

Britannia - The Story of a Mine

by Bruce Ramsay

Extract from book about 1918 flu epidemic

As successor, E.B. Schley was named president, and that year, C.P. Browning, who had been associated with the company since 1914, was appointed general superintendent.

The great news for 1918, of course, was the end of the war. When the news reached the Beach a great celebration ensued, with a snake parade around town and down to the mine manager's house, but Moodie, despite the gaiety and the great occasion being celebrated, refused to make an appearance on his front porch, and few people in camp realized the tragedy which had struck the Moodie household. Down in Vancouver, the 'flu' epidemic was raging unchecked and one of the victims was Moodie's daughter, Fannie, a student at Crofton House School. Thus his reluctance to acknowledge the employees' demonstration becomes understandable. So far, Britannia had escaped the deadly virus, but just as the fogs blanketed Howe Sound and Britannia so you could hardly see ten feet ahead, so did the 'flu' blanket the Beach and very little anybody could do about it. For weeks there was practically no work done in the mines. Men died like flies in the bunkhouses, and the dance hall up at the Townsite became a temporary hospital. At the Beach, Dr. Roberts, the camp medical officer, had his hands full. The hospital was full, every house had somebody sick in it, and his task was made even more difficult when the nurse up at the Townsite succumbed to the ravages of 'flu'. The best the doctor could do was to give the men plenty of whisky and hope for the best. At the Townsite, Bob Ryan, a first aid man, took over the job of nursing the camp back to health, and at the Beach, Yip Bing, the Chinese boy who worked in the store, made and delivered on his little wagon, pots and pots of soup, earning for himself the title "Doctor Y.B."

At night, the aerial tramway became a funeral cortege as bodies, sometimes as many as a dozen at a time, were brought down to await the steamer for Vancouver. It is not known how many died during the 'flu' epidemic at Britannia, but estimates range all the way from 40 to over the hundred mark.

The 'flu' was only one of Moodie's problems as the mine prepared to celebrate its first peacetime Christmas in four years. Now that Kaiser Wilhelm II had become the lowly woodchopper of Doorn, the question arose: What was the future of the copper industry? It didn't take too long for the bad news to be known.