

Bygone Days of British Columbia

Gold Finds on Fraser River

HISTORIANS OF PROVINCE

BY R. E. GOSNELL

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WHEN was the first gold found in British Columbia? Who were the men or man who first panned it? These are questions which, owing to the importance attaching to such a discovery, ought to be easy. Authorities do not agree on the subject, contemporary evidence is at variance, and there is not one who apparently with absolute certainty can place his finger on the time, or the man, or the spot of first finding. Houston, who died about three years ago, claimed to have been the first man on the Fraser to pan gold, and wanted the government to give him a pension on account of it. Houston was undoubtedly among the first of the early miners. There are men living who confirm his claims. One at least still lives who formed part of the party to which Houston belonged. I intend to give the story as it was told to me and as it will appear for the first time in print. It will be necessary to clear the way a bit, however.

Historians of B. C. Bancroft and Dr. Dawson, who both studied to answer the questions I have asked by carefully investigating original sources, have told the story as it was told to them, and I propose to give their versions, and to add what light I can to their findings. Bancroft, whatever we may say about him otherwise, was a great collector and an almost phenomenal compiler, as his thirty odd volumes of Pacific Coast history amply testify. The late Sir John George Bourinot, no mean authority in such matters, told me he considered Hubert Howe Bancroft among the greatest of American historians. But Bourinot was too far away from the scenes of his literary exploits, and his numerous scientific families, and the facts of Pacific coast history to judge accurately. Nevertheless, Bancroft did a Herculean labor in getting together data that would otherwise have been lost and which future generations will bless him, as some of the present generation now curse him for borrowing documents which he never returned and for ill-repaying their kindness in comments that were in bad taste and undesired. He was by no means a "fakir," as some

have described him, but he was in some respects what in the language of slangdom is known as a "bad actor." However, in some of his phases as an historian and a man I shall not now discuss him. As an ardent and as a compiler, he did monumental service for which let us praise him. He was too mercenary, or should I say, commercial, in his instincts to be a real historian like his great namesake Geo. Bancroft, or like Parkman or Prescott, or Lothrop Motley. He confesses to have written his histories on the cooperative plan, in which he employed many men and many minds. He was a practical and a money-making way, but as a method of making history it was fatal to uniformity of treatment and a sustained style for which Gibbon and Macaulay are so conspicuous, and does not bear the impress of one master mind throughout who analyses, deduces, and illuminates producing an harmonious whole and a definite form permeating the entire. It is wholly unreasonable to suppose they would, or could, have kept such knowledge to themselves. Not all the rigid discipline of the Hudson's Bay Company could have overcome the avarice of the average man, even if it were sufficient to keep his mouth closed. The story that the policy of secrecy was enforced to keep intruders out of the few preserves is palpably a myth.

Excitement, starts out by rebutting the charges, one of many against the Hudson's Bay Company, of concealing the existence of gold, which it was alleged was long known to the company's officials. In this I believe Bancroft was entirely in the right. All the evidence and circumstances of the time go to show that, as A. C. Anderson avers, there was no suspicion among officials of the Hudson's Bay Company of the existence of gold anywhere in the interior in either in large or small quantities. Nine out of ten of the high officials, not to speak of the rank and file, would not have known gold had they seen it. Gold in the concrete, "in situ," so to speak, was just as intelligible to them as diamonds in the rough. So true was this that McLean and other traders to whom gold was first brought were unable to appraise its value, and took it on the credit of the miners who brought it to them rather than on account of its inherent value, as understood by them. It is wholly unreasonable to suppose they would, or could, have kept such knowledge to themselves. Not all the rigid discipline of the Hudson's Bay Company could have overcome the avarice of the average man, even if it were sufficient to keep his mouth closed. The story that the policy of secrecy was enforced to keep intruders out of the few preserves is palpably a myth.

I shall not here give the details of the finding of gold on Queen Charlotte Islands, about 1851, or the reported existence of placers on the Skeena river in 1852, as not being pertinent to the main issue. Nothing came of them. J. W. McKay, one of the most observant and intelligent of the Hudson's Bay Company's officials in 1850, found particles of gold in exploring for land between Victoria and Nanaimo. He told me himself, but in quantity not sufficient to warrant serious pursuit. J. D. Pemberton, surveyor-general of Vancouver Island, in his book on V. I., published in 1852, also speaks of gold in 1852, found gold in considerable quantities between Naches Pass and Stella-

reproduced. When the little birds but a day or two old they could not fly, but they were very active. If disturbed, although they could not travel fast, it was noticeable that they were much livelier in the evening than in the day time, in this respect resembling the laughing gull. When cornered they would turn, and utter a hissing noise, and even peck at the toe of my boot in a savage way. When disturbed on her nest the old bird did just as the grouse would have done in similar circumstances. She flew off as if her wing was broken and dropped, struggling on the ground only a few feet distant. I followed her to try to get a snapshot with my camera, but she moved so swiftly that I could not attain my object. She did not, however, fly away until she had, as she thought, fled me away from her nest. With a dog or a bear, the rabbit would have been successful. Night hawks may often be seen in the neighborhood of Victoria and sometimes right inside the city flying in the

The Times Nature Club

On the boat going from Victoria to Vancouver I met an old man who had been staying at Victoria for some time. In the course of conversation he asked me if I had noticed the scoring of the rocks at Oak Bay and Ross Bay. I had not noticed them, particularly at these places, but had seen the grooves made by the action of glaciers on the beach of Beacon Hill.

