

Chapter Eleven: Politics, Michigan, Mines and Ghost Towns

Political Ambitions, Second Attempt

Did Will's marriage to Annie Fox influence him to stand as a candidate in the 1894 Cowichan-Alberni District election or did the family lumber business play a part, or, did Will simply fancy a political career?

The Colonist had blatantly promoted Will in his previous attempt in 1887; he did not, however, enjoy similar support this time. The election was for two representatives, one of whom had stood down leaving a vacant post. There were three candidates for the two posts: Premier Theodore Davie who was the current MPP and was standing for re-election, Will Sutton and Major J.M. Mutter.

Born in Scotland Major Mutter was now a farmer in Somenos and president of the Cowichan and Salt Spring Island Agricultural Association. He argued that whoever was elected should live in the district and promoted sheep farming. He was critical of the current government for not encouraging agricultural interests in the district but nevertheless declared he was a candidate for the government.ⁱ

Will Sutton, living in Victoria, also declared himself a candidate on the side of the government, and attacked Major Mutter, saying

...He would characterize that gentleman from his remarks as one who would be a member of the opposition in the legislature, and he warned the people of Cowichan against the opposition, who, he felt sure, from their general policy, would squeeze out of Cowichan all that they could in the way of revenue and give little or nothing

in return. He asked Cowichan to send to the legislature two government men who could work harmoniously together.

The Hon. Mr. Davie took umbrage at Major Mutter's criticism of the government; in response Major Mutter said he had not meant to "*hurt the feelings of the Attorney General*" but that if the Attorney-General "*did not wish to be returned with him, then he would have to ask the electors to vote for him and not for the Attorney-General. He was willing, however, to give the government an independent support in public matters.*"

At a meeting in Alberni five days later, attended by about ninety people in a full court house, the Hon. Theodore Davie spoke for nearly two hours followed by Will Sutton, who had been "*loudly called for.*" Will repeated his support for the present government and added he had "*valuable interests in Alberni and is identified with its success.*" (i.e. Sutton Lumber and Trading Company Limited). He argued the policy of the opposition was to starve the country districts. He supported opening up the country with roads and bridges and that although it would initially be expensive in the longer term it would be a good investment, to which there were cheers from the audience.

The Colonist published an article supporting Major Mutter's claim that candidates should live in the area they represented. In response, an anonymous voter wrote to the editor pointing out that the district extended from Shawnigan Lake to Nootka Sound and from Duncan to Cape Beale. He continued:

Let the electorate judge of the candidates on their true merits without raising any sectional jealousy. Mr. Sutton

is well known and thoroughly acquainted with every portion of the district and of its requirements. Major Mutter is comparatively a 'chee chako'ⁱⁱ and, although he may be a good man, he is unknown in many parts of the constituency...ⁱⁱⁱ

The row, begun in Duncan in response to Major Mutter's criticism of the current government, continued to simmer but the tide was turning against Will Sutton as Premier Davie wrote to Major Mutter:

MY DEAR SIR:- Referring to the matter of your candidature, and to the assurance of general support which you have given, and also to the expression of regret at the misunderstanding which occurred at the meeting at Duncan's, I cordially accept the same, and now beg to say that I shall be quite content if you are the choice of the people of the district as my colleague.

Regarding the contest as between Mr. Sutton and yourself, I must also say that should the electors decide to elect Mr. Sutton, I shall be equally satisfied, and that from this time I shall exercise no preference either in favour of Mr. Sutton or yourself, being quite content to leave the election to the will of the voters. I may also say that I have written a similar letter to Mr. Sutton. Yours very truly, THEODORE DAVIE.

It will come as no surprise then, to learn on 23rd June, that Will Sutton had withdrawn and the Hon. Mr. Davis and Major Mutter were duly elected. Major Mutter clearly supported the farmers whilst Will's interests were in lumber. Major Mutter was an MPP for four years. With hindsight (and being a tad prejudiced), given his later involvement in

promoting Victoria and Vancouver Island, it seems likely Will would have been a very good politician but this was not to be.

Back to School – Michigan School of Mines

After Will failed to be elected in 1887 he returned to his first love, geology; he did the same again this time. He applied for a special course in chemistry, mineralogy, petrography and geology at the Michigan School of Mines. On completion, he returned to Victoria where he offered to run a course on mineralogy - if there was enough interest.

