robert Mathison and his unique place in history as Vancouver's first independent, non-newspaper based printer.



### The R. Mathison Print Collection

Visit the vibrant streets of downtown Vancouver at the turn of the century through the eyes of one of its most colourful pioneers. After the great fire of 1886 reduced this young city to ashes, Robert Mathison found himself out of work. A typesetter by trade, Mathison had worked with pioneer newspapers to bring news to all corners of the Lower Mainland.

When the flames devoured his livelihood, Mathison seized an opportunity to strike out on his own. He ordered a steam-powered press to be sent to Vancouver and set up shop on the corner of Hastings and Gore, one block east of Hastings and Main Street. Inside the 12 by 25 foot structure, he started the city's first premiere printing business at the tender age of 21.



For four years Mathison served the printing needs of Vancouver

## Highlights

### Discover Rare Books and Special Collections

On June 13, 1886, it took less than an hour for the flames from a brush-clearing fire to spread and consume the entire fledgling city of Vancouver. UBC Library's Rare Books and Special Collections (RBSC) contains many historical and rare items related to this devastating fire and other important historical events. Visit the [RBSC website](#) to find out how to access the collections today!

For four years, Mathison served the printing needs of Vancouver businesses. The business cards, posters, menus, calendars and programmes reveal the cultural life of Vancouverites. The playful mix of fancy fonts, bright inks and coloured paper advertised ice cream shops, glee club concerts, political campaigns, Chinese laundries, and strawberry festivals. The Gold House menu lists the breakfast to dinner options at the popular restaurant of pioneer entrepreneur Emma Gold. The playbill peeps behind the theatre curtain, where audiences were entertained by sentimental songs and Irish step dances.



The R. Mathison Printing Collection at UBC Library is a fascinating snapshot of early Vancouver life. The advertisements are more than simple marketing tools, the printed ephemera reveals the nature of commercial and social life in the city. These materials are vital clues to understanding a society in the process of discovering its identity and defining itself.

To read more about the early days of printing in Vancouver or see more images by R. Mathison, visit [UBC Library Vault](#) or UBC Library's R. Mathison Printing Collection [online](#). To learn more about how Ralph Stanton, Head of UBC Library's Rare Books and Special Collections, views this collection, read the article on UBC Library Vault [News](#).

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