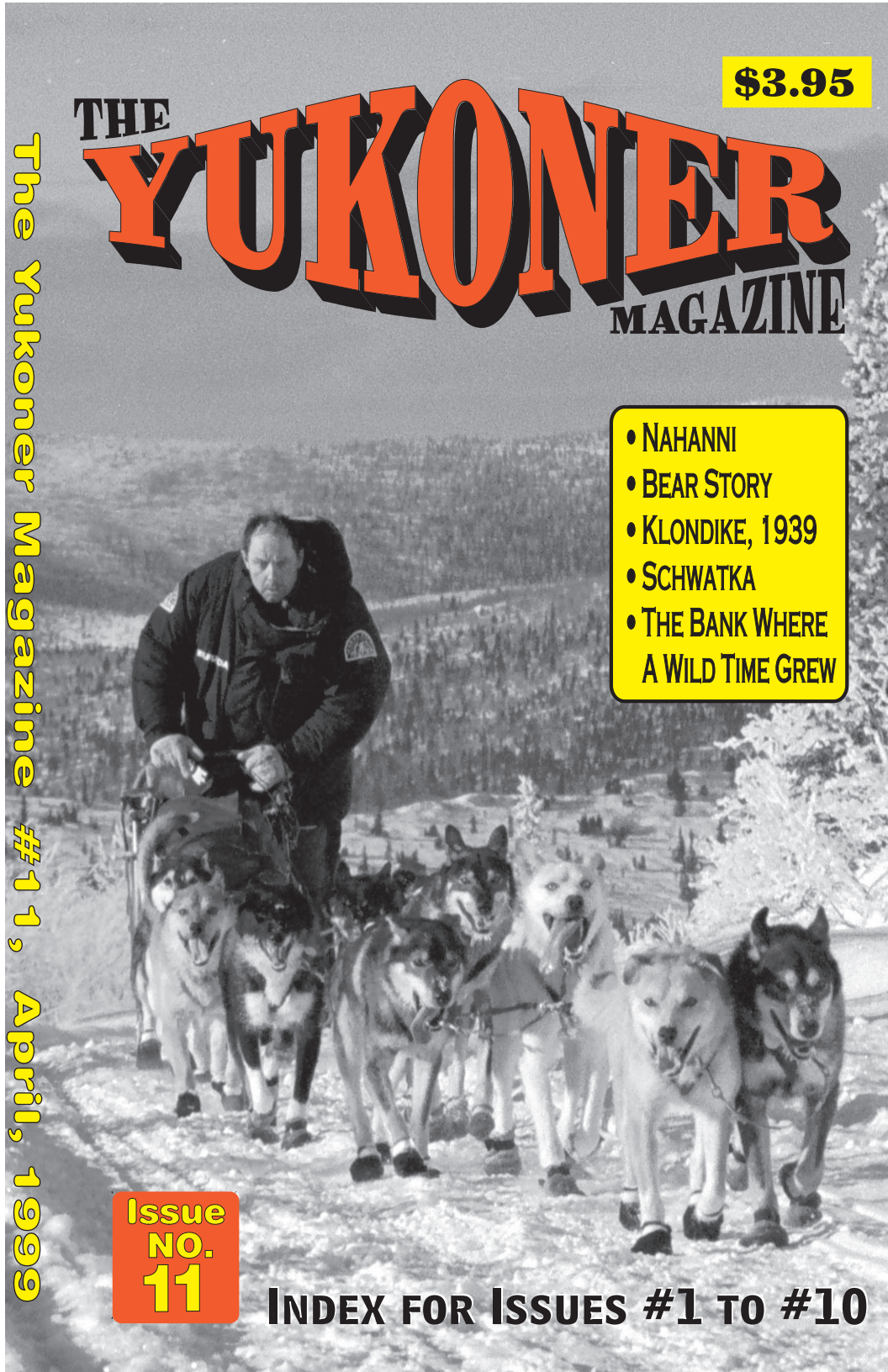
$3.95

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE



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Issue NO. 11

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The Yukoner Magazine #11, April, 1999

AL DOWNES, PROSPECTOR

Allan Downes in the Hart River area of the Yukon in 1953, prospecting for Con-West Mining Co.

Al "rode the rails" from Ottawa to Vancouver in 1949. There he was hired by Yukon Consolidated Gold to work on the dredges at Dawson City. He has been prospecting and mining in the Yukon ever since. The photo on the right shows him staking his "Key" claims (nickel/gold deposit) in the Sixtymile area. [Photo by Jina Croquet of Whitehorse, July 1998]

www.yukoner.com

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Cover photo: Yukon Quest musher Jerry Louden coming over King Solomon's Dome near Dawson City. Jerry is from Two Rivers, Alaska. [Whitehorse Star photo by Cathie Archbould, February 1999].

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

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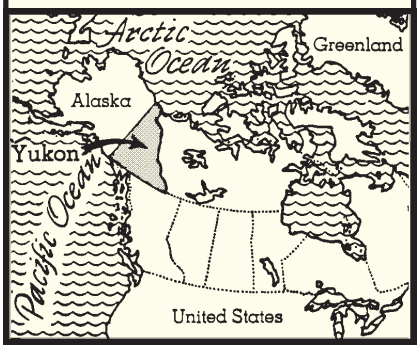


From the Editor

Well, I made some improvements on the old press. Hopefully the cover on this magazine won't be such a mess as some past issues have been.

I put a bigger blower and vacuum pump on the press. They were too big to fit under the frame where the old ones were, so I have them off to one side with hoses and wires going across the floor. Also, I hooked up a spray powder attachment that stops the pages from sticking together (only shiny paper has this problem). It throws baking soda all over the place but it seems to work. Then I hooked up two little pipes to the paper feed end to blow the pages apart somewhat. I won't know how this all this will turn out until this magazine is printed. Then I have to wait until the next issue to try again.

And I put a brand new motor (rebuilt) into Old Dodgie, the first one she's had in 25 years. How sweet it is not to be adding oil for every trip to town. All I have left to fix are the brakes and wheel bearings, change the rear end, get a new windshield, give her a paint job, and she'll be good for another 25 years.

We're getting so many subscribers that I have to add onto the cabin this summer so as to have room for all the paper going through the press. I hope to print more books and perhaps a collection of the first ten magazines, in one bound volume.

So you see, we're busy here too. I finished writing the Goldseeker story this winter but only had room for a few pages of it in this issue. Probably I can get more of into Number 12, due out in July.

So long for now,
Sam

The Mail Run

Dear Sam:

Received my complete order of magazines and nugget, but #9 was missing, in its place was two copies of #6. Enclosed the extra copy, trust you will send #9.

I'm very pleased with all the easy reading and colourful stories, a real sort of grist for my conversation at the local watering hole (Legion) on a quiet rainy day. All stories are repeated as my "Uncle Sam" told them to me years ago.

I think the comments from the Publisher are absolutely great. Keep them coming.

Wilf Bawey
Van Anda, B.C.

Dear Publisher

How I miss the Yukon! My husband says I'm an ex-Yukoner. I say "never." I'll always be a Yukoner no matter where I live. I'll be back to stay someday. I'm currently writing down all my experiences and stories from my 23 years there. I don't want them lost. Great magazine. Thank you many times over.

Mrs. Donna Clayson
Ardrossan, Alberta

Dear Sam:

Thank you for all the nine issues of the Yukoner Magazine, each one read cover to cover. It is nice to visit again with the people in your stories whom I have known personally over my 60 years in the Yukon. I have had some intriguing episodes in my life as a trapper's wife on a trapline. Once we had three cub bears as pets for our two-year-old daughter (who is now grandmother of four), had a wolf in our dogteam—we were short of sleigh dogs—was first woman elected to Territorial Council, and many, many more interesting things. All of which I have yet to write down! Keep that old press rolling and the stories coming.

Jean Gordon
Mayo, Yukon

Dear Editors:

I trust you will be able to read this handwriting. My old Remington typewriter is in for repairs—and it should be.

My husband and I left the Yukon after 18 years of adventures that would fill one of your magazines. When we lost our home and means of livelihood in the Beaver Creek flood, we decided to retire to a warmer climate. I well remember when the temperature of 84 degrees below zero was registered at Snag airport base.

The books I ordered are a birthday gift to myself. I will be 89 on May 1st. When I get my Remington back, I will be typing some stories.

Sincerely,
Alda Bradkoski
Fruitvale, B.C.

Dear Dianne:

Received my Yukoner magazines today and my husband is thrilled with them. Thanks so much for getting them off to me so quickly. I drove the Alaska Highway through the Yukon in 1993 and loved every bit of it. Dawson City was especially memorable. Loved the show we saw at Whitehorse depicting Sam McGee as well as the trip up the Yukon River. Would love to go back someday and maybe I will.

Sincerely,
Beulah Newson
Summerside, P.E.I.

Dear Dianne and Sam:

This is a note to tell your reader, Bill Burdell, where to purchase Pat Allison's book, "From Pack Dogs to Helicopters." I got mine at the museum in Fort St. John, B.C., postal code V1J 4N4. Pat had a brother, John, living in Ft. St. John until his death about three years ago. His sister-in-law and a nephew are still there.

I lived at Mile 351 in 1951-52 at Steamboat Mountain (also called Indian Head) and I have visited six times since. My favourite place is Dawson City. I have plans to hike the Chilkoot Pass this August with my granddaughter. I'll only be 69 so why not?

Sincerely,
Mildred Brandt
Magnetawan, Ontario

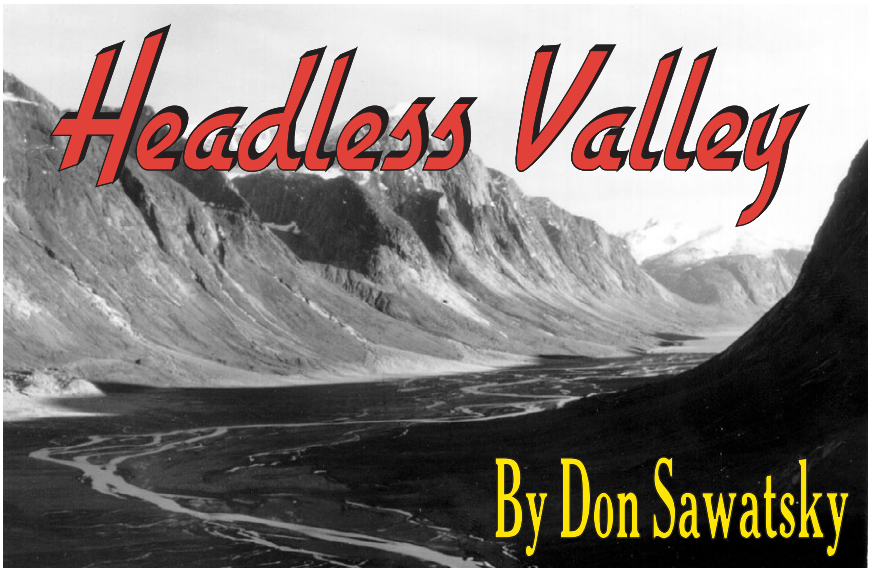
Dear Sir:

Congratulations on your magazine. My wife and I, with our two small children, had the good fortune to live in Whitehorse during the 50s and early 60s, in the days before pavement and TV.

We have moved 34 times in our 51 years of marriage and we both still say that the best years we spent were in the Yukon. I did a lot of hunting and fishing while there and could have some stories you might find of interest. There are also quite a few pictures of those times also.

We look forward to your magazine.

Yours,
Dr. W.B. Collier
Black Creek. B.C.



Way down on the south-western tip of Canada's North-west Territories, near the borders of the Yukon and British Columbia, lies a land that has given birth to a host of tales of mystery and murder.

It is a land of superstition, where evil spirits are said to hold sway; where a band of pigmy headhunters, led by a white woman, terrorize the rugged country; where a semi-tropical valley exists in this sub-Arctic country; where lost gold mines tantalize the dreamer and the adventurer.

For example, many people still believe that no white man has ever returned from the valley alive. Superstition and misinformation have it that as many as two dozen men have died in the area and that when their bodies were finally found, they were all headless. It all makes for fascinating reading, but the facts are rather less exciting and mysterious.

