

# Bygone Days of British Columbia

## Old Trading Posts in the Province

BY R. E. GOSNELL

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**OLD FORT HOPE** was established by the Hudson's Bay Co. in 1827. It was a trading post under the direct supervision of the chief trader at Fort Langley established in the early days, the latter place was the chief emporium for the trade of the interior coming by way of the Fraser river from Kamloops. Fort Langley was really intended to have been the capital of British Columbia, but other considerations prevailed, principally that which appealed to a military man.

The townsite of Derby, as the new city was to have been called, was flat and unprotected. For military reasons New Westminster was selected by Lt. Col. Moody, and there are few who will say that his selection was not a good one. Nowadays the military aspect of the situation does not appeal to people as it did to the head of the imperial forces, as we do not now think of going to war, and besides New Westminster is no longer the capital; but from a picturesque point of view it would be hard to beat. I shall not make comparisons with Victoria, nature has done as much, and as one critic has remarked, man has done so little. It is a very delicate subject to discuss, however gingerly we approach it. Anyway, the Royal City is a very beautiful place and a very healthy place, and Col. Moody made no mistake when he recommended it, as the proposed seat of government for a future great province. Besides it is practically the central point of the great fishing industries of the Fraser river valley, and is bound, the more I think of it, to be part of a great city to extend continuously from Point Grey to Brownsville and as much farther as the imagination can carry you.

Fort Langley had Fort Hope. In the days when Fort Langley and Fort Hope were in their prime, of course, nobody thought of a future Westminster any more than "Easy Jack" had visions of Gastown being the commercial metropolis of British Columbia and of the Canadian west coast. It may be that "Easy Jack" did have such visions, but it is not at all likely. If I had been selecting a capital for the province in 1858 I think I should have preferred Hope to Langley. It has great many things to recommend it. When you first approach it it gives you the impression of being an island or an immense bar, which is really what it is. It is a sedimentary formation the result of a huge eddy, which gradually enlarged its scope until it became what it is, a charming piece of landscape flanking the mountain side for some distance. It would have made a beautiful site for a small capital city, to make happy and important its official residents and to charm the passerby. Its verdure reminds one of the shores of Ireland, while the delightful quiet of its situation and its rugged and romantic background carry you back in recollection to some of the glens of Scotland. Mr. Teague has told us how.

Hope Lost the Opportunity of becoming the most important place on the Fraser river as the virtual head of navigation and we can easily understand what a disappointment it must have been, especially to those who could properly take stock of its possibilities. There was a greater loss than people are apt to imagine when Yale carried off the plum to the beautiful but sequestered hamlet. Had Hope become the emporium of the river trade and travel as Yale afterwards became it might have had a different future. Yale, as I remarked in a previous article, never was and never could become a gateway. It did not afford an easy way into the mines of Cariboo, and the Fraser beyond was not navigable. Hope, on the other hand, while it stood in but little less favorable relation to Cariboo, is the portal of the Similkameen country and has country back and ways to imagine a hundred eventualities whereby that route might have become one of the most important highways in the province, and there are still a hundred eventualities possible. The prophetic, or rather shall we say the practical, mind of Sir James Douglas saw in the Dewdney Trail the forerunner of a Great Highway.

connecting the waters of the Fraser with eastern Canada by which the great future "trunk" from the East to the West should take place. How was he or any person else in his time to know of the change in fortunes and in methods of transportation that was to take place. None of us at the present time are wise enough to predict the actual outcome of the building of the Panama canal or how we are to be affected by perfecting a new navigation. Very little, I contend, might have changed the entire railway scheme, or given us a wagon road for some years instead of a railway. Unexpected mining development in the mountains back of Hope, or in the Similkameen just beyond the hogback, might have diverted attention and the line of railway that way on account of population and mineral wealth. That has lived in the dreams of some of the old timers for fifty years and their dreams may yet be realized. Remember that the name of the place is Hope and the spirit, lives eternal in the human breast. I say, therefore, that Hope narrowly escaped great things, and may yet come up to expectations of half a century ago. Among the men who have stayed there hoping against hope, shall we say, are old man Yates, I hope he will forgive me for calling him "old man," because he still has the activity of a young man. Billy Bristol, or as some call him, "Capt" Bristol, Postmaster Wardle and some two or three others whose names I have forgotten. Yates I have written about, and given some

of his reminiscences. Bristol have yet to tell of. He carried the mail and express from New Westminster to Yale for years, and his exploits in that direction only rank after those of that other celebrated carrier, Billy Ballou, because he came after him and in less strenuous times. Like Billy Ballou he was hard as nails, and capable of enduring any amount of hardships and exposure without at least immediate results. He is now doubled up with rheumatism, no doubt the aftermath of his early hard experience. It is told of Billy Ballou that he would come wet and cold into camp after immersion in the river or through wet snow and ice and lie right down on his back without supper, and in half an hour would be asleep and steaming through the blankets. He would be up again at three or four in the morning, and off with his Indians pushing to his destination. He never let up in his ceaseless journey to and fro. The question sometimes is asked: Are there

