

Memoirs of Hugh Hunter

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Notes of conversations with Hugh Hunter at his home, four miles east of Princeton.
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I was born in Armagh, Ireland. My father was a chaplain to the Imperial troops. As a youngster I was with the family in Ballincollig, in the county of Cork; at the Curragh of Kildare, the great military camp of Ireland, and at various places in England. I came out to Canada as a young man. I worked for a time on construction on the C.P.R. I came on a construction train from Laggan, at that time the end of the track, and on a flat car to Beaver, just the other side of Rogers Pass, and then I hoofed it to Revelstoke in the middle of winter. It looked a wild place then and as cold as blazes. I don't know that it looks any less wild now than it was then except that there is a railway line through it and trains rumbling and whistling day and night. It is a wonderful country for scenery, though, and when they get Golden and Revelstoke joined up with a highway there should be thousands of cars driving through there every summer. I wasn't thinking much of the scenery when I came along there on top of a flat and on foot, but of keeping warm and getting to shelter.

Farwell was the original name of Revelstoke, after A.S. Farwell, the surveyor, who had laid out a townsite there in anticipation of the railway coming through. It was below where the court house is and over towards where the traffic bridge is now. He wanted too much for his townsite and so the C.P.R. put in their own. It was a rough-looking place, alright, and a rough-looking crowd, but good order was being kept. There were six thousand men there waiting for the weather to moderate to cut the right-of-way on G.B. Wright's contract down to Sicamous.

I didn't stay there long, then I hoofed it to Sicamous, my first introduction to British Columbia. I went down to Enderby and Armstrong. The English Church sent a man to Armstrong, where they had just built a little shack in the woods. He was Rev. Alfred Shildrick. He was the father of Shildrick, who dropped dead the other day in Revelstoke. (Darrel Heath Innes Shildrick, accountant.) Shildrick brought his wife with him. They came up on the "Spillamachene," a boat which had no accommodation for women. She was a Miss Innes, a daughter of James H. (Henry) Innes, superintendent of naval stores at Esquimalt. There were three daughters. Father Pat (Rev. Henry Irwin) married one (Frances Stuart, 2nd daughter; January 8, 1890); Dr. Simon J. Tunstall another (Marianne Lawson, 3rd daughter, September 22, 1885); and Shildrick the third. Father Pat was no preacher but he was a fine man and did a tremendous amount of good amongst the miners and railway construction men. He put on no airs, as some of the clergy used to, but met everybody man to man, and he was more highly respected than any other minister ever in the boundary districts or along the right-of-way. Shildrick came up to Armstrong from New Westminster. Dodd's (referring to Leonard Alleyne Dodd, Gold Commissioner, Princeton) father, ran a little store at Lansdowne (settlement three miles north of Armstrong), which belonged to Dr. ? and afterwards a brother of the doctor came

in. Old Dodd (William Dodd) was Government Agent at Kamloops for a while. (He was agent for the British Columbia Express Company, the B.X., at Yale for twelve years, and was Government Agent at various agencies from 1886 to 1911.)

From there I kept on going west, mostly hoofing it, and I got on to Kamloops, and then to Spences Bridge, and then down into the Nicola Valley. When I got there all the talk was about the finding of gold in Granite Creek. By that time, the C.P.R. was finished and the men from the construction gangs were pouring down to the new diggings. I landed in Granite Creek in January, 1886, and stayed till the following summer and went back to Nicola. I rode down from Nicola on horseback. I walked down from Granite Creek to Princeton and across on the first bridge over the Tulameen. As dusk fell, I crossed the bridge over a cedar log in the dark. There was no Princeton then; it was part of Allison's ranch. J.F. Allison lived near where the old school is, between here and town, about a mile from town.

