

# Newspapers and Magazines 1900s

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## OFT SOUGHT Pitt Lake Gold Still Awaits Delivery

BY JACK MAHONY

In the crisp, grey dawn of a morning at the turn of this century, the first act of a strange fiction-like drama was being enacted before the eyes of a small group of officials, witnesses and curiosity seekers in the yard of the old provincial jail at New Westminster, now one of the buildings of the T.J. Trapp Technical School.

As they watched in tense, expectant silence, a middle-aged half-breed Indian calmly mounted the steps of the crude wooden gallows, stood stoically erect as the hangman efficiently performed his last minute preparations, the plunged from sight—carrying to eternity a secret that all present were convinced that he alone possessed and which they would have given much to know.

*What was the half-breed's secret?*

It was the location of a little creek flowing through a narrow canyon in the maze of mountains that rise from the headwaters of Pitt Lake. Find that creek and wealth beyond your wildest dreams is yours for the taking, for its banks are lined with yellow, virgin gold that can be "gathered in handfuls in pieces as large as walnuts."

*Romantic fiction?*

Perhaps, but since that morning forty years ago, more than 2000 men from all over the Pacific Northwest have combed the Pitt Lake mountains in search of the half-breed's "El Dorado." Even now the lure of that gold still calls to the occasional prospector.

*Royal City Man Knows All That Is Known*

Today, all known facts of this modern adventure are in the hands of Hugh Murray on New Westminster. One of British Columbia's real pioneers, Mr. Murray came to this province in 1859, as a lad of six, with the famous Royal Engineers aboard the "Thames City." One of the six remaining members of that historic voyage, he has led a story-book life as a stage driver, prospector, guide and steamboat man.

Mr. Murray has made several attempts to locate the Pitt Lake gold and one of his treasured possessions is a letter and map, left by the only man believed to have located the treasure after the death of the half-breed.

*Here is the story as Mr. Murray tells it.*

"A half-breed Red River Indian named Slummock had been prospecting in the Pitt Lake mountains for a number of years

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and in the late nineties began to show every indication of having struck it rich, coming to New Westminster frequently with a well-filled “poke” of nuggets. He spent his money freely, but was careful not to divulge its source, despite the urgings of his cronies.

“Slummock was a tough character, and it was believed but never proven, that he had drowned three of his Indian “wives” near Siwash Rock at the mouth of Pitt Lake to prevent them from divulging the location, which they had been unfortunate enough to learn, of his find.

“Finally, however, he was charged with the murder of another half-breed prospector, whom he had drowned in the same place for apparently the same reason. Following a long chase he was arrested by Constable Moresby of the provincial police. Returned to New Westminster, he stood trial, was found guilty, and sentenced to hang.

### *Seattle Financiers Interested Many Years Ago*

“During the imprisonment he turned a deaf ear to all enquiries about the location of his camp. On the night before his execution, the late Dr. Hall, a well-known local physician, visited him in his death cell and sought to get him to talk, but his lips were sealed and when he went to his death the next morning with stoic calm of his Indian forebears and with the burning question of the community unanswered...!

“Immediately attempts were made to find his camp, but all failed.

“In 1903, John Jackson, veteran Alaskan prospector, came to New Westminster, and hearing of the Slummock legend, set out with two native guides for the headwaters of Pitt Lake.

“About three months later he returned, completely broken in health. He had very little to say about his trip, but carried with him a large and very heavy pack-sack, which he guarded closely and which was thought to contain gold. He stayed only a day or so, then left for San Francisco. That was the last we saw of him.

“In 1912, I was approached by the representatives of three prominent Seattle financial man. They showed me a letter and map which Jackson had written to a Seattle man called Shotwell.

“Apparently Jackson had never recovered from the ordeal of his search for Slummock’s gold. Knowing, on the advice of his doctor, that death was near, he was passing the information in the form of a letter and map to his friend Shotwell in the hope that he would be able to locate the gold.

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"I have in my possession a complete copy of Jackson's letter. In part it read:

"After reaching the headwaters of Pitt Lake, I discharged my two native guides and set out into the mountains ... I had been out about two months and finding myself short of grub, I decided to turn back.

"I climbed to the top of a sharp ridge and looked down into a little valley or canyon. With some difficulty, I reached the little creek lying in the valley.

"Now comes the interesting part ... I had only a small prospector's pan. But I found colours immediately on the surface. Such colours they were. I knew I had struck it rich ... In going up the little creek I came to a place where the bedrock was bare.

"Here I gathered gold by the handful. Some pieces as large as walnuts. I sized up the little creek. There was millions stored in it.

"I found later that the creek flows into a \_\_\_ and is lost.

"Now the doctor has told me that my heart is badly affected and that I am liable to drop any time.

"Don't give it up, Mr. Shotwell, you will be rewarded beyond your wildest dreams. Don't give it up."

## *Letter and Map Eventually Reached Others*

Shotwell, an old man, and unable to go after the gold himself, sold a share in the letter to another Seattle man for \$700. This man set out for Pitt Lake, but returned without success when the map became partially destroyed. Later, another Seattle man called Hall tried, but he met with a serious accident and had to abandon the attempt.

A search of the accounts of San Francisco banks revealed that Jackson had deposited \$8700 in gold in the Bank of British North America on his return from British Columbia in 1903.

Convinced that they were on the trail of something good, the Seattle trio put up \$2400 to equip a four-man expedition to comb the Pitt Lake hills in search of 'the creek that flows into a \_\_\_ and is lost!' They come to me to hire my services as a guide.

We spent about two months in the mountains but failed to find Jackson's Creek. However, we found additional evidence to strengthen our belief in the gold. I also talked to an old Indian woman at the Indian camp at the head of Pitt Lake. She remembered Jackson staying with them in 1903, when he

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took sick upon arrival into the camp bearing a pack that was 'hiyu till' (very heavy) and that he would not let it out of his sight even during the worse of his illness.

## *Many Have Searched for Gold without Success*

"Since that time I have made several attempts to find Jackson's Creek, but failed. Hundreds of others, from Oregon, Washington and British Columbia have searched for the treasure, all without success.

"About five or six years ago, a colourful old prospector named 'Volcanic' Brown left New Westminster in search of the Pitt Lake gold. I talked to him before he left. He was confident that the gold was there, and while he knew it might never be found, he considered it worth a try.

"He returned without success when his feet were so badly frozen that he had to amputate several of his toes. Undaunted, he returned to 'The Pitt' the following spring. This time he never came back. He probably met an accident and died in the mountains."

To a suggestion that Pitt Lake gold may exist only in the minds of those who have searched for it and not in the waters of "Jackson's Creek," Mr. Murray returns a tolerant smile.

"To anyone who has travelled through that maze of uncharted mountains, hills and canyons that cover the area, the truth of his statement becomes apparent. You might search for months and miss the one spot you were seeking. On the other hand you might find it the first day out.

"Why did Jackson's letter and map not lead us to his creek? He repeats.

"The map, as you know, was partially destroyed and the letter was written some time after his discovery. Jackson was a sick man when he found the gold and was very ill in the Indian camp for some time after. I believe that he probably got the directions slightly twisted as a result of his illness. Essentially they are correct, but one slight miscue could easily lead one astray."

The search for the half-breed's gold still goes on.