



# Yukon Prospectors' Association

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William Preston Grainger  
By Dick McKenna

William P Grainger along with partner John McIntyre pioneered “hardrock” mining in the Yukon. Their claim and mine, the Copper King was not only the first claim located in the Whitehorse Copper Belt (July 6th 1898), but it was also the first hardrock (underground) mine of any type in the territory. Unfortunately, both McIntyre and Grainger met early and tragic deaths “breaking trail”, so to speak, for others to follow.

Grainger, a Kentuckian, arrived in the Yukon in 1895 bringing with him a handle bar moustache, a thick southern drawl and an unwavering determination to “make a go” of the north. At first Grainger “prospected extensively” in the southern portion of the territory, particularly in the Wheaton Valley. By 1897 Grainger was in Dawson where he first met up with McIntyre and soon afterwards, the two had entered into a prospecting partnership. This partnership culminated in the staking of the Copper King (McIntyre) and the adjacent Copper Queen (Grainger) Claims the following year, whereupon they became mining partners when they opened up the more promising looking Copper King.

Upon McIntyre’s untimely departure in late 1902 (see John McIntyre) Grainger continued on as manager of the Copper King, taking on Whitehorse merchant James P. Whitney as a new partner. While Whitney would often be as far off as San Francisco promoting and purchasing machinery, Grainger would always be hard at work at the mine, at times superceding as many as 30 miners and support staff. During this period the Copper King was often referred to as “Camp Grainger” due to the fine hospitality he presented to visitors to the mine.

In the spring of 1906 Grainger was back in the Wheaton, or rather the jumping off point to the Wheaton, when he along with Herman Vance staked out the town site of Robinson next to the railroad siding of the same name. The Wheaton Valley during this period was receiving a considerable amount of activity mostly due to fellow “copperbelter” H.E. Porter’s discovery in that area of the “lost Corwin workings”.

In the spring of 1907 after years of barely breaking even at the Copper King, it appeared that Graingers’ fondest anticipations were being realised when he optioned the property to a Pennsylvanian syndicate for \$210,000 and a percentage of the royalties. Within days however, both Grainger and his young assistant Gilbert Joice were found dead at the bottom of the Copper King shaft. The victims of carbon monoxide poisoning, or as the oldtimers say “black damp”.

The entire town of Whitehorse showed up at the funeral and to the pioneer cemetery where the men were laid to final rest. Grainger was toted as “the most ardent believer in a greater Whitehorse”. Whitehorse Star editor Stroller White continued: “For nine long years he

worked his property as his means would permit, always and continuously boasting of the camp and predicting for it a glorious future. And now just as his fondest anticipations were being realised, he is taken to that borne from whence none return”. Stroller went on to describe Grainger as “a Typical Kentuckian, intensely impetuous but generous to a degree that amounted to extravagance in his willingness to aid and assist others”. Not a living relative was known to his most intimate of friends. His age was thought to be between 46 and 50 years old.

Shortly after his death the tallest peak in the Whitehorse area, Mount Grainger (actually a misspelled Granger) was named in his honour, as was the Granger subdivision in the 1980's.

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