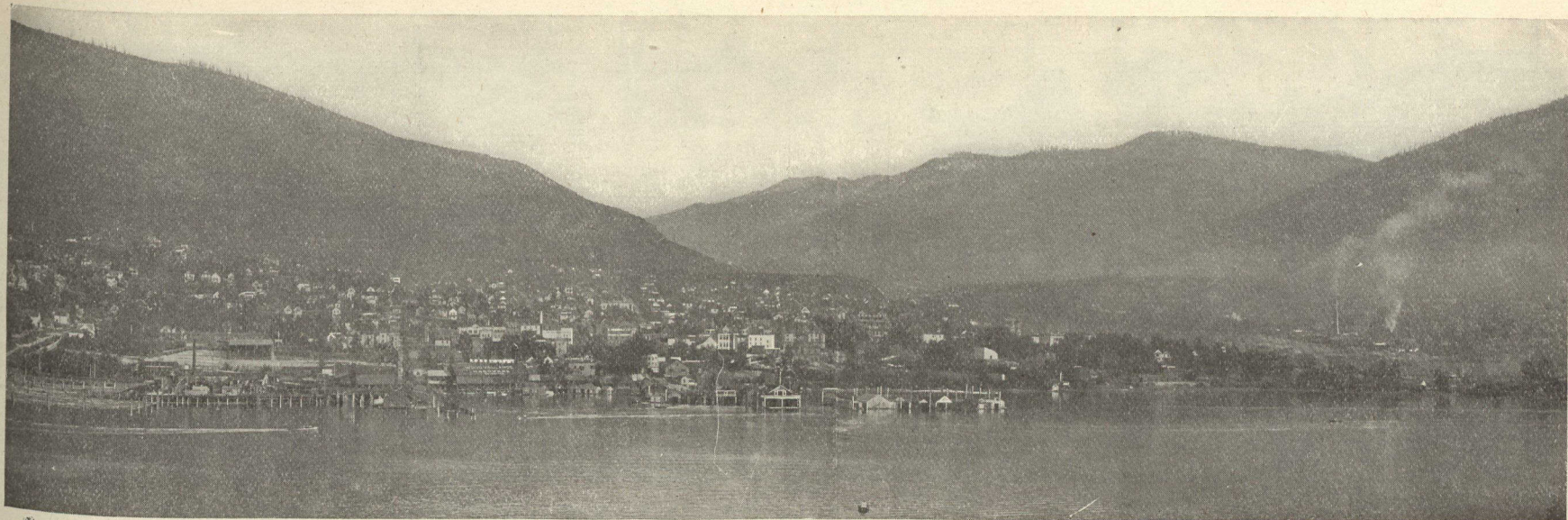




General view of Nelson, B.C., which was an out-of-way trading post in the days of the mining development that brought Silver King and Le Roi into the world's markets.

THE ROMANCE OF TWO GREAT MINES

Both are in the Museum now, but heaped up riches for Canadians and Spokaners last century.

By EDGAR WILLIAM DYNES

THE recent re-opening of the Silver King mine in the Kootenay district of Southern British Columbia recalls to mind the early days in this famous mineral camp, which, in the palmy days made no small number of millionaires and put several wild-cat promoters on easy street for all time. It recalls the old days—the good old days, there are still some of the old timers who will say—the days when you could sell a wild-cat mine for a king's ransom and the backwoods barber would lop off your whiskers for a simple matter of fifty cents. It brings back to memory the stirring period when sky pilots were as rare as white clouds on the day before the flood while the devotees of the green tables were as thick as a swarm of angry bees on the swaying branch of a green sapling. It springs a searchlight on an era when money was flush—too easily got to save.

But it also recalls the story of the finding of the mine itself. It brings to light of how that a delver of the hills found some peacock float of which he did not know the value and thereby lost a fortune, and although he travelled the hills for twenty-and-two years longer, before he turned up his toes, he never found the like of the peacock float again. It tells of how a disheartened prospector came to the conclusion that it was easier to delve into the pockets, and to work on the sympathies of some easy marks down in Colville, Washington, than to drill into the heart of the hills for the hidden treasures stored there; and then by way of getting out of a nasty predicament he aspired to membership in the Ananias Society.

