

Chapter Seven: Politician, Assayist or Lumberman?

Political Ambitions, First Attempt

We have already witnessed how conflict between the provincial and federal governmentsⁱ impacted on William Sutton's plans to build a sawmill at Snug Creek. Although this was resolved, accessing the magnificent timber at Cowichan Lake was thwarted because it was impossible to float large logs from the lake down the Cowichan river to the sawmill at Snug Creek. There were three possible ways to overcome this problem: widen the river to get rid of the obstructions; build roads or build a railway.

The federal government had promised to build a railway on Vancouver Island and William Sutton had planned to use this to transport the logs. But there were many delays. Back in 1880 Will Sutton had attended a meeting in Cowichan with the MPP, William Smythe, to discuss the delayed construction of the Island railway and it was not until 1912 that the railway was extended to Cowichan – much too late for the Suttons.

The lumber business was not Will Sutton's chosen career path. We know he enjoyed public speaking, evidenced by the lectures he gave on phrenology in Victoria (see Chapter Eight). And we must remember it was normal practice for politicians to advance their own interests as well as the interests of the places they represented. So it is highly likely William Sutton would have encouraged his son to take up office in order to push for the building of roads and the railway. Indeed, improvement of the road between Quamichan and Cowichan Lake and another leading up the Koksilah, "*both important colonization roads*" were part of Will Sutton's platform when he stood for election in 1887.ⁱⁱ

By-Election 1887

Premier William Smythe, who was Member of the Legislative Assembly for Cowichan,ⁱⁱⁱ died in 1887, causing a by-election. Will decided to stand: he was 28 years old and had lived in Cowichan for ten years. He was supported by *The Colonist*, who introduced him,

Mr. Sutton is a gentleman of large experience, bright intelligence, and of the greatest moral worth. As a speaker he would take a prominent place on the floor of the house as he has in the lecturing field already testified. We understand that his candidature is highly satisfactory to the large majority of the electorate, and it is generally conceded that he will be a hard man to beat. His interests are closely identified with the people among whom he lives, and he may safely be relied on to advance and conserve their interests to the utmost of his power.^{iv}

There were three candidates, John N. Evans, Henry Fry (who was a J.P. and had been secretary at the meeting back in 1880 in Cowichan to discuss the delayed railway) and Will Sutton. This is how *The Colonist* describes the candidates:

Mr. Sutton [is the] the government candidate, Mr. Evans is an out and oppositionist and comes before the electorate as such. Mr. Fry, whatever he might profess, is in reality playing into the opposition's hand and must be regarded and treated as running in the opposition interest. All reports confirm the belief that the people of Cowichan have no intention of returning a man in opposition to the colleagues of their late representative, and that Mr. Sutton's election is assured.^v

Opposition to the other candidates by *The Colonist* is blatant. We are told John N. Evans has a “*negative quality,*” is critical of the government and is opposed to the interests of the province.^{vi} Henry Fry is accused of “*prejudicing the chances of Mr. Sutton*” by saying he is standing for the government and thereby splitting the vote with the possibility of letting the opposition candidate win.

We believe that the sober sense of the people of Cowichan will tell them that only by voting for Mr. Sutton will they ensure as their representative in the legislature a gentleman who is in accord with, and has the sympathy of, the present administration... Mr. Sutton is a gentleman of the highest intelligence, of the strictest probity and may always be counted on to advance the best interests of those whom he will, we trust, shortly be called upon to represent.^{vii}

With just nine days to go to the election, *The Colonist* continues in the same vein,

Let us see how the matter stands: there are three candidates in the field. Mr. Sutton has come out fairly and squarely as a supporter of the present government. Mr. Fry has come out as a professed government supporter. Mr. Evans runs as an open and avowed oppositionist...we are prepared to state that Mr. Fry is not and has never been loyal to the party now in power. Nay, there need be no hesitation in asserting that he is sailing under false colors, that he is an enemy in disguise – professing to be a friend of the present government simply because he knows that to be the popular card in the district...

