

LYTTON MUSEUM

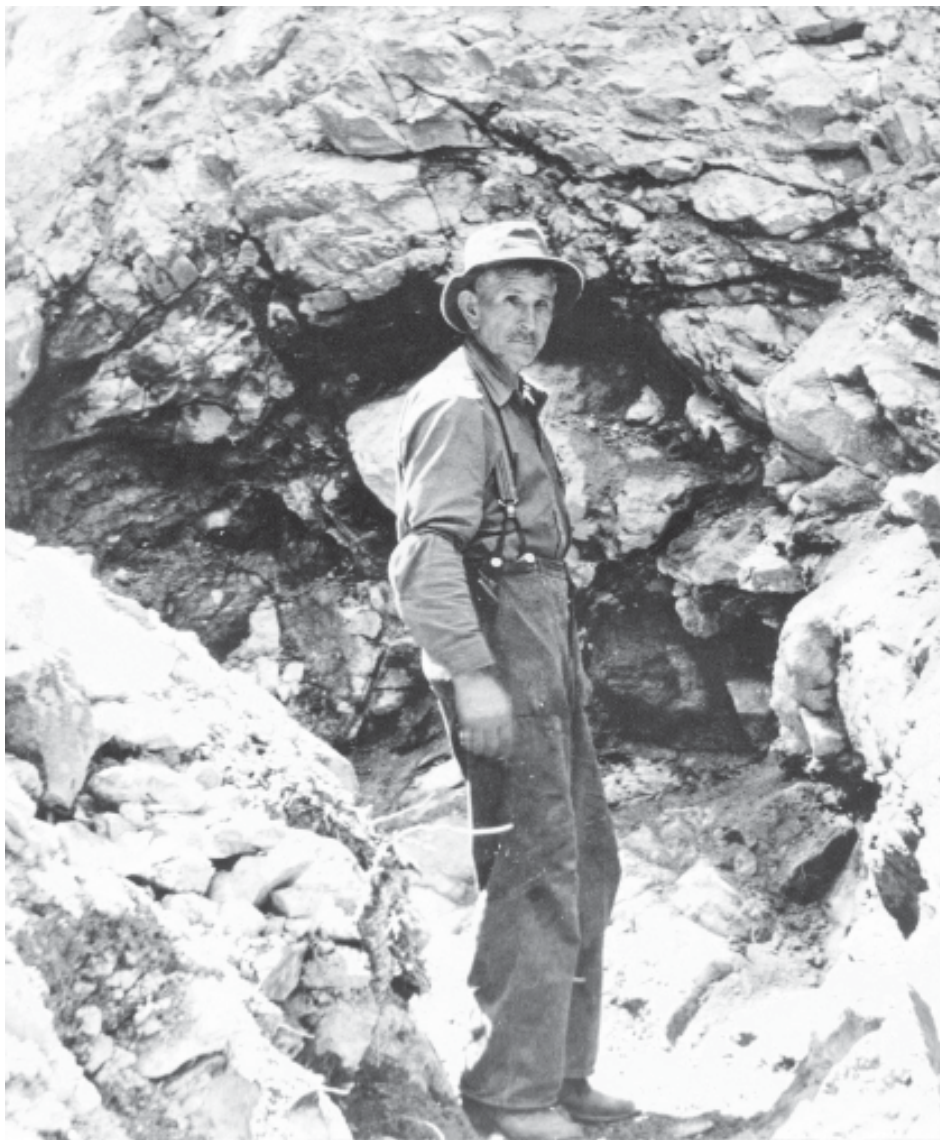
and ARCHIVES

March 2002

420 Fraser Street, Lytton, B.C.

Issue 3 Number 1

LOCAL LEGENDS



URBAN HICKS AND THE SILVER QUEEN MINE [ca 1920's]

Urban Easter Hicks standing in an ore cut at the Silver Queen Mine in Stein Lake Valley [ca1940's]. Mr. Hicks was born April 20, 1881, died Jan. 31, 1972.

