



KIRKLAND LAKE

A Historical Perspective

Department of Economic Development and Tourism

12/1/2010



KIRKLAND LAKE
THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENT

KIRKLAND LAKE

BEGINNINGS

A lost prospector, a rifle shot and a misplaced step...these were the elements that lead to the founding of Kirkland Lake, and signaled the opening of one of the most exciting chapters in Canadian mining history.



Claim Stake

William Wright and Ed Hargreaves were prospecting in the area in 1911. Hargreaves became lost while hunting for rabbits and fired a shot to attract the attention of Wright. While scrambling through the bush, Wright stumbled across a quartz outcrop with clear evidence of gold – lots of it. The next day, Wright and Hargreaves staked out their claims. Little did they know that they had just discovered the main ore-bearing fault of the great mines: the Sylvanite, Wright – Hargreaves, and

Lakeshore. And with that staking, the Kirkland Lake gold rush was on.

The Kirkland Camp attracted some of the most colourful characters in Canadian mining history. Sandy McIntyre of Porcupine fame tramped the area, staking claims that resulted in the Teck-Hughes Mine. The Tough brothers snow-shoed four miles in the middle of the night in -50' to stake out the land that would become the Tough Oakes mine. J.B Tyrell, best known for discovering the dinosaurs in the Alberta badlands, made Kirkland Lake Gold Mines a success, while Robert Bryce, one of Canada's leading mine engineers, bucked conventional wisdom and the financiers of the day to bring the mighty Macassa mine into being.



Harry Oakes

But of all the characters in the camp, none surpassed Harry Oakes for sheer tenaciousness and strength of character. It was he that talked the Tough brothers into the midnight jaunt that would make them rich. And it was he that read the signs that others missed, staking his claims on the shores of Kirkland Lake. And from those claims came the Lakeshore mine, one of richest gold mines in the world. From that point on, Harry never looked back. Success followed success, until his

mysterious murder in the Bahamas in 1943.

As prospectors gave way to production, civilization followed. The municipal council of the Township of Teck was sworn in 1919. The new council quickly set about bringing order to the unorganized township. Roads were built, pipes laid, and rules created to govern the rapidly growing population. And the people came. Some like Roza Brown and



Gold Bearing Quartz



Early Prospectors Circa 1911



Lakeshore Bunkhouse 1922



Sandy McIntyre and Roza Brown

December, 2010

Charlie Chow will forever live in our memories and imagination, for they were the kind of people that added true colour to the community. But there were many others. In 1939, the population peaked at 24,200; 4,680 of which worked for the mines.

BOOM TO BUST AND BACK AGAIN

Mining remained the economic mainstay of the community until the latter half of the 20th century, when stagnant gold prices and rising production costs and the lack on new finds led to a gradual slowdown. The Toburn mine closed in 1953, followed by the Kirkland Minerals in 1960, Sylvanite in 1961, Lake Shore and Wright-Hargreaves in 1965, Teck-Hughes in 1968 and Macassa in 1999.

Then followed the bad years, the lean years when jobs were hard to find and optimism even more so. Municipal council did what it could. For a while, it looked like the environmental industry might be able to turn the town around. But opportunities like the Rail Cycle North's waste facility at Adam's Mine or Bennett's PCB cleaning plant collapsed. Blame it on "Not in My Back Yard" syndrome, bad planning and worse PR – it doesn't matter. All that mattered was that you couldn't give a house away in KL, and the town suffered the third greatest population drop in the country in the 2003 census.

Things change, though. While everybody else was looking to leave, Foxpoint Resources was looking to the past. They didn't believe that KL was mined out, and undertook an aggressive exploration program of the old mines. They found enough there to start new operations, especially as the price of gold started climbing again. And then came the big strikes. Finding the South Mining Complex in 2005 marked a huge departure from the past. Here was a massive new gold find, running north-south instead of east-west like the old breaks. And then the rush started.