Forbes George Vernon reserved an area of land, about a square mile, about a mile below the forks of the river on the trail that is now the Hedley road, and called it Princeton. J.F. Allison got this abolished early in the nineties and the townsite was established where it is now. Allison turned it over to his son-in-law, Dick Sandes, and Sandes sold it to the Watermans, who came out here to represent the Vermillion Forks Mining and Development Company, an English outfit. This was around 1900. After that some of the Allisons and Hon. Edgar Dewdney and others tried to put a townsite called Allison on the market. This was described as "three miles below the forks of the rivers, with a bridge over the Similkameen." This bridge was one Allison had put in and it was the only way for many years to get from the south side of the valley into the town without fording until the bridge at the south end of Bridge Street was built. Allison townsite did not go for some reason, although it was in a fine location. My land is part of the same bench, and you can see in my garden and meadows what rich soil it is.

Granite Creek is eleven miles from Princeton and at that time it was only a horse-trail between the two places. After the mines were going, the trail was improved and in the course of time became a wagon road. I first met George C. Tunstall, the gold commissioner for this district, in the old court house at the creek, which was a log cabin. Mrs. Alice James had it as a hotel and it cost \$5,000 but the Government got it for ten dollars for use as a government building and residence for the officials. Allison had been offered the job of gold commissioner as soon as it was found there was need for such an official, but he did not want to go up to live at the creek so he refused to take it, but he acted for a short time until the government was able to make arrangements. The name of Tunstall as gold commissioner was supposed to be signed to all records of locations but sometimes the mining recorder who was acting for him forgot this and signed just his own name. John Swan was the first mining recorder and he was followed by Archie Irwin. Archie Lindsay and Charley Gallagher acted as recorders for short periods.

I became mining recorder in August, 1889, and later I was appointed gold commissioner and to other positions in connection with the assessment and taxation of lands. The office was at Granite Creek until 1900, when it was moved to Princeton, and a year or two later, the old court house which stands beside the new one was built. I had a nice ranch at Otter Flat where I made my home, but when the office was moved to Princeton, it was too far away so I sold it and moved to my present place.

Granite Creek was sure a rough dump when I saw it first. It was the middle of winter but there were lots of men living in tents. A tent in winter is not so bad as you might think; if you get in a sheltered spot, bank it up with snow or board it round, and put in a rough floor. With a stove going it gets too warm for comfort sometimes. The first winter there were 22 saloons and 22 whores. After the last spike was driven in the C.P.R. late in the year 1885, there was a rush of unemployed men to Granite Creek. There were as many as two thousand men dumped there in the course of a very short time. That winter they were starving along the creek and living on deer meat. The first summer there was a lot of gold taken out of Granite Creek and there were some nice nuggets found. All the gold that was taken out was not reported; you never can tell what Chinese take out as they do not tell. If you ask them they will say they are making four bits or six bits or something like that.

The town of Granite Creek was one narrow street about twenty feet wide, and the buildings were all log buildings, some of them nothing better than shacks, built of rough logs with the chinks filled in with moss and mud, and the roofs were split cedar shakes. While there were no sanitary arrangements about the place there was little sickness, as there never was in any of these mining camps, there being so much fresh air. There was always a good supply of spring water from several springs. Anyone that wanted it could get lots of whiskey to mix with it and there was certainly lots of whiskey drunk on the creek. Saturday nights and Sundays the miners would gather in the bars in town and drink and gamble and chew the fat. Sometimes there would be fights but on the whole they were not a bad lot as soon as those who came from across the line found out that we would not stand any nonsense or rough work or gun play in the camp.

In addition to my other duties, I was provincial constable for several years. As a policeman I had trouble from time to time with old-timers who could not realize that as the place got settled up they could not carry on as they used to in other mining camps and in earlier days. When I began to enforce the closing of bars on Sunday (which I was justified in doing, although the law in that respect was not observed either in town or country), they thought I was an awful tyrant, but they soon came to acknowledge that I was right. When the rush was on, I was ordered to close the hotels, that is, the bars, and everyone thought they were very badly used by me. Thomas Rabbitt, who has a farm near Slate Creek and after whom Rabbitt Mountain is named, at that time had a bar on his place, which was a stopping-place for miners and prospectors going up to the headwaters of the Tulameen. Father Lejeune came to me at Granite Creek and said that there were a lot of Indians at Rabbitt's drunk. I went up there and found that a bunch of natives were lying about the bar and outside the house dead drunk, and though Rabbitt denied they got the liquor in his place, I had no difficulty in getting a conviction against him.

