

GOLD IN THE SASKATCHEWAN.

Gold was not in the least interesting to the Indian or the grizzly bear, especially the fine deposit hidden in the bars and ledges of the Saskatchewan River and other northern streams. Therefore centuries passed over North America, and the metal remained undisturbed in the swift reaches of the river where the fur-laden canoes ran the rapids, or the solitary Hudson's Bay Company voyageur travelled overland on his trapping expeditions.

One day the white prospectors came, tapping among the ledges, and found the metal in the gravel at the ford. Among the adventurous men who accompanied Captain Palliser on an exploration mission of the Northwest in 1855, were two in which we are at the present time chiefly interested. One was Dr. Hector, afterwards Sir James Hector, a well known scientist, and Jos. McDonald at the present time a well known and respected resident of Strathcona, vigorous and hearty at the age of 72.

McDonald was born at Selkirk, a descendant of one of those hardy Highland Scotchmen whom the Hudson's Bay Company employed in the arduous tasks inseparable from its trading undertakings.

His son knew many native languages and it was for that and other reasons that he was selected to accompany the expedition with Dr. Hector, from Winnipeg to the Pacific.

In passing it may be mentioned that from the report of Captain Palliser the inference was drawn that induced members of the British House of Commons to make the statement that the vast territory explored was fit only for buffaloes, grizzly bears and Indians to live in.

While exploring the Saskatchewan River at the point where the prosperous city of Strathcona now stands Dr. Hector found traces of fine gold in the alluvial soil. He cautioned the members of the party to say nothing of it in advance of his report to the Government.

In 1864 Joseph McDonald came to this district in the employ of the Company his father had served so long and faithfully. He took up the homestead on which Strathcona is built, and was the first white settler on the south side of the river trading with the Crees who occupied the district north of the Battle River and along the Saskatchewan. South of the Battle were the Blackfeet with whom the Crees were at deadly enmity; their many feuds giving the river its name.

While in the employ of the Company and during this time an American named Love came to the district on a prospecting trip and learned from McDonald of the discovery made by Hector. Together they began panning the precious mineral from the gravel scooped up from the river bed and they struck good pay dirt, separating the gold from the gravel with a crude hand made sifter. Periodically as the years have gone by others including McDonald have by the most primitive methods succeeded during the time of low water, in making good wages, but in the words of one of themselves they were only "skimmers." Among them was a Californian named Clover after whom Clover Bar was named and Sam Livingston, a forty-niner who first introduced the "rocker" in the Northland.

In the early days in New Zealand rockers were used exclusively until superseded by dredges, and the latter were subsequently utilized on the Saskatchewan, but they were not found to be successful—One of these, long since discarded lies on the river bank at Strathcona at the present day.

Despite these failures in the past a new company backed by men of prominence in the financial world have undertaken the task of making the river yield up its wealth and they are not pursuing a speculation but a reasonably sure business enterprise. The machinery with which a company this spring will begin gold dredging at Strathcona on a large scale is already on the ground. A thorough prospecting investigation of the river bed has been made by an experienced mining engineer. His reports are said

to have been extremely satisfactory in comparison with those of other rivers which yielded handsome dividends; and arrangements were completed. By the time the May "West" is in the hands of its readers operations will be in full swing. A concession of several miles of the river with its gold bearing bars has been secured from the Government and when the results have been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the directorate other concessions will be secured, other similar dredges put in commission and it is not improbable that the manufacture of the machinery will be conducted at the city of Strathcona.

Twenty-five hundred cubic yards of gravel can be handled daily and as the prospectors' assay showed, at an average of thirty-five cents per yard, it can readily be seen that the promises which the Saskatchewan holds out to the company are bright indeed.

The dredge is 114 feet long by 16 feet wide. It weighs 120 tons and uses 100 horse power engines. On each side of one end is a steel hydraulic pipe 27 feet long and 10 inches in diameter. Attached to these is a suction pump and at the other end of each a digging apparatus for hard bottom. For sixty feet on the deck of the dredge is a revolving screen 38 inches in diameter where the coarser material is sited out. The finer parts are caught in boxes and treated in order to extract the minerals, while the coarser materials or "tailings" are thrown clear by a "winged batter," which can be adjusted to throw the refuse in any desired direction. The old dredges dumped this refuse and its accumulation was one of the prime causes of failure.

One end of the dredge is held by a pivot post weighing 2,500 lbs. which is sunk in the river bed and the other end oscillates as required from this point. The whole lower structure of the hull which is made entirely of steel is surmounted like a bridge by steel girders 10 feet high.

All parts of the dredge coming in contact with the water or gravel are lined with Manganese steel to give added durability.

For attacking banks there are in addition two 2-stage hydraulic pumps with 110 pounds pressure to the square inch, and throwing 1,000 gallons of water a minute with an inch and a quarter nozzle. This is to wash out the bank and prepare it for the scoop.

Whence comes this gold? Is it a constantly recurring product from some mountain spring like the waters of the river itself and by them washed along at the time of high water, or was it deposited indiscriminately over these regions by some glacial movement or geologic happening? Miners, like doctors, are given to differences of opinions in their diagnosis.

