

THE HEDLEY GOLD MINE AT NICKEL PLATE

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(Granddaughter of Myron Knox Rodgers)*

Edgar Dewdney, the road builder of the Dewdney Trail, had James Riordan and Charles Allison stake claims on Nickel Plate Mountain as early as 1894. Allison was the son of John Fall Allison, the first white settler at Red Earth or Vermillion Forks. This site had originally been named after the red ochre used for face painting or pictographs before being renamed in 1860 Prince's Town, later Princeton, to honor the visit to eastern Canada of Queen Victoria's eldest son, Edward, Prince of Wales — later to become King Edward VII. Dewdney and Allison married sisters making them brothers-in-law. According to legend, greenhorn prospectors had been panning for gold in the Similkameen valley floor and had encountered some locals who, as a cruel prank, told them that the best prospects were on the high mountainous ridges above the 5,000 foot level. Incredibly, the two men found free gold in a rusty red outcrop near the top of a mountain. As a result other seasoned miners quickly staked claims on the mountain. Ironically, the claims staked by Riordan and Allison were allowed to lapse and reverted back to the crown. Robert Rist Hedley, the manager of the Hall Mine at Nelson, was one of the earliest grubstakers with the result that the town that afterwards sprang up was named after him.

John Oswald Coulthard, known as Ozzie, had four claims on the mountain but he allowed them to lapse. According to Doug Cox's book 'Mines of the Eagle Country Nickel Plate & Mascot' this occurred because Richard Lowe Cawston, after whom Cawston was named, and his brother George were moving steers to Rossland on their fall cattle drive. Since Rossland had an assay office, Ozzie gave some of his Hedley ore samples to Dick to have them assayed. When the steers reached the Columbia River they initially refused to swim across so Dick reached into his pocket and threw some of Ozzie's samples at the frightened steers to get them moving into the water. It's very likely that some very rich gold samples still lay on the banks of the Columbia River at the cattle crossing. Apparently Riordan, a rancher at Olalla, gained knowledge of placer gold locations from a Similkameen First Nations brave with the anglicized name of Pinto.



EDWARD, PRINCE OF WALES

The eldest son of Queen Victoria I, he went on to become King Edward VII. In this portrait he is wearing his masonic regalia of the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of England.

GRAND LODGE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND YUKON



THE STAMP MILL

Stamp mills used batteries of stamps to crush the ore. Each stamp was made up of a round vertical steel shaft approximately eight feet long with a 200-pound cast steel foot attached to the bottom. These were fitted with a cam shaft and allowed them to fall down under their own weight pulverizing the ore into a fine sand. The combination of the shaft and steel foot weighed 1050-pounds each.

HEDLEY MUSEUM



CRUCIBLE WITH POUR SPOUT

This large crucible with the pour-sprout was used in the 1950s at the Mascot Mine in Hedley. Crucibles are heat-resistant containers in which crushed ore is super-heated so that the metals contained within can be extracted.

PENTICTON MUSEUM

The history of the Nickel Plate Mine really began in August of 1898 when Francis H. Woolaston and Constance A. Arundel discovered a rich outcrop of ore on the mountain ridges of what would become Nickel Plate Mountain. They first staked the Horsefly, Nickel Plate, Copperfield, Sunnyside and Bull Dog mineral claims. Late in the fall of that same year the pair took some samples of the surface ore from their Nickel Plate claim to the provincial fair in New Westminster. Myron Knox Rodgers, one of the leading figures in the history of the Nickel Plate, later saw the samples in Victoria. At the time Rodgers was travelling through the province in the interests of Marcus Daly, the copper mining magnate of Butte, Montana. Rodgers was so impressed by the samples that he left post haste by steamer, rail, stage, and horseback to reach the discovery claim. His examination proved so satisfactory that in November Rodgers made a non-refundable \$1000 deposit on the Nickel Plate, Sunnyside, Bull Dog and Copperfield claims promising a payout of \$60,000 if the claims proved to be as rich as the samples.

