

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 Lytton 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 numerous 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

Cariboo gold rushes and many hastened to the new discovery. The steamer Enterprise sometimes carried 100 people daily to Sooke Harbour and by September 1864 some 500 miners were working on the Leech River and two months later there were 1200 men, including Afro-American and Chinese, all looking for gold in the shantytown of Leechtown. Victoria was soon practically deserted and even Governor Kennedy left the capital for a house in Leechtown. A tent town arose on Kennedy Flats, named after the governor, and soon it supported six general stores and three hotels. The first hotel in the area was the ten-room Mount Arrart. The stores sold flour, bacon, lard and all kinds of groceries and provisions, including picks, shovels, axes, rockers and other mining tools. Fresh beef sold for 25 cents a pound, considered expensive at the time.

Within a month, more than \$300,000 had been realized. Single nuggets valued at \$70 were found although most claims paid from \$10 to \$25 a day per man. Malcolm Munro was awarded a contract to build a mule trail from the Sooke Basin.

The smaller Leech River was a branch of the Sooke River but immediately following Leech's discovery and his closer examination of the larger tributary the name "Leech" was bestowed upon it by a party headed by Ranald MacDonald in honour of the discoverer.

Lieutenant's Peter Leech's discovery of gold resulted in British Columbia's first Vancouver Island gold rush. In Victoria the British Colonist newspaper account of 4 August 1864 proclaimed: "The steamer Alexandra arrived... from Sooke...most gladsome intelligence... good diggings...struck on Leech River... people were immediately thrown into a feverish excitement... three cheers for Sooke.

Lieutenant Peter John Leech, an of the Vancouver island exploring expedition, discovered gold at the junction of the Leech and Sooke Rivers on 14 July 1864. Hundreds of claims were soon staked and records indicate that about 12,000 ounces of gold—some nuggets up to 4 ounces—were recovered. Assays of the gold described it as a fine yellow colour of exceptional quality. The miners

stripped the soil and sluiced the worthwhile portions that in most instances came from picking gravel out of the crevices where the gold had been deposited on the bedrock. Smith, Moffat and Company systematically worked their way down to the bedrock by sinking shafts (cribbing and puddle with clay). They tried to divert the flow of the creek while others had their claims flooded by the creek. The rocky creek bed proved to be an immense obstacle for the miners.

By 1874 only a few parties, chiefly Chinese, remained working the claims. The 1890's and 1900's saw further production of gold with it being felt that the "Mother Lode" had yet to be discovered.

Lieut. Peter Leech's own words, written on July 14, 1864, indicate how great were the expectations for the area. Obviously, an enormous gold strike was anticipated with all its consequences.

Leech wrote, "A discovery which I have to communicate is the finding of gold on one of the forks of the Sooke River about 10 miles from the sea in a straight line...the lowest prospect obtained was three cents to the pan; the highest, \$1...the whole value of the diggings cannot be easily overestimated. The gold will speak for itself."

Today, it is hard to imagine once there was a bustling town called Leechtown in the area of the Leech and Sooke Rivers with an equally busy town, Boulder City, Thompsons Landing, Kennedy Flats and Sooke City. It was, in fact, once feared that Victoria's population would sharply and dangerously decline if many more people headed out to the fast-growing communities on the Sooke River.

The first Vancouver Island gold rush marked its peak and a few years later only a few lonely prospectors working their rockers remained. During the interval between 1870 and 1930, Leechtown virtually disappeared. During the depression years in the 1930's, attempts were made once again to find gold. In the 1940's and 50's, Leechtown became a thriving logging community with a mill that shipped out logs and lumber on the Canadian National Railway.



**AN OLDER PETER JOHN LEECH POSES FOR A PORTRAIT SESSION IN A VICTORIA STUDIO.**

HISTORICAL PHOTO#003246 ROYAL BC MUSEUM & ARCHIVES TAKEN 1885  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN ALLEN SPENCER