

BRITANNIA'S AUTOCRAT – J. W. D. MOODIE.

Known for saying “If you don’t like it, pack up and get back to town”, John Wedderburn Dunbar Moodie acted as the General Manager of the Britannia Mines from November 22, 1911 to Aug 7, 1920.

Moodie was born to a garment magnate in Hamilton, Ontario. Being of privilege, he was not allowed friends as a child as his peers were not good enough for him. As an adult he tended to make few friends and was considered a loner.

Moodie was certainly a “get things done” type of man. In his first year at Britannia a new, longer, haulage tunnel was initiated (today’s Museum tour tunnel) along with a new surface electric tramway. His first year also brought improvements to the Beach town site with the construction of worker housing and an up-to-date hospital and a company store. These improvements were shortly added to with the construction of further amenities including a laundry plant and a dancehall.

The company store reveals the management philosophy of Moodie – service was poor, prices were unfair, you could not always get what you wanted, and inconvenient shopping hours were implemented. In essence, you got what the store decided you should get. Britannia residents still shopped at the company store however as Moodie forbid shopping in Vancouver or by catalogue.

He could be equally tough with his superiors. In 1914 copper prices dropped resulting in the Company ordering the mine shut down. Moodie refused and ultimately the Company thanked him for this when copper prices rose again.

Moodie was always working at improving the efficiency of the mine. From 1914 to 1916 he oversaw the construction of Mill 2 and during his tenure improvements to the milling process were actively developed. Not all his efforts were successful, however. His experiments with self-dumping tram buckets proved unworkable.

It was a good period at Britannia for the mine during Moodie’s reign. Unfortunately, when copper prices began to fall the Company felt a tighter control on operations was needed and so Moodie left.

With the departure of Moodie, the management style of Britannia became more accommodating to the workers. While Moodie may be viewed as a tyrant, his oversight brought significant growth and prosperity to Britannia as well as seeing it through its first big set-backs.