The casting of lots was an old Biblical custom which I once saw carried out in the shape of a game of cards to see who should get a liquor licence. At the summer licensing sessions in 1901, one of the first held here, the board had applications for licences from W.A. Dodds, of the Aspen Grove House, and Donald Munro, of the Wayside House, a bit out of Aspen Grove on the Otter Flat road. Both places were regular stopping-places between the Nicola Valley and the Similkameen, and both were well-conducted by men who were highly thought of in the community. Dodds' place was probably the oldest of the two, he having been an old-time settler there and a well-known stock-raiser and rancher. So far as I remember "Judge" Murphy, Alex D.

Bell, and Charley Thomas were the licence commissioners. Anyway, they decided that they would give one licence only for Aspen Grove and vicinity, and they left it to the applicants themselves to decide who should drop out. Both men were good poker players and they agreed to decide the matter by a poker hand. Munro won out, Dodds withdrew his application, and both were satisfied. That is the only time I ever saw or heard of such a method of deciding an application in any court in our part of the country.

Charley Thomas I knew well, having come into the district with him. He was a native of Barnwood, Gloucestershire, and was born there on the first day of November in 1861. He left home when he was twenty and spent four years in Australia prospecting and mining. In 1885 he came to Canada, landing at Victoria, and he was attracted to the Similkameen Valley by the Granite Creek excitement, word of which had reached Victoria just about the time he landed there. A young and enterprising man, with the experience he had gained in Australia, his success in this country was certain. He mined on Granite Creek for a while and did well, and then for some years he was with A.E. Howse in his Nicola store. About 1894 or 1895 Charley opened for himself in Princeton, his being the first retail store here and the first store of any kind for that matter. He was our first postmaster, our first justice of the peace, the first president of the board of trade, and one of the original members of the hospital board. His brothers were associated with him in the store business for some years. He was in every way a good citizen and was always active on behalf of the town and district, frequently going to Victoria at his own expense on deputations. Charley never married but he was not a grumpy old bachelor at all, but a genial, sociable, good-humoured fellow. He died a year ago, May 25th, 1929.

After the railway got into running order, some supplies came to Granite Creek that way, and most of the Nicola Valley stuff. They came by train to Spences Bridge and then were freighted fifty miles to Nicola Lake, and then those that came to Granite Creek came on by horseback. All our goods came over the Hope Mountains in summer. There were stages between Kamloops and Nicola and between Nicola and Spences Bridge each way once a week. There was a mail once a month to Granite Creek. It went out on a Tuesday. Once we were three months without any mail, the snow was so deep. A man on snowshoes brought in our mail in winter; just letters, no papers.

Practically all the furniture there was in Granite Creek was home-made in the early days and even in later days except in houses like F.P. Cook's. There was plenty of timber; I have been told that this valley was very well-timbered one time; and with a whipsaw and adze, a hammer and some nails, there is no article of furniture that a handyman, like all prospectors are, can't make for himself. A miner's stool was three legs and a piece of board. If you wanted to be quite fancy you could nail a back and arms on it, or you could get a log long enough and hew out the upper half of it so to have a back curved round. Lots of them were satisfied with a piece of a small log high enough to sit on. Tables were sometimes a large log set in the middle of the floor or a rough table of whipsawn boards on four legs braced together. Few men went to the trouble of making a bedstead. They built up a bunk in one corner near the fire with a few thin poles and some boards, and threw their blankets on that. If you wanted a mattress all you had to do was cut a few branches of cedar or hemlock and throw them on the bottom of the bunk. Cedar boughs make a fine comfortable bed.

