

THE PETER DUNLEVEY PARTY

While Boulanger and Houston were panning with success on the Thompson River, the first shiploads of miners from San Francisco were making their way up the coast to participate in the Fraser River gold rush and the first paddlewheel steamer, the Commodore, docked at the wharf at Fort Victoria 25th April, 1858.

Official steamship records show that from San Francisco alone, 455 miners left for Victoria in April - 1,262 in May - 7,149 in June and 6,278 in July. In reality, each vessel carried passengers far beyond their capacity and the ship owners did not dare to publish the true figures. Officially the Sierra Nevada carried 900 passengers but at Fort Victoria she unloaded 1900. It is estimated that in May, June and July that some 23,000 people left San Francisco by sea and another 8,000 made their way overland to the new diggings. Those gold seekers who arrived at Fort Victoria soon learned that they were still over 400 miles from Fort Kamloops. Vancouver Island's Fort Victoria, with a population of only 400 souls, was totally unprepared for the sudden invasions of thousands of miners and became a tent town almost overnight. Initially the miners' presence was a real boon to the economy and saleable items sold for incredible prices but once these goods were gone the many residents were anxious to see the miners on their way. Need being the mother of invention, the more aggressive miners built their own boats and made the 20-mile crossing from the island to the mainland without waiting for the riverboat steamers. It was estimated that 300 skiffs, each containing an average of 5 passengers, passed up the Fraser River to Fort Yale during the low-water season. Just below the fort, the miners began panning 4 to 5 ounces of gold per man per day. Many lingered at these gold-bearing river bars, but a few of the more determined professional miners began hiking upriver in search of the Mother Lode.

In this vanguard were 5 Americans led by Peter Curran Dunlevey of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The party consisted of James Sellars from Texas; Ira Crow, an ex-California miner; Thomas Moffat, from Williamsport, Indiana; and Thomas Manifee. In May 1859, these men were busy sluicing for gold opposite the confluence of the Chilcotin and Fraser Rivers when they met Tomaah, the son of Chief Lolo St. Paul. He asked the miners what they were doing and was shown the flakes and small nuggets of gold before being invited by Dunlevey to share their

meal. The young Indian scarcely touched the bean and bannock mixture after the initial taste but a cup of well-sugared tea was an instant success and he gulped it down only to hold out his empty cup for more. It was after he'd drunk the second cup that Tomaah told the miners that he could show them a river where gold lay like beans in a pan. He explained that he worked for the Hudson's Bay Company at Fort Alexandria and that he would not be available to take them to the location until after a jamboree. He told them that all the First Nation peoples from the New Caledonia District would be gathering at Lac La Hache in 16 days for a summer games prior to continuing on to Fort Kamloops to trade their winter and spring harvests of furs. He suggested to the miners that they return to Lillooet and then go by way of Marble Canyon to Fort Kamloops to purchase fresh supplies and to take a message to his father. From Fort Kamloops they could travel to Lac La Hache where he would meet them prior to the commencement of the jamboree and that after the games he would guide them to this 'River of Gold'.

The next morning the miners awoke to find Tomaah gone. They wasted no time and were soon headed downriver towards Lillooet. Here they traded a canoe for two Indian horses before heading towards Fort Kamloops. They spent the first night in an old fur-trading encampment that dominated the Indian village of Fountain. The miners were on their way at daybreak the following morning and soon reached the Indian village of Pavilion. From here they pushed on and reached Fort Kamloops trading post where they met several discouraged Thompson River prospectors who were happy to sell their miner's tools to Dunlevey for a fraction of their value.

Dunlevey, after grooming himself and changing into clean clothes, called on Chief Lolo before visiting the Hudson's Bay Company post for supplies. The old Iroquois had retired from the company in 1843 to begin developing a horse breeding empire and had amassed a sizeable fortune by hiring out pack animals to his

former employees for the transportation of furs to the coast. His two daughters had recently converted the original rundown HBC post into a stopping house.