According to reports and files of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, scores of trappers and prospectors have lived in the valley since the turn of the century. Mounties have been making patrols up and down the South Nahanni since at least 1909 and not one has failed to return to his detachment and file his report. In fact, some of the most complete maps and descriptions of the country have been gathered by men who prospected, trapped and hunted there.

The first member of the Force to travel the Nahanni Valley was Corporal Arthur H. L. Mellor, in charge of the Mountie detachment at Smith's Landing, NWT, in 1909. Acting on instructions from his commanding officer, Inspector D.M. Howard at Athabasca Landing, Corporal Mellor left Fort Smith on July 3, 1909, to investigate the disappearance of two brothers, Willie and Frank McLeod. It was to be the first of several well-publicized reports and investigations of possible murder in the valley.

The police investigation was launched after the Mounties heard of the

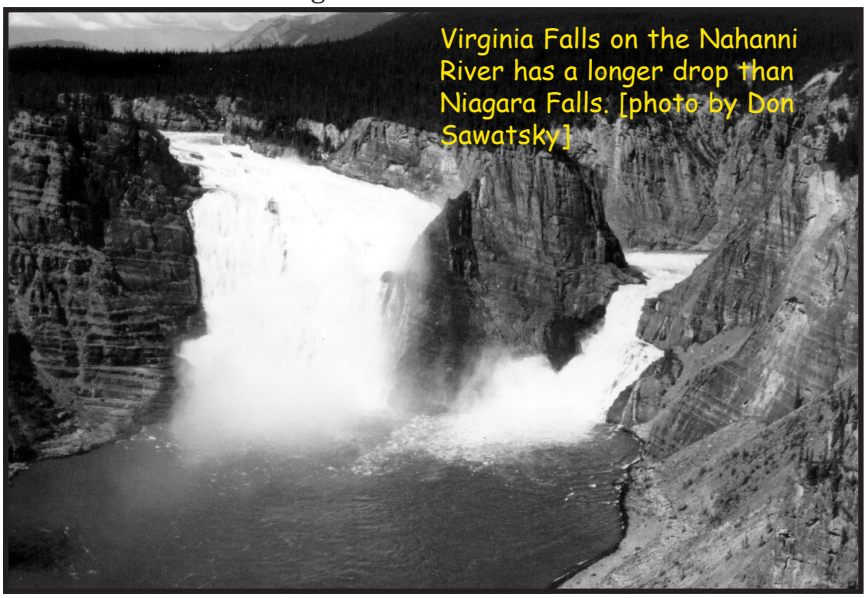
remains of two men being found in some spruce brush about 90 miles up the Nahanni River from its junction with the Liard River on July 24, l908. The skeletons were found by a party of five prospectors (headed by two brothers of the missing men) and one of the brothers, Charlie McLeod, noted that some hair found near the scene was similar to that of his brother, Willie.

They also found a gold watch with the initials "J.H." marked on the inside of the case, a bone-handled pocket knife, a heavy silver chain, a ring, two 40-40 rifle shells, an ax, a 3 l/2-point Hudson's Bay blanket and a fancy Indian rug. All the clothing apparently had been burned. The search party also found two sets of arm bones, two pairs of feet and one lower jaw. All cuttings and signs in the vicinity appeared to be at least three years old. By the time these reports reached the Mounties at Whitehorse, Yukon, Inspector G.S. Worsley at Edmonton had been notified by Charlie McLeod. McLeod told Worsley that his two brothers had left Fort Simpson during the autumn of l904 with another man, Robert Weir, to prospect the South Nahanni country. When nothing was heard of the trio for nearly four years, he (Charlie) headed a search party into the area and found what he believed to be the remains of his brothers. McLeod identified the watch and ring as belonging to his mother and he suspected that his brothers had been murdered by the Nahanni Indians who lived in the general area.

It was nearly five years after the disappearance of Willie and Frank that the Mounties were called in on the incident. Little hope was held out that anything conclusive would be uncovered to support or destroy the theory of murder.

However, Corporal Mellor did put forward one passable reason for the brothers' death in his report of the patrol into the Nahanni.

"I was fortunate enough to meet a number of Little Nahanni band of



Virginia Falls on the Nahanni River has a longer drop than Niagara Falls. [photo by Don Sawatsky]

Indians at Fort Liard and closely examined them regarding the deceased parties. They all professed utter ignorance of the McLeods' movements from the time they left (Fort) Simpson in l904 to start on their disastrous trip. "As far as I can learn, the last time they were seen alive was about one week after leaving Simpson at the mouth of the Nahanni River. They had purchased a small outfit, principally cartridges, at Simpson and what little flour and bacon they did purchase, they traded off to the Indians for moccasins and snowshoes. They also traded their skiff for a canoe. When the Indians left them, the McLeods had only 50 pounds of flour and about five pounds of tea left in the way of food.

"None of the Nahanni Indians saw the bones discovered by the (Charlie) McLeod party, but they have since found one foot bone in the bush a short distance from the grave. These Indians informed me that they had met some Upper Liard Indians who told them that they had found a partially complete skeleton on the headwaters of a tributary of the Nahanni River last fall. This is probably the remains of Robert Weir, the missing third man of the party.

"These Little Nahanni Indians bear a good name in the country and seem a very mild outfit. The Hudson's Bay Company and the traders both speak well of them. I travelled up the Liard River in company with Fred McLeod, a brother of the dead men and the man in charge of the HBC post at Fort Nelson. He laughs at the idea of the Nahanni Indians having killed his brothers.

"He says he has absolutely no doubt that they starved to death. He says the Nahannis knew his brothers well and were very friendly to them and many of them expressed great sorrow on hearing of their untimely end. He also told me that Charlie, the brother who headed the search party, is given to exaggeration. This view is shared by many of the white men here."

Corporal Mellor said game was extremely scarce in that particular area and the brothers had little food supplies of their own. "Besides," he added, "why would Indians murder them? They had nothing of any value and no grub."

The case was closed, but only for a while. Twelve years later, in l92l, the Chief Justice of Canada received a lengthy letter from yet another McLeod brother living in Ashmont, Alberta. The brother charged that his brothers, Willie and Frank, had been murdered not by the Nahanni Indians as Charlie McLeod had suggested but by the third man in the party, Robert Weir. Weir had not died in the valley, the Alberta brother claimed, but had returned to civilization and was working for the Canadian National Railway under an assumed name. He was also said to have $l6,000 in raw gold.

The Mounties checked into the report and found the railroader did not come close to the description of Weir. But McLeod would not let the affair drop. Early in l922 he again wrote to the Department of Justice, this time advising that Weir had returned to the North around Fort Providence, N.W.T. This, too, was discounted. During the next few years, McLeod reported several "Weirs" in various parts of Canada. Newspaper and magazine writ-

The "Gate," located about 25 miles downstream from Virginia Falls. A phenonamon of nature, this S-shaped part of the treacherous Nahanni River has been navigated by scores of people during the last 80 years. [photo by Don Sawatsky]

ers throughout the world began to record the search, adding to it some of the most unusual yarns of the mysterious valley in the North.

While the search for Weir was going on, another skeleton was found in the Nahanni region, and RCMP admit that to this day the cause of death has not been definitely determined and in all likelihood never will be. It was the remains of a long-time prospector in the region, Martin Jorgensen, whom, incidentally, Corporal Mellor met on his patrol in August, 1909.

It was on September 28, 1915, that Jorgensen's headless skeleton was uncovered some 70 miles upriver from where the McLeod brothers' remains were found. Once again, time hampered the subsequent investigation because it wasn't until February of 1916—nearly five months after the body had been found—that Constable William H. York of Carmacks, Yukon, was told of the discovery.

Reverend C. Swanson, returning to Carmacks from the Ross River area of the Yukon, said he had heard second-hand that three prospectors—Olaf Bredvic, Poole Field and Bill Atkinson—had located the skeleton. Corporal David Churchill, then at Fort Simpson, was named to head the investigation.

The Mounties managed to trace a rough picture of Jorgensen's activities through one of his former partners, Osias Meilleur, who first met Jorgensen at Fort Resolution, NWT, during the summer of 1909. Their paths met several times during the next couple of years, and the pair spent the winter of 1911-12 in the Nahanni before returning to Simpson. Here Jorgensen purchased clothing, a rifle and a revolver and planned to spend the winter of 1913 in the Nahanni. Meilleur stayed only until fall and returned to the mouth of the Nahanni River where he spent part of the winter and then returned to Simpson.

The partners agreed to meet in Simpson during the summer of 1913 but this time Jorgensen failed to show up. He was never seen again.

Meilleur asked the local Indians if they had seen his partner. They hadn't so he returned to his home in Seattle, Washington, returning to the Nahanni in the fall 1914. He located one of the old cabins they had built in 1911 and found it had been destroyed by fire. Outside the charred remains, Meilleur found a badly rusted 38-55 rifle and a long-barrel 22-calibre revolver. He also found a bundle of clothes nearby and recognized a pair of trousers that Jorgensen had bought in 1912.

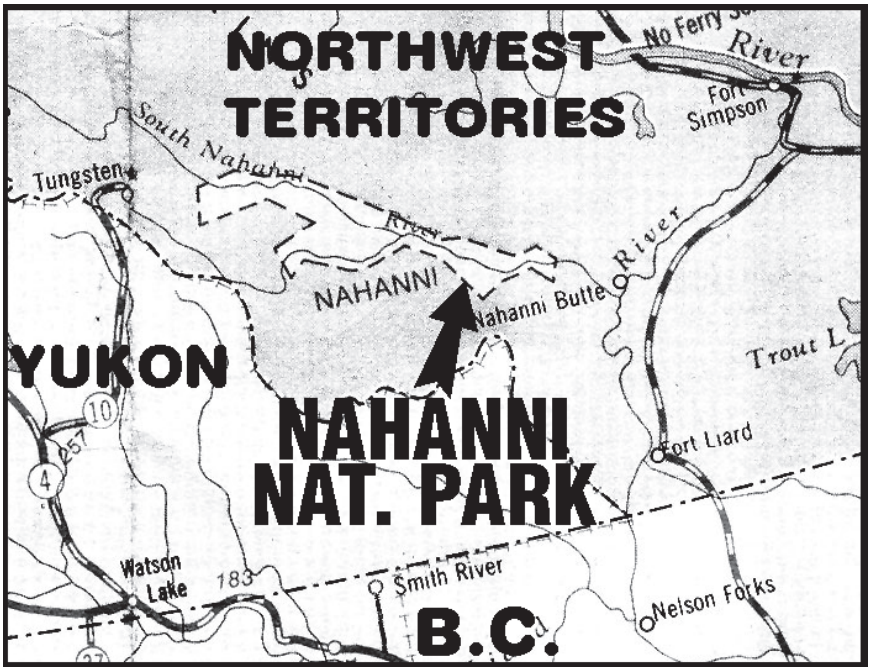
Meilleur wintered in the area and returned to Simpson in the spring of 1915 but for some reason did not immediately report the matter to police. It was nearly three years after the death of the old-timer that the Mounties finally began their investigation. Corporal Churchill and Special Constable Hope, an experienced canoe man, left Fort Simpson on August 14, 1916, and arrived at the burned shack near the Flat River, September 21. The cabin was located about 200 yards back from the river in a thicket of spruce and poplars. Three- quarters of the way to the river, they found a tree blazed by the three men who had found the skeleton and buried the remains. Corporal Churchill dug up all the bones.

"It was impossible to tell just where the body originally lay," he said later in his report. "Also found a few bits of cloth and a number of cartridges, l8-55 and 22-calibre. We spent two and one-half days in this search, going carefully over every foot of ground, removing fallen trees and bushes and I believe found all the larger bones with the exception of the skull, which judging from the close proximity of other bones to the riverbank, might have fallen into the river. Some of these bones had been gnawed."

As a result of Corporal Churchill's patrol, Commissioner A. B. Perry decided the Force could take no further action regarding the death of Martin Jorgensen "as I consider it hopeless at this late date to try and establish the cause."

But, the "Killer Valley" was to claim yet another man. Around the time the McLeod brothers' case was re- opened in l92l, a former soldier, John O'Brien, left the cabin he shared with his partner to inspect some traps. He said he would be gone for eight or nine days. When he failed to return after nearly two weeks, his partner and a neighbouring prospector went looking for him. About a month later, they found his frozen body hunched over a cold campfire. The Mounties did not send a patrol in to investigate this case, presumably because they felt there was no foul play involved.