In view of these facts, the duty of those electors who desire to see a united delegation from the district supporting the present government is surely clear enough. They should give a solid vote for Mr. Sutton, who possesses the full confidence of the government. It is a duty they owe to themselves, as Mr. Sutton would undoubtedly be able to accomplish much more for the district than either or both of the others....^{viii}

The newspaper is confident Will Sutton “*will be elected by a handsome majority.*” They were wrong. Will Sutton was not elected. Mr. Evans polled 74 votes and between them, Will Sutton and Henry Fry polled 181; it would appear it was a tight contest but we do not have the number of votes cast for Will. There is no analysis in the newspaper regarding Will’s defeat, which is surprising given their promotion of him, simply an announcement that Mr. Fry had won, although there is some cynicism: “*...Mr. Fry will always have our support so long as he consistently supports good government – and just so long and no longer will he deserve and receive the support of those who elected him.*”

Never one to stay down for long, the sawmill at Snug Creek remained closed and Will moved to Victoria to take up a new job.

Government Assayer

Will is appointed Government Assayer, an extremely responsible post which he holds for two years. Part of his job is to inspect mines and at the end of 1888 he submits a report to the Minister of Mines on all the mines he had visited during that year.^{ix} These include, The Nicola Mines, Joshua Mine, The King William, The Tubal Cain, The Star Mine, The Mary Reynolds, The Jenny Long, The Bonanza Lodge, and the

Illecillewaet Mines.^x To give a flavour of one of his reports, this is what he said about the Jenny Long mine:

The Jennie Long is owned by Messrs. Dr. Jones, Grant, Moss and others, of Victoria, and located about two miles south-east of the Joshua, and running in about the same direction. The vein averages about three feet in width, upon which a shaft has been sunk about 7-0 feet. A small quantity of very rich ore has been taken from this ledge, assaying over \$3,000 per ton in gold and silver. The vein has about the same characteristics as the other veins of the Nicola Valley, previously described.

A large number of other claims have been taken up throughout the Nicola country, showing out-croppings of mineralized veins, but not sufficiently developed to be of special notice.

The country rock of Mineral Hill is a green crystalline rock of a dioritic nature. It varies considerably, graduating into dioritic slate and diabase. In places it is somewhat porphyritic. The country rock of Idaho Mountain approaches a syenite. Outcroppings of rock of a dolomitic nature were found in several places. The rocks of both Mineral Hill and Idaho Mountain carry considerable calcite and pyrite.

I was pleased to see the business-like method adopted at the Nicola mines, as I may state that much of the distrust that exists in the Province in regard to mining as a legitimate field for investment has arisen very largely from the lack of business principles in its prosecution. A great many of the misfortunes that have attended mining ventures in the Province have been brought about from a too eager desire to turn the newly found treasures into

bullion – mills and machinery being purchased and erected before the existence of a sufficient quantity of paying ore has been definitely ascertained. As so much of this haphazard mining has been done in the past, and since mining men are proverbially sanguine, I deem it important to call their attention particularly to this danger, which must be patent to everyone who has followed the mining history of this Province. There is also the possibility (if not probability) of the ore changing its nature, so that milling plant intended to treat the ore on the surface may become useless on account of not being adapted to treat its altered condition. Sinking and drifting are necessary, and must be done sooner or later to open up the mine and put it in working condition. Why run the great danger of having a mill on your hands with no grist to grind?

Perhaps Will's business studies course is proving useful as well as his experience in the lumber trade (having a sawmill but with poor access to their timber lease and his father having purchased too much machinery). His report concludes with a list of 35 examples of economic minerals found in the Province. Very impressive – it certainly looks like he knows what he is talking about.

Here is a wonderful description of Will's work at the Provincial Assayer's office and workshop in Victoria, published in *The Colonist*, 29th April 1887.

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The premises are situated in the brick building nearest Birdcage walk and next to the Legislative Assembly Hall, James Bay. They consist of three rooms – work room, chemical room and office, all fitted with the best and most modern appliances for scientific assaying.

The workshop comes first in order of interest, and here an hour can be passed away very pleasantly and profitably, in watching the government assayer, Mr. W.J. Sutton, and his assistant Mr. Dowlen, when they are at work. Yesterday, Mr. Sutton kindly undertook to explain matters to a COLONIST reporter who paid him a call.

The workroom is about 24 feet wide by 20 wide. It is here that samples of rock sent for assay are first received.