Curator's Note:

In our museum, we have a copy of a wonderful book by Ross Urquhart. It has never been published, but Ross has given us permission to use a few of his stories.

Ross interviewed many old timers several years ago and came away with stories about old-time prospecting, hunting and trapping by our own local Lytton citizens, many who have now passed on. These stories open a window to the past and the tough life these men led.

We hope to run two or three of these stories in coming editions of our newsletter, and the following will be the first.

Urban Hicks and the Silver Queen Mine

The Silver Queen Mine began its history the same way most of the mines did — as a rumour.

The Native Indian families who lived on the Fraser near the mouth of Siwhe Creek used to come out of the Texas Creek high country, which abuts the headwaters of Siwhe Creek, with samples of silver ore. Eventually they showed those samples to the local missionaries who promptly sent the ore away for assaying and found it to be almost pure native silver.

When the missionaries asked the Natives where these samples came from they refused to answer, reminding the white men of what had happened to their country when they started bringing gold in as a trade good.

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Urban Hicks and the Silver Queen Mine

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As hard as those missionaries tried, they never gathered more than a vague impression of the silver's origin. They eventually concluded that the deposit was accessed by both Texas and Siwhe Creeks which run parallel to each other and lie between the Fraser River and Cottonwood Creek drainage, which also run roughly parallel to each other. Although they speculated that this is where the silver came from, the Cottonwood is one of the largest creeks flowing into the Stein River and it covers a vast and varied territory.

There were many traditional hunting and trapping trails into the upper Cottonwood. The most well travelled routes to reach the headwaters of the Cottonwood used Texas Creek and Siwhe Creek, and the easiest way to reach the mouth of the creek was up the Stein River.

The best of these routes in later years was Siwhe Creek which Simon Phillips and John Thomas upgraded in 1918 so they could take their cattle over the divide and into the lush valley beyond Devil's Lake, later known as Cattle Valley. It was a short and well cared for route — and Cattle Valley Creek flows directly into Cottonwood. Local prospectors made good use of the trail for a few years once it was upgraded but, after a short period of frenzied searching, nothing was discovered and the story died down.

In the late 1920's, prior to his adventure with Adam Klein, trapper and prospector Urban Hicks was poking around the west Fraser when he heard of an old man living at Nine Mile on the Lillooet road who, according to local rumours, had acquired some interesting ore samples from the Cottonwood drainage. They turned out to be very high in zinc and Urban talked the man into telling him where he found the ore.

When Urban had pinpointed the location, he staked a claim and brought out ore samples that also turned out to be very high in silver.

Urban then bought the trapping rights to this same area from John Thomas, so he

could be in there twelve months of the year, if he wished, and to supplement the cost of mining. (A couple of years before this the provincial game commission had decided the region was being over trapped and, in 1926, they instituted a policy of licensing and reporting on all of the trap lines. Any trappers who wanted to work this area from that date on had to buy the rights from an existing trapper.)

Urban was to work this claim for almost thirty years, but he never found his mother lode.

He ran the trap line for almost ten years and then sold it to Eddie Earl in 1936. Eddie hired Ray Dunstan, who had the trapping rights from the Cottonwood down, to pack him into the Cottonwood cabin, but Eddie couldn't find Urban's traps and shortly after returning home he caught a lung disease and died.

Because Eddie had never gotten around to paying Urban for those rights, Urban took them back and sold them to Walter Isaac, who had previously acquired some rights in the upper Stein drainage. This gave Walter a very large area for his trapping territory.

Urban had been a very successful trapper, although some thought he stretched the rules a little. (Ray Dunstan caught him using bear traps for beaver once and took his traps and hid them.) Despite this, Urban was continuously short of money for his mine and, as well, he had suffered some setbacks in his health.

One cold and blustery day, while heading up to Stein Lake to check his line, he slipped down a rock face around Second Canyon and fell hard on his hip. He wasn't sure how bad it was but he was in a lot of pain and it was hours before he could move. He finished his trip in constant agony and when he packed out to Lytton he visited the hospital and discovered his hip was broken. It took a long time to mend and he never did recover fully but that only slowed him down from trapping — not prospecting. In fact he lived to be ninety years old and remained vigorous (some say riotous) to the end.