The government offices were moved to Princeton on March 19, 1900. J. Fred Hume was Minister of Mines at the time and had been visiting Princeton and the Similkameen Valley a short time before. (Editor's Note: Hunter is slightly out in this; Hume went out with the Semlin administration at the end of February and Smith Curtis succeeded him as Minister of Mines, but of course the change in the location of the office was arranged for by Hume.) There was a road completed to Granite Creek in 1896 and the next year they made a sleigh-road to Princeton. They kept on working on it with the object of making it a highway. This was accomplished about 1899 or 1900. The old trail was over the mountain and not as good a grade. It was a good deal later before there was a road east towards Keremeos. It was the development of the Nickle Plate mine at Hedley that brought the construction of that road. There had always been a good horse trail over that route and an Indian trail long before the white men came. There were also horse trails north-and-south which the Indians followed between this part of the country and the Oregon country to the south.

Granite Creek never had a school, not that there ever were many children there to be educated. Still there were a few, white as well as half-breed. Mrs. Beattie's school in Kamloops was the nearest good school there was when I went to Granite Creek. About 1900, a school was started in Princeton. There was never any church at Granite Creek. The Anglican, Presbyterian, and Methodist ministers at Nicola came in at intervals and held service, sometimes in a house – I think they used Swan's or Irwin's house – and sometimes in one of the hotels. If it was in a hotel the sale of liquor would be stopped by the proprietor during the service. There was also Archdeacon Small, from Lytton. Small administered the sacrament to the Indians. One minister, Rev. J.A. (?) Bastin, we had every six weeks in the summer for a year or two. For a long time Princeton had no church either. First, the Presbyterian Minister at Nicola came in once a month or so and held a service in one of the hotels; that would be in the bar-room too; then the Anglicans sent a man in; and then the Catholics. In a short time after the government agency was moved here, there was a small church put up. For a while, the old school was used, that is the first school, which used to be the land company's office.

Granite Creek in its palmy days was the third largest community in the province, Victoria and New Westminster being the only towns larger than it, and in those days it is doubtful if either of them was as busy a place as was the Creek. Everything was booming, the stores were doing a roaring trade, and to us young fellows who had never seen anything just like it, it looked as if this prosperity would go on for years indefinitely and the town grow into a big city. Charley Thomas, F.P. Cook, and I all got in here about the same time, all drawn in by the Granite Creek excitement. F.P. Cook saw the chance for a store in the Creek instead of mining, just as Charley Thomas did in regard to Princeton some years later, and at once opened a general store in a good-sized log building in a central location in the town. As a matter of fact, any location in Granite Creek would have been central, for the population had only the one street to walk along – Main Street they used to call it, but of course it had no name – and they had to go to the store, wherever it was. There were a store or two besides Cook's but he had the best stock and his was the main store in the place. He kept it up, too, for many years, even after Granite Creek began to go down, and served the district for a good way round. In later years, he opened stores in Princeton and in Coalmont, when the Columbia company started their colliery there. Perley Russell ran the business for the estate after Cook died, and is in charge of the store here, which is the only one they run now.

Cook was about the same age as Thomas and myself but died at a comparatively young age. He was born in Bedford, England, in 1861. His name was some family connection and an unusual name, Foxcrowle, but he was generally known familiarly as F.P. He came out to Canada in 1885 and right through to British Columbia, and like Thomas the discovery of gold in Granite Creek brought him here. He tramped in carrying his blankets. He often referred to his shouldering his way through the crowded street in Granite Creek the first time he struck it. Crowds were no novelty to him but that sort of a crowd was. He was always a live and active citizen, and was prominent in all movements for the advancement of the district. While the store was his main thought, he had a number of mining interests, and was always a great friend of miners and prospectors, staking several with success to them and to himself. He was a great horseback rider and some years before his death he was thrown and sustained an injury to his head which gave him a good deal of trouble afterwards. Finally he had to go to the Vancouver General Hospital for an operation for an abscess on the brain and was unable to rally. It was the last day of July, 1918, he died and he was buried, as he had always intended, at Granite Creek.