In the summer of 1886, Nelson Demers, Melt Oakes and Frank Emmett, of Colville, left the Salmon River on what they purposed to be a long prospecting trip. They had a few good cayuses, a good supply of bacon, beans and coffee, and were fully equipped for a long siege of mountain life. One day, after being some six weeks together, Demers picked up some float, peacock in colour, to throw at a passing gopher, and, utterly unconscious of the fact that he held in his hand what might lead to fame and fortune, he passed on. That night there was a quarrel between Emmett and Oakes, with the result that Emmett divorced himself at once, and went "skidoo," taking the horses with him. This resulted in Demers and Oakes having to go back to their cache on the Salmon River for supplies and some few weeks later they returned to Colville.

They found the historic old town in a state of great excitement. Emmett had come in the day before, reporting that his party had left him, and that in a short while he had panned forty dollars out

of a creek on the British Columbia side of the line. Although he had not displayed any gold, he had been successful in borrowing some money on the strength of it and had left town.

Soon afterward, a man named Hall and a party of eleven men, thinking that there might be some truth in the placer find story, set out from Colville with fourteen horses and a good supply of provisions, bound for the Kootenay country.

After getting well up into the northern territory, they came upon some very rugged country, and one morning nine of them took their blankets on their backs and piked off into the hills, leaving Hall and one of the party named White to look after the horses. The animals strayed away some distance and in looking for them Hall and White stumbled on the lead of the Silver King, not two hundred yards from the spot where Demers had picked up the peacock float a month before.

However, the lucky prospectors did not as yet know the value of their find. When they returned to Colville, a fake grafting assayer, who wanted to get his finger in the pie, gave returns of twenty ounces in silver instead of almost five hundred as it really was. A little while later, another assayer, Jack Cobaugh, got his hands on a piece of the ore and, in return for the information that it ran four hundred and eighty-five ounces in silver, he was given a twenty-sixth interest in the claim. He afterwards sold his interest for \$25,000 and blew it in quickly on delusions of various kinds and forms which sprang up and flourished in the wake-me-up-life of the little town of Nelson which grew up on the shore of Kootenay Lake, only a few short miles from the mine. Nelson Demers knowledge that he was once close to a fortune.

The news of the discovery soon spread and in

the following year, Cook and Fox, of Colville, set out for the vicinity of the new bonanza. They located some valuable ground in close proximity to the first find, but to a second party which came later fell the honour of naming the mountain.

One of this party named Thompson was writing the notice on the discovery post of a new location when he called to his partner:

"What shall we call this mountain?"

As he spoke, a large warty toad hopped out from beneath a half-rotten log and his partner answered:

"Look at that toad! Call it Toad Mountain!"—and Toad Mountain it remains to this day. The locators of the Silver King had christened it Mineral Mountain, but the baptism without water has stuck.

The Silver King people began development of their property immediately and some very rich ore was taken out. The first shipment of twenty tons, which had to be sent out by pack train—a very expensive method of transportation—netted the fortunate owners over \$8,000. The mine began to attract unusual attention and many splendid offers to purchase were turned down, one genuine bid of \$300,000 being refused, and all went well for a time.

A little later some men from Victoria made their appearance and jumped the claim. There had been some technical irregularity and the owners, not being very well versed in the mineral laws, did not know what to do. However, just at this time a wealthy Englishman named Atkins happened along, and he offered to fight the claim jumpers and also spend twenty-five thousand dollars in development work in return for a half interest. This was agreed to and the mine was saved. Indeed, it has been authoritatively stated that it has added over ten million dollars to the world's wealth since the day when fourteen "cultus" cayuses wandered to the top of Toad Mountain to find better pasture than the valley ground afforded.

But, as sometimes happens in the mining world, the lead finally pinched, and some three or four years ago the mine was closed. Lately, however, a development syndicate have taken a long lease on the old mine. They are shipping ore regularly and report that the returns are most satisfactory, so that the bonanza of the early days, and around which so much romance swings, appears to be entering on a new lease of life.

The story of the finding of the Le Roi mine at Rossland is not one whit less suggestive of the way that mining lifts some men from poverty to affluence. It sold for \$12.50 in 1890 and nine years later was rated on the great mining exchanges of the world for eight million dollars of honest



Silver King, as it appeared in the early days, about 1890. The mine was located in 1886.