

GEORGE BATSTONE

(Copy of a rough draft written by Eric D. Sismey based on material found in notes written by George Batstone about 1962.)

(Transcriber's note – Diane Sterne – There were two versions of this story in Skip Broderick's family papers. One of them appeared to be a more edited version. The most edited version was not complete, so I finished it with the less edited version.)

“Had I known what to expect I might never have left Boston, Mass. in April 1898 to mine gold on Granite Creek in British Columbia,” mused the late George Batstone in his rough autobiographical notes. “I was one of a party from New York and Boston engaged to work for the Boston-British Columbia Placer Mining Company. My ideas of the West were of gun-toting cowboys, Indians wearing feathered war bonnets and, as for gold mining – well, one just dug it up with a shovel.

After rattling across the continent on the C.P.R. and unloading at Spences Bridge which looked like a desert, my first shock was to learn that Granite Creek was 150 miles distant, three day's journey by horse-drawn stage and the charge to carry my trunk would be \$10.00.

Leaving Spences Bridge behind a four-horse team (I had never before seen one), the first night stop-over was at Nicola, a small town with a few houses, wooden sidewalks, a hotel, a store and butcher shop and a blacksmith shop and post office to serve the sparsely settled area. This was a wide valley with rolling bunch-grass hills surrounding the town where cattle grazed, and ranch houses were miles apart. After supper several cowboys, knowing we were “green”, dared us to ride their horses. They were good sports; the horses provided were fairly gentle.

From Nicola it was another day-long drive to Thynne's Ranch in Otter Valley where we stayed the night at Thynne's Roadhouse. Jack Thynne and his wife had built this roadhouse in 1890 when the wagon road was completed between Nicola and Granite Creek to serve the travelling public of the day before the Kettle Valley Railway was built in 1915. The Thynnes proved to be excellent hosts and after a sumptuous meal served by Mrs. Thynne and her young daughter we retired to a comfortable sitting room where music was enjoyed, and a jolly atmosphere prevailed. Clean rooms provided for the overnight rest and by noon the following day we reached Granite Creek. This was the end of the road. Passengers and freight destined for Princeton were taken on horseback over a twelve-mile trail.

There was not much at Granite Creek in 1898. The rich, shallow placers had been skimmed in '85 but there was still gold in deep gravels, cut-banks along the creek and the outwash where Granite Creek joined the Tulameen River.

Erecting log buildings was our first job; bunkhouses, cook shack, tool sheds and a cabin for the office staff. Imagine the novelty of axes and cross-cut saws to city boys. But with some local help who knew how, the boys from the East could carry their weight before their hands calloused.

Buildings done; next construction was a shaft. Using eight-inch timbers and 2 X 6 lagging, we went down to water level so needed a pump. Several of us went to Nicola where we met a man Alex Gordon who had the contract to deliver this machinery; big 8" pumps and a boiler weighing 20 tons which he mounted on a 20-foot couple on wide wheels with 5" iron tires on rims. The other pumps were mounted on reinforced wagons also with wide 5" iron wheels. Alex Gordon was a rancher in the Nicola area and the only man who would take the contract. He was wonderful with horses; and could handle as many as you cared to hitch up, no matter how wild they were!

It took us 17 days to make the trip which with a normal load of freight required 5 days. It was a long, hard trip – sleeping under trees, cooking over campfires; catching fish and shooting grouse along the way to add to our grub box. Going along flat country was fairly easy but there were many steep grades where sometimes 8 horses were needed to move the heavy load. In narrow spots along high cuts where we had to put heavy planks on the outside bank when wheels were too close to the edge. In turning sharp corners, we put ropes with pulleys up in a tree then fastened to the boiler to keep it from going down over the bank. Sometimes where there was room Alex used another team hitched to the front Axle to keep it from "cramping." We were glad finally to reach Granite Creek and enjoy food cooked by our Chinese cook again.

After the pumps were in operation the shaft was sunk as far as pumps would keep the work dry and since we had worked from April to the end of July without pay most of us quit and found work wherever we could. Three of us got work putting up hay at the Thynne ranch a few miles north of Granite Creek. None of us had ever tried haying before and knew nothing about a scythe. An old hand who realized I was "green" at the job, because I was only cutting off the tops, told me to cut "close to the stubble", but I didn't know what stubble was either. He taught

me the proper way to use a scythe and I never forgot – and I never forgave him for many are the tons I have had to cut with the old hand scythe since then!

We were paid one dollar per day and board and our beds were in the hayloft.

On another haying job two of us lived in a small cabin. One morning my partner accused me of stealing his false teeth and I, in turn, accused him of stealing my toothbrush. A real fight was ensuing when a rat – pack rat I learned later – ran into a hole in the wall and the hunt was on. However, not only did we find the rat but the missing teeth and toothbrush among other things as well. Thus, another lesson of living in this rugged west!

