

## In Days Gone By

By Henry Nicholson

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*Editor's Note: The reminiscences of an early settler in the Similkameen country were contained in a letter to the editor of the Hedley Gazette and Similkameen Advertiser and were published in the first issue of that newspaper dated January 10, 1905. Further reminiscences by Judge T. H. Murphy written at the same time for the same newspaper will appear later in these pages.*

I well remember my first glimpse of the Similkameen Valley, when after a long and fatiguing ride from Princeton (Mr. Allison's) together with my partner, Mr. Barrington Price, arriving at the Hudson's Bay post which we had leased as a stock ranch. It was a beautiful September afternoon in the year 1872: the day had been excessively hot and now as the sun was westering, the valley bathed in a haze was so quiet and lifeless as to be oppressive, more noticeable to one just from the old country with its busy life.

This change to a wild solitude, this narrow valley surrounded with steep and rugged mountains with here and there masses of black pine, might well have been another Thaeland, where the saints of old and those who were not saints sought solitude from their fellow men "the world forgotten by the world forgot."

How different now the scene which meets the eye (1905). Instead of benches covered with sage brush and cactus, and bottom land luxuriant 'tis true with wild herbage, the home of flocks of prairie chicken, but no sign of man's habitation, we are surrounded with cultivated farms and comfortable homes with the happy voices of children, telling us that the days of the solitude of the Similkameen are past no more to return. Though hitherto the evolution has been slow, in a valley so favored by nature, in climate and soil, the advent of railway communication will overcome the one great cause of its isolation and the Hope Mountain will no longer be a barrier to the prosperity and progress of a valley which may be truly called the paradise of the orchardist.

But to go back to the seventies, when beef was king and the "ladyfinger" potato the greatest farming product of the valley. What a free life it was in those days – all too free, no restraining, no refining influences, with but a few events to mark the lapse of time. These events may be briefly summarized as the arrival of the mail carrier every three months, the arrival of the pack trains with their welcome supplies, the cattle drives to Hope, an occasional race-meet and the annual trip to Fort Hope or Victoria.

From the middle of June until the middle of November the Hope trail would be open for pack trains and cattle and a busy time it would be, with pack trains going and returning and the hundreds of heads of cattle from the well known stock ranches of Messrs. Ellis, Haynes, Low, Richter, Barcello, Allison, and others keeping the trail alive with beef for the Victoria market.

Stockraising being almost the sole industry, to be a cattleman was the aspiration of every youngster who could sit a horse, but to boss a drive was the coveted honor for the favored few, it being no easy matter getting a band of steers across the mountains. Only the most careful

herding ensured a successful drive. To the uninitiated the boss driver might appear a most mild though somewhat reticent sort of person, his answers somewhat monosyllabic, and that this placid disposition was the result of his occupation; but let anything go wrong with the drive, then would be seen what a reserve of eloquence he possessed. Dick Cawston as he was familiarly known was one of the most successful cattlemen of those days; having a happy, jovial disposition and thoroughly understanding his business he was always able to get good hands and good work, and if things happened to go wrong, he was gifted with a flow of language that a brindle steer could understand.

In a country where a horse was as indispensable to a man as his legs, horse racing would be a natural sequence and the Sunday gatherings at the store would witness many a trial of nags, the bench below the present town of Keremeos (Upper) being the usual track, but the big race meetings were held on the bench now covered by one of Mr. Barcelo's farms. Here in 1872 took place the famous race between B. Price's "Mountain Chief" and A. McConnell's "Bulger Dick" for the Keremeos Derby Stakes. A large gathering of whites and Indians witnessed the race; the excitement and the cheering when the late Judge Haynes declared the "Chief" the winner, reminded one of an old-country meeting.

What a picturesque appearance the crowd of Indians made in their many colored blankets, bedecked trappings and ornamental headgear, and how thoroughly they enjoyed the sport. Keen judges of horseflesh they were too, as we often found to our cost when they matched some "Croppie" or "Calico" cayuse against the white man's horse. How the Indian has changed, I supposed evolutionized with his surroundings, blanket and buckskin having given place to store clothes, and today the Indian and his better half, may be met Darby and Joan like driving their buggy – the old trapper and hunter like the game, having all but disappeared.