Such Men Nowadays, and could they endure what these men did? Undoubtedly, yes, when the occasion requires. It is only a matter of adaptation to conditions, and that without any loss of vitality. One of our pioneers, The Yukon developed its heroes, the same as did the Fraser river and the Cariboo excitements. There is a message to send to Garcia, the Columbia physique, snuffed out so comparatively an early a period when everything promised so long a life for them. The answer lies without question in the arduous careers they spent, the hardships they were exposed to, the long hard tasks they set themselves to. The human mechanism is like a steam engine. Its period of usefulness is in direct ratio to the strain which it has to stand at given times.

Mr. James Wardle. I was speaking about the Dewdney trail, one of the achievements of the early regime that gave us the Cariboo. Among the men who used this trail, some portions of which are still traveled, and other portions paralleled by rail or modern highway, was James Wardle, postmaster of Hope. He left Nottinghamshire in 1852, and arrived in Esquimalt on the 10th of January, 1853. He mined for gold in Cariboo, on the Columbia river, in the Similkameen and Big Bend, and prospected at Leitch river on Vancouver Island. His experience, however, for eight years carrying mail and express from Hope into the Cariboo was rather unique, and his avocation unusually hazardous. That during all the time he followed the trail in and out he was not once held in a remarkable tribute to the way the fear of the law on British soil served to protect him. Not only did he carry mail, including of course registered letters and money orders, but he often brought out gold dust. In the winter time he took the route through American territory, and he is free to admit while on that side of the line he some times felt "dickey," and always was on his guard. He relates nothing in the way of serious adventure, which is an astonishing fact in itself. Like the careful, skilled navigator he took as few chances as possible, and in the minimum of risk there is the maximum of safety, a mighty safe rule to follow. Nevertheless, the unvarnished tale of those comings and goings, often alone, are extremely interesting.

A Long Trip. "After confederation I got the contract for carrying the mail from Hope to Wild Horse Creek, in the Kootenays. In the summer I used to travel through Colville Valley and Spokane to Spokane Prairie—across the Senacatine ferry—then to the Pend d'Reille lake—across Bonners ferry—then swing around into British Columbia again, and follow the Moyie up to Moyie lake. In going this way the distance would be 650 miles, or 1,300 miles for the trip. In the summer it would take me about 25 days, or perhaps 30 days, but I have done it in 21 days, and in 30 days I think I did one trip. Of course I used to get behind in the winter time, when I went on snow shoes all the time. In going out of Hope I followed the old trail down through the Cascade Range. As a rule I took about 50 pounds of mail matter. I carried letters wherever there were any parties on the road. There were many accommodations along the road, but generally I used to camp out. "I had sixteen horses the first year, and had them scattered at different places along the route. When I came to where my horses were I would have to lie out over night until I got them corralled.

Carrying Opium. "I used to carry express in foo. I used to get 25 a pound for packing opium in this way. For Chinamen, who were nearly all on Wild Horse creek, and I would have to go and see the American customs officer and tell him what I had. He had confidence in me, and I only had to give bonds on me. After that I simply had to give my word that I had so much opium and that it was all going into Canada. "In winter I went over the same route except that in going we used to go to Colville and then take a canoe up to Fort Shppard and cross the Columbia there and go over the Selkirk to the Kootenay Bottom—rafting the Kootenay river. We had to make rafts for this purpose. We could not rely on the rafting service. The water would be all frozen on the bottom and the water would come up to our armpits in places to form them. I would almost equal sometimes getting into the water. We had nothing but mercury in the thermometers and it would all freeze. We could never tell how cold it was when we were traveling. "It took me five days once to go 25

miles in the winter with snowshoes. Generally, it took me ten weeks to make the trip in the winter. The distance was not so far. It would be 500 miles by snowshoeing it. This was because we took shorter trails. All the trails then were foot trails.

Some Experiences. "It was not always able to take enough to get up into the mountains. We would often fall short of supplies in the winter time. I got snowed in once between the Pend d'Reille lakes and Bonners ferry. We were two days there without any food or water. We used to go to Pack river and camp there. And then when we got to the Kootenay it was all running and full of ice, and we could not cross it. We had to break the ice and swim the horses over. We got over on a log jam away below. "One time when we got to Bonners Ferry the Kootenay was running full of large blocks of ice, and we had to go up into Wild Horse. I took a pack river and camp there. And then when we got to the Kootenay it was all running and full of ice, and we could not cross it. We had to break the ice and swim the horses over. We got over on a log jam away below. "One time when we got to Bonners Ferry the Kootenay was running full of large blocks of ice, and we had to go up into Wild Horse. 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