

# Story of the Week

## A B.C. FLASHBACK

# The stolen gold was never found

By Susan Hilliard

Specially written for The Province.

THIS is the true story of a robbery, a mysterious witness, a murder and a lost treasure. The scene is the famous Cariboo Gold Mine, at Camp McKinney, British Columbia. The time is August, 1896.

The Cariboo Gold Mine is not, as its name implies, situated in B.C.'s Cariboo country, but is in the historic Boundary District, which follows the International Boundary Line and stretches from Bridesville to Cascade. The Boundary District was the scene of a great copper mining boom in the early years of the century, when the cities of Greenwood, Grand Forks and Phoenix enjoyed their brief periods of glory.

"Drive on and keep driving!" McCauley drove on to Rock Creek arriving some time later at the hotel of H. Pittendrich. He ran into the hotel shouting: "I have been robbed!" "Hell you say!" rejoined Pittendrich.

"What do you think I better do?" asked McCauley. "You'd better go to the nearest magistrate," advised Pittendrich.

### Predates boom

This story, however, predates that boom. In 1896 Grand Forks and Greenwood were little more than mining camps. The economy of the Boundary District in 1896 was centered chiefly in the Cariboo Gold Mine, which was British Columbia's first lode gold mine. Rock Creek, situated twenty miles from Camp McKinney, the site of the mine, was the hub of the district and had been known as a gold mining centre since 1858. The various population centres were connected to each other and to the outside world by stage which traversed roads which were only trails through the forests. Law and order was in the hands of two provincial policemen, Chief Constable W. G. McMynn of Midway, and Constable I. C. Dinsmore of Grand Forks, who covered their large rough territory on horseback. It was in this setting that one of the Boundary District's most dramatic incidents took place.

Chief Constable McMynn and Constable Dinsmore were immediately notified. To the advantage of the police was the fact that avenues of escape from the area were limited, particularly



if the bandit attempted to travel with the heavy, bulky gold, which could not be easily concealed. It would be virtually impossible for him to carry the loot, in addition to a pack and rifle, out of the area without a packhorse.

### Lived at camp

In 1896 the Cariboo Gold Mine was owned partly by James Monaghan and George B. McCauley of Spokane, and managed by J. P. Keene, who lived at camp McKinney. It was the custom of the owners to take the mine's production of gold, in the form of gold bars, once monthly from Camp McKinney down the lonely forest trail to Rock Creek. From there arrangements were made to send the gold by stage to the company headquarters at Spokane.

All routes along which a horse could travel were watched, as well as all departing stages. The masked bandit, however, seemed to have disappeared without a trace. McCauley could furnish no useful description of the robber and police investigations met with no success.

On the morning of August 18, 1896, McCauley prepared to make the journey to Rock Creek with the month's supply of gold, consisting of three gold bricks weighing twenty pounds each. The gold was worth approximately \$11,000, at a time when gold was worth twenty dollars an ounce, rather than thirty-five dollars, as it is today. McCauley and J. P. Keene took the heavy bricks, placed them in saddle bags, and put them into the wagon in which McCauley intended to make the journey to Rock Creek.



contained two half empty bottles of whiskey. Police were positive the bandit had hidden the bullion in the area, and that he himself remained, waiting to make his escape later on when the hunt had died down.

### Driving uphill

McCauley had driven two and a half miles, and was driving up a little hill near a part of the trail named McMynn's Meadows ("Oh, a splendid place for the business," said McCauley later), when suddenly a heavily masked man stepped out from behind a tree, seized the horses by the bit, levelled a rifle and said gruffly, "Stop! Throw your hands up!" "I have no shooting irons," said McCauley, quickly obeying the command. "Throw out that bullion," said the masked man. "Throw it on the bank there." McCauley complied. "Have you any money?" asked the robber. McCauley replied, "Yes, a little—but surely you will not leave me broke!" The robber said again, "Throw it on the bank there."

The "Grand Forks Miner", one of the area's first weekly newspapers, excitedly reported details of the robbery in its issue of August 22, 1896.

"ONE LONE HIGHWAYMAN GETS THE MONTHLY DIVIDEND OF THE CARIBOO", it headlined continuing, "AT ONE FELL SWOOP THE ENTIRE MONTH'S OUTPUT OF THE CELEBRATED CARIBOO MINE AT CAMP MCKINNEY WAS STOLEN."