In the seventies, deer, mountain sheep, goat and bear were plentiful on the Similkameen, the steep mountains of the Ashnola in particular, being the home of large herds of big horn. On the knoll overlooking the pretty farm of Mr. Bullock-Webster, bands of over a hundred have been counted. Few seasons passed without seeing some hunting party from the old country or the States anxious for a shot at this king of game.

The outfits of some of these parties were more luxurious than workmanlike. I have in mind a party of four New York magnates with some twenty pack animals and attendants, including a French cook, under the guidance of the late Jack Fannin. Fannin was a born hunter, and the look on his face as he pointed out to me the collection of easy chairs, camp bedsteads, oil cooking stove, etc. was more eloquent than words: though no heads were obtained, the party took away renewed health from their picnic in the mountains. There were others who hunted in a more modest fashion and were content to rough it who succeeded in obtaining some fine specimens.

Our farming in those days was indeed primitive: we found nature in the rough and did little to disturb her, indeed as an old Irishman put it "ye seem to have learned your farming from the Siwashes and bedad, ye haven't improved on it," was more truthful than flattering. The building of a flouring mill by Mr. Price in '77 led to the raising of wheat by the Indians as well as the white settlers, and then was realized for the first time the wonderful productiveness of the

soil of the valley – the bench lands with a supply of water yielding splendid crops – that on the Barcello ranch being especially good.

It was not till the early eighties that any large amount of land was brought under cultivation. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway brought some most desirable settlers and families from Ontario, the famous farming province of the dominion, and a changed condition in the social life of the valley was soon apparent, its evolution had commenced, the old careless habits of living were passing away, even bacon and beans had to give place to more home-like fare, and a “grooming” necessary when a visit was to be paid to a benedict neighbor. What an agreeable change it was to sit at a well spread table presided over by a kindly hostess.

Among the pleasant homes of those days must be mentioned that of Mr. Cawston and his amiable wife, who resided on the original Richter property. Before disposing of it Mr. Richter had built quite a modern house and laid out an orchard, the first in the valley, Mr. and Mrs. McCurdy, whose property adjoined and Mr. and Mrs. Daley on the old Price ranch, now one of the valuable properties of the valley, also to be mentioned in this connection.

Favoured as the Similkameen is in climate and soil, it is to its vast store of minerals “locked up in the sea of mountains,” extending from Keremeos to Princeton that we look for its great store of wealth – the exploitation of this mineral belt incidentally developing its agricultural possibilities. As the placer miner is invariably the fore-runner of the quartz miner the Similkameen has been no exception, placer mining having been carried on in the very early sixties. Prominent among those early pioneers who are still with us are the genial and ever youthful Bob Stevenson and Jim Orr. I believe it is a disputed point between them, to which belongs the honour of being the first on the Similkameen. None, however, can dispute the fact that they are wonderful examples of the hardiness of the miner of half a century ago.

Another name is associated with those early days, the late Mr. Allison, who built the Allison Trail across the Hope Mountain; a most kindly and large-hearted gentleman whose faith in the future mineral possibilities of the Similkameen was unbounded. He was the first discoverer of copper and with his associates, among whom was his brother-in-law, the Hon. E. Dewdney, did considerable development work, but the day of the quartz miner had not yet arrived: several decades must pass before polishing a drill would take the place of wielding a pick.

With the departure from the Similkameen of white miners they were replaced by their faithful followers, John Chinaman, who has mined on the South Fork and on the Tulameen almost continuously to the present day. Granite Creek was discovered by John Chance in '85, his associates being T. Curry and W. Jenkins, and for about four miles it was very rich being very narrow and with little fall, it was more like a ground-sluice in the mountains. The diggings were shallow and the cream of the pay easily taken out; consequently its life, or I should say the dazzling promise of its youthful life was early cut short, although its influence on the future developments of quartz mining in the Similkameen district was far-reaching.

Extravagant accounts of its richness spread far and wide and attracted miners from all parts of the world. Men from California and Australia as well as Cariboo and Cassiar were

flocking to the latest El Dorado, and it may be easily understood that among a gathering of experienced miners the possibility of gold-bearing veins in the vicinity would be frequently discussed, indeed, the late Dr. Davison when he first visited the camp, coming in from Nicola, spoke of the favourable indications of the surrounding mountains for mineral deposits.

The history of the first excitement on Granite Creek was brief though stirring, a considerable town sprung into existence in a few months, some business houses but mostly saloons, gambling houses and restaurants, in fact, a typical mining town. Money was plentiful and was squandered in the usual miner-like fashion.