Despite newspaper reports of various other men having lost their lives in the valley throughout the l920's (one account listed five separate deaths over a four-year period), RCMP files show that the next death, under apparently suspicious circumstances, was in l932 when the charred remains of trapper-prospector Phil Powers were found in the ashes of his cabin in the valley.



Powers had travelled the Nahanni for years and had entered the area to do some trapping and prospecting during the summer of l93l. When nothing was heard from him for a year, the RCMP at Fort Liard set out to find him. Constable Duncan C. Martin and Special Constable William Edwards left their post on August 26, l932, by motor-driven canoe and arrived at the mouth of the Nahanni the following day.

The police patrol picked up two prospectors along the way—Poole Field and Albert Faille—who led the Mounties to Powers' main camp up the Flat. It was a heap of ashes and Powers' charred bones were lying in the ruins. Powers had been lying in his bunk reading a magazine when fire levelled the small cabin. Two other men disappeared in the Nahanni region in l936 and to this day, not a trace of them has been found. On June l, l936, Constable Winston C. Graham of the Fort Liard detachment was told by bush pilot George C.F. Dalziel that two men, William Epler and Joseph E. Mulholland, were believed missing somewhere along the Nahanni River. Dalziel said he had flown the two men into Glacier Lake, well up the Nahanni, in late February, l936. Spier had told him that they would return from the Nahanni by May, but when the pair was 23 days late, Mulholland's brother Jack asked that an air search be carried out.

Constable Graham had Dalziel fly him to Glacier Lake where they found the missing men's cabin—burned to the ground. No one burned in the blaze. Except for a month-old campfire, believed to have been made by the missing men, nothing was ever seen again of Epler and Mulholland. Police concluded that the pair either went through the ice of the Nahanni or were caught in a snowslide while attempting to cross the mountains near the junction of the Flat and South Nahanni.

According to RCMP reports, only one other death occurred in the valley after the disappearance of Epler and Mulholland. On March 7, l960, Savante Adolf Mieskonen killed himself with a charge of dynamite.

Mieskonen was prospecting near McMillan Lake with four other men and according to the details that came out during the full-scale investiga-

tion, he became despondent because of the failure of his aircraft to arrive. There was apparently a mixup in instructions, however, and the coroner's jury absolved everyone connected with the incident of all blame.

And that is the "official" list of men who have died in the mysterious "Headless Valley" of the Northwest Territories. The Mounties say there may have been more that either were not reported to the authorities or facts surrounding the deaths were so straightforward that no official investigation was necessary.

If the skeleton found by the Indians in l908 was that of Robert Weir, there have been nine reported deaths in the area. The stories of pigmy headhunters are pure fantasy, although Hudon's Bay explorer Robert Campbell reported in the mid-1800s that the Nahanni Indians were led by a woman who was remarkable for her intelligence and leadership qualities. She was a Nahanni Indian woman—not white— and was instrumental in saving the lives of Campbell and his men at least once. The Nahanni Indians are far from being "pigmies" and were never headhunters. There is no "tropical valley"—although there are hot mineral springs that never freeze, even during the coldest weather.

The Nahanni is a rough, beautiful, treacherous country that has tricked and defeated even the most skilled bushmen—men who have lived in Canada's north country for a lifetime and know its every quirk. ❑

Editor's note: The late Don Sawatsky wrote many articles about the Yukon. He took the photos for this story in 1966.

Whiskers Lake, just outside Ross River. (SH photo)

Beware the Mahoneys

By Sam Holloway

In the late fall of 1899, workmen were excavating the foundation for a new fire hall in Dawson City when they discovered the remains of an adult Indian and child. The child. partly preserved and wrapped in a Hudson Bay blanket, had a coffin made of shake lumber (split, not sawed from logs); but the adult Indian's coffin was of a type not seen among other tribes on the North American continent.

It was made from a log at least 30 inches in diameter and about seven feet long. The log had been split down the middle into two halves and each half hollowed out, similar to a dugout canoe. The body had then been placed inside the two halves. This body, obviously a male about five feet six inches tall, had completely decomposed except for the skeleton; no clothing or adornments remained except for a handful of beads of a type traded to the natives in the early 19th century.

Some Dawson area natives (called Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation today) feasting on a caribou near Dawson in the winter of 1900. Drawn by Tappan Adney, Harper Magazine correpondent.

The leader of the Moosehide Indian tribe at that time was Chief Isaac and he paddled up the river from their village to have a look at the bodies. He thought the adult Indian to have been a chieftain by the way he was buried. As Chief Isaac tried to explain why he thought this was so, he related the following story to a reporter:

(From the Dawson Daily News, November 11. I899).

". . . Many, many snows ago, when Isaac was but a mere boy, the forefathers of the Indians now living at the mouth of Moosehide Creek had a tradition that somewhere up the Klondike River in the vicinity of the Rocky Mountains lived a large and savage Indian tribe which they to this day refer to as the Mahoneys. They were supposed to be relentless in war and particularly ferocious, and at one time had descended to the Yukon and in a battle with Isaac's tribe, had killed all the men then in camp and carried off their women as slaves. So great was the dread of the river Indians of the Mahoneys that until the arrival of the white men they would not extend their hunting excursions any further away than what is known as Allgold Creek. a tributary of Flat Creek.

"At one time, so Isaac says, it was determined to go on a long hunt and penetrate farther into the grounds of their hereditary enemies than ever before. Great preparations were made for the expedition. Tribal dances were indulged in to propitiate their protecting war god in their favour, and for their leader was chosen the son of the then reigning chief. The Shaman of the tribe looked with disfavour upon the proceedings and warned them of impending disaster. Not heeding his advice. the party set out for the unknown land of the Mahoneys. Day after day they travelled over country new to them and not once catching a glimpse of the foe they dreaded to meet. Game they found in abundance, and after they had secured all that could be brought back, preparations were made to return to their tribe in triumph.

"The evening preceding their departure, when all were asleep and dreaming of the feasts to follow their arrival home, the visions of the. prophetic Shaman appeared in the shape of the terrible Mahoneys. The, battle was short and decisive and terminated in the death of the entire expedition except two, who escaped in the darkness of the night. They remained hidden until the following day, when they recovered the body of their leader, and placing him in a canoe, they silently floated down the river to the camp they had left but a few weeks previously.

"Following the custom then in vogue, the body of the dead heir to the chieftain was interred in a hollowed log coffin so that when he reached the happy hunting ground he would not be without a canoe to travel in. And to this day if one of the Moosehide Indians is asked where the Mahoneys are he will point in a vague, uncertain way to the range of mountains at the head of the Klondike River and mutter under his breath, 'Mahoneys—very bad Indians.'

Naming the Yukon River

By Darrell Hookey

Schwatka and his famous raft floating down the Yukon River in 1883.

"I don't care what the map says, Whitehorse sits on the Lewes River."

Just an old timer looking for a good argument? Or is this the venting of some anti-American sentiment?

Either way, Whitehorse sits on the Yukon River. It's been official since May 5, 1949. But not first without 100 years of politics, grandstanding and earnest mistakes.

The federal government knew as early as 1892 there would be trouble all over the expanding country. Explorers and traders were tripping over each other naming geological features. Some mountains had three names while some lakes shared a name with another 1,000 kilometres away.

Often the choices ignored the names preferred by the locals and were based instead on incomplete data, over-inflated egos or just sycophantic explorers seeking to honour benefactors.

So, a Board of Geographical Nomenclature was formed to standardize names used on all maps and correspondence among government departments.

Before a name would be approved, it had to pass a test: Has it been used before? Is it entrenched in common usage? Is it the first name published? Does it conform to English or French rules of spelling?

The board was set up to be similar to American and British systems. Its members represented the Geological Survey, Railways and Canals, Post Office, Marine and Fisheries, Indian Affairs and Interior Departments.

Unfortunately the board was voluntary, had no budget, no authority and was so large meetings were impossible to schedule.

There were no meetings until November of 1897, when the Surveyor-General sounded an alarm. He pointed out that the Americans were tired of Ottawa's inaction and had started to assign names to Canadian geological features. The rest of the world was following suit more and more as news of the gold rush spread.

Case and point: That stretch of river between Marsh Lake and Lake Laberge and further downstream north to Pelly River.

On June 16, 1843, Hudson Bay Company's Robert Campbell *(a sycophantic explorer?)* assumed the river upstream from the Pelly was just a tributary *(based on incomplete data?)* deserving of a new name. He named it Lewes River for John Lee Lewes, the chief factor of the HBC *(honouring a benefactor?)* to its headwaters, reported to be near the sea.

Three years later another HBC explorer, John Bell, came upon the same stretch of river hundreds of kilometres further north. He named it the Youcon River from the Gwich'in name Yuchoo, meaning the greatest river (or big river). This new name replaced "Kwikhpak", the name given the river by the Russians 10 years earlier based on the Aleut Eskimo word meaning great river.

And so it was for the next 40 years. The river was known as the Yukon upstream to the Pelly River until local usage extended it to Lake Laberge. From Lake Laberge to the headwaters it was called Lewes River.

Then in 1883 along came Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka—"a dapper, arrogant little man" according to Allen Wright in his book *Prelude to Bo-*

A map of Alaska and British Columbia, showing the Yukon River and its tributaries as they were named after Schwatka's raft trip in 1883.

nanza—in the service of the American army. He was to collect information on the land and people that may be of military interest.

Based on observation, Schwatka decided the Lewes River moved much more water towards the Yukon River than to the Pelly River. He concluded the Lewes River was much more than a tributary to the Pelly River, it *was* the Yukon River.

Ignoring local preference, he changed the name to Yukon River from Lewes River.

Although his information was correct, there was no real reason to change the name of the river. Maintaining a name popular with the local population, native or otherwise, was an ideal protected by the boards of geographic names from the United States, Britain, Australia, Germany and France.

Indeed, 15 years after Schwatka's trip the Geographic Board of Canada dismissed the American's opinion and ruled the river shall remain the Lewes.

The decision was likely based on the report of Dr. George M. Dawson of the Geological and Natural History Survey of Canada. In it he calls Schwatka's decision to rename Lewes River "a quite arbitrary and unjustifiable proceeding".

But this was 1898 and the world press was already reporting on the rush for gold in the Klondike ... just off the now world famous Yukon River.

The deluge of new people to the Yukon and the attention of the world, all calling the Lewes River the Yukon River, decided the matter once and for all. On May 5, 1949, the Geographic Board of Canada relented and officially erased the name of Lewes River from all maps.

Reaction to the name change in Whitehorse was underwhelming. It was reported in the *Whitehorse Star* in just 18 lines. Anyone who knew about the change may have simply remarked that it was about time Ottawa got it right.

By 1949 local preferred usage was "Yukon River". The tourism industry could sell Whitehorse as a vacation destination easier if it was on the famous Yukon River. And canoeists and kayakers took more pride in telling their friends they travelled 3,200 km on "the Yukon River" instead of saying "a series of rivers".

But why was Schwatka so determined to change the name in the first place? And if Lewes River had its name before the Yukon River was named further downstream and it flows from the headwaters itself, why not name the whole stretch Lewes River?

Possibly the answers lie in the fact that it is called the Yukon River in Alaska *(politics?)*; that Schwatka would boast for years he traversed the entire length of the Yukon River, "the longest raft journey ever made in the interest of geographic science" *(grandstanding?)*; and that Schwatka believed his observations gave him the right to change the name *(earnest mistake?)*.

Nosey the Fox

Al Downes and daughter Laurie took these photos of a frequent visitor to their mining camp in the Sixtymile district last summer. Nosey often sat in a chair at the dinner table and followed Al's truck when he went somewhere. They suspect Nosey will be back this summer with several kittens—all looking for a grubstake!

On the page opposite, Nosey sleeps under the sun on a loader tire. And there she is in the photo below checking out the bacon and eggs cooking on the stove.

Runs With Bears

By Yukon Pete Esser

Years ago when I saw the movie "Dances With Wolves," I was quite taken by it. The beauty of the wilderness and life in the last frontier reminded me in many ways of the years of my life I spent in the Yukon wilderness: 1967-78.