Will had hoped his recent studies would help him obtain the position of Provincial Mineralogist for British Columbia but the post went to an ***“Eastern man recommended by Dr Dawson of Ottawa.”***^v Plan ‘B’ came into action: Will had clearly made an impression on Dr Wadsworth, Director of the Michigan School of Mines, as he was offered the post of assistant, despite not yet having completed his degree. Considering Michigan could boast in 1894 it was the largest mining school in America, this was not an offer to be sniffed at. Will accepted the position but before taking up his new teaching role he told the Director, ***“I am going up into the mountains to examine a new mining camp and will be gone about six weeks.”***

Alberni: China Creek

The Provincial Government had commissioned Will to inspect geological formations and precious metals of the China Creek basin in Alberni. Part of his nine-page report to the Minister of Mines was published in *The Colonist*.^{vi} The report begins with a description of the Vancouver Range of mountains, followed by an examination of China Creek and various mining claims. Will highlighted the Golden Eagle and King Solomon mines and said:

Considerable work has been done on the Golden Eagle claim, at the head of China creek, where the trail ends. Two cabins have been built about five chains apart, in what is known as the Golden Eagle basin, which is about ten acres in extent and completely surrounded by high, precipitous mountains 4000 to 5000 feet in height. I enclose some photographs showing the extremely rugged nature of this part of the country, which look like scenes in the Alps.

The basin is beautifully situated for a stamp mill^{vii} or other works which might be needed in working the mines, and there is a plentiful supply of water and timber. The Golden Eagle is about half-a-mile from the cabin, and is reached by a gradual ascent of about 500 feet up the foot of Mount Saunders, which is covered with heavy debris from the mountain.

The quartz vein upon which the work has been done is exposed along the ridge of a "hog's back," with snowslides on either side. The ridge is covered with timber, which serves as a protection from the heavy snowslides that would otherwise be a constant menace.

The vein is crystalline quartz, with a large percentage of pyrites. There is also interspersed through the quartz some blende, galena, chalcopyrite^{viii} and arsenopyrite, making in ... [total] about 10% of sulphurets. The vein averages about three and a half feet in width, widening to seven feet and narrowing to a few inches....

In conclusion, I may state that I found it necessary to spend a large portion of my time in working up the geography and topography of the country examined. In order to do so I had to climb many precipitous bluffs of no

particular geological interest, but which enabled me to obtain more accurate information regarding the location of the different claims, etc., which I have embodied in a carefully prepared map of the mining district.^{ix}

His report was covered several times in the local media and we are told he is “...*greatly pleased with what he has seen ... and is confident of a brilliant future for this new mining district.*”^x Will’s predictions turned out to be right.

Completing his Degree and Teaching

Will begins teaching at Michigan School of Mines in September 1895, where he stays for five years. He taught the following subjects:

Metallurgy^{xi} including **Assaying**^{xii} with Professor Koenig.

Biology^{xiii} including **Zoology**^{xiv} and **Palaeontology**^{xv} with Professor Seaman and the President.

Mineralogy^{xvi} including **Mineralogy and Crystallography**^{xvii} with Professor Seaman.

Petrography^{xviii} including **Lithology**^{xix} and **Petrology**^{xx} with Professor Seaman and the President.

Geology^{xxi} including **Geological Field Work** with Professor Seaman.

Field Work included 45 hours for the last six weeks of the summer term beginning in July. This is practical work in the field, mostly amongst the pre-Cambrian rocks of the Lake Superior region. Part of the syllabus states:

The first few days of the course are spent at compass work, in which the student is trained in pacing and in the use of the dial and dip compass and aneroid barometer.^{xxii} This work consists of running section lines, meandering wood-roads and streams, running contour lines, platting^{xxiii} outcrops; in fact, making a complete map of the traverses. Specimens are collected and must be located with reference to some section corner or quarter-post established by the United States linear survey. On this work the student plats all of his work in the field, keeping his latitude and departure by means of his compass course and pacing.

