

George Christie Tunstall By Diane Sterne



Granite Creek was fortunate to be influenced by the life of adventurer and Government Agent, George Christie Tunstall. Born in Montreal, Quebec (some reports say he was born in New York) on December 5, 1836, George's life began amidst a family with ties to Canada's early years. George's parents were James Marmaduke Tunstall, Jr. (1802-1865) and Elizabeth Woolrich (1806-1897). His paternal grandfather, James Marmaduke Tunstall was an Anglican Missionary to French Canada, arriving in 1788. His grandmother, Sarah Christie, was a daughter of the British General Gabriel Christie of Stirling, Scotland. General Christie came to Canada during the French and Indian wars and bought up land from the defeated French. He owned most of the land south of Montreal to the United States border.

George Tunstall was educated at Sparkman's Academy, Sorel and Lower Canada College, Montreal and later married Anne Morgan (1842-1873) in Quebec. In 1862 George was one of the famous Overlanders who travelled across Canada with Thomas McMicking's group from Montreal to British Columbia. For awhile, George mined in the Cariboo. During a time when travel was difficult and dangerous, George managed to traverse the country numerous times. In 1865 he was in Montreal when his father died, and shortly after that George's first son was born. George and Anne had two sons: George Christie, Jr. (1866-1950) and Charles Augustus (1868-1942). Charles was a surgeon with the Australian Merchant Navy and was killed in action. When George's wife died, the two boys lived with their grandmother, Elizabeth, and an aunt (Louise) in Quebec.

By 1879 British Columbia had lured George back. In December of that year he was appointed Government Agent at Kamloops. On December 1, 1885 George was the Gold Commissioner at Granite Creek. Granite Creek was in its prime, and it was critical to have a Gold Commissioner in the area to keep accurate records of the mines and resolve disputes amongst the prospectors.

Tulameen can credit George Tunstall as its founder. In 1886 the Daily Colonist reported: "Otter Flat, six miles from Granite Creek has been reserved by Mr. Tunstall, Government Agent at Kamloops, and registered as a town site, and government offices, etc. will be erected at that point." Otter Flat was the original name of what is known today as Tulameen.

George Tunstall had a long history as a Government Agent holding various offices throughout his life. In July, 1886 he was Registrar of the County Court for Yale. In 1890 he was Gold Commissioner at Revelstoke and Gold Commissioner and Government Agent at Kamloops. In 1891, George was being paid \$150 per month (approximately \$4,000 in today's dollars) for his work in Kamloops. By 1896 he was Assistant Commissioner of Lands and Works and Stipendiary Magistrate for British Columbia.

The life of George Tunstall greatly impacted the future of the Similkameen. He died on January 6, 1911 at Royal Inland Hospital, Kamloops. His headstone in Pleasant Street Cemetery in Kamloops reads, “Distress Always Came Smiling From His Door.” This is a quote from the poem, “The Tears of Genius” by Samuel Jackson Pratt:

“The rich received a moral from thy head,
And from thy heart the stranger found a bed.
Distress came always smiling from thy door;
For God had made thee agent to the poor...”



George Christie Tunstall’s life is best summed up by Henry Nicholson:

“I cannot leave Granite without a word or two in reference to my old chief, Mr. Geo. Tunstall, Gold Commissioner, himself an old Cariboo miner, his kind heart and ready hand always open to help an old friend. He was a firm believer in the great future that awaited the Similkameen as a mining district and must feel greatly satisfied with its present outlook.”

Over the years, his name has been overlooked in many historic accounts; however, we will remember and respect George Christie Tunstall for his impact on Granite Creek and the Tulameen Valley.

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