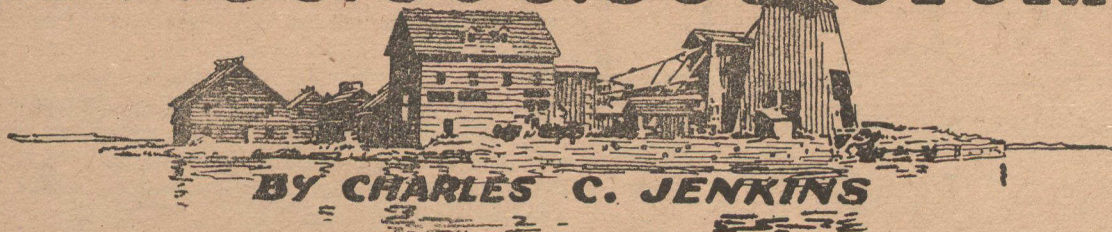


A \$100,000,000 STORM



SILVER in this part of 1917 is running gold a tight race in value. Silver has jumped in value almost as much as wheat. The higher cost of living is not due to the lower value of the silver dollar. The value of Canada's silver mines to-day is higher than ever. But in looking over the list, bear in mind what was once the richest silver mine in the world—Silver Islet, which many years ago a storm on Lake Superior swallowed to the tune of at least \$100,000,000.

ONE stygian night in the Fall of 1867, the sail-boat bearing a small party of adventurers to the trading post of the Hudson's Bay Company at Waukauegning (now Fort William, Ontario) was gripped in one of those weird twisters that still haunt the headland of the Sleeping Giant and dashed to pieces on the horn of a submerged reef. Some swam, others were dashed up to the rocky shore of a tiny island so flat that the heavy seas spent themselves almost to its centre.

The island offered little shelter, but in the early morning hours the storm subsided. In the crystal light of a North Shore dawn, long before the red sun peeped over the purple-bordered hills, the shivering refugees made the startling discovery that they were stranded on an island of solid silver quartz.

Such was the manner of the discovery of Silver Islet, the richest silver mine the world has ever produced, and whose rise and fall reads like a page of romance.

Its story is the story of the freak of Chance, stupendous enterprise, fabulous wealth, commercial greed, disaster, all capped by a climax of colossal human failure that lost to the world in general, and to Canada in particular, a silver eldorado whose resources were but scratched.

Passengers travelling to-day by the Northern water routes, on a clear day, may see from the lanes of the Great Lakes leviathans, just before they pass Thunder Cape at the entrance to Thunder Bay, the ghost of this all but forgotten tragedy. It consists of a small patch of an island, perfectly flat and almost hugging the mainland, which supports a row of dismal, time-battered log buildings.

Beyond, on the mainland, may be seen Silver Islet Summer Resort, one of the hot weather rendezvous of folks from Fort William and Port Arthur. There, where holidayers now make merry, once thrived a lively mining town of the early seventies and eighties, with stamp mill, smelter, assay house, main street, hotel, jail, and all the other human incidentals of a great boom in the wilderness. The site is one of the most charming and picturesque on the whole North Shore, with a wild, sort of garden-of-Eden beauty to it that words would fail to limn up into a mental picture. In its centre lies a tiny mirror lake which has its own queer enigma in that its surface is fully thirty feet above the level of Superior fifty yards away, and the pool has no apparent inlet or outlet.

One by one, the old relic-buildings on the mainland are being gathered to oblivion in the inexorable march of the years, and some day Silver Islet, with all its vast dreams and potentialities, will be nothing but a memory surviving on the pages of history. At one time half a thousand workers and their families were housed on this strip of waterfront.

Most of the miners were Cornishmen, some of whom remained in the North after the silver island's star had set. Captain Trethewey, Nicholas Williams, George State and R. Nichols, now resident in Port Arthur, are among to-day's survivors. Many of the one-time colony sleep in the little plot of wooden crosses back of the site of the town. The balance wandered afar and were lost track of.

It was in the Spring of 1868, following the accidental discovery through a wreck the Fall before, that an investigation by a committee of experts was made and the Silver Islet Land and Mining Com-

pany was organized by Montreal capitalists.

This company acquired the rights of the seventy-five foot silver reef or island and secured control of the water-front on the mainland opposite. The first expedition consisted of a working party of thirty men, two horses, some machinery, stores and provisions. About \$80,000 was expended by the company in the original operations, which, somehow, one is led to believe in reading "between the lines" of available records, were made with purely speculative ends in view.

Later, real operations commenced. The island was not large enough to take care of the company's plants, all of which had, with the stores, church, school, warehouses and so forth, to be erected on the mainland. A force of five hundred men at one time worked there, many of them in the industries ashore and others deep down in a cribbed tunnel beneath the waves of Lake Superior.

The company's first step was to coffer-dam around the island and fill in the cribwork with loose stones. On top of that they built a sea-wall of cement and asphalt. Then their forces started the work of eating out the silver heart of the island, which spurted from some prehistoric cauldron, leaving only the artificial shell to withstand the battering assaults of old Superior's rage. For some unexplained reason, the shaft was built slightly concave.

