# THE WEST KOONTENAYS



**HUGH NELSON**, the fourth Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia and for whom the City of Nelson was named, arrived in the province at the height of the gold rush and became engaged in freighting to the goldfields with partner George Dietz. He later became a partner in the Moodyville Sawmill [North Vancouver] with Sewell Prescott Moody and Dietz. The freighting firm was sold to Francis Jones Barnard and morphed into the B.X. Express. Nelson filled the capacity of Governor from 1889 until 1892 when he resigned to return to England where he died the following year of kidney failure. The City of Nelson was named by Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, a stipendiary judge and a gold commissioner who later became known as the 'Father of the Kootenay'. Sproat presided over the sale of the first town lots.

Captain George Ainsworth, a rich capitalist from San Francisco who founded the Oregon Navigation Company, had mineral interests on the western side of Kootenay Lake at a small community that was soon to take his name. The town was known for both its silver deposits and its warm hot springs. In 1885 Ainsworth and Gustavus Blinn Wright, the Cariboo wagon road builder of 25-years earlier, made a deposit of $25,000 and secured a charter from the government in Victoria to build a narrow-guage railroad 21-miles between the Columbia River and Kootenay Lake. For the deposit and the completed railroad, the enterpreneurs were to receive 750,000 acres but unfortunately were not able to complete the railway.

In the late summer of 1886, a 15-man party left Colville, Washington, on a gold prospecting trip on the Salmon [Salmo River] just north of the Canada-US border. Winslow Hall wanted to investigate a tributary of that stream. William V. Brown, pioneer merchant, ferryman and prospector, agreed to grubstake the expedition. The Hall party included Winslow Hall, known as Bill, and his five sons—Robert, Charles, William Jr., Thomas and Albert; William's brother Osner, and three cousins, William Oakes, Melvin Oakes and Henry Oakes. In addition to this large family there was William White, son of Captain Lenard White, who had built and commanded the first steamboat on the upper Columbia River. Narcisse Downing and Dauncey Williams, two Colville First Nations youths, provided the party with fresh meat.

'The Nelson and the Kootenays A History in Pictures' booklet's 1971 article 'History of Nelson' by Michael Jessen provides more insite into the founding of the City of Nelson. "By autumn, with the snow level creeping down the mountains the weary Hall group found nothing for all their effort and were discouraged. They decided to pack up and head for home. Tommy Hall, Willie Hall and Willie White were sent to fetch the pack and saddle horses, while the hunters were sent to get meat for the return trip. Even at these tasks the two groups had little luck and when the five od them met late in the afternoon they sat down to rest on a small outcropping of rock. According to an account by Van B. Putnam, the boys vented their frustration by digging their heels in the ground and kicking away the vegetation. Suddenly a pine squirrel scooted by and one

of the boys licked up a loosened rock to throw at it. Where the rock had been, lay the copper-silver deposit which to this day, was to be famous on two accounts.

The following year, the Halls returned to their secret area after receiving financial asistance from their Scottish neighbour, John McDonald. In one of his first official acts upon becoming a partner, McDonald bought out Narcisse Downey and Dauncey Williams, the First Nations meat hunters, with a bonus of $250. The wily Scotsman told the two youths that they were only paid employees of the prospecting partners, and, as such, they were not entitled into the partnership. The hunters assumed they would share equally in the find since they had shared in all the work and the accident of the discovery, in addition to both having miner's permits. But, believing they had no alternative, they took the bonus money and retired from the partnership.

The Halls staked four claims in the Silver King group—the Silver King, the Kootenay Bonanza, the American Flag, and the Kohinoor. The mountain was not named at this time and the property was described as being on the divide between Cottonwood Smith Creek and the Salmon River. On 27 July 1887 Charles Townsend was siting on a log half a mile from the Silver King Group of Mines writing its location notice when a big toad hopped out from under a log—giving rise to the name of 'Toad Mountain'.