Not that prospecting was much safer.

Another time, late in the season at his mine, he was splitting frozen wood for kindling and the wood was so slick with frost that the ax blade bounced off the stick and slipped down onto the hand holding it, almost slicing right through. The hand was barely hanging by a sinew. Mrs. Kanu, who, along with her husband Tommy, worked at the mine, took Urban to the cook shack and dunked his hand in coal oil to stop the bleeding. She then bandaged it tightly and Urban rode to the Lytton hospital where he had it sewed back on.

Urban may have found what he thought was valuable ore, but it was the same maddening old story as most other local mining ventures. It was a two-day trip on horseback to get there, in even the best weather, and the trail was so steep and rugged that the ore could only come out by pack train. This ensured that the gains would hardly pay the bills.

Of course Urban didn't see it that way.

He was sure he found the pot at the end of the rainbow if only he could find a cheap way of getting it out. To help him fulfill his dream he took on a partner, Jack Campbell, and spent much time upgrading the Stein Trail and the Cottonwood Trail.

In 1935, with the help of Walter Isaac and Jimmy Johnson, he built a bridge across the Stein below Canoe Landing, where the rapids end and the calm water begins. That helped him cross the river at high water, but the bridge washed out in the late thirties. Then he built one right at Canoe Landing with the help of Albert Hance and some government money in 1942, but it washed out in '48, in the same year of floods that killed his brother. A couple years later he built another bridge, this time down-river at the narrows where the first one was located, and that one managed to hang around until the mid sixties.

He and his partner, and occasionally a hired crew, spent many hours hand drilling and blasting, looking for better ore samples in the usual agonizingly slow method, but they never happened to find exactly what they were looking for.

It sounded like a frustrating and heartbreak-

ing existence to me, but when I asked people who had lived this life they were unperturbed. They enjoyed their surroundings and being strong and tough in a beautiful and challenging environment. They relished their hard times as much as their good times and their ability to survive and prosper in this demanding country brought them respect and admiration from the people in their communities.

And they never lost hope. As one old miner told me, "You couldn't be a pessimist and a prospector at the same time. It's a contradiction in terms."

An old friend of mine, Laurie Walkem, when he was just a youngster, took a contract to pack a load of supplies into the Silver Queen mine for Urban Hicks and he told me about the journey.

The going was slow because the trail was narrow and the packhorses were fully loaded but he and a couple of his friends, although all barely out of their teens, were well known as good horsemen and they were able to overcome the difficulties.

They took two full days to get to the mine with the greatest excitement along the way provided by Chester Mabelle shooting a grizzly halfway up the Cottonwood.

The miners were glad to get the supplies as meat especially was in short supply. The goats had been pretty well shot out from around the mine and all the fresh meat that was left was the large hoary marmots, (or "groundhogs" as they were called by the miners).

Marmots are very clean animals, closely related to squirrels, and they are strict vegetarians. They grow to ten pounds in this area and had long been a staple of the West Fraser natives.

The traditional method of gathering them was snaring, followed by flaying and placing the meat on rocks to dry in the sun. At that altitude, the cool breezes kept the meat from spoiling as it dried. It would then be stacked in bales and packed home for winter food.

The meat is supposed to be quite tasty and

they are certainly plentiful at high elevations in this region. The major problem, as Laurie explained, was that if you kill one for immediate consumption they are too fat — and when you cook them most of what you get to eat is grease. To solve this problem Mrs. Kanu would boil the marmots, changing the water three times, and then roast them over the fire until they were well done. This procedure was said to make them very edible but it was very time consuming and fresh meat coming in on horse pack was a much appreciated treat.