After the students become more or less adept at platting and compass work they are given special small areas to map in detail and to work out the relations of the rocks. They make sections and plans showing these relations, and are required to write descriptions of the specimens collected, and to explain the geological phenomena observed.

In 1985 Michigan Technological University (MTU) celebrated its centenary with the publication of *MTU 1885-1985 Advancing our Tradition of Excellent* by David T. Halkola. MTU now offers over 130 degree programmes through its five colleges and schools but back in 1885 its purpose was to train mining engineers. Here is a photograph of the 1896 faculty, Will is on the back row, third from the left:



Michigan School of Mines, Faculty, 1896, public domain

A few years later, Will was to have a chance meeting with his colleague, John Knox, whilst waiting for a train connection at Revelstoke. His wife, Annie, kept a diary of their trip. October 1st, 1903:

Will brought up a gentleman to us and asked me if I remembered him. It was Mr Knox of the Mining School who, with his wife, baby, and sister-in-law, were on their way to Camborne, where he has a situation. His wife is a sister of a nice young student I met once or twice..."

John Knox is on the back row of the photograph, second from right. Thanks to this little nugget we can confirm that Annie accompanied Will to Michigan. Here is another photograph of some of the students Will taught in 1898, notice the candles on their hats for going down the mines:



Michigan School of Mines, students, 1898, public domain

Alongside teaching Will completed his degree with a 54-page thesis entitled *Geology of Penokee-Gogebic Iron Bearing District* which he submitted in 1898 and was awarded an E.M. (Mining Engineer) degree.

Speculative Joint Stock Mining Companies

Between 1880 and 1910 many Canadian businesses moved from family orientated concerns to joint stock corporate entities. A joint stock company is a type of business where shareholders can buy stocks in the company. Indeed, this is reflected in the Sutton story itself when William and his sons set up their new business as the Sutton Lumber Trading Company in 1893, although their shares were mainly owned by family members until they sold out in 1902.

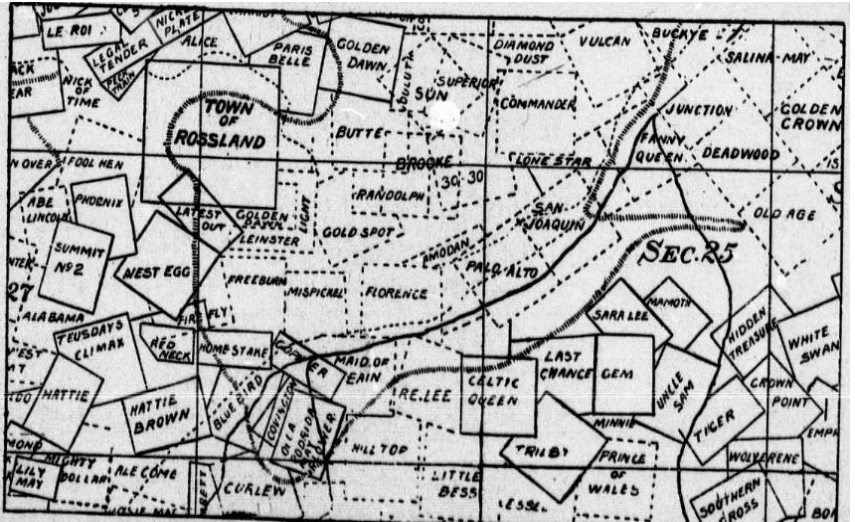
During this period there were several mining booms which led to many new joint stock mining companies being

set up and people who had money to spare investing in them. Selling shares in a speculative mine could enable new companies to further develop and expand but they were often dependent on good reports from ‘expert’ miners or geologists.

In his report to the Minister of Mines in 1888, Will Sutton had warned of the dangers of funding new mines and buying expensive equipment without evidence of enough ore to warrant mining. He had a good reputation as a result of the two years he was Provincial Assayer - a reputation which would have increased with his appointment to the faculty of the best known mining school in North America, as well as the published China Creek report. His opinion would stand some weight in any mining promotion.^{xxiv} It is not surprising, therefore, that he is named in an advertisement appearing in *The Colonist* in May 1896 (and for several weeks thereafter) selling shares in the Freeburn mine. The advert tells us Will is to make an examination of the Freeburn “*immediately*” so that “*work will be directed to the best advantage.*” The Freeburn, according to the advert, is close to the Nestegg and Homestake mines, situated on Red Mountain in Rossland. We hear nothing more about the Freeburn in *The Colonist* and nothing about Will’s report. It is assumed Will’s report was negative as nothing came of the mine although mere mention that Will was planning to inspect was clearly used to influence people to buy shares.

