

George Gilbert Batstone
Likely Written by George Batstone

(Transcriber's Note – Diane Sterne – There are two versions of this story and it is unknown who wrote it. One version is handwritten. The other is typed. I have put the versions together as best I could.)

Born: Boston, Mass., March 27, 1878 – Died: Penticton, B.C., Sept. 27, 1967

I came to Granite Creek, which is 12 miles from Princeton, B.C. travelling by train to Spence's Bridge on the main line of the C.P.R. in April, 1898. Leaving Spence's Bridge in the morning by stage over the old dirt wagon road we arrived in Nicola that night where a bunch of cowboys dared us to ride their horses after supper. We accepted and managed well enough since the animals seemed to be fairly gentle. They had noticed we were from the city – Boston and New York – and I suppose expected a little excitement.

Next morning, we continued the trip by stage arriving at Jack Thynne's ranch in time for supper. Thynne and his wife and daughter ran a stopping house at their ranch in Otter Valley, 9 miles north of Otter Flat (now known as Tulameen). Next morning, we left on stage for Granite Creek arriving at noon. That's as far as the stage could go because there was no road to Princeton, so passengers going to Princeton would ride horses over the trail. The stage driver would put passengers on saddle horses and express, etc. on pack horses for the trip to Princeton. He would stay the night at Princeton and leave in the morning with any passengers riding saddle horses again to Granite Creek where the stage would be ready and waiting for the trip back to Nicola after lunch. Thynne's Ranch by suppertime and an overnight stay; then leaving for Nicola in the morning the stage would reach Nicola by nightfall and go on to Spence's Bridge next morning.

The boys that I came out with from New York and Boston came to work for the Boston – British Columbia Placer Gold Co. setting up placer mining machinery at Granite Creek. Our boss was a man named "Coleman" from New York. At that time, in the late 1800's, an opportunity to "go west" was about the most exciting thing that could happen to a young man. I got my chance because of my father having financed Mr. Coleman for a venture in South America. As a return favour, Coleman offered to take any one of us boys "out west" with him on his next venture – Granite Creek, B.C.

Here we started to build log buildings at the mine. One big building for us boys, a cookhouse, a dining room, a nice cabin for the Secretary and a few other buildings for tools, workshop, etc.

After all buildings were finished, we started working on a shaft using 8-inch timbers and 2 X 6 lagging, wheeling the gravel to the creek where we had sluice boxes, etc. to wash gravel to get the gold out. We went down as far as we could until we needed pumps. Then we stopped and went to Nicola where we met the man who had the contract to bring in the mining machinery; big 8" pumps, etc. and a big boiler which weighed 20 tons and had a 20-foot couple mounted on wide iron-tired wheels with 5" tires. He used 6 horses in some places, 8 in others on steep hills. The other pumps were mounted on reinforced iron trucks also with wide iron wheels and 5" tires. This man was Alex Gordon who had a ranch and was the only person who would take this contract. He was a wonderful man with horses. I don't know how many he could drive, and it didn't matter how wild they were!

It took us 17 days to make the trip. All roads were narrow with very steep hills. Going along the flat country it was alright, but hills were very steep. We had to put heavy planks on the outside bank of roads when the wheels were too close to the edge. We had to keep putting these planks ahead for wheels to run on until we got by a narrow place. In turning a sharp corner, he put ropes with pulleys up in a tree then fastened to the boiler to keep it from going over the bank. Sometimes, where there was room, he used another team hitched to the front axle to keep it from cramping.

We camped along the road, sleeping under the trees. Each man took his turn cooking – and there were some wonderful cooks! I was one of them and we sure didn't put on any weight during the trip. If you camped near a creek you cooked fish as there were trout in all the streams, and plenty of grouse everywhere. If you wanted to take a bath you jumped in the creek and this we did about every other night. If you wanted to wash your clothes you could do that at night after supper but if you had only the one change you would have to wait till morning for the clothes to dry. However, after this job was finished we had some very good times, and with a good Chinaman cook at the camp in Granite and good everything we felt better and glad to be back at Granite Creek again.

When we first arrived in Granite Creek in '98 there was a Government Office, Jail and Court House as Princeton wasn't anything much then; the road to Princeton was not yet built.

Hugh Hunter was the Government Agent, Policeman and Justice of Peace. There were two stores – one owned by F.P. Cook and the other by A.E. Howse of Nicola and run by a young fellow called Charley Revely. The Hotel was owned by Dan McKay. There were several miners' cabins and several Chinamen's cabins.

We set up the pumps and steam boiler and connected the boiler to the pumps. We made a staging down in the shaft for pumps. After we got down further, we connected on another 8" pump. They only ran the pumps during the day but should have kept them going all night because when the pumps were shut down the shaft would fill up with water. When the pumps were started up again in the morning you could hear the gravel changing in back of the lagging and it could become dangerous. However, we were very "green" in most things.