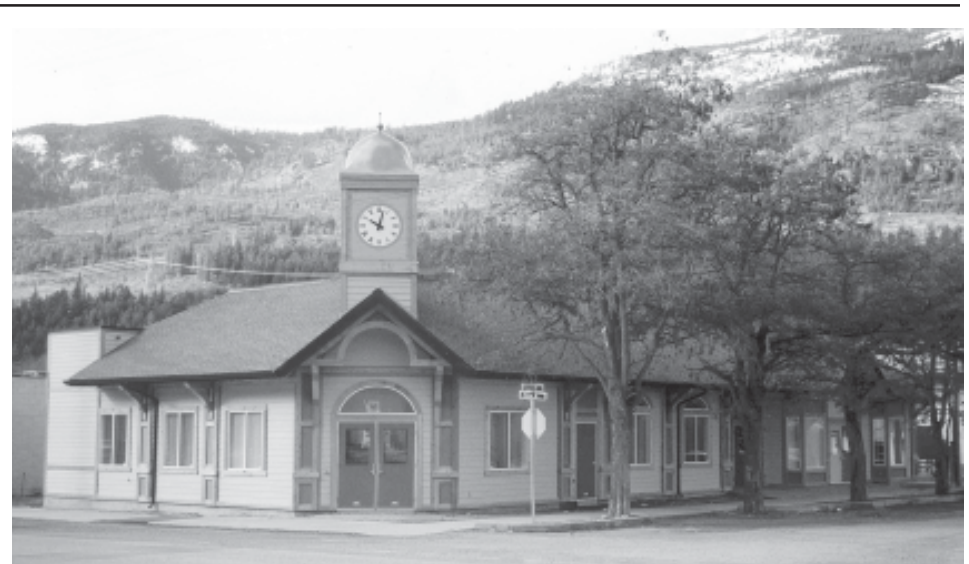
Urban Hicks sold out his share of the Silver Creek mine in the late fifties to Rampart Mines, who years later sold to Dome. Since then I hear it has changed hands a couple more times.

The Duffy Lake road was completed in the sixties bringing logging to that drainage.

One of the feeder creeks, the Blowdown, was just a few miles from a mine through a pass below Gott Peak, so a tote road was extended into the headwaters of the Cottonwood and down to the mine site around 1973 using that route.

At this date it is the only portion of road in the entire Stein River drainage and, surprisingly, the mine is no more prosperous than it was when accessed solely by horse trail.

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HISTORY IN THE MAKING!

The new building housing the Village of Lytton Office, TNRD Library and All People's Gallery opens March 9, 2002.

An all-day community celebration is scheduled, with official ribbon cuttings, a parade, face-painting, balloons, the new Lytton flag and a recital in the new Council Chambers.

A time capsule will be buried just outside the door of the Office, with memorabilia preserved for a future generation. The capsule will contain items as diverse as personal stories from students at all of the schools, current newspaper articles and a DVD copy of "The Pledge".

The new building will provide much-needed retail space in the form of an art gallery, *The All People's Gallery*, owned and operated by Alice Munro and Georgia Lesley. We look forward to this much needed addition to our Village downtown.

The new Library and Village Office mean that two of the trailers used in town will soon be gone. Is anyone interested in adding to the atmosphere of Lytton with a new building?





Aftermath of the Lytton Fire — 1931. Right center is the site of the Lytton Hotel.

The Lytton Fire

(From the memoirs of Canon Stanley Higgs)

I was in my pajamas saying my prayers when I heard it—the town fire bell—and almost at the same instant hurried footsteps on the porch and an excited shaking of the screen door! Through the bedroom window, which faced in the direction of town, I could see a great bank of flame. I hastened to answer the door. It was Margaret Owen, quite out of breath, but able to say, “Get your car out, your garage is on fire.”

It was obvious that the Lytton Hotel was on fire and burning violently. My garage and four houses a block away had caught from some burning debris carried on the wind. My house was threatened and so was the whole mission. I ran to the garage and rescued the car. The hospital was directly in the path of the fire and would have to be evacuated.

