

## George Batstone

When six weary horses came jogging into the yard of Thynne Lake Ranch, the dusty old stage was completing just another regular trip between the rail point of Spences Bridge and Otter Valley.

But for young George Batstone, who painfully crawled out, not knowing for sure if he was more dead, or alive, it was both the end --- and the beginning. Straight from Boston he had come, across the huge prairie land, and through the formidable mountains of British Columbia, by C.P.R. When he had finally stepped down at the little town of Spences Bridge on April 10, 1898 and had looked around with a sigh of relief at the barren hills his only thought was one of thankfulness that the long journey was at last ended. Then, as he told later, in his memoirs, when he had been informed that the end was still three good day's travel by stagecoach, he had had a good mind to climb on the next train heading east and forget the whole thing.

The fact that he didn't, is attested for by his life story, for George Batstone, in spite of moments of black despair, had always had optimism and renewed energy, which enabled him to overcome adversity and disappointment. On that fateful day in the spring of 1898, he climbed aboard the old wooden stage and started the first lap of the journey, which took them to the cattle town of Nicola the first day.

In Nicola, (now Merritt) he began to enter into the spirit of western life, and always one to be part of things, he accepted a cowboy's dare to ride a horse, his first experience with a western saddle.

From Nicola the road was narrow, winding, and dangerous in places. If, as an easterner, he looked at that rocky track in awe it would be little wonder, and doubtful if he at that time visualized himself as the driver, sitting up on the high seat, handling the three pairs of lines which controlled the six straining horses up the steep grades, down the hills, and around the sharp corners.

When the stage did finally pull up in the yard by the huge red stage barn of the Thynne Lake Ranch, George was only interested in getting out and sitting on something which, for a change did not sway, teeter, jolt, bump, creek, clatter, and bang. Sick to the stomach, dusty, dry, and weary, he made his way, as directed, to the large, white ranch house, which, set in a lush

meadow, was surrounded by beautiful cottonwood trees, with a tennis court visible around the corner of the wonderfully well-kept garden.

The ranch house, built in 1890, was presided over by the jolly, capable hostess, Mary Thynne, who, ably assisted by her young daughter Ethel, was busily preparing the meal for the stage passengers, the driver, stable boys, ranch hands, and all who were part of the ranch community.

When the genial host, Jack Thynne, owner of the ranch, took possession of head place at the table, and made the assembled throng feel like honoured guests, young George Batstone warmed up, and his feelings toward this raw, hard, unrelenting land of British Columbia warmed a little. He decided to stay awhile after all, and to fulfill his objective.

A plumber by trade, apprenticed to a firm in Boston, George Batstone had been sent by a firm with which he was affiliated through his family, to help set up placer mining equipment in the gold mines of Granite Creek. There, after the first miners had worked over the rivers and creeks with pick and shovel, gold pan, sluice box and other crude equipment, the large syndicate had begun to develop what was left with more sophisticated equipment, in an effort to make a profit from small returns.

Granite Creek in 1898, says George Batstone in his memoirs, was a rough, raw, frontier type of community. But the young, naturally happy, and fun-loving Bostonian soon found the people easy to get along with, and they accepted the newcomer readily, and without question.

Along with the rest of the 'Boston Boys' as they came to be known, George was introduced to the site of his labours, on a creek to be sluiced with the great hydraulic guns which they were to set up. Nothing was prepared, and the main requirement, a huge steam boiler to work the pumps, was still at the railroad in Spences Bridge. So George was dispatched with the freight wagon driver and a crew of men to bring the boiler in.

