

**MINES AND MINERALS OF
WASHINGTON: ANNUAL
REPORT OF GEORGE A. BETHUNE,
FIRST STATE GEOLOGIST**

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Mines and Minerals of Washington: Annual Report of George A. Bethune, First State Geologist
by George A. Bethune

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GEORGE A. BETHUNE

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FIRST STATE GEOLOGIST**

Tacoma, Wash., Jan. 1891.

To.....

I take pleasure in presenting this, the first annual report upon the Mines and Minerals of Washington.

Yours very truly,

GEO. A. BETHUNE,

First State Geologist.

J. C. Sawyer

Est.

Mines and Minerals of Washington.



ANNUAL REPORT
OF
GEORGE A. BETHUNE,
FIRST STATE GEOLOGIST.

STANFORD LIBRARY

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1891.

ANNUAL REPORT.

To his Excellency, CHARLES E. LAUGHTON, Governor, and the honorable, the members of the Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington:

GENTLEMEN—Herewith find my annual report, as the first state geologist of the State of Washington.

In submitting this report for your consideration, and possibly for dissemination throughout the state, I beg leave first to call your attention to the following facts:

By act of the legislature, the first to convene in this state, the office of which I have the honor to be the possessor, was created in March, 1890, and my appointment as state geologist and confirmation by the senate followed shortly thereafter. You will readily see the length of time that has been at my disposal for the performance of duties incumbent upon me, and which I soon found were multifarious in character. Yet during the brief period encompassing the first year of my incumbency I may say, and with feelings of personal gratification I feel you will deem pardonable, that much has been accomplished through the medium of this office and its coincidental factors toward the development and upbuilding of what I hope to demonstrate to you further on is one of our new state's greatest resources—her mineral wealth.

Very soon after perfecting those necessary preliminaries to legally taking up my work as your state geologist, I secured quarters as nearly suitable for the necessary requirements of the work as the limited funds placed at the disposal of the mineralogical department of the state would admit. These quarters I located in the sixth floor of what is known as the Barlow-Catlin, or Washington block, in the city of Tacoma, Pierce county. I forthwith prepared for business, fitting up what is now known throughout the mineral belt as the state laboratory, to the best of my ability.

I speedily found my field of labor to be an extensive one, it becoming apparent that I must needs, to revive a lapsing interest in our mines and in mining development generally, visit all sections where mineral was known to be existent, and many in which recent discoveries had been made. Also to others in which prospectors believed it to exist and desired the advice and direction of myself, as state geologist, regarding what course to pursue in the premises.

During the past year, or rather that part of it intervening between the date of my formal taking of office and the present time, I have visited, inspected, and now report upon every mining district, every mine of promise or prospective worth, every industrial and commercial enterprise born of the mineral development of the country, and all geological formations indicative of the existence of merchantable metal in Washington, as far as known.

DUTIES OF GEOLOGIST.

My duties have not been performed without let or hindrance, either from the state government itself or private corporations and individuals. As regards the former I have only to say that so niggardly was the appropriation granted for the carrying on of a work you will see is gigantic in its proportions and of incalculable importance and value, that I have found it absolutely impossible to do it the justice I hope to convince you it richly deserves. The reticence to give information, the reluctance to admit of inspection of properties, the general desire to hold within themselves their gains, their losses, the present and prospective status of their possessions upon the part of the latter, I look upon as pardonable, because of the comparative recent establishment of a state mineralogical department.

Consider the fact that the mineral bearing area of Washington is second to none in size found elsewhere in the Union. Consider the fact that until the state decided to itself foster and develop the development of this area, mines and mining in Washington were, if I might use the expression, a dead letter. Consider the fact that transportation, in the main, to and from these mines must be made in the costliest if most primitive way. Consider the cost of maintenance of a fully equipped laboratory, with its innumerable

and expensive accessories; and lastly the incident expenses incumbent on an official occupying my position, and I think that when you compare all with what was deemed sufficient to meet all, you will agree with me that the appropriation made for this department of our state government by our last legislature was nothing more or less than ridiculously small.

But despite these lets and hindrances, the many disagreeable features incident to the first establishment of a mineralogical department in the state, and the initial incumbency of a state geologist, I feel gratified, even highly encouraged, over the progress that has been made. For as complete information concerning this latter that the limited time at my disposal has permitted me to compile, I respectfully submit the following.

HISTORICAL.

As romantic and as deeply interesting as the discovery of that precious metal in California, "the new El Dorado," away back in the days of '49, is the story of the discovery of gold in what is now the State of Washington; that event which first heralded the future greatness of the young empire, which first gave sustenance to her in her struggle for the supremacy nature had decreed she should attain and, which it must be conceded proved, so to speak, the foundation stone upon which our great state has been builded. In my opinion no chapter in the absorbingly interesting history of this state is of such entrancing interest as is the story of the finding of the treasure trove of nature, from time immemorial heretofore, hidden beneath her soil.