The fire was growing rapidly. It had spread across a narrow lane to the annex of the hotel which occupied the rest of the block, and already the annex was ablaze from end to end. The roar of the flames generated a sense of urgency. But what was to be done? One had to assume that the occupants of homes already engulfed had escaped to safety. Their homes were out of reach already. Theo had taken his wife and Ida Caniff up to the Indian Church. Luckily bed pa-

tients were few and in two trips we had transferred them there too. Ida had set up emergency provisions for casualties. The doctor had arrived and, as I was leaving for the hospital again, he asked me to fetch some ether. The first serious victim had been brought in. He was a traveling salesman, named Thibodeau.

I collected three cans of ether. I had left Margaret at the church on my first trip up there, and she, still clad only in a night-gown under a light coat, was busy helping with the care of the injured. Dr. Ellis asked me to make contact with CNR, warning them to hold the first east-bound train, as the seriously injured people would have to be rushed to Kamloops Royal Inland Hospital. The trip down to the CNR was a case of running the gauntlet of fire. On the left of the road the hotel and annex were totally ablaze. Opposite, the office of the Indian agent was already beyond recognition. Behind it and fronting onto the hotel street the agent’s house was a mass of flame, as was the home of old Mrs. McKnight. A two storey community centre, which had been the Theatre Royal of construction days, had caught from the annex, and fire had also carried to a large log barn on the back street facing the conflagration. All the landmarks down to the CNR station had either gone or were a blinding mass of flame.

I drove to where I thought the corner of the main street was, and saw a hose being played on a building quite beyond saving. I per-

suaded the user to move down to the hospital and help to keep the roof wet. He readily agreed to do so. I didn’t know that, as I got back into the car, the nozzle of one of the round cans of ether had rolled into the crack of the door and was neatly snipped off. Immediately the smell of ether was strong, far too strong! I jumped out, called back the man with the hose, and aimed it inside my car. I threw the can into the middle of the flaming Indian office, then I took off for the CNR station. Mr. Keys the agent, promised to hold the first train for casualties. It surprised me to see down there, completely unruffled or even soiled, Don Winch, the son of the owner of the hotel and his wife.

He regretted that one of their temporary staff had been lost. I asked who that might be, and how he knew. He said, “I’m talking of Margaret Owen. She didn’t get out of her room.”

“How do you know?”

He replied. “She never came downstairs to report as the others did.”

I told him she was working with the injured. As I drove back to the hospital I realized that the fire had spread to my own house and the end wall was burning. My first home, Bishop Sillitoe’s Cottage, had caught fire from my garage. It was likely that the entire contents of my house would be lost. In a mood of distorted priorities I went in and rescued a razor and my handsome school football cap. Jumbo, the Indian who sold me my first horse, the aging horse with the broken back, came into the house and asked if he could do anything to help. As secretary-treasurer to the hospital board I had money which would normally be deposited in the Bank of Montreal, Ashcroft, later in the week. Also I had monies to be banked at the same time for the Lytton Athletic Association. The deposit forms were all made up and the total in cheques and bills was something in excess of \$1300.

“Here, Jumbo, take this and look after it, please. Bring it back to me wherever I am tomorrow.”

A group of Indians had gathered in front

of the burning side of my house. All they had to work with were spades. I left them and the house to see if the hospital had been evacuated. All I found which was moveable and valuable was the rather ancient X-ray machine. It consisted of a transformer, a control panel, and the open Roentgen tube. The first unit was heavy, the other two very awkward. With the help of an Indian I got the antique onto the driveway outside, not realizing that there it might be in the way. Bordering the driveway was an eight-foot wall of round stones. I managed to carry the three units to the road level at the top of the wall where they were picked up by a worker in a light delivery truck, and taken up to the church. Then I drove back to my house.

The Indians with the shovels and soil, had stopped the fire there. Other buildings had vanished: two houses between mine and the Indian office, a garage across from the hotel, an old picture theatre of construction days long used as a sample room for traveling salesmen, and AG Rebagliati's general store. Twenty seven buildings in all were burned to the ground. Counting the eventual toll: two killed; the business manager, Mr. Anfield, crippled for life; the Chinese cook, Go, never worked again.