The "Miner" reported that rewards totalling \$3,500 had been posted by the mining company—\$2,000 for the capture and conviction of the robber and \$1,500 for the return of the gold. The "Miner" closed on a somewhat virtuous note.

### Bills and silver

McCauley tossed out a new five dollar bill, a silver dollar and some ten cent pieces. The robber said, "Now drive on, and don't go back to Camp McKinney." McCauley drove a short way and looked back. The robber was weighing in his hands the three gold bricks. He dropped the bags, pointed the rifle at McCauley and



"These shipments have been made regularly for months past," it said, "and the public always knows within a day or two of the exact time at which they could pass through, so the only surprise created by the holdup is that it has not happened before."

It was not long before a clue appeared. James Monaghan of Spokane received a letter from a man whose name was never revealed. This letter was printed in the Grand Forks "Miner" of November 14, 1896 without a signature "for reasons that are obvious," said the "Miner." The body of the letter to Mr. Monaghan from the mystery witness was as follows:

### Fell to drinking

"I met a man in a saloon in Oroville at about the end of May. We fell to drinking together, and he told me that his name was Matthew Roderick, from Seattle, that he was very hard up and on his way to get the bullion from Camp McKinney—an easy job, he said.

"He had a gun, a Winchester, I think, and was going to stage a holdup. He liked the way I held my liquor—said I'd be one with a cool head and wanted me to come in with him on the job. I didn't want to. Roderick said he was a dead shot and he wouldn't hesitate to kill me if I ever revealed what passed between us that night.

"We went on to camp McKinney where we both got work. After we'd been working three months, and nothing happened, I left for Trail Creek late in August. After I'd been there three days I read an account of the robbery of the Camp McKinney bullion in the "Spokesman Review", so thought I'd better let you know about Roderick."

### Worked there

Inquiries were made about Roderick at Camp McKinney. It was found that, as the letter said, he had worked there. A few days before the robbery he had complained of being sick and had been laid up in his cabin for several days. Shortly after the robbery he had said that there was no point in hanging around the camp too sick to work, and he had left by stage. He had certainly had no bullion with him, the mine officials and police reported. A search of his cabin was made but nothing was found.

Monaghan located the writer of the strange letter, and, since Roderick had said that he came from Seattle, they went there in search of him. When they arrived they located him by the simple expedient of looking him up in the city directory. His name, address and occupation were listed. Strangely, he was a civil engineer.

### Identified man

Monaghan and his companion went stealthily to Roderick's house and watched it until he appeared. The writer of the letter identified Roderick as the man with whom he had talked in the Oroville saloon, but neither he nor Monaghan revealed themselves to Roderick, or made any attempt to apprehend him. The authorities were certain that the gold remained hidden in the Camp McKinney area, and Monaghan made arrangements to have Roderick shadowed in the hope that he would lead the way to the hiding place of the bullion. Monaghan and his companion returned to Spokane on the night of September 12, 1896, prepared to await further developments.

### Made no move

Some times passed before Roderick made any move. In late October 1896, however, he left Seattle and began making his way northward, on horseback, unaware that he was being followed. He made his way again to Oroville, across the border to Osoyoos, and over the Anarchist Mountains to Camp McKinney.

His arrival there those in the camp who knew that he was under suspicion into a state of suppressed excitement. No outward sign was made, however, that anything out of the ordinary was afoot. The mine manager, J. P. Keene undertook the task



"Throw down the bullion," the man said.

of shadowing Roderick as long as he was in the camp, in the hope that he would lead the way to the hidden gold.

### Little-used trail

On Monday, November 9, 1896, Roderick left Camp McKinney and went into the surrounding forest, setting out on a little used trail. Keene, alone, stealthily followed. Unfortunately, he was not stealthy enough. Roderick discovered him and became enraged. Possibly by now he was becoming suspicious that he was being followed. He drew his gun, but Keene was faster. He shot, and the suspected robber fell to the ground, instantly killed by one bullet from the mine ranger's gun.

The headlines of the Grand Forks "Miner" of Saturday, November 14, 1896, tell the story in brief.

"Lost his life while returning for plunder—crime fastened, the man shadowed and a tragedy when he discovers pursuer."