Albert E. Howse is a Canadian from Ontario. He settled in Nicola in 1876 and came to Princeton in 1900. He has had several stores in various places and flour-mill and sawmill interests as well. His business here is now owned by the Princeton Mercantile Company. John Campbell had the first drug store here. He is now in business in Keremeos. I don't know whether or not George G. Lyall is his successor in the business, but Lyall has been here for a quarter of a century or more in the drug business.

The first hotel here was Jim Wallace's, which was called the Princeton by him later on. He started it thirty-five years ago, at least, and probably a year or two more than that. Before that, he had been running a saloon in Granite Creek. John H. Jackson established the Jackson House about 1900. It was where the Princeton now is. The present building of the Princeton Hotel was the first brick erection in town. The Tulameen Hotel was started by George W. Aldous about the same time as the Jackson. Mr. Aldous had a butcher business in Princeton with one of the Allison boys. The Similkameen Hotel was put up by Mrs. Worgan, a very smart, businesslike Englishwoman, who came here with her husband from Rossland or Greenwood. He was no hotel-man, but it was her house and she knew how to run it. It stood for many years beside the old court house on Vermillion Avenue, and was burned down last winter. Mrs. Worgan had been out of it for years before that. There was none better fitted up in the country. Chinese were in charge of it at the end, and they had the water system shut off from most of the house on account of the cold weather. When the fire broke out they were unable to get the water turned on or they could have put the fire out before it got beyond control. Today, there are just the two hotels in town, the Princeton and the Tulameen, which are quite enough for the place. Both have beer parlors and on Saturdays the chaps come in and drink and gossip just as they used to do in the old days, but there is not the drunkenness nor the fighting that were to be seen in the older times.

We had no doctor in here in the early days, but Dr. A.M. Sutton came in monthly from Nicola, and if there was an emergency case he had to be sent for from there. He used to be in Guy's Hospital, London; he is now in California. Dr. H.A. Whillans was the first resident doctor in Princeton. He and Alec Bell came in together, hoofing it up the valley. That was about 1900. He moved from here to Hedley and then to the coast, where he practiced in Victoria. Then I

think he went to Prince George and he is now in Stewart. His wife was a Miss Dunlop who was one of our earliest school teachers and whom he married after she had been here a few months. Afterwards she was a school trustee for a couple of terms. A sister of Dr. Whillans also taught here and is married to Jim Wright, who ran The Star for a long time. Mrs. Wright is secretary of the school board. We had Dr. James E. Schon for quite a time. Then we had Dr. Lesieur or Lazier after that. (Editor's Note: Lazier is correct.) At Nicola for a long time, they had Dr. John Chipp, who was a bit of a character. He came out to Victoria in the very earliest days as a ship surgeon, and can't have been a young man then. He practiced at Barkerville, from where he came to Nicola. From Nicola he went over to Vernon and I think that is where he died. Probably he was a widower when he came out, for he had a daughter keeping house for him in Cariboo and in Nicola.

The first building for a school here was a temporary one used before there was a properly organized school district. After the district was organized they used an old building on the townsite which had been the office of the townsite company while they were building a school house. This old office building was used by all denominations for church purposes until a church was built.

The first undertaker here was "Tink" French (D.M. French). He got his nickname from "tinker," he and Dave Day being in partnership for a number of years as plumbers and tinsmiths. Before that they were together prospecting and recorded a number of claims together. In his advertisement in the Star "Tink" one time had: "We have buried others, why not you? Caskets cosy and comfortable. Give us a trial." "Just received, a shipment of caskets, warm and inviting – come in and inspect them."

I find from old papers that my first official actions as mining recorder were on September 4th, 1889, when I recorded lay-overs.