



Fighting for
their **Families**

**Henry Snyder, the First Nations
& the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush**

A Historical Fiction

Fraser W

Fighting for their **Families**

**Henry Snyder, the First Nations
& the Fraser Canyon Gold Rush**

A Historical Fiction



Fraser W

! TRIGGER WARNING !

This story contains content related to genocide, suppression, mistreatment and sexual assault of First Nations People.
This story also contains descriptions of death.

This story is fiction based on historical information.
Names of characters are used but any descriptions of personality, physical descriptions, thoughts and actions relating to them are fictitious.

First Nations are referred to as Indians in some parts of this story for historical accuracy.

.....



Written by Fraser W.
Visit my blog: blog44.ca/fraserw

This story was written as part of a project for Performance Learning Program.
To learn more about PLP, visit plp.seycove.ca

Part 1 - Henry Snyder



Henry Snyder breathed deeply and ran his hand through his dark brown hair as he looked out over the Fraser River, so different from his home of San Francisco. He took a sip of tea, then went to ready himself for another day of gold mining. He had come from the California goldfields to the rugged wilderness of what was soon to become British Columbia. He had left his wife and 14 year old daughter back home. He missed them more than words could describe, but he was determined to return to them with plenty of gold. A man of average height and build made muscular from the laborous work of mining, the long travel had taken a toll on his body; he stretched, then seated himself wearily on his favourite rock. Also a correspondent for the San Francisco *Bulletin*, Snyder pulled out his notebook, and began to write.

August 1858

Tensions are rising as the American miners become less willing to share their tools and space with the Indians. A fight broke out today when an Indian was accused of not returning a shovel to an American miner. I fear that soon a war may break out between the American and European miners and the Indians.

The gold rush had started when the Governor of Fort Victoria, James Douglas, sent 800 ounces of gold to the San Francisco mint. With the California goldfields running out of

gold, the miners were willing to risk it all by travelling up to the Fraser Canyon, and Henry Snyder was no different.

When he had arrived in Fort Victoria, he had purchased mining equipment and a mining license from the various shops. While he prepared for the long trip, he had slept in a canvas tent amongst the hundreds of other tents that had sprung up overnight. After a week of preparing, he had begun the long, treacherous journey up the Fraser River. The going was slow. The hours seemed to crawl by as he pushed forward. It took him many long days and when he arrived he felt as though he could fall asleep right then and there, and sleep for a month.

He, as did many miners, relied on the First Nations people for food, canoes, guides and translators. Despite this, as the population of miners increased, the First Nations found themselves being terrorized on their lands.

Part 2 - First Nations



First Nations people had been living in thriving communities with powerful leaders since the beginning of time. They relied on the plentiful salmon runs that they could harvest each year. Before the white miners arrived, they could harvest as much as they needed and there would still be plentiful salmon to continue the lifecycle for the next

generation of salmon. Salmon was so plentiful that the river would turn red from their colour. Once harvested, they would dry the salmon which would last them the entire winter.

When thirty thousand miners arrived and began diverting waterways and draining lakes, soil and silt drained into the Fraser River at the height of the salmon run. The First Nations were not pleased.

At the same time, Chief Cexpe'nthlEm from the Nlaka'pamux First Nations of the Fraser Canyon, had heard about the California gold miners' genocide of the Indigenous Peoples, and was determined not to have the same happen to his people. He gave a speech to the First Nations and white miners in an attempt to calm the rising tensions. It had not gone well. The white miners were unable to understand his language and some had become angry.

One night, a First Nations village was torched. Then another. And another. White miners invaded the First Nations villages, burning property and killing many First Nations men, women and children. The next morning, all that was left was the smouldering remains of the village. The people were devastated. All had lost family members. Parents wept over the bodies of their children. Children sobbed over the bodies of their parents. As they gathered together what was left of their lives, they became more and more enraged. The First Nations had had enough.

Part 3 - War



Snyder was horrified to hear about the actions of other miners. He had heard one story about a group of French miners who had raped three young Indian women as they were bathing in the river. In retaliation, the women's families killed the miners: mutilated their bodies, cut out their hearts and threw their dismembered bodies into the river.

“A well deserved punishment,” thought Snyder.

Snyder was not surprised that Indians got fed up with the miners and blockaded the river, forcing the miners back down to Yale. Battles had ensued on all sides. Although the settlers had pistols and rifles, Snyder had heard that the Indians' weapons were even more fearsome. Miners had told him that the Indians fought with poison tipped arrows and knives. In a matter of 12 hours, the wounded died from violent convulsions which broke their bones and their bodies turned black as the poison spread. Snyder later learned that the poison was derived from rattlesnake venom combined with deer blood and plants containing anticoagulants.

Miners in Yale were becoming paranoid of First Nations attack after several bodies had washed up in what quickly became known as Deadman's Eddy. They frantically assembled to form a military-like group called the Pike Guards, who were to travel upriver and confront the First Nations who were blockading the river. Snyder decided to

volunteer and was successfully elected as captain. His militia prepared to start the trek upriver, ready to kill as needed, but Snyder had another plan. He wanted to negotiate peace with the First Nations instead of fighting them.