The life in the north made me become a hunter or at least woke up already existing instincts within me. So over the years I have seen more game than most people ever will. We (my family and I) always had plenty of meat in the freezer to face the long and cold northern winter and shared with the town people the game I was so lucky to hunt. Mostly moose, sheep and rabbit. Fish smoked or fresh frozen was stored too.

Our home base was the small mining town of Clinton Creek, 57 miles northwest of Dawson City, built on a hillside overlooking the Fortymile River. Bears we had around plenty and at times too close for comfort. Living at the shore of the Fortymile River, to have a boat made a lot of sense. Ours was a 14-foot aluminum powered by a 20 hp outboard.

From the moment the ice went out in late May till October, time was spent on the river and in the bush . The Yukon River with its tributaries and hundreds of islands gave us plenty to discover and a new adventure every time we went out. To see moose and bears was a given event and our children learned fast to like and respect them as we did. But just to be on the safe side, I always had a shotgun with me.

Most of the islands on the Yukon River have beautiful sandy beaches with plenty of bush in the center. The constant wind keeps the mosquitoes away and with the sun out it, is a paradise. Naturally, we had a campfire, plenty of wieners and marshmallows and Karin's potato salad. Well, you can be sure the finest nose in the neighbourhood would show up in no time.

Bluff, the Spaniel family dog and lover of the great outdoors, was our early warning system. He never barked but would lift his front lip to show his teeth and would give a deep growl while looking at the intruder. Most bears will stay out of range when there is a dog close by, but some could care less and walk right out in the open. A blast out of the shotgun into the air gets them retreating.

Well, not always, as we had to find out on one midsummer afternoon. The black bear, give it four to five years in age, kept coming. Karin and I grabbed the three kids, cooler and blanket and retreated to the nearby boat. Bluff, with all his hair standing up, had put himself between us and the bear, barking like crazy but giving ground. I had a few wieners thrown toward the slowly coming bear and this gave us a little more time to get out.

The island was his and the rest of no camera with me. But this is life, so at least we have our memories.

The dogs in town gave us all more time to relax and the children learned quickly that safety is in numbers and ganged up very fast. When at one end of the small town, several dogs started barking, we as parents and the kids paid attention.. What can be more inviting to a bear than to have a big company kitchen with the best cooks working in it to feed 350 men four times a day in the middle of their territory? Breakfast time is bacon time and it is hot in the kitchen so open the back door all the way to let in some fresh air. I am still laughing when I think about it how funny it looked when the four cooks came running out into the dining area and the bear taking over the kitchen.

Some of us were laughing, some were running out of the building, some were lifting chairs to chase the intruder. He was digging into the food like it would be his last meal and could care less about our commotion. The only thing that got him out was a good blast from the fire extinguisher. The kitchen was a mess but the bear was out and the talk of the town.

Years passed by and the sense of danger towards bears is weakening. We are a part of it if we live in the wilderness, it is our home too, and the rifle in our hands makes us superior over all living creatures—or does it? Well, for all of us there is the one day in our life where we will have to face how mighty we are. This day came for me in the summer of 1972 , the date of it has left my memory but not the happening.

I had finished the night shift at the mill and the bus was bringing us, my crew and me, home to the town. A distance of seven miles, a winding gravel road following along Clinton Creek from which the town took its name. To see wildlife along the road was nothing new, so it was no surprise when the young black bear crossing the road a mile out of town received only little attention from the crew. Sitting in the front row, I got the best look and I noticed some white hair on his black hide, like a round spot on his chest. The size of my hand but not bigger. The bus passed and some man called 'hi bear.' It was a kind of cool morning with the clouds hanging low and a good day to take an early sleep after a long night. Karin and the kids were up already and fussing around in the kitchen when I came home.

Once in bed it takes less than a minute and I am in the land of dreams. When I heard the shuddering of glass and Karin's scream for Susie to run, I knew it was not a dream. But the yell "bear!" made me jump out of the bed and rush to the utility room where I found Karin holding a crying and shaking Susie in her arms. Daddy , daddy the bear wanted to get me. Karin looked up to me. He is still out there, Pete."

I stepped over the broken glass of the screen door. It must have broken when she slammed it open to get Susie in, out onto the porch. It was the same bear I had seen earlier that morning and he was now at least 200 feet from the house, standing there and looking at us. This is just a young bear, what is all the commotion ? He tried to get me daddy, he is mean. O. K. I will show to you guys how daddy is taking care for him."

Out I went in my shorts and bare feet straight towards him.Yelling and throwing rocks I picked up on the way. Get away bear, get away, move now, move. I don't know how close I came to him, it could have been 20 - 30 feet, but I remember seeing the dust flying from his paws when he charged. I am 6' 3" tall with a weight of 220 lb. When I was a member of the armed forces in 1960 I think the world record on 100 meters was around 10.4 second . My best time then was 14.6

On this morning with the bear behind me. hearing him puffing his air, sensing him gaining ground on me, talk about adrenaline and overdrive. I saw the house rushing towards me Karin standing on the porch holding the door open with sheer terror on her face. I had no time for thinking, just give it all you have and run, run. There was no time for me to run up the stairs to the landing. It was clear I would not be able to swing around. I jumped.

To the top of the handrail from the ground—the height is 7'3" —and I landed on both feet in the utility room, clearing this handrail. A loud crash indicated that the bear was stopped by the staircase and a 4x4 post. He retreated and did not look back. I was shaking like a leaf in the wind. My feet were bleeding from all the cuts I picked up while running for my life, never feeling the ground I touched.

The good Lord must have been with me and lifted me over the handrail. How in the world would I have been able to do a jump like the one I did? It took us a little time to settle down. Karin told me how it all started.

"Susie was sitting on the edge of her sandbox playing , with her back turned to the bush. I don't know, but I got the impulse to look and check on her. So I went to the kitchen window, when I spotted the bear a few feet behind her. When I slammed the screen door, he stopped and looked up. I yelled run, Susie, run, and the rest you know."

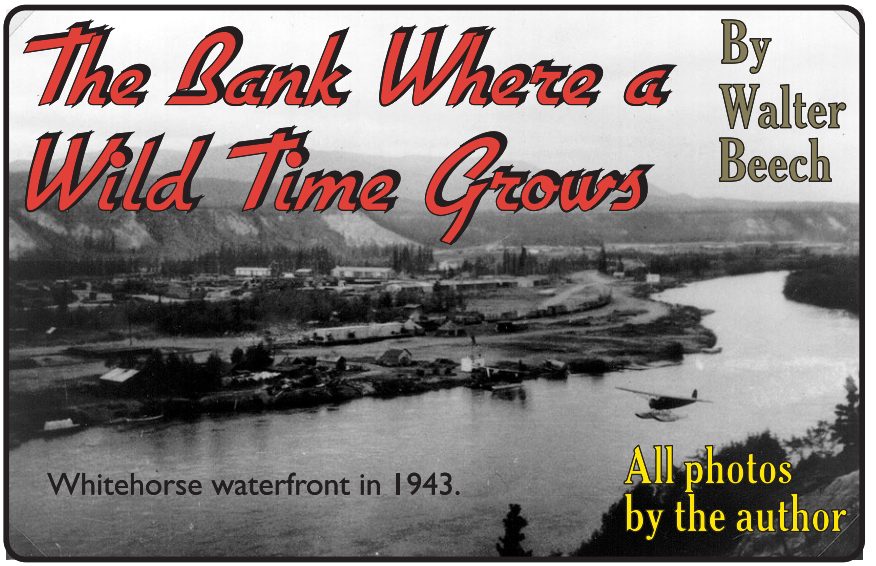
It was a company regulation not to discharge a firearm within one mile of the town. So I called the town manager and reported the incident.

The bear showed up for the rest of the week in all corners of the town, killed one dog and in the end had to be shot. I was foolish in the way I acted when I went after the bear. I know this now , but that was then and then was a long time ago.

"Dances with Wolves is a movie. Runs With Bears was one lucky day for me and my family, to be in memory forever.

The Bank Where a Wild Time Grows

By Walter Beech



This is a very personal record. There are no earthshaking events described here. No heroism. No great tragedies. Just the small doings that make up the tug and flux of one's life. It is a chronicle about a time in my life when I was doing a common, everyday thing, working in a bank. It was also a time shared by a small group which became closely knit, for whom no effort was too much when there was a job to get done.

The story is half a century old. I have always intended that it should be in some sort of readable form. It is surfacing now because I am making the time to do it. My family has told me that I shall shuffle off this mortal coil and they won't know anything about me. So I have started with this, the Yukon adventure, which I have entitled, ***THERE IS A BANK WHERE A WILD TIME GROWS.***

I was not much of a participant in the war effort. From Grand Forks, in the Boundary Country in British Columbia, I was called up to Military District No. 10 in Vernon, B.C. There, the examining doctor was good old Doc Strong who had been our family doctor in Revelstoke and had known me since I was five or six years old. He took one look at my trifocals and rejected me for the armed services. So I went back to the Bank at Grand Forks. The town was a pleasant spot at the Junction of the two Kettle Rivers, close to Christina Lake and the American border. There was swimming and tennis by the lake and lots of pretty girls in their summer finery.

This is just a fast lead-up as to how I got to the Yukon. The dolce vita of Grand Forks is not important to this story. The Manager at the Branch was Hugh Sutherland, whose last posting was Manager of the Bank at White Horse, Yukon Territory. Back at the turn of the century the first party of bankers floated on a raft down the Yukon (or Lewes) River to Dawson, com-

plete with the appurtenances of banking: buffalo coats, a safe, gold scales and several cases of rum. Later, these pioneers were provided with a regular rum ration.

Hugh Sutherland, although he came to the North long after the roar and glamour and the Lady That's Known as Lou had passed from the scene, had observed the coming of the great placer operations, the hydraulics and the six storey dredges of the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation. He was an enthusiastic and excellent raconteur. As our work involved the operation of a sub-agency at Greenwood, we had to make a bi-weekly, 60-mile round trip to Greenwood. I was well steeped in tales of the Gold Rush, Hunker Creek, White Horse Rapids, White Pass and the value of felt boots as the temperature went into decline.

In the meantime, some larger world affairs were taking place. Pearl Harbour brought the United States into the War. The Canadian government removed the Canadian Japanese from the West Coast and placed them in concentration camps, one of which was at Greenwood. Under the Hyde Park Agreement, the United States was beginning to construct the Alaska Highway The CANOL pipeline project was being made ready - all of which were to combine to make a change in my circumstances.

In pre-war years, White Horse was a small northern town, where the White Pass & Yukon Route, a narrow guage railway, connected with the Yukon River paddle wheelers of the British Yukon Navigation Company for the journey down to Dawson.(In the Yukon, you say "down to Dawson" even though Dawson is further north, because it is downriver.) The population of White Horse was about 600 people, rising to about 1,000 during the four months of the tourist season. Remember, this is the land of the midnight sun where Sam McGee was cremated and Dan McGrew was a face on the barroom floor.

Taxi to Aishihak

The Bank was a two person office, with a third officer, (all personnel were called "officers") being added for the summer months and then rotated so that his predecessor was returned to the "outside". Suddenly, in the summer of 1942 this well ordered little community was devastated, never to recover, by an invasion of Caterpillar D8's, Le Tourneaus, P 38's, and worst of all, strangers - thousands upon thousands of them - American, Air Force and construction men. By the summer of 1943, it was estimated that there were 30,000 people in the White Horse area. Payrolls burgeoned and an unprecedented amount of money flowed in and out of town. Under all this the Bank staggered and lurched. Requests for more staff fell upon deaf ears and dull minds in the Superintendent's Department in Vancouver. I quote: "We have men of wide and varied experience in this department." It was only when the Alberta Superintendent, who was better informed than his B.C. counterpart, paid a visit to Vancouver, that people began to get the picture.

Unlike other postings in the Bank, service in the Yukon was a matter of volunteering. It was a two year stint, without holidays, but with six weeks leave afterwards. It was usually considered that it did no harm to one's career to show a little daring do. So, in mid-October 1942, a letter arrived in Grand Forks - "Would Mr. Beech consider a sojourn in northern climes amid the malamutes?"- Always enamored of what might be on the other side of the hill, I caught a Greyhound bus at 1:30 a.m. (Elvera, she of the shoulder length gold blonde hair and the white calf-high boots, said, "Can a fellow kiss you good-bye?" A gentle osculation. I boarded the bus and never saw Elvera again. And that is how I got to the Yukon.

