

WADDINGTON & THE CHILCOTIN WAR



The Chilcotin First Nation had grown increasingly hostile towards the caucasians because of the ill treatment they received at his hands. Their women had become diseased from sleeping with the white men, their traditional way of life had been destroyed by alcohol, and now smallpox was wiping them out. The final insult was meted out to them during the building of a new road from Bute Inlet to the Cariboo when the road builder refused any payment for work done.

In the spring of 1862, Alfred Waddington, a progressive businessman from Victoria, had obtained a charter from the government for the construction of a toll road from Bute Inlet along the banks of the Homathko River to the goldfields of the Cariboo. He had hoped that this route, 200 miles shorter than the Cariboo Wagon Road, would encourage more business with Victoria, which lay directly across the inlet. Aware of his plans, settlers William Manning and Alexander McDonald began to formulate plans to build a stopping house at Puntzi Lake. The two men ignored the fact that they were trespassing on Indian land. A group of 40 road builders under the supervision of Francis Poole arrived at Bella Coola where the leader chose to leave several men that were inflicted with small pox. The disease decimated the First Nations peoples in that community. James Taylor and Angus McLeod, two unconscionable fur traders at Bella Coola, removed HBC blankets from the dead and sold them to a Chilcotin village. These blankets, that carried the small pox disease, killed some 200 men, women and children. The loss of so many families destroyed the Chilcotin way of life.

In the fall of 1863 some 90-road builders commenced constructing a road and bridges up the Homathco River and many Chilcotin braves offered to hire on as laborers. Little was accomplished. The white labour force left to winter over in Victoria. Cusshen, a young Chilcotin, was hired to guard 25 sacks of flour until the men returned in the spring but the flour is stolen. The Chilcotin road builders approached the road foreman for payment but were told that the money had to come from Victoria.

In March 1864 the First Nations braves went back to work but William Brewster, the road foreman, again gives the same story regarding the nonpayment of wages. Brewster was furious that the flour had been stolen and threatened to send the small pox sickness into the Chilcotin encampment. In mid-April 14 Chilcotin

were hired as packers and are allowed to set up camp near the road builders. The road crew refused to share their food with the Chilcotin. Some time later a few young Chilcotin girls came to the camp of the road builders to ask for food. They are offered food for sex. Foreman Brewster and two others rape the girls—the youngest being only 11 years of age.

In late-April small bands of braves lead by Klatsassin arrive at a ferry crossing, shoot its operator, and destroy his camp. The following night some Chilcotin braves paint themselves before singing and dancing in preparation for battle. Early the following morning, the braves without warning swoop down on a sleeping party of road builders. The Indians cut the guy ropes of the road builders' tents and began stabbing with spears and knives through the canvass. Only 3 of 18 white men escaped. Brewster's genitals were mutilated, his mouth slit, and his heart hollowed for his crimes.

The news of the attack reached Victoria 12 May. Governor Frederick Seymour, the man chosen by the home government to replace the aging Douglas, promptly ordered Chartres Brew to recruit a force of New Westminster volunteers and proceed to Bute Inlet to arrest the Indians responsible for the killings.

Brew, a bachelor Irishman, had been appointed by Sir Edward Bulwar Lytton, secretary of state for the colonies, to organize the first police force. Prior to coming to British Columbia, Brew had served in the Irish Constabulary and in the Crimean War. He recruited 38 volunteers, mostly disciplined soldiers from the disbanded Royal Engineers corps, and chartered the H.M.S. Forward to go up the coast to the scenes of the crimes and hold an inquest. Instead of following orders and chasing after the Indians, Brew returned to Victoria to discuss the matter with the governor. He advised Seymour that the inland route along the Homathko River was not suitable for horse travel and suggested that the New Westminster volunteers be taken to Bentinck Arm and head inland from Bella Coola by following the recently upgraded MacKenzie Trail. The governor sent a letter via express to Williams Lake advising Gold Commissioner William George Cox of the massacre and of Brew's departure to Bella Coola to try and intercept the Indians. He instructed Cox to recruit a volunteer army of miners to take the trail out of Alexandria until the two parties were able to rendezvous. Cox wasted little time and soon had a volunteer army of 68 miners under his command.



ALFRED WADDINGTON (1801 - 1872)

A merchant from Victoria, Waddington attempted to build a route to the goldfields of Cariboo through Bute Inlet. His refusal to pay his First Nations labour force resulted in the 'Chilcotin War'.

HISTORICAL PHOTO #004468 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES

OPPOSITE

A bronze cast of Sir Matthew Baillie Begbie, the first Chief Justice of the Colony of British Columbia, stands at the entrance to the Law Westminister.