He describes the trip, which to a green hand from the east was indeed a feat of no mean effort. He tells how they loaded the great bulk of the boiler on the high wheeled freight wagon and commented on its towering height above them. Then the teamster took his lines and off went the six horses down the road. When he had jolted in on the stage a short time before, George had never visualized a trip such as they made with the steam boiler. For, on the narrow, winding road the teamster would have to manoeuvre the six horses up the banks and into the bush to make the sharp turns, to keep the wagon wheels in the tracks of the road. Then, on side

hills, where the high wheeled wagon would lean at a perilous angle, and the top-heavy load would cause the whole thing to roll into a canyon below, the teamster would stop his horses and call for the men to fasten ropes to the gigantic load. Then, with the men on the high bank, straining on the ropes, he would manoeuvre his team along the sideling road, while they held the whole thing upright.

George Batstone worked in Granite Creek while the hydraulic system was installed, but the mining company, with headquarters in the eastern U.S.A., was tardy with wages for the men. Finally, in disgust and frustration when no sign of a payroll appeared they all quit, to seek work elsewhere.

It was on the Thynne Ranch that George found work, and strong and healthy though he was, he says in his memoirs that it was the hardest work he had ever done. But the crew was well fed, for the Thynne Ranch was well stocked, and Mary Thynne was famous for her cooking. Every fore-noon and afternoon her little gig would appear, as she jogged across the field, bearing a tremendous lunch for the toiling men. (NOTE: in the margin at this paragraph is written “\$1.50 day & board. Went to Nicola threshing. Worked on ranch. Learned to use scythe never forgot & never forgave.”) (NOTE: on back of page 5 is written “Charley Revelly ran store for E. Howse, one of the leading men in Nicola, thawed dynamite, blew up cabin. Went to Nicola with Alex Gordon to bring in boilers. Wagon with 5 in. tires and horses. While railroad building south from S. (Spences) Bridge tended bar in A.E. Howse’s Driad Hotel.”)

When the financial troubles were settled George Batstone went back to the mining company for a time, for he had another job to be done for them. It took him to the far off gold fields of Redding, California where he helped install the most gigantic hydraulic gun in operation. It was nicknamed Big Bertha, and George, being a great raconteur, told many stories of his experiences there, complete with the idiom of various personalities. As a comparison between the labour conditions then, and now, he told how, in order to get a job on the ‘Big Bertha’, a man was required to sign a form, releasing the company from any liability for damage in case of injury or death. He was determined, once completing the installation, and watching in awe as the gigantic stream of water, coming from the small opening of the nozzle made banks of clay and gravel melt like sugar, to become an operator. He worked in the camp until he finally obtained the necessary experience and seniority to hold the job.

From the gold fields of Redding, George Batstone returned to the Otter Valley of British Columbia. The magic of the west had affected him, as it did so many, and there was no cure for the condition. However, he did see the east once more, for having left Boston as a journeyman plumber, and with the experience in installing hydraulic equipment in the gold fields, he returned to his home. There he sat for, and passed, the examination, and received his Masters certificate.

As a Master Plumber George Batstone returned to British Columbia, and he told of an experience on that trip which is an interesting sidelight. While in the east he encountered, and became intrigued by a great new invention that was sweeping the area. The wonderful Edison Gramophone captured his imagination, so he bought one, and brought it west with him, the first gramophone in the Otter Valley area.

Although George Batstone came west as a plumber, it was not as a plumber, except with a few exceptions, that he established himself and became known. He took naturally to western ways, for as all his stories indicated, he established an empathy with the sometimes crude, but honest and forthright people who were the citizens of the country. He learned to understand and became fond of livestock. He started to develop as a horseman of no mean accomplishment, in a day and environment where the horses were looked upon as all important, and horsemanship as a basic necessity.

He worked on and around the Thynne Ranch, with Jack Thynne as teacher, critic and competitor. For, coming to Canada as a 'green Englishman', himself, Jack Thynne, the younger son of titled English stock, had named his ranch Bristowe, after his old ancestral home in England. He had also had to adapt to Canadian ways, and to prove himself in a hard land, where no apologies or weaknesses were tolerated, and had developed, because of his love of freedom of movement, and of people, into a real westerner of that era. Jack Thynne had fallen in love, in his early days in Saskatchewan, with a young girl, daughter of the H.B. (Hudson Bay) factor at Fort Pelly.

