

From the Desk of... RON MacARTHUR

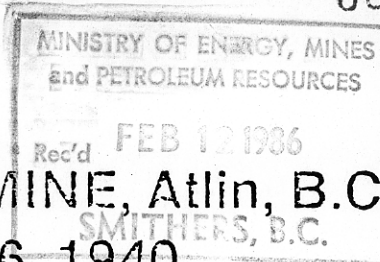
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NOTES ON THE ENGINEER MINE, Atlin, B.C.

by M. F. Fairlie, July 16, 1940

The remarkable history surrounding this property is still the subject of interest about firesides on the north Pacific coast, due to the trail of misfortune and fatality that has seemed to follow those who directly interested themselves in its operation. There is a definite feeling among some that misfortune follows the 'curse' put upon the mine by Brown, the Skagway lawyer, in the initial stage of the mine's life and to which reference will later be made. Rather let us outline the history and let the following facts speak for themselves as a long series of untoward coincidences:—

In 1900 a railway was nearing completion joining the towns of Skagway, Alaska, and Whitehorse, Y.T., on the route to Dawson City. The Chief Engineer, in charge of the railroad construction, an American, along with several of his assistant engineers decided at the conclusion of work to interest themselves in prospecting the area opened up by the new railway. They formed a grubstake and sent out a small party of prospectors to stake what eventually proved to be the Engineer Mine on the east shore of Tagish Lake, about thirty miles from Atlin, B.C., where placer mining had previously been undertaken.

Upon completion of railway construction, the engineering staff was dispersed and returned to the U.S. Next year the Chief Engineer alone returned and took a party of men into the property to do the necessary assessment work. Following its completion, he went to Atlin to record this work and put his claims in order. Not being familiar with the required routine, he was referred to a Capt. Alexander, who, he was told, could advise him in regard to details. Alexander had been in and about Atlin for several seasons and was well-known as a man of great physical strength. He was an Australian, a soldier of fortune with a certain knowledge of mining and of law, but was particularly outstanding in his capacity for brandy, with the result that at the date mentioned he had reached a rather low lebb in his fortunes.

The American engineer had done quite sufficient work to keep his claims in good standing, but, at the suggestion of Alexander, in recording he added the expense of travelling from Seattle. Having set the trap, Alexander now pulled the string. He had friends on the police force in Atlin, and information was sworn against the American engineer for having falsely recorded the work. As a result he was thrown into jail, whereupon Alexander offered his services in getting him out of trouble if he would withdraw the recording of his claims and quit the country. Odd to say, the engineer complied, glad to escape.

Alexander waited a few months until the claims were again thrown open for staking, whereupon, in company

with a Swede named Olsen, he restaked and recorded the claims in his own name. Shortly after this he forced or bought Olsen out of his interest for a sum said to have been \$300. One of the Engineers' Syndicate named Brown, an American lawyer from Skagway, upon hearing of Alexander's tactics, met him and taxed him with the underhand methods used, telling him that if he persisted in recording and working the claims nothing but evil would result. He formally and solemnly put a curse on the property, prophesying that nothing but death and disaster would be the lot of Alexander or anyone else who had anything to do with the property.

Little note of this was taken by Alexander, who went ahead with his plans, working the mine in a small way for a long period of years. The mine apparently produced a certain tonnage of spectacular ore, but Alexander was always secretive about it, nor would he allow engineers, other than the occasional one he hired in a professional way, to examine his showings, nor would he ever entertain any offers to sell the property. His custom over the years was to work the mine in the Summer only, using a very small mill operated with a water wheel, the plant having been installed by Victor Clausen, an American mining engineer well-known for his successful record in the Alaska country. As the years went by Alexander became a spectacular figure, especially in Vancouver. He would come down on the last boat from Skagway to spend the Winter in Vancouver, bringing with him the Summer's output of gold which he deposited at the mint, following which he proceeded to paint the town red. His lavish and spectacular antics, as well as his secretiveness about the mine's operation, gave rise to all sorts of wild rumors concerning the richness of the property until it became a rather notorious mystery. This went on until 1918.