Before setting off to White Horse, I made a side trip to Revelstoke to visit my parents as it looked as if I might be away for two years.

During the evening of November 5th, 1942, I went on board *S.S. Princess Louise,* where I was joined by D.M."Daddy" Sinclair, who was being

The bank where a wild time grew (Bank of Commerce, Whitehorse, in 1943, where Robert Service wrote of Dangerous Dan and Sam McGee, now the location of the Toronto-Dominion Bank, Second & Main.)

sent on the trip to "assess the situation and make a report on the prospects for the branch." Daddy was a crusty individual who wrote back that the bank building was as bad as any "Siwash shack" he had ever seen. In his own way, Daddy was an empire builder for the Bank. When he was Manager at Williams Lake branch it had been his custom to ride horseback 200 miles into the Chilcotin to contact his rancher customers. Accommodation on the *Louise* was in short supply, so Daddy and I ended up sharing the bridal suite. (When I think of Helen or Daphne or Joan, what a waste) Oh, well. Such is life.

The passage on the *Louise* was from Vancouver, B.C. to Skagway, Alaska, touching at Prince Rupert, Ketchican, Juneau and then Skagway. The route is known as the Inside Passage as it is sheltered water all the way except across Queen Charlotte Sound, which is the open Pacific. Here we picked up a destroyer escort. The Japanese were in possession of the Aleutians and we were not permitted radios or electric razors or anything that might act as a transmitter and indicate our position to possible Japanese submarines. There had been reports of Japanese submarines off the California coast. Perhaps unfounded reports, but nothing would have surprised me. In all, it was a somber, gray trip, in which the objective seemed to be to keep the passengers comatose with a surplus of food. Old hands said that there was a battle on between Alaska Steamships, based in Seattle, and our own Canadian Pacific Steamship Lines as to who would dock at Skagway with the most obese passengers

The mountains at Skagway come right down to the water. The dock juts out into the harbour for about half a mile, but we were able to hitch a ride with a soldier in a Jeep, which was a curiosity at that time. Once in town we went walkabout and eventually to the railway station for the final section of the journey. We had been on the *Louise* for almost four days.

The White Pass & Yukon Route was the Yukon's umbilical cord to the rest of the world. Everything one ate, drank, wore or used came in over the W.P.& Y.R. (often translated into Wait Patiently and You'll Ride). This was a narrow guage railway that snaked and switchbacked its way up the side of the Coast Range to the plateau area and Lake Bennett. (Lake Bennett and the White & Chilcoot passes were significant in the Gold Rush days but have little place in this narrative). The train stopped here so that the passengers could disembark for lunch and during this lunch period the weather cleared for the first time since we left Vancouver. However, the latitude was 59 degrees North, it was November, and twilight was upon us as we threaded our way across this most barren of lands. I thought to myself, "At last you have reached Outer Siberia. Which way to the salt mines? Little did I know that the salt mines were at the end of steel.

Our train hissed and shrieked its way along the Yukon River where the berthed B.Y.N. fleet waited for the ice to go out next spring. At 9:00 p.m. we arrived. No bands. No welcoming committee. No fellow bankers. Only a friendly malamute to tell us that this was the place where hell freezes over.

There is an old and trite saying that one picture is worth a thousand

words and I took a good number of pictures. However, the pictures do not reveal what is under the ground, or in this case, what is not there: NO HOUSEHOLD RUNNING WATER. There was a limited water system in the town. The hotel across the street was connected and even had flush toilets but the Bank had never been connected. Still, the fact that our two-holer was located within the envelope of the building was a step up compared to those facilities which were not protected from the stormy blasts.

Water for such premises as ours was provided by a gentleman by the name of Ryder who delivered water from the river in a little tank truck. The householder then stored the water in barrels or whatever until the next delivery. Mr. Ryder also operated the "honey wagon" by which the night soil was removed from the privies. Heaven only knows where it was disposed of.

At the time of our arrival, there had been an outbreak of dysentery, largely amongst the Indian population, so we thought we had better do something about our water supply and eventually obtained water from the U.S. Army pumping station on the road to the airport.

The Bank building was a frame structure, probably pre-World War One {Ed. Note: The Bank of Commerce building went up in 1906. Robert Service worked in the same building}. It had electric lights and that is all. Heating for the office was a large woodburner which required frequent stoking, especially during the night, to ensure that some vestige of a flame remained for the morning. At least there were no water pipes to freeze. The last office chore of an evening was to collect all the ink wells and place them in a tray on the top of the stove in the hope that the ink would be fluid in the morning.

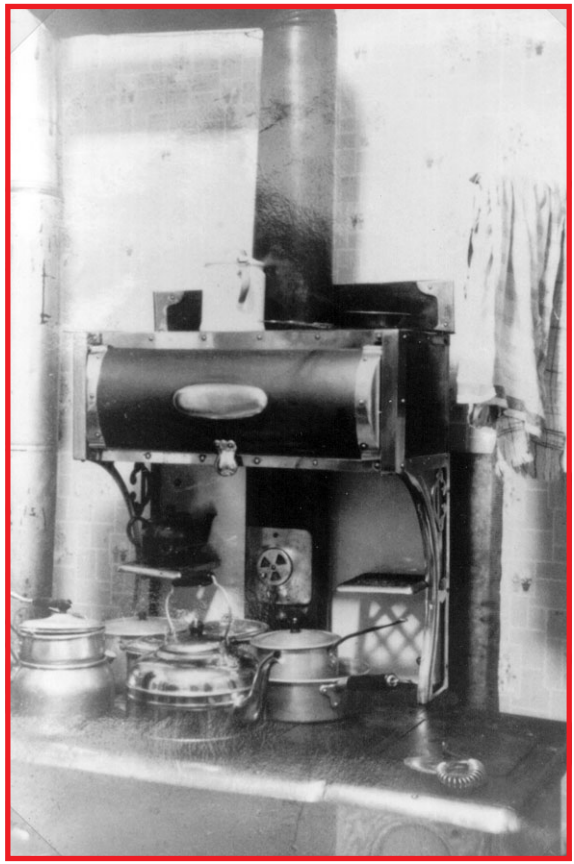
The second floor of the building was in past years an apartment for the Manager. It consisted of a kitchen, a living room, and three bedrooms off a

Fleming gets his exercise

long hallway. There was no bathroom. One can only assume that the previous residents belonged to the round-tub-in-the-kitchen-on-a-Saturday-night school of ablutions. It would seem that warm air from the heater below, assisted by the pipes running through the second floor, plus the kitchen stove, was expected to keep the place warm. There was also a space heater in the living room.

A good part of the problems of the next six months were due to the weather. The winter of 1942/43 was one of the coldest on record, with the temperature dropping to minus 75 degrees F. at Snag and Aishihik. Seventy five below was as far as the thermometers were calibrated. I have told my friends ad nauseum about my quick trip across the White Horse airport on the back of an open truck at 64 below. Or going from the office to the post office at midnight when it was 58 below with a wind. That was not a good experience.

Our citified bankers suits gave way to anything that would keep us warm enough to work. Obviously we wore the heaviest longjohns we could find, and sweaters. My "work station" was near the front door and I was the recipient of gales whipping in from the North Pole. On my feet I wore my regular oxford shoes, stockings over these and moccasins over the stockings, and then rigged up a little platform to get my feet up and off the floor. Our felt boots were on order, but had not yet arrived.



The tyrant

Our domestic chill recorder was in the kitchen: a nail in a window frame about six feet from the stove. We knew when it was 40 or more below zero when the frost crystals congealed around this nail to a one inch diameter. We kept the kitchen stove going by chopping wood and then packing

it up to the wood storage area in the kitchen, about three feet from the stove. Week after week we discovered that when the wood had all been used, the snow that had been carted in with the wood several days before remained on the floor. I did not start to keep a daily journal until January 17th, 1943, but I have vivid memories and photographs as reminders of the eight to ten weeks between arrival and the beginning of the journal. I probably do not have the story in exact sequence and some of the incidents took place when there were a lot of things going on at the same time.

It is time to introduce the other players in this comedy/drama. Looking back on it all now, it really was a great team effort, although we were all so deeply involved in our own tasks, we would never have seen how well we were functioning as a group. The Manager was A.E. (Bert) Hardy whose last posts had been at Salmon Arm and Keremeos. He was a decent, amiable chap, but had a tendency to go off at tangents, rather than deal with the nitty-gritty of hard organizational decisions. He had his bull-in-a-china-shop moments.

Then came W.G. Kennedy (Bill). Bill was a quiet Scot , always with a twinkle in his eye. He had been recruited in Scotland and had served in a number of prairie branches and had been stationed at Dawson for two years and was thus able to inculcate us into the lore of the North. He was an avid reader and everything readable that came into the place ended up under Kennedy's bed.

Improving the water

Carl Carlsen came to White Horse from Nelson, B.C. where as a teller he had become a legend in his own time as the fastest cash in the West. Carl was a strange man. He seemed to carry all the chips of the world on his shoulders. To me, his one redeeming feature was his in-

terest in good music and the strains of Tchaikovsky's "Serenade for Strings" coming from his room at midnight suggested that he might be possessed of some modest degree of civilization.

Edy the Caddy was a local product, whose sense of fun and humour took the hard edge off the daily toil. Edythe was addicted to a mild form of swearing at situations, never at people. She had a slotted tin can on her desk and she was required to put a nickel in the can for each swear word. It soon mounted up.

Edythe was also the first woman cigar smoker of my acquaintance, real stogies, not these little cigarillos that the chic ones affect nowadays. There was in those days (and perhaps there still is) a book known as the "Register of Advances". One day I asked her if she had seen the Register of Improper Advances. She went into gales of laughter and for a week afterwards a mere hint of the remark sent her into fits. As well as all this, she was a dedicated worker who often had to be bundled into her coat and sent home.

In this pre-journal period all was a form of chaos, with one gratifying exception. Some time in early December we were joined by Frank Fleming and Arthur McKay. What possessed these men to leave the salubrious climes of Vancouver and Victoria has always eluded me. Both men were good level heads, with a rare sense of humour. While they were both as slim as rake handles, theirs was the slimness of whipcord. They were the last of our "sourdoughs," a Yukon term for old hands. Other people who came to the staff later and who did not experience the winter of 1942/43 were forever "cheechakos."

One of the realizations forced upon us was that we would have to cook and fend for ourselves. Our salaries had best be kept hidden behind a veil but the fact is that we could never have afforded to eat at either of the two local cafes, even if we had survived acute dyspepsia. So the "Mess" was born. Up in the kitchen there was a monstrous wood and coal burner, and all manner of pots and pans, a collection of plates, bowls, cutlery and so on. Fools rush in where culinary angels fear to tread. While it was an additional effort on top of an already crazy work load, cooking our own meals was in a way a form of recreation and our (that is to say mostly mine) mistakes and misadventures provided a lot of funny moments.