Chief Trader McLean was suspicious of the immaculately dressed miner and at first refused to fill his order since he had been instructed by the company not to become involved with the miners. Gradually, the trader warmed to the mannerly Dunlevey and the next morning the miners were able to leave the fort with 12 of Lolo's packhorses loaded with over a ton of provisions. John Moore and John McLean joined the Dunlevey party as axe men.

On the evening of the 15th day since they had seen Tomaah, the group camped a few miles from Lac la Hache. Just as they were crawling into their blankets, Tomaah and another Indian named Baptiste appeared out of the darkness. The next morning the 7 white men and two Indians continued to Lac la Hache. Shortly after their arrival, the miners sat with Tomaah and Baptiste as the First Nation chiefs from the New Caledonia Districts addressed the great semi-circle throng of athletes and spectators. As the chiefs talked, Baptiste translated their words to the attentive miners. Because the orations concerned the welfare of all the miners coming into the country, they were indelibly etched into the memory of Dunlevey who in later years was able to recite them almost word for word to his biographer:

Old Chief Dehtus Anahiem of the Chilcotins was the first to speak, "It makes warm my heart to come to this old time meeting place of the Shuswaps, to visit with our brothers the Denés and the Yabatah. These games are the chief attraction, for they keep us brave and strong, eager and fleet, not only for the hunt but to scare away our enemies. It is mainly for this last point that Anahiem of the Chilcotins has come to talk with the brother chiefs at this meeting.

"For some time our scouts have been bringing us news of white men coming up our rivers. We have tolerated



PETER CURRAN DUNLEVEY (1833-1905)

One of the earliest gold discoverers into the cariboo, Dunlevey later owned a stopping house at Soda Creek where he grew grain crops for the horses and oxen. He later was a large property owner in fledgling Vancouver.

HISTORICAL PHOTO#056601 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

these men thinking them to be weak-minded and therefore entitled to the reverent regard that all Indians have for these weak ones as dictated by the Great Spirit. However, we have found out that these men are really not crazy and are washing out little pieces of yellow stone that they call gold and which they use as money such as we use fur skins to trade for other goods. The Indians of Lillooet have already been corrupted. It is said that they have learned the white man's skill and are also finding little pieces of yellow gold.

"The priests have told us to shun the firewater as we would the devil that they have told us of but how can we keep clear of their firewater if we allow them to come among us and ruin our women with their diseases? Will we not be ruined as other tribes far to the east that the priests have told us about?"

"Another thing, this money really belongs to us and the white men are taking it without asking our permission. The priests tell us that this is stealing. If we steal the priests tell us that their God will punish us. Will their God punish them for this bad act or have they made a convenient arrangement with this God? Has He one law for the Indian and another one for the white man?"

"We must keep these white men out! We tribes must act together. If we do not act immediately we will only have to drive them out later. This will result in much bloodshed for them and also for our own people. We must act now or we are lost!"

"This is not my country or my camp. If it were I would say to the white men to go back to the country you came from and induce your white brothers to do likewise. You are not wanted here. If you still choose to come and disregard my warning then with sorrow I say that your blood be upon your heads and hands and not on ours."

A feeling of fear passed through the Dunlevey party for the speaker's arguments were all too true. Unchallenged, his words could easily result in the amalgamation of the Shuswaps, the Yubatan-Denés

and the Chilcotins for the purpose of warring against the sudden influx of miners. When Chief Anahiem finished his oration, he stepped back from the center of the circle and nodded for Chief Shuswap Williams of the Williams Lake First Nations for a rebuttal. Chief Williams, instead of addressing the crowd, shifted the onus of responsibility for a decisive vote for or against bloodshed by inviting Chief Lolo, because of his age and wisdom, to be the first to reply to the Chief of the Chilcotins. Fortunately for the Dunlevey party, Tomaah's father was a much more forceful linguist than his former enemy Chief Anahiem. Dunlevey quoted him as saying:

"It is just as useless for our 3 tribes to resist these white men as it is for one of us to try and resist. We know that our resistance would only result in needless bloodshed and possible annihilation.

"The Indians can never win against the white man because of his numbers, his guns, his learning, and his craftiness."