The following morning, seeing me about my house again, Jumbo came down carrying the books and the pile of cheques and money exactly as I handed it to him the night before. It was alright to sell me, a green Englishman, a horse of uncertain age and still more uncertain lineage. That was horse trading, and I had not complained. But to steal from me would never enter his mind.

I took a week off after the fire, when the hospital was back in working order, and visited the hotel's business manager in Vancouver General. He was suffering greatly as he had been required to jump some eighteen feet and lay beside the burning building waiting to be carried to safety. Already he had been approached, on behalf of the management, while in an extremely weakened state, and asked to sign a release whereby he would be deprived of any claim upon the owners for any injury or loss occasioned by the fire.

For the most ambiguous reasons, the spe-

cial enquiry was held, not in Lytton where evidence and witnesses were handy, but in Ashcroft where special witnesses were not available. If there were other aspects of the tragic occasion which ought to have been brought to light, the opportunity to do so

was beyond reach. The Lytton fire was a grim sad story of aggressive mismanagement.



3rd ANNUAL HERITAGE TEA AND TALK FEB. 20, 2002

This was a very successful gathering, with over 30 participants enjoying the tea, coffee, goodies and *lots* of talking!

Dorothy Phillips brought photographs to share with us, and then donated them to the museum - way to go!

Mandy Brown shared stories with us, as did Nellie Russell and Berit Rasmussen.

Victorine Bull, from the LTC unit at St. Bartholomew's, really enjoyed our photographs and albums.

It was great to see the men enjoying themselves and discovering our collection of artifacts. The stories were flying thick and fast, proving once again that we do indeed have an interesting history in this area!



Above:
Marie Heaster, Dorothy Share, Gwendy Lamont, Mandy Brown and Nellie Russell enjoying the conversation.

Left:
Lloyd Dodge, Gordie Ablett and Lawrence Haugen trade stories.



MUSEUM HAPPENINGS

We now have 1300+ photographs in our museum collection. You will see copies of some of these pictures in the Lytton Hotel, where George Kirszenstein is displaying framed copies in the dining room and coffee shop. We have also had inquiries from the new library.

There are eight binders containing photocopies of all the photographs we have, available for your perusal. Copies can be ordered.

We have recently included the Canon Stanley Higgs collection in our archives. Stanley Higgs was a very popular Anglican missionary in the Lytton area from 1928-1934 and 1937-1941. He wrote his autobiography in early 1980, but died (1983) before it could be published. A copy of his book, "That they Might Have Life", is available at the museum. Elsewhere in this newsletter is his story of the 1931 Lytton fire.

Our newest artifact is a rusty old 'scraper'. When the dam was first built at Botannie

Lake, it was built with manual labour and these scrapers, hauled by horses. The scrapers had wooden handles and were hooked to the horse harnesses, so that a man could drive the horses and hold the scraper down with the handles. When the destination was reached the scraper was tipped forward where the dirt was needed. Many thanks to George Kirszenstein, who found this artifact in the bush and donated it to the museum.

MUSEUM MEMBERSHIPS

YES, IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN. MEMBERSHIPS ARE \$5.00 EACH AND EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO JOIN.

Please see Joan Craig at the Doctor's office or Dorothy Dodge at the museum.

MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

Unfortunately, there are no set opening hours through the winter months.

However, the Curator is usually there from 10am to 1 pm through the week, and will

always open the museum anytime if phoned to do so, or if an appointment is set up. We hope to be able to hire a student full-time during the months of June to August. In the meantime, volunteers would be very, very welcome! Phone Dorothy Dodge, 455-2268.

OUR NEXT MEETING

Our next meeting will be at the museum on Tuesday, March 26, 7:00 pm. Every one is welcome.



Photo Credits:

- Urban Hicks (page 1)
courtesy of Anita Nixon
- Village Office (page 3)
courtesy of Dorothy Dodge
- The Lytton Fire (page 4)
courtesy Lytton Museum & Archives
- Tea & Talk (page 5)
courtesy of Dorothy Dodge



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