Rodgers, the son of William Knox Rodgers and Sarah Spahr, was born 6 November 1861 at the family homestead at Charleroi, Pennsylvania. He was the oldest of ten children; however two of the children died young. He earned his own way through Washington & Jefferson College in Washington, Pennsylvania, and graduated as a civil engineer. He would come home to the family farm at Charleroi, one hundred miles from the college, sometimes walking most of the way. He was very dedicated to his family and after he graduated he paid for the education of his five brothers and three sisters. He was born with a strong character, conservative, and close mouthed and he possessed an unusual ability in his mining work and finance.

Shortly after he graduated as a civil engineer, he left for the west. He traveled to Helena, Montana, where he secured a position as a rodman on one of James J. Hill's locating engineering parties, who was then building the Great Northern Railway system from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Seattle, Washington. It wasn't long before he was promoted to transitman of the party. From this position he was promoted to Chief Engineer. As the Chief Engineer he had the responsibility of locating a section of the route that involved a tunnel of considerable length, which, when completed, met the other end of steel with remarkable precision.

Hill had been keeping track of him and told him that Meyer Guggenheim of New York had asked him to recommend a man to

take care of their northern explorations in Alaska. Hill recommended Rodgers and asked that he return to New York to see Guggenheim. This he did resulting in a four-year contract. These operations included the building of 200-miles of railroad, the exploring of the Bering River coalfields and the building of docking terminals and smelter sites.

After completion of the railroad he went to Butte, Montana, and entered the employ of Marcus Daly and James Ben Ali Haggin, the owners of the great Anaconda Copper Mine. Here his rise was rapid and soon he was drawn to the attention of Daly. He persuaded Daly to purchase two Corliss compound hoisting engines each with 2,500-horse power. The machinery weighed over 400 tons and was in continuous use for the next fourteen years. They were the largest and most economical hoisting engines west of the Mississippi River being capable of hoisting a load of 25 tons of ore at a speed of 3,500 feet per minute.

While residing in Butte, Rodgers married Lucy Forshee Joyner, a Canadian from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in 1892. Lucy's parents were of Irish and Scottish descent. A college graduate, she was a shrewd lady with unusual native intelligence. At the time of the marriage, Lucy's parents were living in Butte. Lucy had an eccentric character in that she always attempted to be of humble means and talk poverty when she was amply supplied with money. The couple had two children, a son Edwin Leavitt Rodgers born in 1894 and then, 10 years later, a daughter Margaret Elizabeth [my mother]. Edwin, although well educated, ran the gauntlet of wild living as a rich man's son, and was disinherited by his father.

Myron wrote many letters to his wife and often told her of his long days travelling by train. In one letter to Lucy he spoke about a man who had many ideas and who pondered them aloud to Myron. At the end of the letter he mentioned the man's name in passing. He told his wife to remember the name Thomas Edison for he felt that she would be hearing his name about some of his inventions.

Rodgers became a world traveller for his boss Daly responsible for scouting out potential mines as per a story written by Percy F. Goldenrath in 1905 in 'Mother Earth's Treasure Vaults': "Hardships! You get used to hardships after travelling for three and one-half years, covering over 135,000 miles and sampling in the neighbourhood of 700 mineral claims, from the tropical climes of Guatemala to the inhospitable shores of Alaska. And disappointment; yes, mining men have their full share, for fortune is never fickle, to one who seeks to unlock her treasure chests. One instance in point will suffice before I tell you how I ran across the Nickel Plate. I started out from Butte



GOLD INGOT MOLD

This gold ingot mold was used for pouring gold bricks weighing 12,000 ounces or 125 pounds. It had outside measurements of 15" long by 6 3/4" wide by 5 3/4" deep. The inside measurements were 11" by 4 3/4" by 4 3/4". It took 16 bars poured from this size of mold to make one ton of gold. The Hedley Gold Mine yielded 80 tons of gold during its lifetime—80 x 16 or 1,280 bars. That amount of gold would result in a cube of gold less than 6-feet square.

PENTICTON MUSEUM

in 1895, holding a sort of roving commission on behalf of the late Marcus Daly. I first tackled the then little known Boundary district, examining the many remarkable low-grade ore bodies in the Phoenix and the Deadwood camps.