The primary work in the process of assaying, is to crush the samples to powder. To do this the fragment of rock is first crushed in a miniature “Jumbo” between a pair of iron jaws which work together, and soon reduce the hardest rock to powder.

This powder is next sent to the bucking board – a common slab of iron – where it is ground with a muller into the finest dust or flour.

Whatever quantity of the flour is to be analyzed, is next carefully weighed; so that an examination may be made of a known quantity. The dust is then mixed with certain “fluxes,” in much the same manner as bread is mixed. The fluxes are used to make the specimen melt. Half the secret of assaying is to understand how to properly “flux” the rock, so that it will become fluid and the precious metals will quickly settle to the bottom. Oxide of lead is principally used in fluxing, to gather the precious metal and with it settle to the bottom of the crucible.

After being fluxed, the powder is put in the crucible and covered with common table salt. When placed in the furnace the salt melts quickly and floats on the top, excluding the air and acting as a necessary wash as well.

The crucibles having come out of the furnace, a little button shaped deposit of precious metal, mixed with lead, is found at the bottom. This ends the first process, the rock having been entirely got rid of.

A little cup or “cupel” made of bone ash is next called into use; the button being placed in it in the oven, and exposed to the combined action of the heat and air, which changing the lead back to litharge, leaves the precious metal in the bottom of the cupel, the litharge being absorbed by the ash.

An alloy of gold and silver is now in hand, and from this it is easy to separate the gold by dissolving the silver with nitrate acid. The gold is then weighed, and the crucible assay is complete.

All the work described, known as “dry work,” with the roasting and many other processes through which some ores have to be put, is done in the work room, which is provided with first-class appliances, furnaces, both coal and gas, etc., etc.

The chemical room is well stored with dangerous fluids and harmless fluids of all the colors known to millinery, all in bottles of every size contained on the well-filled shelves. The chemicals are used for analyzing the ingredients in rocks sent for assay. The chemical room is also equipped with electric and scientific apparatus for making analyses for poisons – in fact, nothing is missing from the list of chemicals and appliances for making qualitative and quantitative analyses.

The office is equipped with a series of valuable instruments, optical and weighing, the very acme of

mechanical perfection. One of the balances is deserving of especial description. It was made in London by the most celebrated instrument manufacturers in the world. The bearings are jewels, the beam of aluminium, and the entire instrument is plated with gold. It weighs accurately the smallest particle that it is possible to conceive of.

In order to test the working of the instrument, THE COLONIST reporter yesterday tore a little scrap of paper, about one-half an inch square, out of his notebook and asked to have it weighed. Mr. Sutton gently laid it on one of the cups of the scale, using a tiny pair of pincers, as the perspiration, had it been touched by the hand, would effect the weight. The delicate pendulum wavered, and the weight of the paper was registered at 23.15 milligrams. With the aid of the pincers, the scrap of paper was again produced; and with a lead pencil the reporter wrote on it the words "THE COLONIST." Again it was placed on the scales, and weight taken. The weight before it was endorsed and duly subtracted, and the weight of the writing was found to be .025 milligrams.

The office is also provided with the finest and most powerful microscope, and a fine spectroscope, by means of which the presence of different minerals can be detected by the different colored lights they give when seen in a gas blaze. There are many other objects of curiosity and interest to the scientific, while Mr. Sutton's personal cabinet containing several thousands of choice specimens, is one that would be a credit to any museum of mineralogy in the world.

On 1st September 1889 *The Colonist* tells us that W.J. Sutton, the government assayer, has resigned from his post to take charge of Cowichan Lumber Mills. The article goes on

to say that during the two years he was assayer, William had ***“given universal satisfaction.”*** Under Will’s management the assay office ***“had been converted to a model of its kind.”*** What a pity he had to leave but his duty to his father clearly came first above his love of geology.

Cowichan Sawmill Re-opened and Sold

Will Sutton was obliged to leave his job as Government Assayer to sort out the family lumber business at Cowichan. He reopened the sawmill in 1889. On 2nd April that year, under the title, **Damming the Cowichan River**, *The Colonist* tells us,

Mr. Sutton, the lumberman of Cowichan, it is stated, has entered into partnership with a company of capitalists for the purpose of building a dam across the Cowichan River, so as to bring logs down from his timber claim, near Cowichan Lake. This will be quite an extensive undertaking, and about thirty men will be employed and the work will be completed in about three months.