Donald McLean, the former Hudson's Bay Company chief at Fort Kamloops but now owner of the Hat Creek stopping house located on the wagon road between Spence's Bridge and Clinton, went along as a scout since he was familiar with both the country and the Indians. Cox's party reached Puntzi, located at the halfway mark on the trail, where they inadvertently galloped upon the Indians' encampment. The braves vanished into thin air while Cox put his force to work constructing a log fort on the top of a small knoll. He was at the fort awaiting attack when Seymour reached the lake.

The governor was livid and disgusted to find Cox idling about and unceremoniously ordered him to get on with the job of pursuing Indians. McLean, who always wore an iron breastplate when going into battle, was scouting ahead of Cox's main party when a shot knocked him out of the saddle. He was dead before he hit the ground with a bullet through his heart. An Indian, knowing about the breastplate, shot him in the upper chest. Cox, deprived of the experienced HBC man, at once retreated to Puntzi Lake and to the wrath of Seymour. The governor sent Brew, with the much smaller force, to harass the Indians so continuously that they had no time to hunt or fish. He also sent scouts out to find Chilcotin Chief Dehtus Anahiem and request that he refrain from supporting the small renegade band of warriors. The chief complied and on 15 August Klatassin and his small band surrendered to Cox under a promise of clemency. They were taken to Quesnel Mouth and held to await the arrival of Judge Begbie to stand trial for murder. Only a month after their surrender, Klatassin and 4 of his warriors were hanged in retribution for the killing of 21 whites at Quesnel. A fifth brave was hung in New Westminster a year later. The entire fiasco bothered Judge Begbie until the day he died.

As far as the First nations braves were concerned, they were participating in an act of war and were not murderer. It was not seen that way by the British government. A "letter" of the "murder" of one of the victims was summed up by Ltton thusly:

HE WAS BRAVE, GENEROUS, KIND AND JUST

In Affectionate Remembrance of
CLIFFORD ALFRED HIGGINS

Aged 27 years.

Who while on his way through new Aberdeen at the Head of the Bentick Arm of Fort Alexandria, on the Fraser River, Vancouver's Island, British Columbia, in the company of Alexander McDonald and six others, having with them 12 pack animals laden with merchandise, when they were attacked by a nenerous party of Indians, at Nancootloon Lake, he was shot through the breast at the first fire, and fell from his horse mortally wounded: only one of the brave party escaped uninjured from the murderous assault."



THE LETTER FROM SIR EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

This letter from Lytton, the Secretary of State to the Colonies, was presented to Higgins' family after the death of their son in the Chilcotin War.

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1864 LEECHTOWN

After six years of James Douglas' joint governorship of Vancouver Island and the Mainland, the British Government decided to split the two responsibilities. In March 1864 Captain Arthur Edward Kennedy arrived in Victoria and was appointed the first Governor of Vancouver Island. He immediately suggested that the citizens of the capital city provide funds for the exploration of the island. The liberal and thoughtful offer of the new governor was taken up warmly, and a number of volunteers, including some ex-Royal Engineers, presented themselves for the acceptance of the authorities and were approved. Dr. Robert Brown, a 22-year old, acting on behalf of the British Columbian Botanical Society of Edinburgh, was appointed commander of the expedition for the island.

Lieutenant Peter John Leech, an ex-engineer and astronomer for Dr. Brown's Vancouver Island Exploration Expedition, was to examine the resources of the southern part of the province. Louis Lazzar, of the T'Sou-ke First Nations, was the guide on the expedition. He had arrived in Sooke mid-century via Quebec and the fur trade across the continent and down the Columbia River to the Willamette Valley and had then come up into Canada shortly after the signing of the Treaty of Oregon. His origins were French-Canadian and Iroquois, and he was "adopted" by the T'Sou-ke Chief with the understanding that he would marry into the Chief's family and inherit the title of Chief.

Also included were botanist John Buttle, two university graduates Henry Thomas Lewis (Cambridge University) and Alexander Barnston (McGill University) and Ranald MacDonald (Barnston's cousin) and John Foley. Leech was paid a salary of \$100. The other members were paid \$60.

The expedition left Victoria on 7 June 1864 aboard the gunboat Her Majesty's Ship Grappler for Cowichan.

Dr. Brown led an expedition exploring the interior of Vancouver Island after delegating Lieutenant Leech to investigate the southern end of the island. On 14 July 1864 Leech's party discovered gold on a tributary of the Sooke River. Ranald MacDonald, already associated with several gold discoveries on the mainland, suggested that the tributary be named the Leech River in honour of their leader. As soon as word got back to Victoria, British Columbia's a new gold rush was born. Gold miners remembered the California and