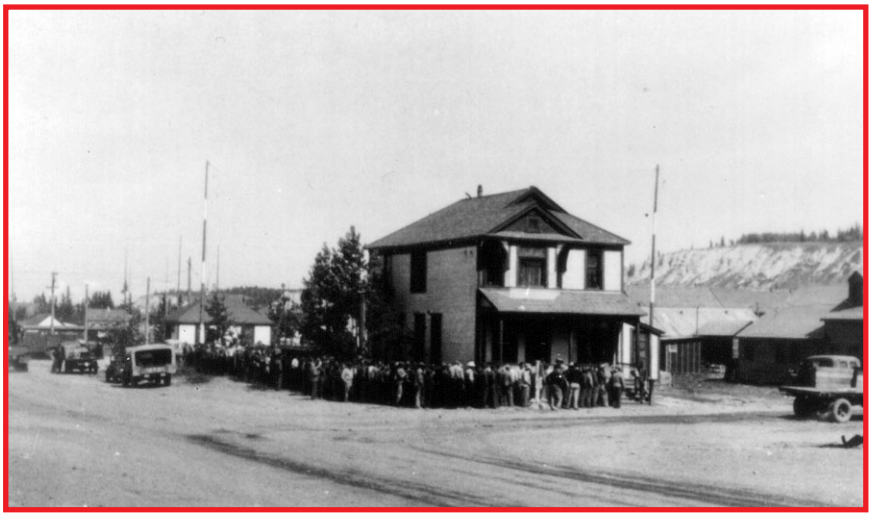
As I mentioned before, our water was delivered twice weekly by Ryder, the honey-wagon man, and stored in a metal drum on the landing part way up the stairs and a few steps from the kitchen. It later was collected in saucepans as required for cooking, dishwashing, shaving and washing ourselves. Some time in this period we realized that we would have to supplement the water supply. We acquired a 90 gallon oil drum from the W.P.& Y.R. and had the top cut out by a chap known as Buzz Saw Jimmy (reputed to have two degrees from Oxford).We then burned out the drum, boiled snow in it several times, and finally painted it inside with two coats of aluminum paint and we were ready to make our debut with the U.S. Army pumping station. It was also necessary to get the use of a truck and driver to get out to the

pumping station about four miles away. This was of such high priority that someone had to drop their work at whatever stage, load the drum on the truck and make the trip. On the return, with ice forming on the water in the drum, the water was transferred to the drum on the landing by bucket brigade. On one occasion I froze myself to the truck, having slipped into the water at the pumping station.

Then there was the matter of keeping clean. I think the only deodorant product on the market in those days was called Odor-ono, but fortunately we were not reduced to that. The Bank maintained a room in the hotel and we made our way there, in relays for a tub and a soak. It was to his room that I retreated when I came down with the flu, or more likely, sheer exhaustion. I was out for a week and spent my few wakeful moments counting the number of joints in the V-joint lumber in the ceiling above me: 43 joints as I remember. In due course I got back on my feet and was able to take part in the comedy of confusion.

One Sunday afternoon, armed with crowbar and sledgehammers, we tore out the Manager's office and dismantled an unused chimney. Working space for another teller was more important than the so-called dignity of a managerial office. Assisted by a local carpenter, Arne Anderson, we created some other work stations. These were unbelievably crude, but they worked. Improving our working and living facilities was a process that went on for 18 months but as the northern construction effort came to completion there came a surplus capacity in our enterprise also.

When a community goes from less than 600 to 30,000 in a short time there becomes a problem in supplying the necessities of life—one being liquor. Liquor was the only item in the Yukon for which there was a formal rationing system: one bottle per month. Booze arrived over the W.P.& Y.R. once a month and line-ups four deep around the block were the common



Lining up for a bottle at the liquor store

occurrence for a few days after the long-awaited train. The standard liquor store price for a 26'er of any hard liquor was $6, compared with $3.25 outside.

Simply by walking out the door, a bottle could be re-sold in the line-up for $15; it went for $35 in the local camps. Out on the road the going price was $75 and at Norman Wells the tariff was $90. Rumour had it that a good sized (100,000 gallon) operation was in place up the highway, but the entrepreneurs were advised by the RCMP that a Florida vacation would be appropriate.

Rationing was the order of the day. Outside the Yukon, meat, butter, sugar and jams, tea, coffee, gasoline and tires and so on, were in short supply. In White Horse, apart from liquor, the only rationing was imposed by the local merchants on some canned products, mostly fruits. It was largely a matter of cargo space in the ships and the capacity of the W.P.& Y. R. There was a fire at the Northern Commercial Company and unlabelled canned goods went on sale at 10 cents per can. We shut down one of our tellers so that he could go and make a large purchase. He was good and we did not end up with too many cans of pumpkin pie mix. We had no fresh milk, only canned and powdered. After much experiment, we arrived at a blend of Klim and Fraser Valley evaporated that was acceptable. On rare occasions, stewardesses on the newly organized Canadian Pacific Airlines would arrive with a couple of quarts of milk for us. To paraphrase some old lines: "Candy is Dandy Liquor is Quicker But Milk is like Silk." Needless to say, the stewardesses were popular.

Neither did we have fresh vegetables of any kind. The occasional orange crossed our path and my father sent us a box of apples. White Horse had no agricultural land, but down at Dawson there was suitable soil and the long summer hours made for good growing conditions. The Manager at Dawson, Charley Fyfe, sent us a barrel of fresh produce, but we had barely made a dent in the fresh goodies when it was stolen from the back of the lot. A fiendish crime, if I may say so.

I am now able to pick up the Journal on January 17th, 1943 but before doing so, a little bit of background is required. The little polka dot book was actually started by T.W. Watson, a local boy who had "entered the service of the Bank." He went on to join the Air Force and flew the last plane out of Singapore before the Japanese invasion of that land. (Watson's entry:)

"January 1st, 1935: Danced until 2:30 a.m. Breakfast at the Bank.

Home 6:00 a.m. with Jack Dunlop and to bed. Up at noon and worked most of the day. Jimmie Paterson for supper. Worked evening. Bed 11:30 p.m.

That was the only entry ever made until I came across the book eight years later.

Excerpts from the author's diary:

In the Year of our Lord, 1943

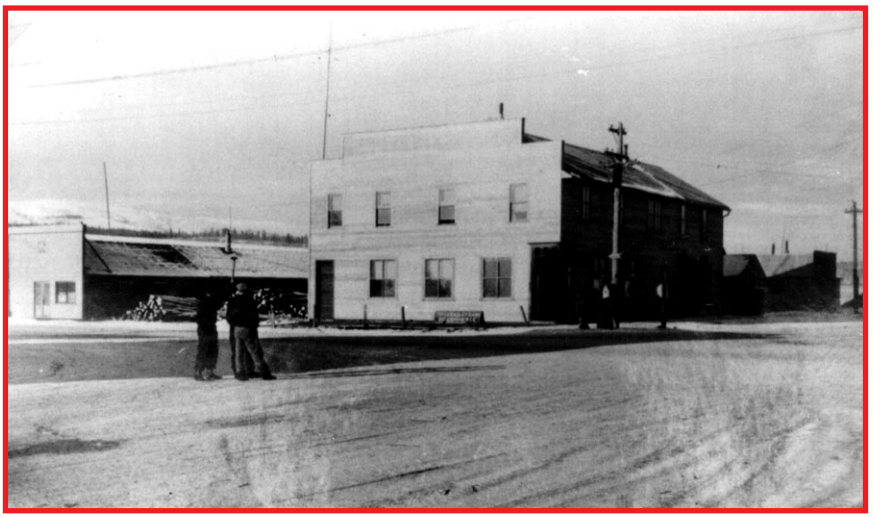
January 17th (Sunday) Cold. Up at noon. Satisfactory breakfast. Made cheque-holder. Clean up desk. Chopped wood. 30 degrees below. Tried cam-

era-shutter action odd due to cold. Roast too solid yet to put into oven. Sun trying to break through fog-frozen ice crystals. Kitchen being cleaned up. Water shortage. Roast beef and Yellow Peril (a form of pound cake, coloured yellow with bits and pieces of rubberized candied peel. Wrote J. Back House (BH) a chilly proposition.

January l8th (Monday) Still cold. Up 15 minutes late. Started off things by dropping toast in slop bucket_no loss since it was burnt anyway. Fairly busy in office. Spudless supper-Fleming dropped them in pail. Water shortage stopped the works_dishes stacked and no H20.Worked at night to 10:15. Carlsen & I parade over to Inn and bum 4 pails H20 and "956" can operate yet. Received negatives from D.M.S.- really show the mess. And so to bed. 42 below-fire in living room seems to help things-roast beef in prime.

January l9th (Tuesday) Seemed colder today-coffee pot frozen on stove -much levity over this-broke one inkwell thawing things out below. Lunch more substantial than usual. Business quite slack. Argued with T & D and got parka changed. Fish for supper-eking out our water. Staff engaged in nightly bridge sessions-AEH still checking Cash Book. Weather definitely warmer. Up to 42 below. And so to bed. Kennedy having troubles today. New towels from H.B.Co. Also discovered that mail thought to be on missing. CPA plane all OK.

January 20th (Wednesday) Up at 8:15- a little warmer today. K reports stomach flu - at 40. below is not his idea of humour. Business slow. Lunch time quite a fuss shopping, wood, water and finally food. Beans. Quietest day yet-closed cage at 2:30 and finished up. Supper by six o'clock. Trip for water-cold and clear-moonlight not appreciated while you're being frozen to the truck. Letter from Spencers-new record Dec l6 to Jan 9 WH to Vanc. Lit fire in drawing room-ordered from Eatons. Water in pail freezing beside the stove.



The bank gets a facelift.

January 21st (Thursday) - Awakened 5:15 by fire sirens-great glow at N end of airport-second sleep so delightful didn't get up till 8:30. ASH usurped my working space so didn't open cage. Swung the lead all day. Traipsed all over town and finally found a cord for our toaster. Office busier but got routine done in good time. Steaks for supper-well done, Had great time handling frozen meat-like a block of granite, but while frosted cuts like cheese, K's ailment improving. Took picture of Back House for the record. Wrote home.

January 22nd (Friday) - Quel Jour. Up at 7:45. Chopped wood before work. Fairly busy. Had culinary failure for lunch. Closed cage so I could help bring up our stationery and furnishings which have arrived. AEH like bull in a China shop. Had a difference- EWE cheque in envelope, also over $ 22 - gypped chap on U.S. premium. F1emings Fancy for supper. CBC stevedores in action. 4800 sheets toilet paper by chain toss upstairs. Now have stationery. Saw a draft requisition and passbook after three months. Great sport. Wrote Ryder re our Sanitary Service (or the lack of it). Weather warmer,

January 23rd (Saturday) (All this was in the days when Banks opened from 9 to 12 on Saturday mornings. These were often very heavy sessions and it was often 2 or 3 in the afternoon before one could get through.) Up before 8 - work slow- finished 12:45, Worked on skis. Carl & I skied other side of the river-good snow-side hill-good but cold. Indian dogs and Indian graves. Down to Elliott's for supper with McKay. Wesley Robinson our host. What a meal! Camp has every convenience-very organized crew. Emile Ivezek lost $ 1,250 - Yugoslavian. Recreation room-table tennis- coffee and cake and so to home. Got skis ready for Sunday's jaunt- 28 below. A Good Day Today.

January 24th (Sunday)- What a day- up at 7:00 a.m.-cleaned stove, burned boxes, 40 Below-cut wood, opened carpets, Roused F- made second breakfast. Beat carpet-what a mess-cleaned out room-uncrated dresser-no brackets for mirror-nurses-hooked it on wall-laid carpets and remade beds, M.B.Carpets, Made living room cozy, Definite improvement, Peeling onions-chair collapsed. Started roast of pork early this time, (On previous occasion-started the pork roast too late. As a result it was left in the oven overnight and in the morning presented itself as a pan full of succulent pork jelly surrounding islands of the most tender pork meat. Too cold to ski. Terrific hunt for sock.

January 25th (Monday) - Up at 8:00 a.m. days are getting longer. Burning lamplight very late- I was much annoyed-reach saturation point in business. All through in good time, Supper brought forth Fleming's new creation, me Good Earth-the oriental touch, (In reality it was his version of chocolate pudding), Letter from Jane, Staggered over for bath today-Got H20 from Inn. (Picture two men in the hotel lobby getting water cup by cup from the drinking fountain and filling pails, then packing them across the street, up two flights of stairs in order to do the dishes.)

January 26th (Tuesday) 46 Below. All inkwells frozen again today. Up at 8 a.m. business quieter-had a mess of a time getting balanced. FK "ommeletize" -new word. Nothing very special about today, Wrote Jane and

went to bed early. Building seems to be getting colder-continued chill penetrating.

January 28th (Thursday) Really warmer today-up to 12 Below. Office quiet, all through at 4:45. H. out to dinner at McEachern's - much abused behind his back -regrettable but deserving of abuse. After supper cleaned up back room and improved cash drawer. Put all books on shelves-down to "P" and so to bed.

January 29th (Friday) Temp moderate-down to work in good time. Payday, busy afternoon. H2O trip up 2 Mile hill, past BPC shacks. Re-arranged water system. Fish for supper. Helped F with ledgers. Down to E for walk-cold-made up shopping list. Tripped over carpet for 19th time. Mail in, but we use subterfuge to avoid dealing with it.