I had just made a flying (steam or sailing ship) trip to Australia and was in Victoria bound for the Skeena River country. Time hung heavily on my hands while waiting for the northbound steamer. One day I happened to be in William Wilson's store on Government Street in Victoria. He showed me some striking looking samples of ore that he said came from the southern part of the province from a claim owned by two prospectors named Woolaston and Arundel. I met Woolaston and arranged to see the prospect. We went into the Similkameen by a rather circuitous route, down the Okanagan Lake to Penticton, then to Fairview (later Oliver), where we were joined by Arundel, Woolaston's partner, and on to Twenty Mile Creek. I made a stay of about an hour and a half on the claim and sampled the showing. Intuitively it came to me that it had the earmarks of a mine. I sent the samples to a Montana assayer. His returns were encouraging. They looked too good, so later on I went back to the claim myself and resampled the ore. Again I received big results and that determined me to secure the property. I bonded the Nickel Plate, Bulldog, Sunnyside and Copperfield claims for \$60,000. Development started and the prospects in time became a mine. That delay at Victoria was responsible for my getting the Nickel Plate. Godenrath continued: "It was the 12th of January, 1899, that a gang of 18 men started development work at the Nickel Plate. All supplies had to be packed in forty miles, and the early work of proving the ore body was prosecuted under the greatest disadvantages. As the work progressed Mr. Rodgers began to gather in other claims, and two month before the bond had expired on the Nickel Plate group, it was taken up and the balance of the money paid."

Early in 1898 Rodgers set out to examine the claims that he bonded 5,000 feet above the valley floor. He first hired local First Nations men to shovel a trail through the snow to the mountaintop and then hired George H. Cahill and a partner by the name of William W. Yates to build a cabin for 20 men before beginning to put in a tunnel on the Sunnyside claim. These men began by stripping off some overburden and driving a wide open cut to an average depth of about 9-feet with dynamite. Cahill was in charge of the first pack train that brought in supplies for the men employed at

the new camp first came in from Fairview (present day Oliver) in November 1898. Rodgers remained on the site all that winter and the following summer.

Rodgers neglected to mention that he had discovered an incredible copper mine in Mexico the year before for Daly and Haggan. The mine finder did \$12,000 worth of development work but Daly wrongly concluded that his man was throwing good money after bad and sent word down to Mexico to close down the work and to pass on paying any bond. Upon leaving Rodgers remarked "if there was no copper mine, there should be and that be would probably travel the rest of his life without finding another place with such favorable conditions for copper." When the property was started up at a later date by Colonel William Cornel Greene, his corporation known as the Greene Consolidated Copper Company, found that one of Rodgers' crosscuts was within 7-feet and another 12-feet of the bonanza ore body. Incidentally, Rodgers had a 25 per cent interest and had been given two days longer the property would have had different owners. The five-mile long by one-mile wide discovery called the Cananea Properties became the richest copper mine in Mexico and eventually yielded \$50,000,000.

This ore car, made by John Hudson Limited of Leeds, England, is exhibited near the entrance to the Hedley Historical Museum.



MYRON KNOX RODGERS

Rodgers, working on behalf of Marcus Daly and James Ben Ali Haggan of Butte, Montana, brought the Hedley gold mine in production in 1904.

Rodgers was perhaps the greatest mine finder in both North and South America.

COURTESY MARILYN L. (MRS. GENE) MORRIS NÉE PROBERT



Many seasoned miners came to check out the new camp and look for any areas that had not yet been recorded. Cahill combed the mountain and discovered 40 acres that had been missed by the other Argonauts. Once strapped for cash, George sold the claim to Duncan Woods for a reported \$15. Woods' 40 acres would over time be whittled down to 8 and 6/10 acres and be called the Mascot Fraction—in time to become the richest gold producing claim in British Columbia—but that's the second half of the history of the Hedley mines.

With the property proving very satisfactory in Marcus Daly's eyes, he authorized the funds for the building of stamp mill and reduction plant. Unfortunately Daly died in 1900 and his assets went into his estate.