In the summer of 1888, Gilbert Malcolm Sproat, a stipendiary judge and gold commissioner who was soon to become known as the 'Father of the Kootenay', began visting the various mining camps. Sproat found a western arm of Kootenay Lake and decided to name the place after Hugh Nelson, the fourth Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia. Sproat presided at the sale of town lots in little log shack in October 1888. Constable John Kirkup served as auctioner. Colonel Eugene Topping—whose name later became inextricably linked with Trail—continued to sell lots during the winter of 1888-89. By the following year lots were bringing in as much as $295 for a single lot and $9,515 for a block of 32 lots. Newlin Hoover became one of the major property holders in Nelson.



**A CARYATID OR SCULPTED FEMALE FIGURE**
This figure serves as an architectural support in the Hume Hotel in downtown Nelson. Opened in 1898, the hotel was designed by Alexander Charles Ewart for owners J. Fred and Lydia Hume.
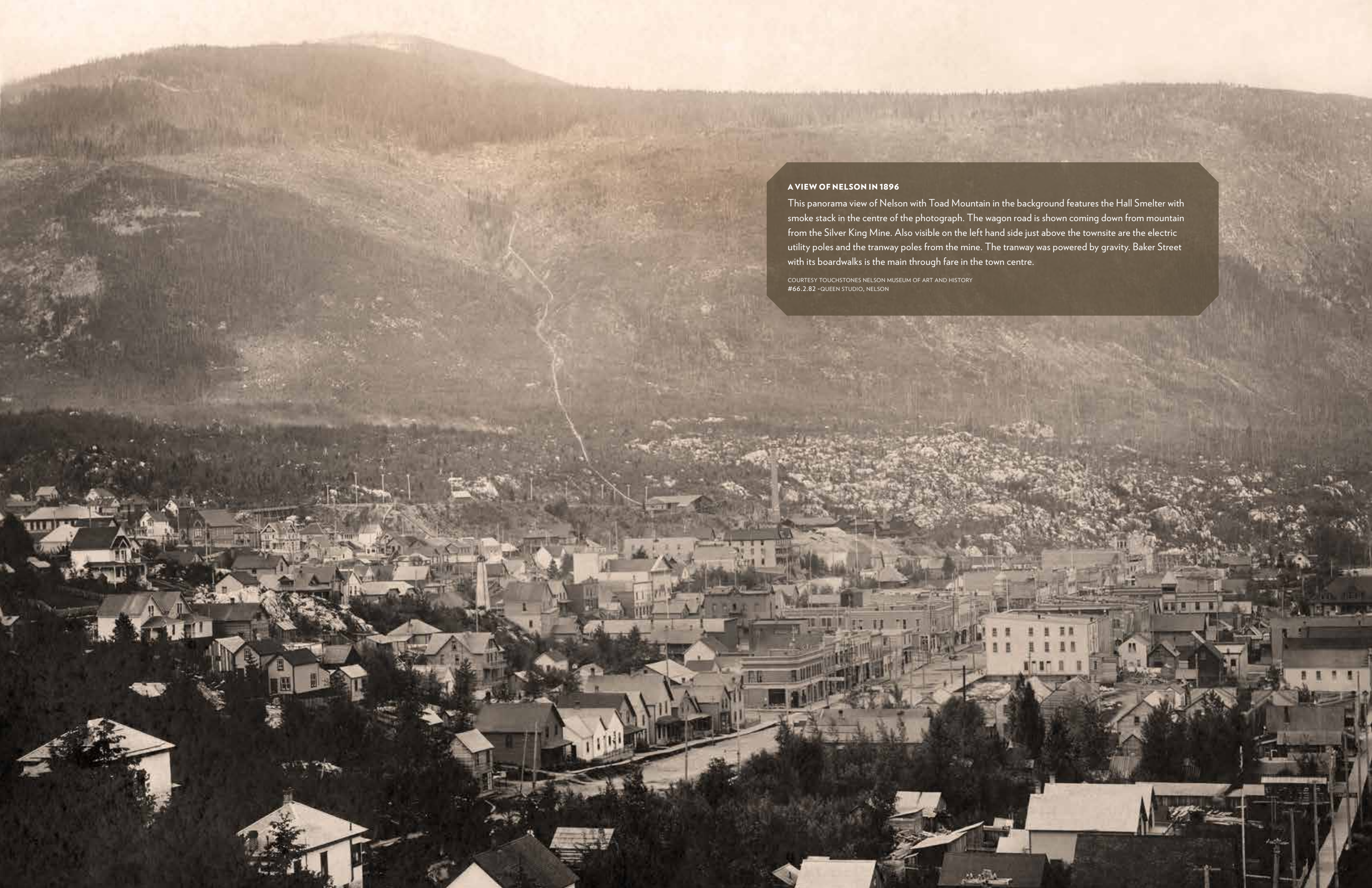
**PROMOTION OF MINES**
*"A mine is a hole in the ground with a liar on top."* — Anonymous