Few people who live in Victoria realize that at one time the whole country must have been covered with snow and ice. The fact that the climate there now is so mild makes it difficult to realize that such a thing could have been. It must have been ages ago, but the scorings in the rocks do not appear very old.

I have often wondered if I am right in speculating on the reason for this.

stalk them, but the coyotes are cunning. There were many birds to be seen, and among them a number of birds of prey. One large eagle hovered slowly over a swampy place and small hawks in large numbers were seen.

Cow Bird.

One of the most interesting birds was the little cow bird. This bird has a similar habit to the English cuckoo. It lays its eggs in the nest of some other bird. Many people have tried to find out how it does this. The best explanation I have heard was given by a Victorian. Before cows came to the prairies the cow birds adopted the buffalo for their companions. These, seemingly, incongruous friends, were mutually helpful. The buffalo always attracted numbers of flies and these were used by the cow bird for food. On the other hand, the buffalo were glad to be rid of the flies which bothered them so much. These buffalo seldom stayed long in one part of the country. They roamed from place to place, and if the birds were to go with them, there was no opportunity for nesting. For this reason the bird sought out some other bird's nest and laid the egg there. It is quite a common thing on the prairies to find a nest with three or four eggs, all but one very dark spotted one, a little larger than the others. This was the egg of the cow bird. The cow bird is sometimes known as the buffalo bird. It is said that they sometimes accompany the moose or caribou herds in the same way that they did the buffalo.

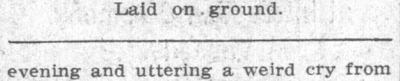
NIGHT HAWK'S EGGS
Laid on ground.

Speaking of the cow bird reminds me of the night hawk, sometimes called night jar, or goat sucker. I remember that many years ago in the times of man's ignorance when it was thought that the bird sucked the milk from the nanny goats, when as a matter of fact all they were doing was catching the flies beneath the bellies of the goats or cattle.

The night hawk is a near relative of the swallow, resembling them particularly in their method of catching flies. Their mouths are very wide, and they have a number of short bristles on either side which aid them in getting their meals. Like the swallows and all other insect-eating birds these are very useful. Owing to their resemblance to the hawks, however, they are often killed in mistake for them. It is because of its appearance that it has the name night hawk, and also on account of its habit of flying in the evening in preference to the day time.

It is in its method of raising its young, however, that the night hawk is particularly interesting. The two eggs are laid on the bare ground and the old one sits on them for the required time and the little ones are hatched. One that I found several years ago at Comox, a mile or two from Comox, is given in the illustration. The eggs were laid in an open spot in the woods near the cemetery. Near the eggs were a number of pebbles somewhat about the size and color, so that even if the old bird was not covering them they were not easy to find. The plumage of the old bird was mottled something like the surrounding stones so that she was hidden although in the open.

I photographed the eggs and later did the same to the young, but they so much resembled the ground that I picture is not a good one for newspaper



evening and uttering a weird cry from which they get the name night jar.

Burshuses.

I picked a couple of burshuses this morning in Southern Saskatchewan. They were not quite as early as on the Pacific coast. The moment I touched them the pollen dust fell from them in showers. The pistillate flowers of the plant surround the top end of the stalk, the staminate flowers being low or down. When the pollen have fallen the flowers fall off and nothing is left but a dry brown point. The part that is so valuable for decorations is the pistillate part. If the stalks are picked too late in the season the forets come and it is found that each seed is provided with wings-like the dandelion seeds and they float off through the air looking for a place suitable for growing.

Another Coyote.

As I write passing along through Southern Saskatchewan, I have just seen another coyote from the window of the fast moving train. It was in the bottom of a small creek or brook and seemed to be feeding on something. It was very pale yellow and only about half as large as the one seen earlier in the morning. When I told several of the other passengers about it they seemed rather incredulous and none of them had seen either of the animals.

Attracted by Water.

It is wonderful how a small stream of water attracts the birds, animals and insects, no matter in what country it may be. This was very clearly illustrated this morning. At one little stream near the railway I counted seven different kinds of birds, at there at the same time, and two of them were birds of prey. Anyone wishing to at-

tract birds in their garden can take a lesson from this. It may be done by keeping a small pond in the garden with water not only for drinking but also for bathing, a luxury which almost all birds enjoy.

The Farmer's "Clever" Cat.

Titus liked living in the country. He and his mother caught all the mice that came to the house as well as those in the barn. One day he was out and caught a rat. He was like the farmer. Both Peggy and Titus were like members of the family, and would have lived together for the rest of their lives if Titus had been just like other cats.

Titus' master and mistress slept in the front room upstairs. Part of the front of the house was covered with a very large Virginia creeper which was planted in 1852, also speaks of gold in 1852, found gold in considerable quantities between Naches Pass and Stella-

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