Rodgers wanted to build a stamp mill and reduction plant as soon as possible along the side of the mountain just to the southeast of the Hedley Camp. His first stumbling block was with the Chuchuwayha First Nations who happened to have a reserve on the property that Rodgers so desperately needed. The mine finder dealt directly with both the Dominion and Provincial Departments of Indian Affairs but progress was extremely slow. Eventually Rodgers swapped 200 acres for 300 acres of suitable grazing land with the First Nations. Although Chief Charlie Squalkim and most of the First Nations braves seemed all right with the exchange, Medicine Man Cosatasket and other braves of the Chuchuwayhas of Sixteen Mile Creek were angry and placed a curse on the palefaces for annexing their ancestral lands.

Later Rodgers went ahead and built a large stamp mill, concentrating plant, cyanide plant, office, assay office, a hydroelectric ore haulage road and all the accessories for a complete mine and milling operation. He also had built an electric ore haulage road and incline tramway. This tramway was the longest of its type in the world. It was nearly two miles long and the difference in elevation between the terminals was 3600-feet. There was also a flume for the hydroelectric plant about three-miles long. The reduction plant was built on the side of a hill above the town of Hedley and about 4,000-feet lower than the mine in elevation.

The logistics of setting up the mine were enormous. The first challenge was to bring supplies from Fairview [near Oliver] on a switchback trail to the site of the original discovery. Later the trail was upgraded to a freight route to the Nickel Plate mine.

A second freight route was also built from Penticton to Hedley Camp



GOMER P. JONES TRENCHING FOR GOLD FLAKES ATOP NICKEL PLATE MOUNTAIN, CIRCA 1902-1905

HEDLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM SOCIETY PHOTO #1702 PHOTOGRAPHY BY HARRY D. BARNES

at the base of the mountains. F.A. Heinze of Butte, Montana, came to Trail in 1895 and obtained a contract to process ore from the rich LeRoi Mine in Rossland. The B.C. government soon granted him a charter to build a narrow-gauge railway between his smelter at Trail Landing and the mine at nearby Rossland. The charter also permitted Heinze to build a standard-gauge line from Trail to Penticton

Although the CPR were building branch lines into other mining camps in B.C., Rodger's former boss, James J. Hill, had decided to run one of his branch lines from Spokane and Oroville and purchase the Vancouver, Victoria and Eastern Railway, a subsidiary of the Great Northern Railway. This line reached Penticton in 1907

and Hedley in 1909.

One of the first steps that Rodgers took was to hire Gomer Philip Jones. Born in Australia, GP started mining at the age of 14 and by attending night school earned his chemical engineering degree before he was 21. He later received a mining engineering degree from the Bendigo School of Mines in the State of Victoria, Australia. In 1892 Jones went to New York where he operated a bicycle shop. Rodgers tracked him down there and in 1900, leaving his wife and infant child in New York; GP arrived at the Nickel Plate as the Mine Superintendent.

During the entire development stage of the mine, Rodgers seemed to have confidence that he had located



EXECUTIVE STAFF AT THE HEDLEY GOLD MINE, 21 AUGUST 1908.

Back Row left to right: S. L. Smith, Mine Accountant; J. Gordon, Assistant Accountant; Gomer Phillip Jones, Mine Superintendent; Frank Bragg, Store Keeper and Time Keeper

Front Row left to right: Wesley Percy Rodgers, brother of Myron Knox Rogers, Mine Manager and Surveyor; Myron Knox Rogers, General Manager; and Harry D. Barnes, Purchasing Agent.

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a great mine. A most remarkable incident took place at this time. Rodgers went over the property carefully noting the geography and then placed himself on a particular spot and exclaimed, "There should be great body of ore under here." He constructed a tunnel towards this place and struck the richest body of ore—assaying \$1000 gold per ton of ore.