Part 4 - Peace



Snyder sighed as he flipped open his journal to a fresh page and began to write.

We (myself and the Pike Guards), have been travelling upriver making peace with many of the Indian bands. All has been going well, although my muscles ache from all the hiking.

A few days ago we ran into Captain Graham of the Watkin Guards at Spuzzum. I am horrified that they are so determined to kill all the Indians once and for all. I was thankfully able to convince them to wait while we continue our peace journey upriver. I will send a white flag to him if peace continues to successfully be negotiated. I hope he doesn't break his promise to wait at Spuzzum or it could end quite badly.

Today I sent a runner with the white flag back to Captain Graham and his men. I hope the runner is able to find them easily, they should be where we left them.

The runner was still catching his breath when he gave his report to Snyder.

“Captain Graham and his men were not where we left them,” the runner exclaimed. “After talking to some helpful miners at Spuzzum, I found them a ways up the river. When I gave him the flag, Captain Graham tossed it aside in a rage. I don’t think he’s very happy with our success.”

Unfortunately for Graham, that was the last mistake he ever made.

This morning, Graham and his Lieutenant were found dead. No one knows for sure who killed them. Some say that a sound in the night spooked the other Watkin Guards and they began shooting. In the confusion, Graham and his lieutenant were shot. The more likely reason however, is that when the Indians saw his treatment of the white flag (which they knew was a symbol for peace), they quietly executed them, leaving no trace of Indian weaponry behind. I think that if Captain Graham had just listened and kept his promise, he would still be very much alive today.

As Snyder made his way up the Fraser River, Nlaka'pamux warriors and their allies, the St'at'imc, Secwépehc, Okanagan and Yakima First Nations, were gathering at Kumsheen* to hold war council. The allies all had had bad experiences with the white settlers and were ready to go to war. Shwooshpntlm (Grizzly Bear) was intent to kill all the white settlers once and for all. They had been killing, raping and stealing from the First Nations for far too long.

Chief Cexpe'nthlEm, on the other hand, was determined to negotiate peace. He knew that if they were to go to war, they would be unable to harvest the food they needed to survive the winter. The women of the village were also worried, and as equals in the decision making, they argued against war because they knew it would result in extreme losses to both sides.

After a tense debate, it was settled that Chief Cexpe'nthlEm would attempt to negotiate peace. If peace was not agreed upon, the warriors would be ready to kill the white settlers and push them back to the coast.

When Snyder and his men arrived at Kumsheen, Snyder noticed the dry, sun-baked ground coated with pine needles. The pine trees swayed in the warm wind, which carried the slight scent of salmon, pitch and campfire smoke. Snyder looked around and observed the many tense, yet hopeful, men, women and children gathered around a large campfire. He noticed a group of young women his daughter's age. He remembered the story of the French miners raping the three women. He thought of his own beloved daughter and shuddered at the thought of such a thing happening to the vibrant soul he loved so much.

**now known as Lytton*

Later that evening...

Snyder and Chief Cexpe'nthlEm both breathed a sigh of relief as they signed the peace treaty between the white miners and the First Nations. The First Nations could harvest salmon and prepare for winter without being terrorized. Gold miners could travel upriver in an attempt to find more gold, to send back to their families, without being attacked by First Nations warriors. Everyone was happy.

Unfortunately, peace didn't last for long...

Resources

- ❖ Canyon War The Untold Story: youtube.com/watch?v=-eTxxY9Ae-w
- ❖ First Nations Reconciliation - New Pathways to Gold Society: newpathwaystogold.ca/about/first-nations-reconciliation/
- ❖ The story of the Canyon War presented by Tuckkwiowhum elder Byron Spinks - Gold Rush Trail: goldrushtrail.ca/stories/the-story-of-the-canyon-war-presented-by-tuckkwiowhum-elder-byron-spinks/
- ❖ British Columbia: An Untold History - E1 - Change + Resistance: knowledge.ca/program/british-columbia-untold-history/e1/change-resistance
- ❖ Gold Rush Trail - History: goldrushtrail.ca/history
- ❖ Gold Rush: learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/bcs-gold-rush/look/
- ❖ Fraser River Gold Rush | The Canadian Encyclopedia: www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/fraser-river-gold-rush
- ❖ Cariboo Gold Rush | The Canadian Encyclopedia: www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/cariboo-gold-rush
- ❖ Barkerville National Historic Site of Canada: https://www.pc.gc.ca/apps/dfhd/page_nhs_eng.aspx?id=922
- ❖ The Edge of the World: BC's Early Years | Knowledge Network: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mco6Z-6xCK
- ❖ Packing for a Trip up the Cariboo Road – Coquitlam Heritage at Mackin House: coquitlamheritage.ca/blog-pages/up-the-cariboo-road
- ❖ Case Study 1: The Gold Rush – British Columbia in a Global Context: opentextbc.ca/geography/chapter/5-4-case-studies/