

Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

Columbian 19 December 1970

FOR CENTENNIAL '71 | SLUMACH LEGEND BOOK TOPIC

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The intriguing legend of the lost John Slumach gold mine is the basis for a Centennial project by three young Burnaby-ites.

They want to publish a book about the Slumach legend as their Centennial project, and they want the book to be “something special.”

“We’ve done a considerable amount of research, talked to people, and explored the area,” Rick Antonson, 5349 Baker Avenue, said. “The whole subject is fascinating and I know we could sell the book.”

The Slumach legend goes back to the hanging of a Salish Indian named John Slumach in New Westminster in 1891. His crime, the murder of a half-breed Louis Bee at Lillooet Slough on September 18, 1890.

Newspaper accounts from the time say the Bee had accused Slumach of murdering nine Indian women to protect his million-dollar gold mine.

The gold mine is reputed to be somewhere in the Pitt Lake area. Slumach placed a curse on the mine and anyone who found it, and 21 people have lost their lives searching for it.

“I believe that our province today is in danger of losing a heritage which exists yet in the minds of many people—but these are older people who soon will be lost to us,” Antonson said, “With them will go the cornerstones of our history.

“Whether they be fact or fiction, many of our background legends needs to be preserved and saved.”

Antonson and his co-authors, brother Brian Antonson and Mary Trainor, intend to have a press run of 2,500 copies and want an interesting, easy to read, informative book.

“Our main problem now is getting financing,” Antonson said. “We applied for a Centennial grant but they aren’t given to individual efforts.”

They need money to finance the research, pay the cost of copying old documents and to pay a photographer for the illustrations.

“If we can just get going we’ll finance the book through a bank,” Antonson said. “I’m that confident that it will sell.”

He is now considering approaching industries for donations and support.

“We don’t want anything out of it for ourselves,” he said. “I

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expect that the most I'll get will be a typewriter.”

He has already spent long hours researching the legend and finds that the book takes most of his spare time. He is employed as a representative for the Greater Vancouver Visitors and Convention Bureau.

Mary Trainor is Centennial coordinator for Burnaby's Centennial '71 and Brian Antonson, currently working for CKNW, was production director of CJOB radio in Winnipeg last year.

“The Slumach legend is perhaps one of the most intriguing and evasive of all the legends that have grown out of British Columbia's last 100 years,” Antonson said.

“It is significant that the legend involves a substantial area that was a focal point for a portion of the great gold rushes—the boom we grew with.”

Antonson has received support for the book from mayors of Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Maple Ridge and Coquitlam.

Peter Jenewein, Maple Ridge mayor, reported that a letter describing the project was read to council and they unanimously supported it.

“From time to time in the last 40 years I have seen many feature articles written by various researchers and stories in major newspapers.” Jenewein said “No matter in what form it was displayed, it always created a tremendous amount of public interest as to the truth about the Slumach mine legend.”

If there are any profits from the book, Antonson wants to see them go into a fund to encourage other books of the same type.

“I'm not interested in making money from the book. I just want to see it done and done right,” Antonson said. “The experience of researching and writing it is all the payment I need.”

Antonson and his associates prepared a complete brief for L.J. Wallace in Victoria, general chairman for the province's Centennial '71 committee.

Wallace wrote back that while it is impossible to grant them funds, he found the project interesting.

“I have perused your brief with great interest and must congratulate you on the research which you have proposed to do in this most interesting project,” Wallace said. “I hope you will be able to carry out the publishing of your book.”

There are many theories about Slumach's legend, but the most commonly accepted is that on each trip to the mine he

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would take a young woman to help him with the work. Afterwards he would murder her so she couldn't reveal the secret of the mine's whereabouts.

Antonson isn't even sure there really is a mine. He has a theory which says that Slumach and the attractive girl would waylay miners on their way to the city with gold. They would kill the miner, steal the gold, and then Slumach would kill the girl so she couldn't report him to the North West Mounted Police.

He thinks that the mine legend may have started when a fellow named Jackson sold a map of a gold mine to some people in San Francisco. Jackson may have fabricated both the mine and the map.

"I'll know the project is finished when my own curiosity is sated," Antonson said. "Until then I'd like to talk to anyone with information about the mine, the legend and John Slumach.

Antonson's phone number is 434 5172