January 30th (Saturday) Up early-busy Sat morn-woke up A.E.H. at 9:40-very embarrassed-all aft counting cash-spent rest of afternoon on grocery patrol. Bought inner tube for bike. AAA priority. After supper made list of kitchen essentials-swept hall. Helped F stuff statements and exchanged culinary comments Had tea and doughnuts from bake shop (new) at end of Orton Ave & Dowells- pie 75 cents, doughnuts 50 cents per doz. Cash count at 9:15 P.M. Hells Bells. Temp Zero- Old Man spilled beans, literally. F made steamed pudding aided by a scaffold. (An improvisation made from pieces of wood)

January 31st (Sunday) Up at 10:30-cleaned stove- PANCAKES for breakfast delicious. Real housecleaning party today, went skiing over river-regular amphitheatre-kids with cardboard and sleighs very hard. Arne Andersen a good skier. Home at 4:30. Temperature 20 above South wind. SUPPER- scalloped spuds, roast lamb-plum pudding. Rolf Bailey, ex CBC

Busy day at the bank.

for supper. A.E.H. absent cheers. Staff unified in disparagement of A.E.H. Noted Eaton's for value of contents when we are on our own, H. returns from dinner with the General and the local 400.

February 1st (Monday) Up late after sound sleep-busy day- throwing out Can $ by the bucketful-finest day yet in the Yukon, Had letters from Jane & Ruby-bright item. Through in good time. John Harding called today. Supper was a left over affair. Tried new stove in office and found large hole in end, very unique. Worked at night. Tied up magazines for 9th Airdrome Defense boys. Early to bed.

February 2nd (Tuesday) Up at 6:30-stopped Nels from using furnace. Rose finally at 7:45 - much disgusted over this. Went shopping and had haircut before 10. Army in control of office. DeVarona leaning over ledgers-All staff annoyed at their being early. Glorious day (42 above) bright, clear. Had a fall of snow last night. Planes flew over so high that only vapour streaks showed. Supper earliest in history. Worked on Vancouver Account- this item quite sick. Put fountain pen into action again. Bed by 10:30

February 3rd (Wednesday) Up at 7:30-breakfast a mess- remarked on porridge pot. Army deposit first thing-fairly active morning. Mgr decides to get furniture from W.P.-have no room so it sits on the sidewalk. Up to see John Hardy in D/T house -plans for town water system going ahead, Lads have very posh quarters- had a ride home-shaved and so to bed Mild today with more snow,

February 4th (Thursday) Up at 7:30-better breakfast this morning. At work by 9:15-new record. Went shopping-lunch-afternoon busier. Staff through in new record time, 5:15. Blowing a gale outside- all our furniture is getting drifted over. Painted second coat on water barrel before supper. Carlsen reading Bible whilst others work.

February 5th (Friday) And still she blows-up in good time-busy today. K's vivid description of B.H.- guffaw-, B.H. has snow on seat because of wind. I had damn fool customers all day. Started to move one dresser upstairs as linen closet-ended by moving three from off the street. During supper H K & C leave table as shot from gun when wind blew aerial away. Fire back of airport, traffic jammed on hill. M F & C go to show "Ruggles of Red Gap", Malemutes howling more a/c wind. Fresh tomatoes today, Grocery list after supper and so to bed.

February 6th (Saturday) Cold as charity today- what a dread-" Beech sans pants". Work smooth-quit at 1:30 Shopped at N.C.C. for odds and ends, Fire last night at B & W cookhouse. Fire today at Burns Co. Fire today at Elliotts. People too generous with drafts. F's supper tonight had baked sausage goo". SUPER. Went to "Ruggles of Red Gap" with K. Jim Crow section in theatre. Four score and seven years ago our forefathers etc., "equality" - very ironic. Tried a batch of Bkd Pdr Biscuits. O.K. Weather cold but wind decreasing,

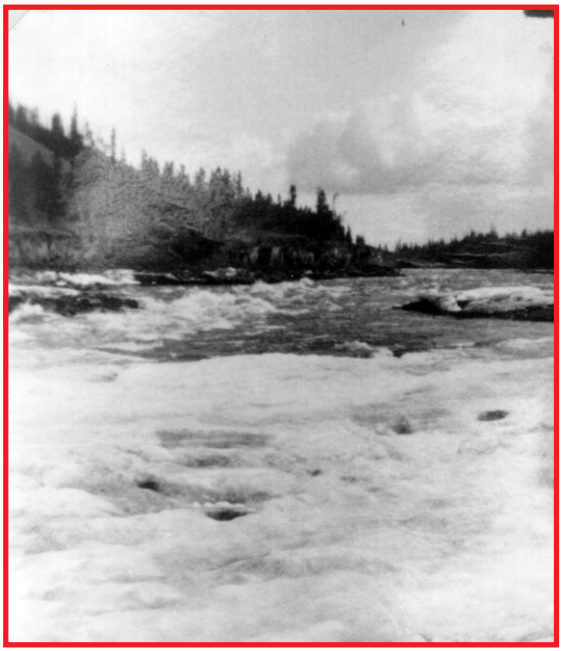
February 7th (Sunday) Bed very comfy. McK up first at 11:30-had fried tomatoes for brek- Kitchen reaches disorganization-eventually all cleaned up. Johnny Harding down- He, F.M. & I down to Elliott for Table Tennis- no

balls. J.H. for supper. Roast beef in good shape but no spuds. After supper parcelled spoon for Ruby and got films ready. McKay erects mirror in kitchen. Had fire in living room-cozy. Two U.S. planes lost to North of Wheel J.H. put out of D.O.T. house-quite disgusted with affairs. Note green bed socks with draw strings-Chic! (Knitted by F's maternal parent) Dresser fell apart on uncrating- TSK! TSK!

February 8th (Monday) 50 Below - cold ears- up at 8:10 office frozen tight Dowell payday. BUSY. Water situation critical-ironic- got H2O from kitchen of Whse Inn and so got by. No trains- no spuds, Arne Anderson starts work on back room of building-this promises to be fun. PY officer bring in Hershey Bars. Collected inkwells before retiring-no chances tonight. C still reading Bible in one hand and highball in the other.

February 9th (Tuesday) No wind but 55 Below-fairly active day. H2O situation critical-water shortage at the Inn-got 3 buckets and carried on-breakfast is problematical. F's macaroni-does it shrink indigestion from quantity- had a bath tonight-women in the room had pants in right place. Met Jack Barber, the Morrisons and 7 of 300 WAACS who have arrived. Letters from Jane and home today. Completed order to Eaton's-adding machine list. Sent some stamps

The keeping of the diary ends here. I can only imagine that we became even busier and more frenetic on the work-a-day side of our lives, and as our numbers grew to include persons of the opposite sex, we became more social, and there was less time for journal keeping. Also the worst was behind us-flush toilets, hot and cold running water, central heating were in sight, so perhaps I believed that the noteworthy comings and goings were behind us. From here I am going on memory and the order of events for the next year may be awry.



Whitehorse Rapids (now covered by a man-made lake, the forebay for a hydro generating station.)

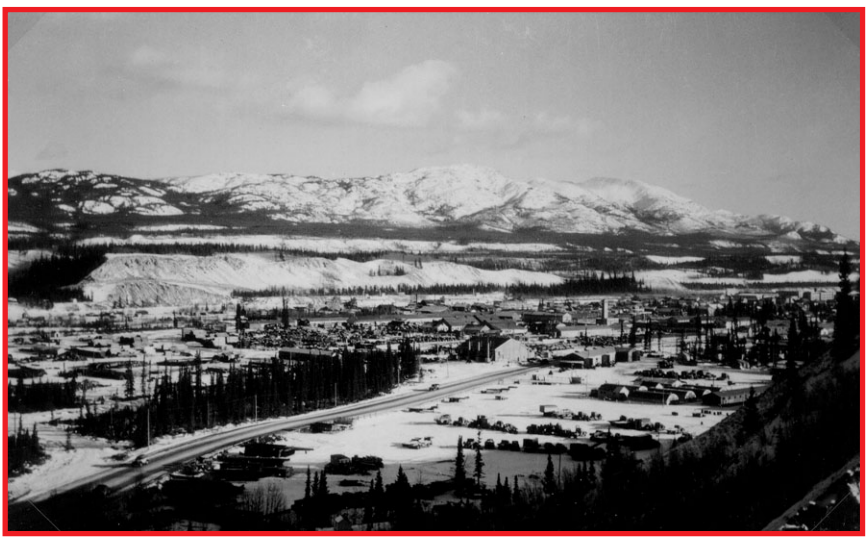
Somehow I have omitted from the diary the one real tragedy among our friends in the Yukon. I was working at a counter along a window which faced to the south and in the general direction of the airport. Low

flying aircraft were not a novelty but the plane that I saw through the window was clearly in trouble. It was about 100 feet above the ground, the engine firing spasmodically. It was trailing smoke, and willow-leafing towards the ground. The plane crashed in a main street about three blocks from the Bank and burst into flames. There was no helping the three men aboard. The pilot was Les Cook, with two mechanics on board. They had been changing a propeller and this was the test flight after the installation of the new propeller. Les had been a customer and he and his wife were rather favourites of the staff. As time passed, we were happy to see that romance blossomed for the widow in the person of an American Army officer who was a decent chap and a fitting consort for her.

In the now-it-can-be-told category, somewhere in the spring/summer of 1943 occurred the first and perhaps the only mutiny in the annals of the Bank (or perhaps any Bank for that matter). Good old bouncy A.E.H. came into the office one bright morning and announced that he had told General Smith that we would open a branch of the Bank at McCrae on the following Monday. (Pot was not in general distribution in those days but it was a harebrained proposition.) This announcement resulted in the following conversation: Carlsen: "Count me out." JM Beech: " Me too- impossible!" And we never did provide a service at McRae, although we did later extend our operations to Johnsons Crossing and to Standard Oil as sub-agencies,

In this period there also occurred one of the most classic commentaries on the banking business ever made. Art McKay slept as near to the principal intersection in town as was possible. His bed was directly over the main door to the banking office. Imagine his disgust, when on a bright and clear morning, he, deep in the arms of Morpheus, was awakened by a gross pounding on the door below at 6:45 a.m. plus a great bellow:

"Hey, this God damned Bank doesn't open till 10:00 o'clock"!



The Canol refinery.

One of the few Canadian entrepreneurs among the multitude of Americans in this land of opportunity was Clyde Wann. Clyde had operated a small sawmill and had a couple of extra trucks, which he was able to put to good use, including transporting our water from the pumping station. He went on to create a bowling alley not far from the Bank and it was there that I learned about strikes and gutters and established my average of about 15 for three games. Clyde was generous with his vehicles and we had the use of them for our social life on several occasions.

One of the more memorable journeys I made in the Yukon was a trip to Kluane Lake, about 60 miles northwest of White Horse. On this occasion Clyde drove Frank Fleming and I to the post of Kluane at the southern end of the lake. To the west runs the Kluane Mountain Range with peaks in the 12 - 14,000- foot range, and finally to Mt. Logan at 19,500 feet, the highest peak in Canada. The area has now been turned into a national park, and the mountains are those which appear on the current two dollar postage stamp. The valley in which the lake is situated is about 12-15 miles wide and on the day of our visit, the yellow-golden aspen leaves stretched across and along the valley to the end of vision. This was a time when I regret that I was limited to black & white photography.

I do not recall just how the Johnson's Crossing-Standard Oil operation came about, but I suppose that we were requested by the U.S. Army Engineers to provide the service. In the one case, they provided the premises, equipment and vehicle. In the case of Standard Oil, we simply set up shop in their offices, which were only about five miles up behind the airport. The operation at the oil company was for taking deposits, and selling Money Orders, Drafts and Telegraphic Transfers. We did this on Mondays and Tues-

Road to Kluane (the Alaska Highway west of Whitehorse in 1944)

days from five to eight in the evening with time out for supper. It is was not a very exciting time. In fact my only vivid memory of those hours is Fleming's transformation of his dinner chit into works by Salvador Dali. The expression of bewilderment on the part of the hostess was worth the effort.