Red Mountain, Rossland

Red Mountain in Rossland is now a famous ski resort but began life as a gold-boom town in the late 19th century. Le Roi was the most famous of the mines which produced almost 30 million dollars during its lifetime. There were several other large mines and many smaller ones, in all over 90 claims were made as the following map^{xxv} indicates,



Map of Rossland Claims

Le Roi is north west of Rossland town; Freeburn is to the south with Homestake below and Nestegg to the west.

It looks like Will examined the Nestegg mine at the same time as he examined the Freeburn because he submitted a bill of \$50 for his inspection of the Nestegg on 10th June 1896.^{xxvi} In his thesis on the Nestegg mining company, Dr. Patrick Chapin^{xxvii} points out that most of the Nestegg records are extant with only one minute book missing and Will's report. If Will's report was negative, and this seems likely as no gold was ever mined at the Nestegg, publication would have had a devastating effect on shares so it seems likely the report was suppressed.

One interesting 'fact' uncovered by Chapin's research is that there was another William John Sutton who had correspondence with Michigan School; this William John

was, in 1892, the acting principal of the State Normal School in Cheney outside of Spokane - an interesting coincidence but not our Will.

Leaving Michigan

It is not clear precisely when Will left Michigan School of Mines to return to Vancouver Island to work for James Dunsmuir although it seems likely he left before the new term began in September 1899. We know that Will had written to James Dunsmuir in February that year seeking employment but in response had been told there was insufficient development at that time to employ him.^{xxviii} The situation had clearly changed by July as Will had been sent by Dunsmuir to inspect Noble Five mine on mainland B.C.^{xxix} We learn from the Sandon *Mining Review*, 1st July 1899, that:

Prof. Sutton Instructor of geology in the School of Mines, Michigan, was in the city this week and made a trip to the Noble Five, Last Chance and other mines, in a tour of inspection for information. He says the Dominion geological survey of this country does not do this district anything like justice. He was convinced that when our mineral wealth became at all fairly discovered, the country would be liberally dotted with concentrators. He took 125 pounds of rock back with him for use in his college.

Will was clearly hedging his bets in case the job with Dunsmuir did not materialise.



Image Noble Five Concentrator and Aerial Tramway, 1930, courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

B.C. Ghost Towns

There are over 150 ghost towns in British Columbia; most are the result of mining, some are from the days of railway building, plus a handful of religious colonies. It is likely Will Sutton would have visited many of the old mining settlements but we only have evidence from available reports, newspaper items, and some of Will's photographs.^{xxx} Will's album contains a group of photographs of mines and towns around Sandon, mainland British Columbia so it is possible they belong to the same period, around 1899, when he visited Noble Five.

Cody

Noble Five mine was at Cody, which is just over half a mile east of Sandon and 20 miles west of Kaslo. In the late 1800's there was a population of about 250 at Cody, mostly working for the Noble Five mine. All that is left today are ruins and the Noble Five office

Camp McKinny

Like Cody, Camp McKinny is also a ghost town. It was founded in 1896 and is on the south eastern slopes of Mount Baldy and included several mines. In 1901 there was a population of 250, in the same year 9,439 ounces of gold and 428 tons of concentrates were mined. With the decline of gold mining in 1903 Camp McKinny died, all that remains is the cemetery and some abandoned workings. Here is another of Will's photographs in which both he and his wife, Annie, appear on horseback. His album also includes a photograph of Fontenoy Mine at Camp McKinny.



Image Camp McKinney, courtesy of the Royal BC Museum and Archives.

As his wife Annie features in this photograph it suggests she accompanied him to visit towns on mainland B.C. on their way back home.

Vaseaux Lake, Bossburg and Kaslo

The album includes photographs of Vaseaux Lake, which is 31 miles from Camp McKinney; Bossburg another ghost town in Stevens County, Washington on the east bank of Columbia River just south of the Canadian border; and Kaslo, which is the only image from this group that is still a town. Unfortunately the cost of acquiring the photographs and the license fee prohibits their inclusion.