The Summer of 1869 was exceedingly stormy, and it was only during the calmest weather that the excavating work, begun the previous year, could be extended, but nevertheless, records show that during that Summer 9,445 pounds of excellent ore were produced and shipped to Montreal.

Between the years 1871 and 1884 Silver Islet mine had its richest run, producing in that period about \$3,500,000 worth of ore.

An excerpt from "Ocean to Ocean," the diary of Reverend George M. Grant, chronicler of Sanford Fleming's Expedition Through Canada in 1872, on his visit in that year to Silver Islet is interesting.

"At one in the morning," Reverend Mr. Grant relates, "we arrived at Silver Island—a little bit of rock in a bay studded with islands. The most wonderful vein of silver in the world has been struck there. Last year, thirty men took out from it \$1,200,000 worth of ore; and competent judges say that in all probability the mine is worth hundreds of millions. The original shares, bought at \$50 each, now sell for \$25,000. The company that works it is chiefly a New York one, though it was originally held by Montreal men, and was offered for sale in London (Eng.), for a trifle. Such a marvellous 'find' as this has stimulated search in every other direction around Lake Superior."

The rich vein which had exposed its point in a reef above Superior's waves was eventually lost. All indications went to prove that it threaded direct under the lake's floor to the mainland. Fortunes were spent in investigations and shafts sunk ashore in an effort to again pick up the billion dollar thread, but in vain. Nature, it seemed, had forever locked up her scintillating treasure in her keep beneath the waters of the earth.

Stories differ as to the climax that marked the finis of the Silver Islet boom. Major W. J. Hamilton, in his extracts from a paper prepared by Thomas Macfarlane, of Actonville, Quebec, 1879, quotes as follows in the Thunder Bay Historical Society's

Annual of 1911-12; an eloquent estimate:

"This remarkable mine was regularly exploited, with varying results until 1885. In the late Fall of 1884, a fierce snowstorm caused the supply coal barge to seek shelter in a South Shore port. After the cessation of the storm, which lasted some days, the captain found that his crew had deserted, and he was unable to secure more hands. He was thus forced to tie up for the Winter dismantled. The storms of 1884-5, along with the seepage through the rocks, did their work, and when the Summer of 1885 arrived, the shafts, the immeasurable galleries and passages, and all approaches thereto, were filled with water."

Thus, according to the traditions, as this wonderful discovery was given into man's hands so was it taken away—by the freak of a storm.

But there are other versions, and they have to do with the greed of the exploiter, who, not content with profitable production from a reasonable tunnel of safe dimension, scooped away the whole island, leaving too thin a shell to withstand the weight of the lake and the continuous battery of the waves. His nemesis came in the destruction of the man-made tube and the entrance of Superior to reclaim its secrets.

Available records state that the mine was carried to a depth of 1,250 feet. Tradition has it that the workmen could not stay down longer than four-hour shifts, even with fresh air pumped to them. The legend of the Objibwas is that Lake Superior has a copper bottom, and that before the white man came strange gasses arose from beneath it, which seems to secure rather weird proof in the experience of the subaqueous toilers who grubbed fortunes from under the foundations of Silver Islet.

The Legacy

(Continued from page 9.)

ways that a-way. My ole mudder she had that ha'n't fer ten years, and it was her half-sister that brung her up from six years ole! She'll jes have ter leave it onto some one."

"Well, I'll tell her so," said I, just in joke, of course.

"You do," says she, solemn as the grave, "you do, Miss Jessop, honey, an' she'll bless you all her life! You get some one ter say they'd take that ha'n't off her right w'ile it's there, so it hears 'em, and w'ile there's a witness there ter hear bofe sides, an' you hear to me, now, she'll go free!"

"I'll certainly tell her, Margaret," I said, and I went on and never gave it another thought, of course.

We went up to the Eltons' camp in Maine all of a sudden, for Miss Elton got the idea she'd feel better there, and though it was cold as Greenland, it did seem for a little as if she got a bit more sleep. But not for long. We slept out on pine-bough beds around a big fire, for that made more light, and that precious Janet seemed to be fainter, but she was there, just the same, and the poor girl had lost eighteen pounds and I felt pretty blue about it. It didn't really look as if we got ahead any, as I told the doctor, and she hardly spoke all day. I'm not much for the country, as a rule, it always smells so damp at night, but the Lord knows I'd have lived there a year if it would have helped her any.

Then came the night when Mr. Ferrau ran up to see how she was getting along. It was too cold for madam and the commodore, so we were there alone except for a gang of guides and servants and chauffeurs and masseuses. She had a bad night that night, for she got the idea that this lovely Janet was sitting up nearer and nearer to her, and she had it in her head that when Janet got to a certain point it would be all up with her. And when I told the doctor that over the telephone, all he said was:

"Too bad, too bad!" So I knew how he felt.

Well, she got talking rather hysterically for her, and I began to wish somebody else was around, when Mr. Ferrau jumps out of his door in the bachelor quarters and dashes over to us in a heavy bath robe, white as a sheet.

"For God's sake, Miss Jessop, do something!" he said, but I just shrugged my shoulders. There was nothing to do, you see. She was all bundled up in a sealskin sleeping bag with a wool helmet over her

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