Having to build a dam supports the argument that logging had not taken place on the original lease by Honeymoon Bay due to problems getting the logs down the river.

The sawmill reopened in August and received a boom of logs from Victoria Lumber and Manufacturing Company. By November Will Sutton had teams working to change the channel of the Cowichan river opposite the Quamichan village and by December^{xi} he had sold the business:

Mr. W. Sutton of Cowichan, has concluded arrangements with a party of Michigan lumbermen to take hold of his sawmill property at Cowichan. The cutting capacity of

the mill is to be increased to a daily output of one hundred thousand feet. The mill will be supplied with logs from Cowichan lake, where large logging operations are in progress. The people of Cowichan are to be congratulated on having such an important enterprise established in their midst.

Here is a photograph of the Sutton sawmill taken by R. Maynard of Victoria; it was probably used by Will as part of his pitch to sell the mill and lease to Hughitt and McIntyre:



Sutton Mill, c. 1889; thanks to the Wright-Hughitt Family

The person on the left looks suspiciously like James Sutton. We know the mill was extended by the new owners who must have pumped a large amount of money into the

venture; here is a photograph after the extension which shows a much bigger mill; note the steamer and barque by the jetty.



Hughitt and McIntyre Mill, c. 1891; thanks to the Wright-Hughitt Family.

And here is a wonderful photograph showing the barque, *Colorado*, waiting for the finished product to be loaded.



Barque, Colorado, at the Hughitt McIntyre Mill, c. 1891; thanks to the Wright-Hughitt Family

After the Business is Sold

During the winter of 1889-90 the Cowichan River did not rise enough for a log-drive. By December 1890 the new owners began to release logs but a flood set in and the river rose so quickly and to such an extent that, without proper booms being placed to control the logs and protect the banks, the logs ran into Indian Allotments. The road bridge was swept away and the railway bridge was in danger. This resulted in an injunction being served on the new owners from the railway company.^{xii}

There were several logging camps on Cowichan Lake at this time which is hardly surprising given transportation via the new channel had potentially opened up access to the ‘magnificent timber.’ A repeat of the 1890 drive was likely and the situation resulted in letters between the Departments

of Justice and Indian Affairs as to who was responsible for the damage caused by the logs. In June 1891 Indian Agent Lomas wrote to the Indian Superintendent to inform him that ***“in the upper reaches of the river there are already about three million feet of logs stranded while at Cowichan Lake two gangs of loggers are constantly at work,”*** he warns of the potential damage to the Reserve if the banks are not protected sufficiently by booms.^{xiii}

In fact, two years later the sawmill company let loose from the lake two and a half million feet of logs creating jams, damaging land and stopping navigation by canoes.^{xiv} In December 1893 the federal government served an injunction against Hughitt and McIntyre to stop them running logs until the banks of the river were protected.^{xv}

The following year there was a mass meeting in Duncan at which residents urged the provincial government to improve the river. The provincial government blamed the federal government (sound familiar)?^{xvi} Amos Jay Hughitt made the following statement at the meeting:

...since the commencement of the logging business on this river there had been obstacles continuously thrown in their way by the Dominion Government that injunctions were placed on the running of logs, thereby preventing the fulfilling of contracts and entirely crippling the lumber industry and making it impossible to obtain money to carry on the lumber trade or make improvements in the river and that capitalists, on being approached, reply that while opposed and hampered by the action of the Government they will not invest their money.

Without improvements and with the legal injunction still in place, the new owners experienced a huge loss. Their

assets were taken over from the Bank of British Columbia in 1894, and in 1895 were bought by Mossom Boyd and others who formed the Cowichan Lumber Company. The injunction was lifted in 1898 when the Cowichan river was again used as a means of transporting logs; this continued until 1908, with many more log jams. Various plans were hatched to lessen the obstacles; a dyke and a dam were built in 1907 but both were washed away by the log drive.