Gold rebounded, hitting prices no one had dared to hope see. At \$700 an ounce in 2007, things looked good. But when the price jumped to \$1200 an ounce and kept going up from there – well now, that is boom country. And nowhere was this more evident than in the Kirkland Lake district. Fox Point, now operating as Kirkland Lake Gold, became the darling of the industry. And they weren't alone. Other mines have become part of the lexicon in the 'new' KL Gold Camp: Northgate Minerals and it Young Davidson Mine in Matachewan; Armistice Resources; St. Andrews Gold Mines; Queenston Mineralsand the best part is the projected lifetimes of the mines. It is generally estimated that each operation will last 15 years. That is a very conservative estimate, based on gold at \$700 an ounce. So if the price of gold stays above that (and the pundits in the know say it will easily stay above that), things are looking good!



Bill Wright



Charlie Chow



Roza Brown



Bill Wright

December, 2010

So what is KL today? A boom town, just as it was a hundred years ago. The challenges are the same as then: how do we manage this growth? We need more homes. We need more workers. We need more commercial and industrial enterprises. But hey, who's complaining?



Lake Shore Mine – Circa 1930's



Kirkland Lake Gold - 2010

DID YOU KNOW?

We would like to thank author Michael Barnes. The following anecdotes were taken from his book "Kirkland Lake: the Town that Stands on the Mile of Gold".

Leon Trotsky, a leader of the Bolshevik Revolution and one of the Twentieth Century's most influential communists, visited Kirkland Lake in 1916. For three weeks, he observed life in the gold mine, trying to determine if working people could become rich overnight. He wasn't taken too seriously in a camp where everybody was trying to get rich fast. Obviously Trotsky didn't take the lessons he learned back to Russia. Kirkland Lake is still here....the Soviet Union is not.

The winter of 1917 was one of the worst on record. In three days, 37 inches of snow fell. It took thirty-six hours for thirteen teams of horse and eighteen men to plow a five mile section of road.

Prohibition never really caught on in Kirkland Lake. During the time when alcohol was illegal in Ontario, an enterprising investigator for the Attorney General's office tried to practice a little entrapment while on the train. Pretending to be a soldier, he faked a heart attack and begged a little "stimulation". One nice soul gave him a drink from his hip flask. The "soldier" immediately recovered and promptly arrested his saviour. Everything turned out all right in the end however. The Justice of the Peace fined the investigator \$200 or six months in jail for impersonating an officer. The Good Samaritan was fined \$10 and told to be more careful in choosing whom to help.

Early mines worked in slightly different ways from their modern counterparts. Take the Miller Independence mine near Boston Creek, for example. The directors of the mine regularly consulted a spiritualist when in doubt as to where to drift or sink a shaft. Doing business in that manner quickly put the mine under.

Life in early Kirkland Lake wasn't easy. Hard work, hard conditions combined to put people over the edge occasionally. It helped to have a kind and understanding police force and magistrate. For instance, a call came into the police one day that a man was running amok with a rifle on Poplar Street. The police quickly responded and subdued the wild man. Everything worked out okay in the end however. The fellow was let off with a fine. The Magistrate accepted his excuse that his temporary insanity was due to excessive pain after the removal of teeth and consumption of liquor to ease the pain.

Working in the bush has never been easy. In the winter you freeze, in the summer you broil and serve as a walking smorgasbord for every kind of



Toburn Miner



J Tough, T Tough,
Martandale, Oakes (1912)



Wright-Hargreaves Drillers



Lakeshore Gold Bars

December, 2010

biting insect. No wonder that some left without looking back. Consider this notice found on a deserted prospector's cabin:

*“Fore miles from a nabur;
twenty-five miles from a post office;
twenty miles from a R.R.; one mile from water;
God bless our home,
but I’m glad I’m leavin’.”*



December, 2010

RESOURCES

“Kirkland Lake: The Town That Stands On Gold”, by Michael Barnes (1978. Published by the Highway Book Shop, Cobalt Ontario, Canada).

“Fortunes in the Ground: Cobalt, Porcupine & Kirkland Lake”, by Michael Barnes. (1986. Published by The Boston Mills Press, Erin Ontario, Canada).

“Kirkland Lake on the Mile of Gold”, by Michael Barnes (1994. Published by the Kirkland Lake Economic Development and Tourism Department).

“The Kirkland Lake Story - A Pictorial History”, by Andre Wetjen and L.H.T. Irvine.

“Three Miles of Gold: The Story of Kirkland Lake”, by S. A. Pain. (1969. The Ryerson Press, Toronto, Ontario).

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Miners Memorial



Museum of Northern History