Promotion of mines often had little to do with their actual value.

In 1935, the notorious Major E.R.K. Waite appeared in Nelson promoting his Gold Cup Mining claim.

He had a chauffeured Rolls Royce and invited wealthy Nelsonites to dine with him at the Hume Hotel where specular mineral samples were displayed.

Waite left Nelson soon after the investors' cheques were cashed. The claim was virtually worthless.

**A VIEW OF NELSON IN 1896**

This panorama view of Nelson with Toad Mountain in the background features the Hall Smelter with smoke stack in the centre of the photograph. The wagon road is shown coming down from mountain from the Silver King Mine. Also visible on the left hand side just above the townsite are the electric utility poles and the tranway poles from the mine. The tranway was powered by gravity. Baker Street with its boardwalks is the main through fare in the town centre.

The Residents of Nelson, some 10,000 strong, line both sides of Baker Street to watch a horse race as part of the 1 July 1898 Dominion Day Celebrations.

The 1/4 mile race took place at 1:30 p.m., had a first prize of $100 and $25 for second prize. The winning horse was Jack, owned by G.R. Wilson of Northport, Washington, winning two heats at 24 and 24 1/2 seconds respectively. Most of the riders were using riding crops to make their animals go faster. Standing on boardwalk, the cheering spectators are held back by a rope. Horse dung, politely referred to as road apples, litter Nelson's main street. Two policemen with truncheons, one with a badge on his chest, stand beneath the Vienna Bakery & Restaurant. The photograph was a donation: For the Archives of the City of Nelson With Happy Memories, 1892 visit to Paradise Mine, Judge J.A. Fortin, Resident Judge, 1896 - 1928.

**THE HALL MINING & SMELTING COMPANY, NELSON, 1899**

The company was formed in 1895 with 325,000 pounds ($1,625,000) of capital from London, England. An ambitious labor force built an aerial cableway from the Silver King Mine, a distance of 4 1/2 miles, to get the ore from Toad Mountain down to the smelter for processing. The cableway carried 875 buckets with a capacity of 10 tons per hour. This smelter worked until 1897 when a new plant, with the largest furnance in the northwest, was built adjacent to the original structure. By this time Selwyn G. Blaylock,  the General Manager of the Condsolidated Mining & Smelting Company in Trail, perfected the process that made it possible to separate the silver, lead, zinc, copper and gold from the rich and newly discovered ore at Kimberly, the discovery that led to the development of the Sullivan Mine. The first shipment of copper matte, not gold or silver, left Nelson for Swansea, Wales on 28 June 1897. The smelter remained in the industrial section of Nelson until being burned by an arsonist in 1911. By then a larger and more modern smelter had been built at Trail (Trail's Landing) on the Columbia River. The smokestack stood alone until being demolished in the 1920s. This view to the northeast shows a steamer, Kootenay Lake and downtown City of Nelson in the background.