

The Processing Process: The Concentrator Mills of Sandon & Area

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Before the arrival of the railways, transportation costs of getting the ores to the smelters was astronomical. The smelters were all located south of the border, so only the richest ores were worth shipping. The ore had to be hand-sorted before being put into sacks in order to avoid shipping and waste. When the railroads were completed in 1895, transportation of the ores became convenient and affordable. Many mines which had previously been uneconomical to operate became viable producers. Lower grade ores also became commercially viable.

Many of the larger mines opted to build concentrator mills in order to process huge tonnages of their lower grade ores. By mechanically removing the majority of waste rock from the ore, it avoided needless freight and handling cost. The concentrate produced by the mills was able to match the quality of the hand-picked high-grade ores which had been shipped in the earlier years.

Dozens of concentrator mills were built in the Silvery Slocan. The first mill was operational by 1896. The majority of the mills were in the Sandon area, and some were even built within the city limits. T.L. Mitchell, an extremely talented engineer, mill builder, and tramway designer had his office in Sandon. During his incredible career, he designed and built the majority of the Slocan mills, all of which had enviable production records. Some of his works, including the Silversmith Power-House, still exist today.

Although the earliest concentrators were jig mills, much of the modern flotation technology was pioneered here in the Slocan. The Tremingo concentrator at Sandon is one such example and is still operational today.