Ashdown Green, a government employed surveyor, wrote the following report to the Indian Superintendent in April 1908:

I do not think it probable that logs will ever be run again on the Cowichan river. The bed is now so wide and shallow that, except during unusually high freshets, logs cannot float for any distance. The contract for driving has always been more or less of a gamble; if a heavy freshet occurred the contractor made money; if, as during the past two years, the river was only uniformly high he lost or made very little, the consequence is that hardly any work is undertaken to clear the river until all hope of a freshet has gone.

Cowichan river was never again used to transport logs.^{xvii} It was only with the coming of the railway spar lines in 1912 and new roads that the timber industry around Cowichan Lake opened up significantly; remember, William Sutton had originally envisaged using the railway but delays scuppered his dream.^{xviii}

The sawmill at Genoa Bay (Snug Creek was renamed Genoa Bay by Amos Jay Hughitt as this was the district in New York where he was born) was expanded by several owners and at one time was one of the largest of its kind on

Vancouver Island but was eventually closed down in 1940. At its height there were about 60 buildings including houses, offices, a school and a church. It is now a marina with a restaurant.^{xix}

Concluding Remarks

The Cowichan venture reveals more about the character of William Sutton confirming that he was a very ambitious man. At the same time, this early period of ten years working in the lumber trade gave Will Sutton grounding for his understanding of the business which he would use in his arguments for conservation many years later.

All in all it does not look like the logging venture at Cowichan was a huge success. Having said this, at the end of the day with the sale of the mill and timber lease, the Suttons were probably not out of pocket. The sale provided \$100,000, for William Sutton and his sons Will and James, to set up a similar venture but on a much grander scale, the Sutton Lumber and Trading Company of Ucluelet, which is covered in Chapter Nine. But before we leave Cowichan there is some unfinished business.

¹ The British North America Act of 1867 is Canada's founding document; it resulted in a two tier system of government: a powerful federal/dominion government alongside provincial governments who, over time, were given more power. The federal government has two chambers, the House of Commons (lower house) and the Senate (upper house) with the Sovereign represented by the Governor General. When British Columbia joined the

Canadian Confederacy in 1871 a Westminster-style parliamentary government was introduced in the province but unlike Westminster (and the federal government) it only had one chamber - the legislative assembly. The Premier of the assembly was the leader of the party with most seats. Before 1903 there were no political parties at provincial level: you stood either as an independent, or for the government (supporting the premier) or in opposition (opposing the premier). Provincial government encouraged immigration and development of Islands resources often overriding the federal office responsible for Indian Affairs and causing conflict.

ⁱⁱThe Colonist, 29th April 1887

ⁱⁱⁱIn 1887 there were 27 MPPs in British Columbia.

^{iv}The Colonist, 15th April 1887

^vThe Colonist, 20th April 1887

^{vi}The Colonist, 19th April 1887

^{vii}The Colonist, 20th April 1887

^{viii}The Colonist, 29th April 1887

^{ix}http://cmscontent.nrs.gov.bc.ca/geoscience/PublicationCatalogue/AnnualReport/BCGS_AR1888.pdf

^xWill would have visited many mines and claims during his lifetime but we only have evidence of a few.

^{xi}The Sutton sawmill and property at Snug Creek as well as timber leaseholds were sold by William Sutton to Amos Jay Hughitt and his partner, Daniel McIntyre on 25th February, 1890. BC Archives – Timber Lease #0117 Assignment of Timber Leaseholds from William Sutton to Daniel McIntyre and Amos Jay Hughitt dated February 25, 1890.

^{xii}Brendan O'Donnell, Indian and Non-Native Use of the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers, An Historical Perspective, Native Affairs Division Issue 8 Policy and Program Planning, July 1988, Fisheries and Oceans.

^{xiii}op.cit.

^{xiv}op. cit.

^{xv}op.cit.

^{xvi}Saywell op. cit.

^{xvii}O'Donnell, op.cit.

^{xviii}William Sutton had hoped to use the Esquimalt and Nanaimo railway to transport logs but the railway was delayed many years. Construction on the railway, initially from Esquimalt to Nanaimo, began at the end of April 1884 and was completed in August 1886; the line was extended to Victoria in 1888. But it was not until CPR took over the company that new spar lines were built to Cowichan Lake in 1912.

^{xix}T.W. Paterson, A History of Genoa Bay,

<http://tastetheisland.ca/Cowichan/press/snug-cove-tw-paterson/>