Taking his young bride to a poorly equipped homestead, they had attempted to eke out a living as wheat farmers, until moving to B.C. in 1888.

So George Batstone, eager, possibly somewhat cocksure, and with his own original ideas was often at loggerheads with his older, more experienced employer. But the warmth and forgiving friendliness of Mary Thynne reached out to the lonely young man, the serenity of her

nature stemming in some measure no doubt, from the blood of the true Canadians she had flowing in her veins.

The lovely dark-eyed daughter of Jack and Mary Thynne, Ethel was an important personage on and around the Thynne Ranch, and the whole Otter Valley. A superb horsewoman herself, she covered the countryside as cowboy, as messenger from ranch to ranch and for sheer pleasure in riding. When the town of Princeton started holding an annual horse race, Ethel would regularly take first prize on her favourite saddle horse which she had trained herself.

As Ethel grew to womanhood, young George Batstone was not unaware of her vital but gentle nature, and a great lover of fun himself he took part in all the social activities which Jack and Mary Thynne frequently put on in the great roomy ranch house.

The common bond that drew Ethel and George together blossomed into love, and a courtship, not entirely sanctioned by the parents, developed over the years. For, Jack Thynne, although holding George in high esteem for his abilities and willingness as a worker, at the same time looked upon him as an interloper and newcomer.

But the pair were married with the blessings of both parents, and the young couple began a partnership in the Thynne Lake Ranch. They eventually took over the Diamond H Ranch on the other side of Pike's Mountain, and there George Batstone worked, when not helping at the home place, while he learned more of the ranching skills. The time came when he was looked upon as the neighbourhood vet, and Jack Thynne called upon his talents with untamed horses at shoeing time, for as a farrier he was unequalled.

One night in the large white ranch house of the Thynne Ranch, with Mary Thynne as capable midwife, a daughter was born to George and Ethel Batstone. Later a son Jack arrived, and as a family of four they worked the range of the Diamond H, all the while keeping close ties with the Thynne Ranch, as the two places enjoined, and the family bond was strong.

The Otter Valley country, and surrounding area was wild and mostly uninhabited in those days. Hunting and fishing was more than a sport with the ranchers, it was an important, method of stocking the larder, as well as a good excuse to knock off from the mundane chores. George Batstone learned the way of the wild life, he studied the habits of deer and bear as a scholar peruses his books, and learned to outthink a deer so as to make it his prey.

Being a fascinating story teller, with the ability to make people and events come alive, George often, in later years recounted exploits of his hunting. He would tell of waking up to find

a light snow on the ground, and so, putting a sandwich in his pocket, and reaching his rifle off the deer antler rack he would strike out alone up the mountain. Knowing every foot of the terrain, the haunts of deer at various times of the year, and their likely destination he would invariably succeed in bagging a buck which would be a welcome addition to the food supply.

As the children grew up, disciplined and trained by a father who, patiently but firmly taught and led them, and by a mother who with a background of grace and dignity insisted on, and never tolerated anything but good manners, and a manifestation of good breeding, they naturally learned to respect their natural environment, and to treat it with respect.

It is not surprising then, to observe the love and respect one member of the family held for the others, and that the parents, although respected and obeyed as authorities, were also companions. As the children, Mollie, the eldest, and Jack learned by listening and doing, for on a ranch everyone, from an early age, has a job, a place, and a responsibility, they emulated their parents, and became proficient in handling stock, riding the rough country, and outfoxing the foxiest deer.