Jos. McDonald believes in the glacial theory, as does the engineer employed by the dredging company. They believe that the bank contains the gold and that it is being constantly washed out and down on to the bed by the water of the stream. They are of opinion that gold may be found in varying quantities all over the Western plains and McDonald cites the instance of a well dug for the Hudson's Bay Company the gravel of which as it was brought up showed gold mixed with it in about the same proportion as in the river. The current theory has been for years that the gold was washed down from the mountains and continually moved forward by the force of the stream, but this idea is held largely by persons who have given the subject less thought than those named.

Be the source what it may it has been known for years that a rich harvest of the precious metal was here when the proper appliances for its garnering were put in operation.

The time has now come when the industry is to be revived, carried forward by modern methods and made of great value to Strathcona. Canadian enterprise and push is behind the material is there, and one more resource is added to those already listed in the great Northwest—gold. Write Strathcona, in Canada West.

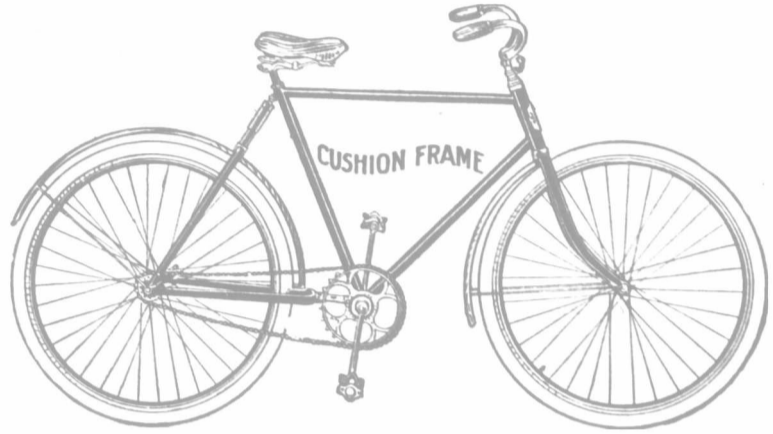
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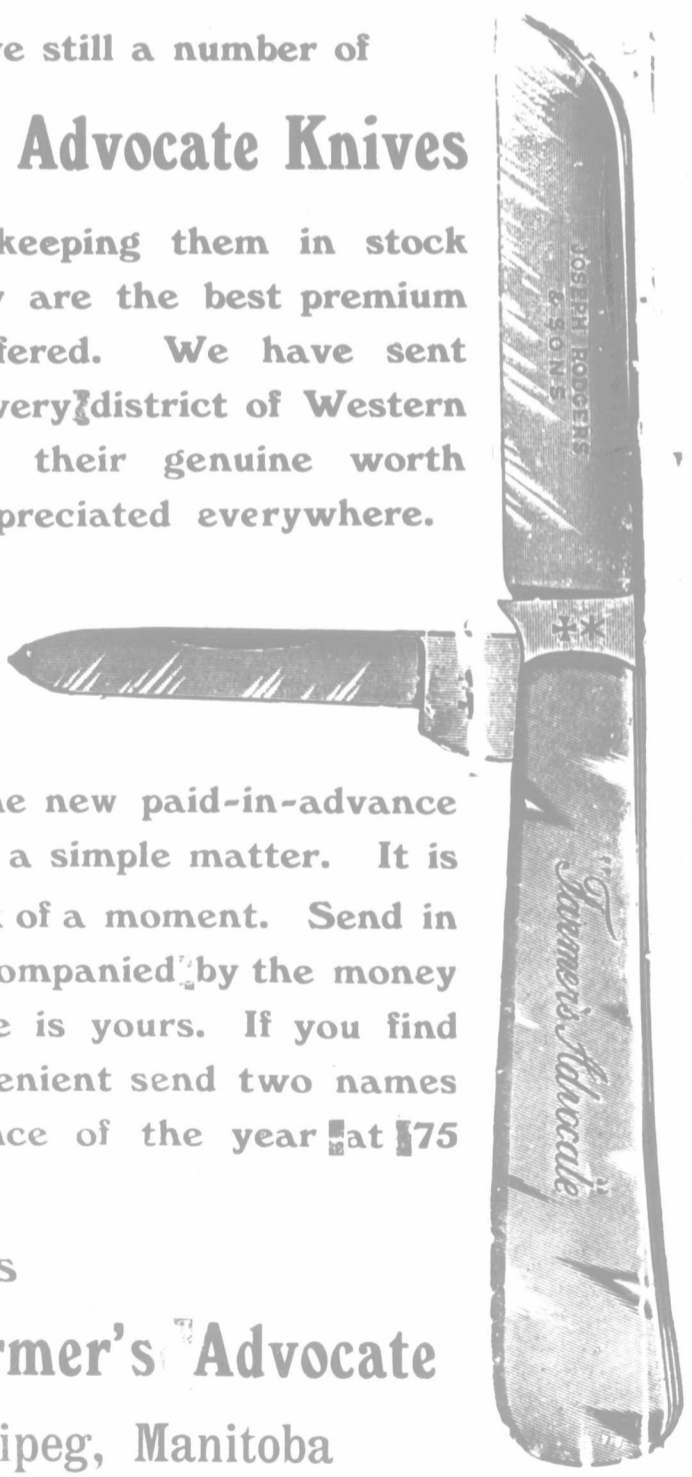
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