All early settlers in the Pacific Northwest will easily recall that famous exodus of miners from all over the Pacific coast to that newest "El Dorado" of the time, the Frazier river in British Columbia; the hegira to what was then an unknown realm, being caused by stories of fabulously wealthy mineral deposits being existent along that great water highway. It is a popular fallacy that the "Frazier river excitement," as it was then called, preceded that incident to the discovery of gold in Washington. To this state is due the distinction of being the first division of the Union in which gold was discovered north of California on the Pacific coast.

It was early in 1858 that a dispute arose between the United States government and that of Great Britain over a determination of the boundary line separating the British possessions on this continent from those of our government. In amicably arranging this difficulty a scheme was perfected by which a commission was to be sent out to definitely establish such boundary lines. All the vast area now known as British Columbia, Idaho and Washington was then looked upon as we look upon the depths of Africa—an unknown wilderness, except to the hardy trappers and hunters of the Hudson Bay Company, a handful of soldiers of Uncle Sam and the aborigine who called it all his own.

This boundary commission reached a point on what is now known as the Similkameen river, just this side of the established boundary line, in the Okanogan county we know to-day, early in 1859. Its members were men of iron nerve, for they had braved the dangers and trials of an almost impenetrable wilderness. They were bound south and totally ignorant of the character of the territory they must needs traverse, determined beside the beautiful and clear Similkameen to camp and recuperate preparatory to the commencement of their long journey to the southward.

This determination upon the part of these men proved the greatest boon Washington ever has received and, I opine, ever will receive at the hands of mankind, for they had been in camp scarce a fortnight when they were electrified by the discovery of golden metal in abundance, made by one of their number, who, noting the sparkle in the gravel lining the banks of the stream, became speedily convinced by investigations he made that gold lay along its shores in abundance.

Of course, as is always the case, the news spread like wildfire. Nobody could tell just how, from those hidden wilds, the news went forth that gold had been found, but soon the hardy miner of the time made his appearance.

Next he came with his "pard." Then parties of six and seven, then scores, then hundreds of gold seekers flocked to the banks of the Similkameen. Old Okanogan City was the Embarcadero for the new found placers, and like a mushroom in its natural soil here sprang up in a week a flourishing camp, which, within the first month of its existence, numbered nearly three thousand souls.

Not content with what in these days would have satiated the appetite for wealth of the miner, those hardy fellows feasted off

the richest of the placers of the Similkameen until news came that a venturesome party in search of still richer diggings had found them in the far off Cariboo and Frazier River countries, in the realm of Great Britain. Following the instinct of his nature, nearly every man in the placers of the Similkameen packed up his outfit and rushed for the latest craze. That journey over mountain and river, valley and plain would appall the miner of to-day. But it did not those pioneers in the mineral development of the great Northwest. They laughingly braved its dangers, footed it or rode cayuses across either the state or the boundary line and penetrated by hundreds the mineral belts of the Frazier river and the Cariboo. Miners from as far south as California flocked northward to the same fields and the *entrepot* to them for these was Whatcom, pioneer settlement of Bellingham bay and a town that in the fall of 1859 is said to have been the place of residence of no less than twenty thousand souls. The Similkameen placers were left practically deserted. Beds of golden gravel from which untold thousands have been delved were left for the bubbling waters to ripple over. Okanogan, the busy, bustling, noisy mining camp of scarce three months' existence lapsed into innocuous desuetude, nature held again full sway, and as far as that busy hum incident to the presence of man was concerned, silence reigned well nigh supreme.

I have not to deal with either the Frazier river or the Cariboo excitements. It was the story, as far as they were concerned, of the Similkameen told over again. The migratory prospector, to whom always green were the hills afar off, tired of the golden treasures of these districts, and when winter approached, started for the south and more congenial climes. His course led him back whence he came—to Washington. He and his "pard," his friend and his friend's "pard," and others of his ilk by hundreds began a systematic search for wealth here. Many returned to the deserted placers of the Similkameen, others worked their way to the southward, penetrating even as far into the then trackless wilderness as the Peschastin and Cle-Elum country. There can be no doubt but that the whole of the vast area encompassing Okanogan, Stevens, Douglas, Kittitas and even Yakima counties was looked over by those roving gold hunters some time antecedent to dates secured by me when discoveries of the precious metals were first made. It is a well known fact that the first placer discovery west of the Cascade mountains was made toward the head waters