A well-known man of that era was Charlie Revely who ran a little log store for A.E. Howse, one of the leading men in the country. The store was in the front part of the building and Charlie lived in a room at the back. He had a claim up in the hills and since I knew he would be going out there to work it that day I stopped by early to buy a few things. Charlie invited me to have breakfast and had put a pot of stew on the stove to warm. There was a big fire in the stove and nearby on top of a box were two sticks of dynamite capped and fused that he wanted to thaw out before going up to his claim. I knew nothing about dynamite – the two sticks looked like candles to me. Suddenly there was a cloud of white smoke and a tremendous bang! Both of us rushed outside being quite badly cut with flying debris. There were pieces of cast iron buried in the door behind where I had been sitting. The cheese cloth on walls was burning and the store was a wreck with windows blown out and coins scattered over the floor. Well, we managed to douse the fire and tidied things up as best we could but before long nearly everybody in the town came to see if we were dead! We were taken to the hotel, given breakfast, our wounds dressed and since we were not badly hurt the explosion became an occasion for celebration and a dance which lasted long into that night.

In those days dances were the main social functions. We supplied our own music – usually a fiddle player, piano, banjo and accordion. Several of the old-timers were very talented and through the years perhaps I helped more providing a bit of music than dancing for I handled a banjo fairly well; also the drums – when I could find something to use for this purpose, such as a thick piece of hardwood or a cannister held between the knees to mute the hollow sound. On this subject I should here include the fact that I brought the first phonograph that ever came into this country from New York where, even there, it was a novelty. It was an Edison “Gem” with a brass horn on it and I had about a dozen cylinders (records) of hit tunes of that time. Travelling

first on the Soo line from St. Paul to Moose Jaw it was difficult to play as the roadbed was so rough, but once on the tracks of the C.P.R. I was able to entertain the passengers, many of whom were quite filled with wonder at this remarkable machine.

There were of course tragedies, sickness and deaths too, and we learned how to handle these as well. Being a bit handy with carpenter tools I was usually called upon to make coffins when needed.

One tragedy in which I was indirectly involved occurred when Pete Gunderson interested two Vancouver men in coal prospects up in the mountains behind camp. Pete engaged two helpers and with the saddle and packhorses the trip began. A terrific thunderstorm began and Pete, fearing falling trees, told his helpers to loosen the horses and hobble them. While they were doing this, they heard a crash and on return found a large tree had fallen across the tent. Pete was inside. It took time to chop the tree so that Pete could be freed. He was severely injured. The Princeton doctor, the only one in the country, rode the 12 miles to Granite Creek to find that amputation of a foot and an arm necessary. This was not enough to save Pete who died before morning.

I was called upon to make a coffin. Stealing a few boards from the roof of an abandoned cabin I made the box which was left on the porch of the cabin while we went to get the body. Returning, we found the lid in place and after taking it off found some prankster had put Steve Brooks inside. He was so drunk that when lifted out, he rolled off the porch to the ground.

Another time a stranger who had been drinking all day was heard to say, "It's no crime to kill a partner like him". With that he borrowed a 30-30 and told the man from whom the gun was borrowed that he was going hunting. Next day he went down in the brush and shot himself. The shot was heard, and the man was found dead. That night the doctor came from Princeton to see whether it was murder or suicide and he wanted help. The body was laid out on a plank supported by two apple boxes and stripped. Then the doctor cut from between chest and stomach and with his hand traced the course of the bullet. After that he asked me to confirm his findings. After I had washed, the doctor said, "Now if I was going to operate for appendicitis, I would open him this way." "Doctor," I said, "if you are going to cut any more you will do it alone."

I did make a coffin for old John Burns and buried him alongside the One Mile Road, near the present Sky Blue Lodge which was owned by J.T. in 1925.

I will not keep on with burials George Batstone's rough notes reveal. Though I did help with several more. The incidents related above did not occur one after the other but there were long intervals between during which time I was mining or later freighting with four and six horse teams.

While the railroad was building south from Spences Bridge I tended bar in A.E. Howse's Driard Hotel. It was a rough place and how I came away with a whole skin I'll never know, except I was husky and able to take care of myself. One at a time I could handle them, sometimes lock them up, but there were times when two or three tackled me and I took a beating. Men who I knew often came in with a stake. They would give watches and money to my keeping and I would dole it out as requested, usually til it was gone.

George Batstone also described placer mining in detail, which I will not repeat since the methods are well known. One thing, however, that interested me was his description of the Chinese water wheel pump which was effective to depths of 15 – 16 feet. A water wheel in the stream was connected to an endless belt on which gallon size cans were mounted in such a way they scooped water to fill the cans which spilled at the top of the lift. Not so strange perhaps for this method has been used for irrigation in Asia and the Middle East since the beginning of recorded time.

George commented too on the abundance of game. Streams were filled with fish, the forest with grouse and lakes with ducks and geese. Trapping was profitable as there were many beaver. Game, of course, stood an important place in the larder.