A coroner's inquest into the causes of Roderick's death was held at Camp McKinney on Wednesday, Nov. 11, 1896, two days after the shooting, by Dr. Jakes of Greenwood. The jury was composed of local men, namely, H. Nicolson, foreman; J. Attwood, W. H. Blick, A. Coeuss, George M. Bennett, and R. Swanson. After the jury had heard several witnesses they

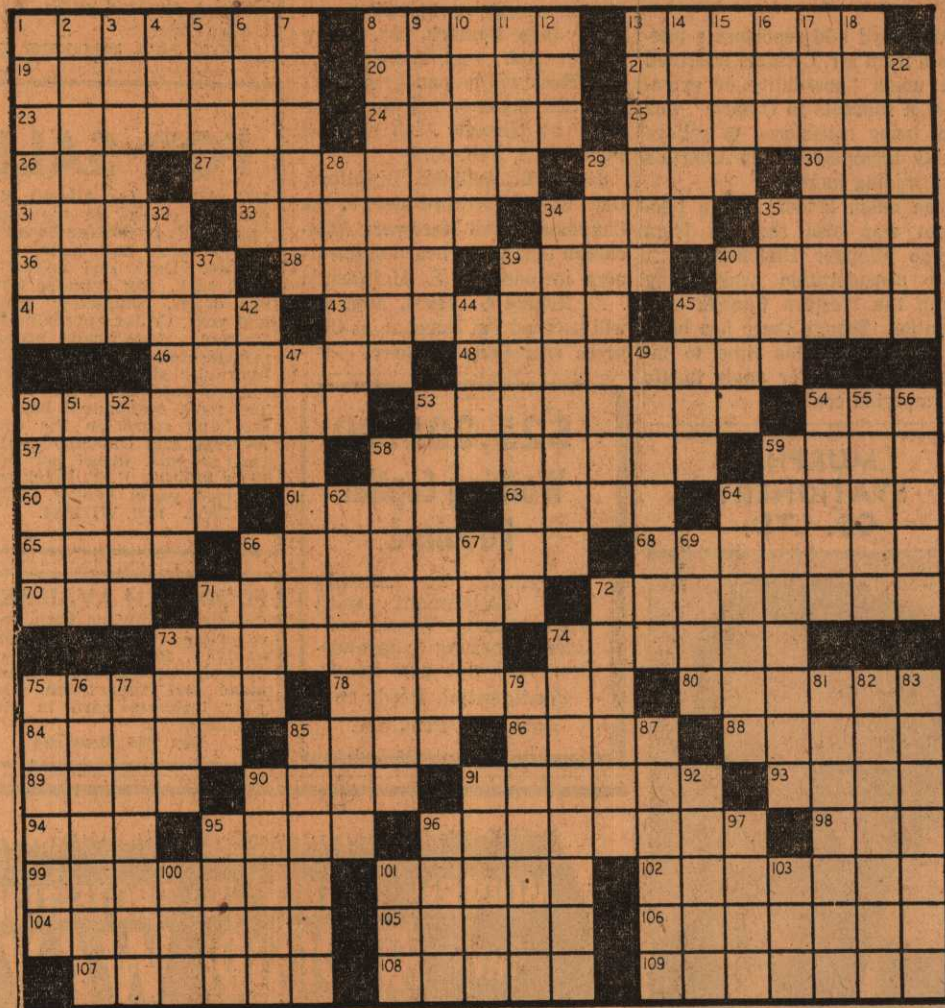
brought in a verdict of justifiable homicide, and completely exonerated Keene from all blame.

Sixty-one years have passed since these dramatic events took place. The Cariboo Gold Mine has long since discontinued operation, and Camp McKinney has fallen into ruin. Most of the people who remember this incident are dead.

And the gold? Roderick's bullion still lies wherever he hid it on the lonely trail near Camp McKinney. Many searchers have looked long and hard for the three gold bricks, an "entire month's output from the celebrated Cariboo Mine at Camp McKinney," but it has never been found.