In 1885, before my time, Granite Creek was quite a place, so I was told. There were hotels, bands, dance halls and it was a real booming town. Thousands of dollars of gold were taken from the creeks. From the river into which Granite Creek empties gold was found up to Newton Creek but nothing beyond Newton Creek. They never could go any deeper than sixteen feet because all they used were "Chinaman" wheel pumps. (That's a big water wheel with an endless belt on it and cans to pick up the water as it turns. The wheel is turned by waterpower but exactly how this works I am not sure because I never actually saw one.) However, that is the way I was told about it. One thing I do know for sure is that they never reached bedrock where the big nuggets are and the bulk of the gold. Someday maybe a way will be found to work it.

In California they have a creek like that, and they use a stacker on the end of a flume, and it picks up the gravel that comes out of the flume and stacks it out of the way. It's a big machine run by power with an endless belt on it with buckets on the belt. But then, too, the depth is not as deep as Granite Creek.

Getting back to our Granite Creek operation, we went down as far as the pumps could handle the water. About that time the boys went on strike having received no pay yet. (We had worked from April until July 27th with no pay.) So, we all quit and scattered everywhere looking for other work. Three of us got a job haying at Thynne's Ranch. Of course, none of us had ever worked at haying before but we were young and strong and soon learned. I well remember an old timer who worked there. I was sent with him to cut hay with a scythe. He didn't know I had just come from Boston and had never seen a scythe before, and when he saw me cutting just the tops off, he said, "Cut it close to the stubble, my boy!" I said, "All right", but of course I didn't

know what stubble was either. I never forgot that experience, nor have I ever forgiven him for teaching me how to handle a scythe for since then I have had to cut a good many tons of hay with a scythe – back breaking work by today’s standards! At that time, we were earning a dollar per day plus board, and we sure earned it. We slept in the hay loft. Someone had a pair of hair clippers, so we all got our hair clipped. Each one clipped the other fellow’s hair, but this was a big mistake because the mosquitoes were very bad at that time of year. We had to keep our heads under the blankets at night. Then when we were scything in the brush sometimes, we would hit a hornets’ nest and no matter which way you ran the hornets would be there ahead of you, so we were sure sorry we clipped our hair. But being from the big cities of Boston and New York we had to learn things out here the hard way.

Another fellow and I were sent up to a meadow to do some haying. We stayed in a cabin for a few days. The boss brought us up some grub and other needs. The cabin hadn’t been used for a long time. In the morning when we got up the fellow I was with accused me of stealing his false teeth and I accused him of taking my tooth brush and other things. We both “fell out” over this until I happened to see a big rat run into a hole in the wall where some hay was hanging down. I poked around in there and found everything we lost. We were told this was a pack rat.

When haying was over we went to Nicola (there was no Merritt then) where we went thrashing and worked at ranches all over the valley. When we returned to Nicola from thrashing there was a letter for me from Mr. Coleman, President of the Placer Mining Company we had been working for at Granite Creek. He had been told by the Secretary about the boys quitting and working elsewhere. Mr. Coleman considered himself sort of Guardian for me; that is he felt more or less responsible for me since it was he who had asked my father to allow me to come West with him. The letter I received advised me to tell all the boys to go back to camp where we could spend the winter. Then in the Spring he (Coleman) would come back out from New York, pay us up in full and start the mining operations again. There were only 3 or 4 of us left as the others had drifted away and we lost track of them. We were glad to receive this letter from Coleman because winter was fast approaching and it was getting very cold with no work in sight. Temperatures went to 48 degrees below zero although I didn’t mind it as much as 8 below in Boston.

I worked for three seasons on Granite Creek. I also worked at one of the largest placer mines in California called “The Sweepstake Mine” having returned to Boston for a short time

and then being sent to California by Mr. Coleman. The Sweepstake Mine was in Weaverville up high in the mountains north of Redding, California where I saw a cleanup of \$50,000.00. One claim in an old channel was so evenly spotted with gold that they could tell what amount they would be able to take out when working it with the same number of men and one Giant or Monitor. It was similar to Granite Creek in that they had plenty of water but no dump to take care of rock and gravel after the gold was taken out. So they used a stacker run with water power and built like a "Chinaman pump" with buckets and an endless chain which raised the debris up and stacked it out of the way on the side. To work a placer mine one must have lots of water and a dump like a deep gulch nearby where one can run the end of the big sluice box letting the gravel and rocks, etc. go after the gold has been taken out. If, in time this gets filled up they add a couple more boxes on the end of the flume or sluice box which in size would be around five feet square with riffle blocks a foot square made out of the knottiest logs they can get. These blocks protect the bottom of the flume and water must be shut off to renew blocks every so often. Of course, there is much more about placer mining than what I have written. - Shaking quick silver (mercury) to catch the flour gold, rotating after to get quick silver off the gold and it can be used again and again. But this gold coated with a thin coat of quick silver is not worth as much as gold not caught by quick silver as the buyer has to treat it again.

