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Edward Scott Busby

The Man Who Cleaned Up the Customs Crooks in the Yukon

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OVER average height, but of indifferent health, his thin, active form does not cast much of a physical shadow. But a clear working brain has more than once cast a portentous shadow, before which fear and mis-giving possessed the hearts of crooks in Skaguay, whiskey runners over the Passes, and haughty customs evaders in the Klondike country.

A master in strategy and tactics, he has the instinct of sensing the approaching struggle, and his plans are laid far in advance. It is this little habit of his which has caused both the railway magnate cursing in his office at Dawson, and the appointed leader of a bad political combination, to recoil in defeat before his trenches.

The general manager (from Chicago) of the rich railway and steamship corporation, mistook his habitual and quiet politeness for fear and deference; and he made some unprintable and extended remarks about Canada and her customs officials. After he had finished, and the pair of grey eyes into which he looked had changed from a quiet earnestness into the character of two blazing searchlights, the railwayman learned more of the customs laws and the laws of politeness, delivered in pure, red-hot English, than in all his previous years.

When he had regained his breath and hat, and was clear of the place, he went down to the company's local offices, and his suggestions to the agent there, whom he blamed for egging him to "go up and talk to that man," were such that the woman stenographer fled from the office with her hands to her eyes, while the trembling agent and the office furniture received the benefit of some hard knocks.

That general manager is dead now, but he was a man, for he went back to the customs house next day and apologized like a gentleman.

EDWARD SCOTT BUSBY was born in Southampton, Bruce County, Ont., on the 12th June, 1863. His father was a well-known local resident, Major William Adams Busby, who, after giving good service with his regiment throughout the Crimean siege, settled in the new village of Southampton, with his wife, Eliza Hartley.

The family, an old Northamptonshire one, contributed a goodly share of officers, who led their regiments or companies to victory, and sometimes to death, on such widely separated fields as Blenheim, Quebec, Bunker Hill and Inkerman.

When still a half-grown boy, the heroic blood of his ancestors prompted him to plunge into the river at Southampton, and at the peril of his life, rescue a drowning boy. In the struggle, a single spectator across the river kept calling to him, "Stay with it—stay with it!" But the heroic ended there, for when he had taken the sodden and half-strangled boy home, his reception differed from those on such occasions. After her anger had been partially vented on the boy for wetting his clothes, she turned on his rescuer and berated him for encouraging her boy to go in swimming, which was not so.

His next venture into the V. C. class (now the Carnegie class) was even worse rewarded. While stopping a runaway horse tearing down Poulet Street, in Owen Sound, dragging a buggy in which sat a pale and frightened woman, he received a ghastly wound in the side of his face. He still bears the outlines of the scar on his cheek where the shaft tore through, and the gap in his jaws, where good, white teeth grew, before his gallant and successful feat.

He was educated in Southampton public schools and in the Owen Sound business college.



"A master in strategy and tactics."

His first venture was in the auditor's office of the Detroit, Grand Haven and Milwaukee Ry., and was very successful, but was cut short by ill health, after rapid promotion. Later he was in business in Owen Sound, and in 1896 joined the customs staff. He was sent to Boston, Mass., to represent the Canadian customs service, for a couple of years. After that he went west on special business.

Early in 1899 he was selected for the difficult and dangerous position of Canadian customs officer, to facilitate the shipment of Canadian goods across the strip of disputed territory (now Alaska) into Yukon territory.

Here he showed his true mettle in doing great service to our trade with the gold country, which was then discriminated against, through U. S. influences, by the new White Pass Railway.

Skaguay not only contained the worst element found in western states mining camps; of black-legs, gamblers, thieves and murderers; but also harboured such of that brotherhood whose bad character led to their expulsion from Yukon by the Canadian Mounted Police. At first he was naturally anything but popular in such a community, as his work was in opposition to those of the business community of Skaguay and the U. S. coast cities. But in the end his personal bravery, straightforwardness and fair dealing, combined with never-failing urbanity, won him the high respect of the best elements of the place, such as it was.

He was the central and lone figure in a "flag incident" which is worthy of separate treatment, owing to its ending and his justification.

Among his latest activities in Skaguay (and during a visit of the writer in 1901, coming out of Dawson) was to give quiet but effective aid to the R. N. W. M. Police in breaking up what might have become in a few months' time a most dangerous organization, "The Order of the Midnight Sun." The object of its hundreds of members was to quietly assemble in various parts of the Yukon, and by a concerted effort, assisted by dissatisfied and alien residents, to overpower the Mounted Police, loot the banks and creeks in the Klondike, after the spring washup, and take the millions of dollars' worth of gold down the Yukon into Alaska, where it could be "cached" or distributed at ease.

In 1901 he was made inspector of Yukon, and in June, 1902, he was sent to Dawson, where customs affairs were in a very demoralized condition. He not only drastically cleaned the Augean's tables, but also forced payments of evaded customs dues to something like \$30,000, and permanently improved the collection of duties to the extent of several hundreds of thousands of dollars. From reliable sources the writer learned that in his pursuit of this duty he was at the outset offered over \$7,000 to allow matters to stand.

Had he accepted the bribes of whiskey-runners over the Passes, going up to over \$5,000 at times—for it was a rich trade; and of customs evaders in Dawson, he could have come out of Yukon a rich man, to take up the role of a leader in charitable work and a pillar in society.

IN Dawson he founded and was first president of a flourishing Canadian Club.

Besides administering his own department, with its large staff, he also did the work of the Inland Revenue, the Marine and Fisheries, Trade and Commerce (Chinese), Agricultural (quarantine), and any other department not directly represented at Dawson; for which he received little or no extra pay. He was in fact the most efficient, the hardest worked official in Yukon during his term there.

His wife, daughter of the late Henry Zinkan, with his four children, accompanied him in his northern labours. By a most pathetic incident, he lost, at Vancouver, a couple of years ago, his only daughter, just budding into a womanhood of gifted promise. Among the fairest memories the writer has of Skaguay over a decade ago is the picture of three manly brothers escorting along a rough side street, this beautiful little golden-haired maiden, who spent many of her early years amid the northern snows.

In 1906 he was transferred to Vancouver as inspector of Yukon, and of British Columbia ports, where he did such good work that in February, 1912, he was called to Ottawa by the new minister (Hon. Dr. Reid) and was made superintendent of inspection. A few months later he was advanced to the position of chief inspector of customs for Canada, having jurisdiction from Halifax to Vancouver and Dawson.

Active, tireless and methodical, he has already, under direction of the Minister and the Commissioner of Customs, installed a more efficient method of handling the work at the large ports, which has earned the approval of importing business men.

He has rejected flattering offers from across the line, where among business men who have had business relations with His Majesty's Canadian customs, Mr. Busby's talents and capacity for work are well known. His creed, while favouring Presbyterianism, is summed up in the terse Imperialism—Do your duty honestly, fear God and serve the King.