Rodgers offered Wollaston and Arundell \$60,000 for only four claims with a \$1,000 non-refundable deposit when first taken to the

site of discovery. A story exists that just prior to the expiration of the bond that Arundell heard nothing about the results of Rodger's inspection of the claims and the prospector was beginning to feel pessimistic. One day he was passing the bank when he was tapped on the shoulder. Turning around, he was surprised to see Rodgers, who said he wanted to complete payment on the deal. Rodgers told Arundell that he wanted a couple of other nearby claims as well and instead of giving him a cheque for \$59,000 gave him a cheque for \$79,000. A few years later Woolaston and Arundell sold Rodgers the Iron Duke Fraction, Silver Plate, Copper Plate, Woodland and other claims for another reputed \$60,000. Between 1900 and 1905 Rodgers acquired adjacent claims from other prospectors that included the Mound, Coppercleft, Climax, the I.X.L. and the Exchange Fraction.

In 1912 the Hedley Gold Mining Company acquired the Windfall, Morning, Bighorn, Czar and Winchester Fraction. The cost of these new claims was reported at \$131,000.

According to Harry Barnes, in his publication 'The Nickel Plate 1898-1932' "The staff at the Nickel Plate mine in those early years of development consisted of M.K. [Myron Knox] Rodgers, general manger; Wesley P. Rodgers, a brother of M.K. Rodgers, mine manager and surveyor; Gomer P. Jones, who came to the Nickel Plate in August 1900, mine superintendent; and Frank Bragg, store-keeper and timekeeper. About the time the option was taken up on the four original claims a British Columbia charter was obtained for the Yale Mining Company, which became the holding and operating company. A few years later, when it was decided to build mill at Hedley, it was found that the Yale Mining Company's charter was not broad enough to provide for the building of tramways and power-flumes, or for the expropriation of land for right-of-way. Consequently, a second company, the Daly Reduction Company Limited, was incorporated, and a British Columbia charter obtained for it early in 1903. It became the operating company for both the mine and the mill, the Yale Mining Company existing thereafter only as a holding company."

In 1900 Marcus Daly passed away and the Hedley Gold Mine went into the Daly estate. In 1904-05 Rodgers undertook to drive an audit—called the No. 4 tunnel—with the portal or entrance 5,600-feet above sea level to cut into the gold-rich ore body. The tunnel went into the mountain 1,160-feet.

In the spring of 1909 the Daly estate gave an option on their

ASSAYER'S FURNACE

This assayer's furnace was made by the Morgan Crucible Company of Battersea, England, and used at the Nickel Plate Mine in Hedley. Assayers analyze the composition of the ore samples to determine the quantity, quality, and value of precious metals contained within the sample. Assayer's furnaces such as this are used to heat ore samples to very high temperatures, causing the metals to separate from the encasing rock and other impurities, and so can be extracated and evaluated.

PENTICTON MUSEUM





COUNTER-WEIGHT

PENTICTON MUSEUM



BUCKET

PENTICTON MUSEUM

holdings in Nickel Plate to a New York syndicate headed by the Isaac L. Merrill, president of U.S. Steel. Merrill had taken over the control of the largest business in the United States after the death of founder John Pierpont Morgan. The new owners called their holdings the Hedley Gold Mining Company Limited and Gomer Jones was made General Superintendent while Roscoe Wheeler of Oakland, California, was engaged as Mill Superintendent.

In 1914 M.K. Rodgers, accompanied by Mrs. Rodgers and their children Edwin and Margaret, along with Myron's brother Joseph Henry 'Harry' and a Miss Taylor of New York made a trip from the east to the west coast in a large Pierce Arrow car. According to the papers Rodgers was "virtually a scout for the members of President [Woodrow] Wilson's cabinet. Rodgers visited a number of mining camps in Colorado, Utah, Montana and British Columbia. At the end of the 6,000-mile trip Rodgers wrote a letter to the Honorable Franklin K. Lane, Secretary of the Interior, Washington, D.C. A portion of his letter was as follows: "In British Columbia I inspected the property of the Granby Consolidated Mining, Smelting & Power Company Limited of which I am a director. The plant smelts 3,400 tons of copper ore per day yielding less than 1 per cent copper per ton, in blister copper, at a cost of \$1.28 per ton, of which cost 85 cents is for coke. This is the cheapest copper smelting done in the world today.