"Judge" Murphy and his partner had a very rich claim on Granite Creek called the "Pogue Claim". It was the only claim in Granite Creek where I saw bedrock reached. This was because it was on a rim, and they were able to get water from the Stevenson flume to work it with a ground sluice. I saw one cleanup they were making where one could see the gold scattered over the bedrock as they picked and swept it up in their gold pans. Mrs. Hugh Hunter was their banker. They showed me a gold pan half full of coarse gold belonging to the Judge and his partner. They would shut off the water just letting a small amount run over the bedrock while they picked at the rocks with their little hand picks so as to get the nuggets out of the seams of the bedrock. As they swept it up in the gold pan it would be mixed with heavy black sand. Then when they panned it to clean it of any gravel, they would take the black sand out by using a horseshoe-shaped magnet with a piece of tissue over the two prongs. After rubbing the magnet in among the gold and black sand they would lift the magnet which would pick up the black sand and leave the gold. Then they would take off the tissue paper and the black sand would drop off. If they didn't use the tissue paper over the prongs of the magnet it would take more time to

remove the black sand from the gold. They tested the black sand and found it contained platinum, so they saved the sand too.

“Judge” Murphy (so called because he was a very well-educated man and people came to him with their problems) would usually be able to tell them what to do. Murphy and his partner, Joe Newton, were getting along in years. I once saw a gold pan three-quarters full of gold which they took out of the Pogue claim.

The “Judge” was well acquainted with a Dr. Dake from Montreal who had some mining interests in this part of the country. Murphy had a cataract in his eye and the Dr. told him if he came back to Montreal with him, he would fix it up. It was early summer or spring and Joe Newton, his partner, was up at the mine. A bunch of us fellows were repairing some flumes for the Stevenson mine on the mountainside just above Joe’s claim. Murphy said to me, “When you go up to work tomorrow morning go down and tell Joe that I have to go to Montreal, and I want to see him before I leave.” I went down to his cabin and or anywhere around so I thought he might just be out in the woods somewhere and I left a note for him, which I told Murphy. Murphy said, “Have another look tomorrow.” The next day we all went up to look around and one fellow saw him sitting on a log. Upon looking closer we found he was dead and had been there probably a couple of days. We made a stretcher and packed him out to Granite Creek where I made a coffin for him, and we buried him.

Charlie Revely ran a little log store for A.E. Howse in Granite Creek. (Howse was one of the leading men of Nicola, owning most of the property there, and as well, had this store at Granite Creek.) The front part of the building was the store and built on the back was a room where Charlie lived. He had a mineral claim about two miles from town and he had drilled a couple of holes and was going to put a stick of dynamite in each. I knew he was going to be away for the biggest part of the day, and I needed something from the store so I went over very early in the morning before he left. He said, “George, stay and have breakfast with me.” So I said I would. His stove was a sheet metal body with a flat top used for cooking and had cast iron ends, the door of cast iron in front. He put an oil can of stew on to warm up. As we waited for breakfast, he sat down at one end of the room making a smoke out of a plug of tobacco and I was sitting on the bed near the door that went outside. He had put a big fire on to hasten the stew. On a box near the stove he had laid two sticks of dynamite, both capped and fused ready to take to his claim. It was in the winter and very cold and he was thawing out the dynamite. I was

pretty young and “green” then, and never seen dynamite before and it looked like two candles to me. Anyway, first there was a cloud of white smoke, then bang, it went off! Both of us rushed outside, both being cut here and there. The door near the bunk where I was sitting had pieces of the cast iron stove door sticking in it, the windows were blown out and the walls lined with cheesecloth caught fire. The stove was blown everywhere. I rushed in with a broom to beat the fire out. Charlie said, “Stay out, there’s another stick to go off.” Of course, both sticks were together and both had gone off together so I put the fire out. The stuff on the shelves in the store was all smashed all over the place and it sure cost Charlie quite a bit. I helped him all I could. They didn’t need a phone in those days to spread the news – all the town could hear it and rushed up there thinking we were killed. They took us down to the hotel and gave us our breakfast and dressed our cuts. People came from everywhere to celebrate our being alive. They had a dance and there was quite a crowd. They stretched a rope above the dining room table in the hotel with all the pots and things hanging on it with the bottoms blown out.