



From Gold Town To Ghost Town

The Granite Creek Preservation Society

The oldest map the society has of the old Granite Creek Townsite.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Granite Creek Preservation Society Archives

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by **DIANE STERNE**
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The wilderness is home to many sounds, but none so loud as the call of gold. This is how it was in 1885 when prospector John Chance discovered gold nuggets glistening in Granite Creek. People arrived on foot and horseback, and soon a town mushroomed from the forest floor to become the third largest centre of population in British Columbia. Nearly overnight, roads and bridges were constructed, stores and services opened, and a vibrant community gained its footing. Family roots were planted in Granite Creek that remain in the region to this day. The town survived until 1918 when, like many gold rush settlements in British Columbia, it disappeared as quickly as it came to life. Between the forces of nature and opportunistic looting, the built heritage nearly disappeared from the landscape with little trace. Eventually, the town of Granite Creek was all but forgotten.

The Granite Creek Preservation Society has undertaken the task of preserving and interpreting the historical legacy of the site. This is a significant challenge considering that little built heritage remains on the small plateau. Granite Creek is a reservoir of powerful human stories. The Society's website features digitally accessible materials from resident Lou Hare, who left behind countless photographs, diary entries, and sketches that documented his daily life. His diary entries contain phrases and words in Chinook Jargon, a unique "pidgin" language specific to the Pacific Northwest. The Society website also details the large community of Chinese miners and settlers, such as Frenchy (pictured right). The Society is making strides in elevating and preserving Granite Creek's particular Chinese heritage, including recovering and transcribing the claim records coordinates, dates, and names of many Chinese miners. The website also preserves the story of Ah Foo, Chew Lum, Ning Pam, and Soo Key, who made a fortune in 1921 by rediscovering

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grant recipients were grassroots organizations run exclusively by volunteers*

*British Columbia | Canada 150: Celebrating B.C. Communities and their Contributions to Canada grant program Impact Report



ering a stash of platinum they had collected and hidden thirty years prior as young men adventuring around the Tulameen region.

After receiving a B.C. | Canada 150 grant, the Society was able to turn its dream of sharing these stories with a wider audience into a reality. Volunteers banded together to erect storyboards containing photographs, maps, and descriptions of the town and its inhabitants. The interpretive materials provided much-needed context to the remains of the settlement. Within the first two months after the project was completed, over 400 groups toured the Granite Creek town site and cemetery. Visitors are once again walking the paths pounded out by humans and horses in 1885. In an echo of history, a new commu-

nity has once again sprung forth at Granite Creek, a community of volunteers that have only started to understand what they are capable of, and who are inspired to push forward with future heritage projects. The Society is making new connections with diverse stakeholder groups that are kickstarting opportunities to expand the Society's capabilities and mandate. The grant did far more than provide the financial backing to install signage and pathways at Granite Creek, it launched a community, and the legacy will be far-reaching.

WEBSITE: www.granitecreekbc.ca

Far Left: Frenchy.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Granite Creek Preservation Society

Top: Prospector John Chance, and his horse.

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Granite Creek Preservation Society

Bottom Left: The cairn memorializing the development of Granite Creek. You can watch the 1958 unveiling of the cairn, shot by Eric Goodfellow, on [YouTube](#). The cairn is the meeting place for the walking tour.

Photo credit: the Granite Creek Preservation Society

Bottom Right: Storyboard containing information about the inhabitants of Granite Creek.

Photo credit: the Granite Creek Preservation Society