At Hedley I spent three weeks at the property of the Hedley Gold Mining Company (a gold mining company I opened up and equipped about ten years ago, when associated with the late Marcus Daly and am still interested in the property). The property is one of the largest steady gold producers in Canada, and has yielded about \$6,000,000 gold in the past ten years, of which 50 per cent has been profit. This property was found after I had travelled for three years hunting a mine over the United States, Mexico, Alaska, Australia and Tasmania; travelling over 135, 000 miles and examining over four hundred mining properties.

This property has paid over 200 per cent in profits and pays yearly 30 per cent dividends on its capital stock.

While the auto trip ended in Seattle, I had to travel 800 miles further up the Alaska Coast to Anyox, British Columbia (where I am writing this letter) near Portland Canal, Alaska; to the new copper plant of the Granby Consolidated Mining, Smelting & Power Company, Ltd. where this company has just completed a new copper smelter with a capacity of 2,0000 tons per day, and



EXECUTIVE STAFF AT THE HEDLEY GOLD COMPANY MINE, 1909.

Back row left to right: H. G. Freeman; William Sampson; Thomas Dickson; I. O. Merrill, son of President; and Harry D. Barnes, Purchasing Agent

Front row left to right: Arthur Clare; Gilbert Mceachern, Electrician; Roscoe Wheeler; Benjamin Wallis Knowles; Gomer Phillip Jones, Mine Manager; S.L. Smith, Accountant; E. H. Williams; and Isaac L. Merrill, President.

HEDLEY HISTORICAL MUSEUM SOCIETY PHOTO#0376

have expended over \$4,000,000 on the mine and smelting plant and have on reserves over 10,000,000 tons of commercial copper ore. I took hold of this property fifteen years ago, and have some pleasure now in seeing it developed into one of the largest copper producing mines in the world."

In the fall of 1916 Myron was negotiating the purchase of a building

in Los Angeles with an asking price of \$1,000,000. During this same time period Myron had plans drawn up for the construction of a large new home at Puente, California on the 15-acre place that he had purchased. He later built a mansion on an adjacent piece of property.

Many of Rodger's closest friends and business associates were the wealthiest mining men in North America: John Pierpont Morgan; Meyer Guggenheim; Marcus Daly; William A. Clark and Colonel William Boyce Thompson. Daly, the copper king from Butte, Montana, traveled with Rodgers and entertained him extensively.

Other men of influence included President Woodrow Wilson; James W. Girarard, a former Ambassador to Germany, Gifford Pinchot, lumber baron and later Governor of Pennsylvania; Dwight Morrow, an associate of J.P. Morgan and former ambassador to Mexico.

Rodgers was well on his way to becoming one of the wealthiest mining men in North America had not Bright's Disease [kidney failure] taken his life. He died on 23 July 1917 at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The year before he died he told an acquaintance that he had \$5,000,000 in cash [never mind the rest of his holdings in mining properties]. He left half of his \$5,000,000 cash estate to his wife and the other half to his 10-year old daughter. His son was not included in his will. By a strange twist of fate, the mining partners, bankers and lawyers with whom Rodgers had entrusted his money and assets, absconded with his entire estate and the family were left with nothing.

In 1932 a meeting took place in the office of E.W. Wilson (the former president of the Anglo London & Paris National Bank of San Francisco. Those present were Margaret R. Horton, daughter of MK Rodgers; Nedd Joyner, her cousin; and Mr. Cook, Banker of Salt Lake City, Utah, and a director of the Utah Mining Company. He was an old friend of the Rodgers family. At the meeting Mr. Cook made the following remarks:

In the year 1916 Myron K. Rodgers told him he had about \$5,000,000 cash in his possession that he wished to put away for safe keeping.

Myron K. Rodgers had talked to him at length on the subject of creating a trust.

After the above remarks, Mr. Cook was asked if this was all the money that Myron K. Rodgers had at that time. Mr. Cook answered that he did not know although it was generally understood that Mr. Rodgers was one of the wealthiest men of his day.