Chief Lolo's comments certainly received more plaudits than those of the previous speaker. He went on to talk about the years of his early manhood spent near Fort Alexandria. He told them of the time the Chilcotins had tried to attack Fort Alexandria that resulted in the killing of their war hero by a Yabatan who shot an arrow from across the river through the champion's heart.

Chief Williams was the last leader to speak and he sided with Chief Lolo and encouraged the Indians to live in harmony with the white men. He concluded his speech by telling the athletes to enjoy the games.

One of the main events at the games was a wrestling match between Baptiste, representing the Yabatan-Denés, and Red Bear, representing the Chilcotins. It was a well-matched fight involving much betting between the tribes. Sellars got into the spirit and bet on Baptiste. It was a long, drawn-out match but the Yabatan eventually came out the victor and Sellars ended up winning an Indian pony that he immediately

gave to a beautiful maiden named Agat, a cousin of Baptiste. She in turn gave the spirited animal to her sister At-t'uss, Tomaah's girlfriend, because she had the necessary skill to ride the wild bronco.

At the conclusion of the games, Tomaah asked Baptiste or take the miners to the 'River of Gold' so he could spend time with his girlfriend before returning to Fort Alexandria.

After several days travel, Baptiste brought the men to a creek, soon to be named the Little Horsefly because of the annoying insects. Here Ira Crow panned the first coarse free gold to be taken from an area soon to be known as the Cariboo. Only 12 hours after the Dunlevey reached the river, another group of miners arrived and joined their forces. These men were Hans Helgsen, Joseph Devlin, Frederick George Black, Duncan McMartin, and Edward Campbell.

Some of the original miners faded into oblivion. Of the others, Peter Baker mined for a few years around Quesnel Mouth, a small community that came into existence at the confluence of the Quesnel and Fraser Rivers, before settling down to married life at Albion, a small settlement across the Fraser River from Fort Langley and in the Municipality of Maple Ridge. James Houston accompanied Baker out of the Cariboo and homesteaded upon the ruins of the original Fort Langley of 1827. Baker lived until 1897 and Houston did not pass away until 1902.

Peter C. Dunlevey left mining temporarily in 1861 to open a stopping house and fur-trading post at Beaver Post and James Sellars married Agat and became his assistant. A few years later, John McLean settled at Quesnel Mouth, where he operated the Occidental Hotel for the next 30 years until his retirement in 1902. In 1862 Hans Lars Helgesen married Lillian Colquhoun, an Irish lass he had met in San Francisco, and settled down to family life at Metchosin on Vancouver Island. Legend claims that one of his partners had shot a caribou near Quesnel Forks, a predominantly Chinese community near the junctions of the Cariboo and Quesnel Rivers, and the Norwegian moved that the district be called the

Cariboo. Duncan McMartin, one of the men feasting on the steak, seconded the suggestion and the remaining miners unanimously agreed.

Duncan McMartin and Edward Campbell both had creeks in the Cariboo named in their honor. McMartin died in New Westminster. Campbell died in the town of Horsefly that lay on the banks of the river from which he had panned his gold.

Following their rich strike of gold on the Little Horsefly Creek, Peter Curran Dunlevey and his partners invested their wealth in roadhouses and freighting outfits along the Cariboo Wagon Road. When the news broke out that James Reid was building a sternwheel ship on the Upper Fraser in 1862 to ply between Soda Creek and Quesnel, Dunlevey took up good farmland just to the north of Soda Creek and quickly developed many acres of grain fields and gardens as well as a road house to cater to the needs of the miners and freighters. Dunlevey, in association with John F. Hawkes, in later years invested his wealth to purchase shares in the City of Vancouver's Coal Harbour Land Syndicate that owned half of the Saltwater City.

When news of the building of a stern wheel steamship on the upper Fraser reached New Westminster in 1861 it caused a great excitement among the business population of the Lower Mainland, who looked upon it as a great opportunity for the future. Wasting no time, Robert McLeese and his partner Joseph Triffle Senay set out for Soda Creek, where they secured a building lot close to the steamboat landing and proceeded to build a two storey log structure that they called the Colonel Hotel. Like Dunlevey and his partners, they wanted to capitalize on the tiny community of Soda Creek knowing that it would soon become a bee-hive of activity.