## Crossword puzzle

By JACK LUZZATTO (Answer appears next week)



### ACROSS

- 1 Exultant joy.
- 8 Knockdown-drag out fight.
- 13 Improved.
- 19 Trouble in the tropics.
- 20 Frilly pleating.
- 21 Grave a wide berth.
- 23 Porcelain coals.
- 24 The opposition.
- 25 Little house wren.
- 26 Cynny man.
- 27 Fashion stylist.
- 29 Saucy.
- 30 In great shape.
- 31 Small valley.
- 33 Had scope.
- 34 Salver.
- 35 Vital city department.
- 36 The best down.
- 38 Single.
- 39 Alas! Lot.
- 40 Gombles.
- 41 Tapers a timber.
- 43 Strong poison.
- 45 Most painful.
- 46 Author of "Little Women."
- 48 Name the baby.
- 50 Type of rental contract.
- 53 Hunter.

### DOWN

- 1 Comes out.
- 2 Wool fat.
- 3 Town on San Francisco Bay.
- 4 Cap on a Scot.
- 5 Peaved.
- 6 Petroleum ship.
- 7 Bohama capital.
- 8 Booster.
- 9 Streamlets.
- 10 Performed.
- 11 Sewing machine sound.
- 12 Mary Ford's partner.
- 13 Boyau boat.
- 14 All.
- 15 Wrongful act.
- 16 Dickens boy, in India.
- 18 Goes out of business.
- 22 Loathe.
- 28 Inborn.
- 29 Gave minute details: Rare.
- 30 Moslem student of theology.
- 31 Bohemia capital.
- 32 Native of a Himalayan country.
- 34 Craved water.
- 35 Granular snow.
- 37 Soften.
- 39 Heightened.
- 40 Man of action.
- 42 Shoat, call.
- 44 Sound effect.
- 45 Symington and Erwin.
- 47 Small bone.
- 49 More calm.
- 50 Moslem student of theology.
- 51 Bothsbea's first husband.
- 52 Whirls or revolves.
- 53 Originators.
- 54 Uncle Millie.
- 55 Internal.
- 56 Divine at random.

### Answer to last week's puzzle

ACROSS: 1. Joy, 8. Fight, 13. Better, 19. Trouble, 20. Pleating, 21. Berth, 23. Porcelain, 24. Opposition, 25. Little house, 26. Cynny, 27. Fashion, 29. Saucy, 30. Shape, 31. Valley, 33. Scope, 34. Salver, 35. Vital, 36. Best down, 38. Single, 39. Alas, 40. Gombles, 41. Tapers, 43. Strong, 45. Painful, 46. Little Women, 48. Baby, 50. Rental, 53. Hunter.

DOWN: 1. Comes out, 2. Wool fat, 3. San Francisco, 4. Cap, 5. Peaved, 6. Petroleum, 7. Bohama, 8. Booster, 9. Streamlets, 10. Performed, 11. Sewing machine, 12. Mary Ford, 13. Boyau, 14. All, 15. Wrongful, 16. Dickens, 18. Goes out, 22. Loathe, 28. Inborn, 29. Gave minute details, 30. Moslem, 31. Bohemia, 32. Native of, 34. Craved water, 35. Granular snow, 37. Soften, 39. Heightened, 40. Man of action, 42. Shoat, call, 44. Sound effect, 45. Symington and Erwin, 47. Small bone, 49. More calm, 50. Moslem student of theology, 51. Bothsbea's first husband, 52. Whirls or revolves, 53. Originators, 54. Uncle Millie, 55. Internal, 56. Divine at random.

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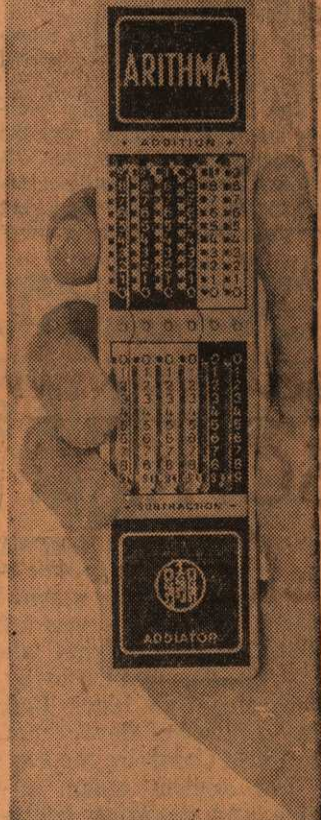
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