George Batstone was to a large extent, a lone worker, not dependent on the aid of a hand about the ranch, and in that sparsely populated region it was often difficult to obtain help. As his daughter, Mollie Broderick remarked, in recalling her father as a rancher. "Sometimes it would be necessary to cut a certain animal out of the Diamond H herd to be moved to the Thynne Ranch, or to be brought into the home corral. Dad would strike out alone on his favourite cutting horse, into the valleys and hills where the herds were grazing. Eventually he would return, hazing a steer or heifer in front of him. His great mass of blond hair would be flying in the wind, as, with his large hat used as a persuader he would force the animal to do his bidding."

Jack "Gaffer" and Mary Thynne gave up the old place in 1921, and moved across the mountains to a place on the road that had been put through from Merritt to Princeton, the 'One Mile' Road. They gave up ranching on a large scale, and worked a smaller place which has become famous as the Sky Blue Ranch. The Batstones continued to ranch on the Diamond H, and during all the lean years of the 1920's and '30's George, and the woman who had worked shoulder to shoulder with him all through his trials and troubles, his wife Ethel, raised their two children Jack and Mollie. As Jack grew into his teens he became an outstanding rider, as his older sister was also. As the cowboys of the ranch they rode the rough range country, and did the ranch chores.

By the mid 1930's ranching was making a precarious living indeed, and Mollie, having received a good education at Crofton House School in Vancouver and a private school in Vernon, took a business course and went to Penticton, where she found work in the office of the Hughie Lear Sawmills.

As the grandparents, 'Gaffer' and 'Nanny' Thynne were getting old she persuaded them to give up the Sky Blue Ranch and come to Penticton. Her parents too had grown tired of the unrewarding struggle, and young Jack took over management of the Diamond H. So, George Batstone gave up the life he had known for forty years and moved to Penticton. There he bought acreage, built a small house, and with the parents of his wife, Ethel he began again, at sixty years of age, and developed a piece of raw land on Fairford Drive into a small beginning of a livelihood by planting fruit and a large garden.

(NOTE: There was no page 13. It was either missing, or pages 14 and 15 were misnumbered.)

In ----- tragedy struck, for Ethel, his helpmate, his rock of Gibraltar, his mainstay and confidant died suddenly at their home on Fairford Drive (NOTE: DOD for Ethel was Nov. 17, 1950 according to familysearch.org and findagrave). The blow was nearly fatal to George, and for long the family were concerned for his future. He lost all desire for any activity; complete despondency took hold of him. But the family held a conference, and between Mollie, and Jack who by that time was married, with a little daughter, Barbara, they worked things out with the cooperation of his son-in-law, George Broderick.

As a result, George and Mollie Broderick took over the place on Fairford Drive, and George Batstone moved in with them. The little cabin in which they first lived, after the move from the ranch, is still there, decorated with the moose head, the deer antlers, the mounted otter, and all the other trophies of his hunting experiences. With his daughter, so much like the dark eyed girl he married, and his grandchildren, George settled down to a life of happiness. He took over the garden, and began a building project on the house, to enlarge it suitable for the increased size of the family.

The grandchildren grew into their teens, and danced with their friends on the living room floor while George watched, and remembered his youth, and the many dances he attended at the Thynne Ranch in Otter Valley. The grandchildren were married, and he was 'Gamps' to another generation, and they all loved to sit around the living room, or preferably in the little cabin at the

back while 'Gamps' told tales of his experience while working the placer mines at Granite Creek, or his freighting trips as he hauled the ore to Princeton over the new road. There were always colourful characters in his stories, and he described them, while imitating their mode of speech. But never was there a vein of sarcasm, of bigotry, or of patronage. It was evident that, in spite of their possible crudeness, of their lack of education or gentle upbringing, George admired them as people, and respected them for what they were, and the job they were doing.

Raised a gentleman, living his life in a crude, rough, and often ruthless environment, he remained a gentleman, while doing whatever job needed doing the most. He raised his children to have the same outlook as himself, and when he passed away in his 90<sup>th</sup> year (NOTE: DOD for George was September 24, 1967 according to [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org) and [findagrave](http://findagrave.com)) he was surrounded by love and admiration by all who knew him.