Late in the latter year George Randolph, a young engineer in the employ of Mining Corporation of Canada, was sent out by that Company to look over properties in B.C., and was authorized to take options on the Company's behalf. Charles E. Watson, at that time Manager of Mining Corporation, went out to B.C. to look over the properties already optioned by Randolph. The first one on the list was a property on Silver Creek, near Revelstoke, which was visited by Watson in company with C. L. Clabon, one of the principals. While there Watson received a wire from his Head Office instructing him to drop everything and proceed at once to the Engineer Mine. He and Randolph at once departed, leaving Clabon at the property. The morning following their departure Clabon fell over a cliff at the mine and was

instantly killed. Wayne Darlington, a well-known New York engineer, had succeeded where others failed and managed to secure an option on the Engineer Mine from Alexander, with total purchase price of \$1,000,000. Darlington had passed this option on to Mining Corporation, and as a result Watson was sent to examine the property. On arrival at Vancouver, Watson and Randolph joined Alexander and a young engineer named Verrall representing Darlington. The party, including Alexander's wife, sailed for Skagway and from there Watson and Randolph visited the mine, returning to catch the last boat at Skagway for Vancouver. This boat was the C.P.R. steamer "Princess Sophia", which sailed from Skagway at midnight, on Wednesday October 26th, with a passenger list of 357. Within three hours, in a blinding snow storm, the Princess Sophia struck the Vanderbilt Reef in the Lynn Canal. When daylight came the tide was down and exposed the steamer high and dry on the reef, with even her keel 8 ft. out of water. Many motor boats and other craft arrived early in the morning from Juneau in answer to the Captain's appeal for help. In the Captain's opinion the boat was quite safe and he refused all aid in the removal of passengers during the whole of Thursday, Thursday night and Friday. By 5 o'clock on Friday evening, with a storm rising, all craft had returned to Juneau, with the exception of two — one a U.S. patrol boat — and both had taken shelter in the lee of a nearby island. Shortly after dark, distress calls were received, but upon arrival at the reef of the two boats mentioned, no sign of the Princess Sophia was left. The whole complement of passengers to a man perished.

Following this disaster the writer, on behalf of Mining Corporation, proceeded to Vancouver where he was given certain information by mint authorities as to Alexander's business affairs and habits. It was disclosed that he had a partner named Alan Smith, of Philadelphia, who in the meantime had arrived in Vancouver. Smith, whose drinking habits were not unlike those of Alexander, claimed to have put up the money for Alexander's initial development of the property, for which he received a half-interest, and stated that an agreement existed under which either survivor was to receive the half-interest of the other in case of death. This rather unusual arrangement was said to be covered by an agreement in the mine office at Tagish Lake, and Smith cabled instructions to Carcross to have a messenger secure these papers and send them on to Vancouver. The

messenger went by ice, as the lakes had already frozen, but on the return trip was drowned, the papers in a packsack being found on the ice near the spot where he had disappeared. It was disclosed at this point that the so-called "Mrs. Alexander" who perished on the Princess Sophia, was not his wife, but rather that his wife and one daughter sixteen years of age were still living in England. Litigation immediately started between Mrs. Alexander and Smith, but within a year she died. The daughter, however, continued the litigation, with the mine lying idle in the meantime.

Some time later, in 1923, Mining Corporation received a wire from Alan Smith in Philadelphia, that the litigation in connection with the property had been settled and that he was now open for a deal. Scott Turner, representing Mining Corporation, went to Philadelphia, but found it impossible on account of Smith's habits to arrive at any conclusion. Returning to Toronto, Turner read in the papers that Alan Smith had committed suicide.

Later, in 1926 or 1927, C. V. Bob, New York financier, undertook to operate the property, but the young engineer who was to have been in charge and who, along with his new bride, was being given a sendoff by friends at a New York uptown station, fell under the moving train and was killed. Bob himself came under scrutiny of American authorities for his stock manipulations and was thrown in jail.

In 1934 Mining Corporation of Canada again entered the picture, purchasing a controlling interest in the property. In February 1935, G. M. Clark, a Director of the Corporation, died followed by the death of W. B. P. Parker, another Director, in April 1936. In the latter year John E. Hammell arranged for an option on the property from Mining Corporation, but a young engineer named Hall, who had previously been at the Engineer, but was then in the Philippines, and whom Mr. Hammell had depended upon to run the property, fell down a shaft and was instantly killed at one of the gold mines in the Philippines; as a result Hammell turned the option down.

So far as the writer knows, the mine is at present idle, and awaiting action from some brave individual who cares nothing for the curse of Brown.

M. F. FAIRLIE
July 16, 1940