Considerable gold was taken out the first year, not only from Granite but from the neighboring creeks, Slate, Collins, Bear and others. The gold was generally coarse, one and two ounce nuggets frequently being found, while much larger ones occasionally rewarded some lucky prospector. I recall among the more fortunate ones a young Londoner who paid his last dollar to record his claim, and having borrowed a rocker, the same afternoon took out over \$400.00 and subsequently left the creek with almost \$11,000. On the upper discovery claim over \$8,000 was taken out in one day's washing.

A little below this claim old Tom Fay had a fraction (25 ft.) which he worked with a rocker, banking his dirt in the forenoon and washing it in the afternoon. When the sun was shining on his pile of dirt the gold could be plainly seen in the gravel.

Genial old Pat Synan, a true son of the Emerald Isle, had named his claim "the Gladstone" and one lucky day Pat found a "foine nugget" which he sent to the late Mr. Gladstone who accepted and acknowledged the gift. Every old timer will remember how proud old Pat was and how he prized this letter from the Great Home Ruler, and alas, how often it caused him to fall by the wayside.

But my old friend Judge Murphy who still sticks to Granite is better able to tell of the doings on the old creek. I wonder if he remembers the first visit the late "Father Pat" paid the creek and incidentally it was the first mining camp in which Mr. Irwin had held service. Even in the brief stay he made on that occasion his amiable personality crept into the hearts of the miners and it is little wonder that in after years he became so endeared to a class of men who, whatever their faults may be are ready to respect the "cloth" and substantially aid a good man in his work. 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.

Returning to the valley, though anteceding my own personal experience, mention should be made of the Hudson's Bay Co. who established a trading post there when it was entirely an Indian country, their first post being on the ranch afterwards occupied by F. Richter. Then it moved to Keremeos where substantial buildings were erected and their pack trains wintered. For some years the fur trade of the Similkameen was carried on very profitably, until the extensive fires which swept the Hope Mountains drove out the marten. The trade fell off, and the Company gave up their trading post.

The Similkameen Indians were long regarded as being hostile to white settlement, retaining even as late as the seventies many of their old superstitions, in spite of the Catholic Fathers. They still believed in the mumeries of the medicine men. On a recent visit to the Similkameen I met an old Indian doctor. It is a peculiar characteristic of the Indian that if he makes up his mind (Chinook, Mammook tum-tum) he is going to die, he generally succeeds. Dummy had mammooked his tum-tum that his time had come although his sorrowing relatives had engaged the services of some eminent medicine men to drive away the evil spirits their efforts were unsuccessful, so the good father Pandosy was sent for, who on departing, gave Dummy some pictures to console him, among them, one of purgatory, which Dummy was given to understand was the place to which he was going. For a long time Dummy studied this picture and then turned to look at the beautiful valley, visible through the open teepee and suddenly startled his watching "tillicums" by informing them that the funeral was postponed: he preferred the looks of the Similkameen to the looks of the other place and was going to stay, and stay he did.

With brief reference to the old time settlers still resident in the valley I must close a letter already too long. Commencing with Mr. Richter, who more than forty years ago made his home on the Similkameen. Comparatively a poor man, he has by his business ability and energy become one of the wealthiest men of the upper country, the owner of a splendid herd of cattle and several ranches, besides his beautiful residence at the head of the valley. Mr. Emanuel Barcelo who came to the valley about the same time is also a large cattle and land owner. Mr. J. H. Coulthard, J.P., who owned the old H. B. Co. property Mr. Price's upper ranch and other purchased land on which his numerous cattle graze. His son, Mr. J. O. Coulthard who preceded his father as a settler in the valley, is manager of the property. Mrs. Daly has for many years successfully managed her valuable stockranch. Mrs. Lown, now occupying the old Cawston ranch, her sons managing the large band of cattle, is among the old settlers. Messrs. McCurdy, Manery, and Armstrong, other old-time settlers, have well-stocked ranches, increasing in value year by year. Mr. Bullock-Webster, J.P., though a more recent settler, is now one of the large land and stock owners of the valley, having a pretty home on the other side of the Similkameen, the result of his industry and good management.

I little imagined that when I rested with my old chum at the Twenty Mile Creek on that September afternoon in '72 that the greatest mine in B.C. was in the mountain above us, or that we were temporarily occupying a possibly valuable lot in an embryo city, or that I should ever write of the fact for the readers of its first newspaper.

Camp McKinney.