ⁱ The Colonist April 21st

ⁱⁱ This means newcomer

ⁱⁱⁱ The Colonist, 3rd May 1894

^{iv} MTUA Correspondence: Letter from WJ Sutton to Dr. Wadsworth 2nd July 1895.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} 22nd September 1895.

^{vii} A mill for crushing ore. Wikipedia.

^{viii}

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pmeubc/39960484133/in/photolist-QHgYev-2h3VZgq-23TaVJn-2gWEAQ4-2fVc2AS-2g8Rink>

^{ix} The map covered 165 square miles of territory east of Alberni Canal with the salient geologic features. It is not known if it still exists.

^x The Daily Colonist, 16th August 1895.

^{xi} Metallurgy is a domain of materials science and engineering that studies the physical and chemical behavior of metallic elements, their intermetallic compounds, and their mixtures, which are called alloys. Wikipedia

^{xii} Assaying: determining the content or quality of (a metal or ore).

Wikipedia

^{xiii} Biology is a natural science concerned with the study of life and living organisms, including their structure, function, growth, evolution, distribution, identification and taxonomy. Modern biology is a vast and eclectic field, composed of many branches and sub disciplines. Wikipedia

^{xiv} Zoology or animal biology is the branch of biology that relates to the animal kingdom, including the structure, embryology, evolution,

classification, habits, and distribution of all animals, both living and extinct, and how they interact with their ecosystems. Wikipedia

^{xv} Paleontology is the scientific study of life existent prior to, and sometimes including, the start of the Holocene Epoch roughly 11,700 years before present. Wikipedia

^{xvi} Mineralogy is a subject of geology specializing in the scientific study of chemistry, crystal structure, and physical (including optical) properties of minerals. Wikipedia

^{xvii} Crystallography: the branch of science concerned with the structure and properties of crystals. Wikipedia

^{xviii} Petrography: the branch of science concerned with the composition and properties of rocks. Wikipedia

^{xix} Lithology: the study of the general physical characteristics of rocks; the general physical characteristics of a rock or the rocks in a particular area. Wikipedia

^{xx} Petrology: the branch of science concerned with the origin, structure, and composition of rocks. Wikipedia

^{xxi} Geology is an earth science comprising the study of solid Earth, the rocks of which it is composed, and the processes by which they change. Wikipedia

^{xxii} An aneroid barometer is an instrument for measuring pressure as a method that does not involve liquid. Wikipedia

^{xxiii} Platting: plan out or make a map of (an area of land, especially a proposed site for construction).

^{xxiv} In this connection, in 1900 Quatsino Mining & Reduction Company had asked Will for a report on their mining property at Quatsino Sound. His letter to the company was reproduced in *The Colonist* followed by an advertisement selling shares in the company. In his letter he states, “...***As my visit was prompted solely by a personal desire to see the property, my examination of the same was not exhaustive: consequently I cannot prepare a full report without another visit.***” *The Colonist*, 25th November 1900 and 9th December 1900.

^{xxv} From The Rossland Homestake Gold Mining Company Limited, a goldmine being thoroughly developed: mine situated at Rossland, B.C. https://archive.org/stream/cihm_93515/cihm_93515_djvu.txt

^{xxvi} Will was due to be back teaching in Michigan on 18th May and Chapin thinks it would be a tight fit for Will to conduct the inspection on his way back to Michigan from Victoria. But this is the most likely time – perhaps he was late in getting back to Michigan?

^{xxvii} *Late Nineteen Century Speculative Mining Promotion in British Columbia: A Case Study of Entrepreneurial Ingenuity, The Nestegg Mining Company, 1896-1898*, Patrick R. Chapin, A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty

of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Department of History, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, 2003.

^{xxviii} MS – 436, Box 166, File 3, British Columbia Archives.

^{xxix} Letter dated 13th June 1899 from James Dunsmuir to Mr. McDonald, Noble Five, introducing Will Sutton who he had sent to examine the mine. British Columbia Archives, MS 436, box 166, file 3.

^{xxx} Although it is possible that when