What developed was a trio who did the S/O stint on Mondays and Tuesdays, and then on Wednesday afternoons took off for Johnson's Crossing, returning on Friday at which time the entries from J/C were amalgamated into the books of the main branch. In those days we opened Saturdays, but the sub-agency crew were exempted from regular branch duties and told to go about their household chores.

Johnson's Crossing is located where the Alaska Highway crosses the Teslin River. It was also the Junction point where the service road for the CANOL pipeline met the Highway. It was a large and bustling construction camp area where most of the major construction companies had installations.

We made the trip in a "carryall" and were accompanied by a constable and onceby Sgt Peck, of the RCMP. The distance was about 100 miles, on the gravelled, washboard road and it took about three hours to make the trip. The "bank" was in a Nissan hut, divided into sleeping quarters in the rear, with three tellers wickets in the front part. We also had a safe, more for the protection of engraved forms and so on. We opened Wednesday and Thursday evenings and Friday morning and then headed back to White Horse to balance and turn the material over to the people there to complete the records and send the telegraphic transfers. On Thursday mornings we would explore the camp or drive out along the Highway. Here you are just north of the British Columbia border and look south to the Slamgeech and Omineca Mountains. It is a beautiful country of rivers and

Our bank branch office at Teslin.

lakes and snow covered mountains. We paid our first visit to Teslin on the lake of the same name.

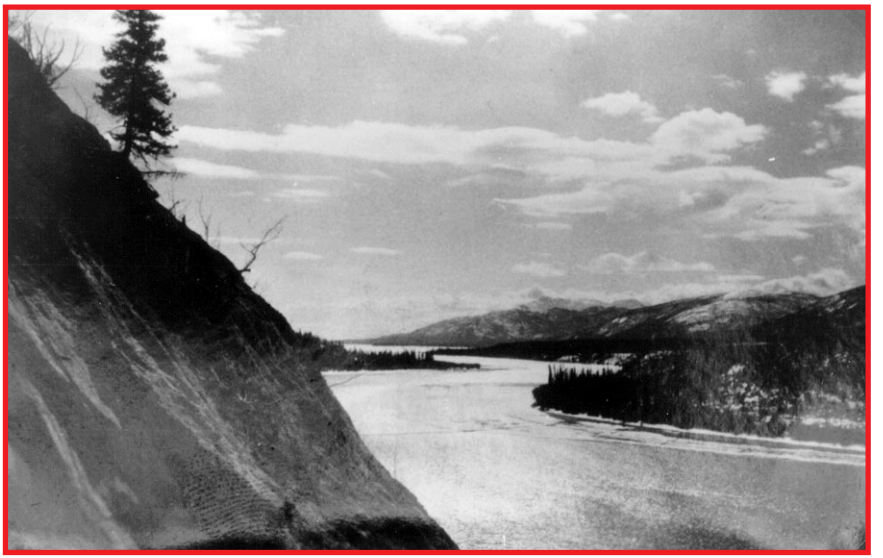
Here, at Teslin, we came across a small cemetery where the graves were marked with the double cross of the Russian Orthodox Church. Teslin was the farthest penetration to the East by the Russians although they did establish posts down the Pacific Coast and in the Hawaiian Islands.

It was now the spring of '44 and some of us were having dim thoughts that we would be transferred outside, so we three, Fleming, Hamilton and I stood aside from the sub-agency operations, so that some of the other chaps could get in on the fun.

What red-blooded Canadian boy could be in the Yukon and not go down to Dawson? The lure of gold, the girls of the Flora Dora, Sam McGee and the Lady that's Known as Lou. Dawson City, Yukon, must be distinguished from Dawson Creek, B.C. The latter had grown from a small country farm town to be the end of steel for the railway and the start of the Alaska Highway. The cheechakos were always getting confused. You went down to Dawson, rather than up because you went down river by paddle-wheeler, or any kind of boat or even a raft as thousands did in the gold rush days.

How did I get to Dawson? Well, forever being my romantic self, it was that ever present drive to see what's over the hill, plus a mild dose of "cherchez la femme". Originally initiated by Charlie Fyfe, the Manager at Dawson, I had been writing to the two girls who made up the staff at Dawson branch. First, a word about Charlie Fyfe. He had opened branches of the Bank at now ghost mining towns such as Gold Bridge and Zeballos. He had worked on the railway at Revelstoke as a locomotive fireman, and even though he had been with the Bank for more than 20 years, he still carried his B of L F & E card- Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers.

Bill Kennedy, who had been at Dawson for a couple of years, was also



Teslin River looking south.

an extoller of the virtues and comeliness of these young women. In his own cryptic style, while discussing their graces and character, he noted that "that Margaret DuBois was a hell-damner." This double-trouble to the equanimity of young men were Hyacinthe Brasseur and Margaret DuBois. (Why is it that every French Canadian heroine is named Margaret DuBois? (Actually I only recalled Margaret's last name this morning after 44 years.)

In April of 1944 we could see that the great projects were tapering off and that some of us would be going outside and were speculating on what might be ahead for us. There was a world out there that we were losing touch with. The North is a seductive mistress - if you stay in her arms too long you will never leave. Kennedy had gone, Carlsen had gone, so McKay and I would be next on the list. The pace of the office had slackened so I decided to make the trip to Dawson.

There are library shelves of the legendary gold rush days of Dawson- even Pierre Berton has got into the act. He is a bit legitimate, having been raised there. I pass through all that, except to mention that Robert Service who gave us "The Shooting of Dan McGrew", "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and a not too bad novel "Anastasia" was an employee of the Bank and wrote some of his works in between posting ledgers. The more solid citizens of the Yukon came in time to feel that Service's distortions created an unfair image of the area as a whole.

But I digress! Dawson is about 350 miles north of White Horse at the joining of the Lewes-Yukon River and the Klondike River. Technically, the river at White Horse is the Lewes and changes its name to Yukon where it meets the Teslin River (Editor's Note: The name was changed in 1949. See Naming the Yukon River in this issue).

In the spring of each year Dawson had, and may still do, its own unique sweepstake. In the same fashion as we, in our urban diversions, have pools on the time of the winning goal in a hockey game, the Yukon operated a pool based on the time the ice "went out" at Dawson. This was timed by inserting a wire deep into the ice, so that the first movement of the ice in the spring would stop a clock to the second and the holder of the ticket nearest to that time would be the winner. This was followed by the consumption of ice-worm cocktails (I jest).

This year there was trouble. The ice declined to break out and move downstream to eventually thaw and go out to the ocean. It then created a very effective dam in the river right at the town. The weather was warming, the winter snows were melting and all of the watershed into the Yukon behind the ice-dam was pouring the melt into the river- and still the ice-dam held and would not let go. Attempts to break the dam by blasting failed, as did bombing by a U.S. plane from Fairbanks. The town was becoming flooded and the buildings downtown, including the Bank, had two-to-three feet of water in them. After a few days, Nature prevailed, the dam let go and the water receded, not gently, but with a rush, leaving great chunks of ice, eight feet thick among the city streets. In the Bank, the water left so abruptly it created a vacuum in the vault so that when the vault door was eventually opened the material on high shelves came crashing to the floor.

While Dawson was going through all this trauma, all flights were cancelled. I managed to get on to the second flight to the town, on Grant McConnachie's newly formed Canadian Pacific Airlines. Grant McC had been a bush pilot who created a one or two-plane line called Yukon Southern, which flew from Vancouver into the North whenever it could find cargo and passengers. The story was, and I can quite believe it, that Grant would fly into White Horse and have to borrow money from local people to buy gas for the return trip to Vancouver. However not in the times of these memoirs.

Dawson was then the capitol of the Yukon and was a larger and more developed community than White Horse, but had been largely by-passed by the activities of the Alaska Highway and the CANOL project. The Bank building had been remodelled in recent years and was a great improvement over the crude affair we found at White Horse in the fall of 1942. One of the Bank's activities in the Yukon was the shipment of gold as brought in by the miners to the Mint and then crediting the proceeds to their accounts. Over the years many thousand ounces of gold went through the branch, and inevitably tiny flakes would fall into the cracks between the floor boards .At the time of the remodelling, the contractor Arne Anderson, who had since moved on to White Horse, made an arrangement whereby he would keep any gold dust he found when tearing up the floor. If I remember correctly, he was in pocket about $500 for this added bonus.

The evening of my arrival, I had dinner with Charlie Fyfe and his wife, Cathy. Cathy Fyfe had, the previous year, sent us the barrel of fresh vegetables, so avidly received, so heinously stolen. Flowers and vegetables could be grown at Dawson, but the soil at White Horse was an alluvial clay in which only the scrub pines could survive. Also at the meal were the Double-

Myself, Hamilton, and Fleming.

trouble girls. Yes-and they were charmers. I stayed overnight in the staff quarters above the Bank, and spent the next day photographing the town, including the great chunks of ice left behind when the ice went out. That evening I spent with the Brasseurs. (During the day I found that the revenge of Montezuma had followed me North, and it was here that I learned to have Fowler's Extract of Wild Strawberry at the ready when travelling.)

"Double Trouble," Margaret Dubois, left, and Hyacinthe Brasseur.

Next day, we headed off in a pick-up into the hinterland south east of Dawson into an area where the gold dredges were still working. It was now more than 40 years since the gold fields were discovered, the quick and easy claims were long ago worked out, and production came largely from the dredges. Difficult to describe in a few words, they chew their way through the terrain, and in exchange for the precious metal they collect, leave a devastation across the landscape. Parts of this area are in the permafrost, which is to say that although a few feet of the earth may thaw in the spring, below a certain depth the earth is permanently frozen. In prehistoric times and in between shifts in the polar cap and ice ages, this was a land, as was Siberia, where the Mastodons existed before some cataclysm led to their passing. Occasionally, the dredges would bring up pieces of Mastodon bones and sometimes the tusks, which were highly prized for a small local ivory business. Bill Kennedy had a cribbage board made from a mastodon tusk, with gold pegs to complete the set. There are a number of other metals in the Yukon and sometimes tin oxide would be brought up by the dredges.

We passed along Hunker Creek, where I panned for gold and easily got colours. (I had panned around home, so I was familiar with the technique). And then out to the dredge which surprised me as to its sheer size,

I am reminded of an ocean going oil rig. The buckets in the picture of the dredge are seven feet across, which will give an indication of the magnitude of the whole machine.

And so on to Granville where we sought the hospitality of an Old Prospector and indeed he had come over the Chilcoot as a young man and had been devoured by the North. However it is not for historical reasons that he is noted here. This is where I learned the meaning of “strong” coffee. I’m sure that the Old Prospector first put the coffee into the pot for boiling in ’98 and had been adding to the grounds ever since!

Next day, flew back to White Horse via Mayo, to learn that a significant time in my life was closing, for word had come that McKay and I were summoned back to the life outside. And so in a week or so, we reversed the original journey. The White Pass to Skagway, down the waters of the Panhandle, past Wrangell, St.Petersburg, Juneau, Prince Rupert, Seymour Narrows, Ripple Rock, under the Lion’s Gate Bridge and to a berth at Pier D.

Well, we were home and we would never be the same again We had grown. We had learned to make our own decisions and rise or fall by them and we had acquired a confidence in our ability to cope with the unexpected.

Around and Around

By Sam Holloway

I had a friend in Dawson City who passed away a couple of years ago. He survived 80 years of hard living and right up to the end his health seemed good. He was short and wide, with a square head and expressionless face. He seldom smiled and I never heard him laugh. He always wanted to be a "character" but as he freely admitted, he had the wrong name and personality for it. His name was Tony Fritz.

He came to Whitehorse one time and visited me in my shack. In those days I always kept sugar, tea, and so forth in tobacco cans which were clearly labelled. As my friend spooned tobacco into his coffee, he told me about a gold mining experience he had in B.C.

He and a partner went bar mining on the Fraser River. Bar mining is where you shovel the gravel from the upstream end of sandbars into a sluice box or rocker to extract the gold. They bought an aluminium boat, a sluicebox, pumps, shovels and the like, and drove to the upper reaches of the Fraser where they cast off into the unknown.

"Undt Zam," he said to me, "A-vay vee vent, down the river, go-ink like hell. Vee came to a virlpool and in vee vent, into the virlpool.

"Around and around vee vent. Around and around and around and around and around. The motor vee had on the boat were too small and wouldn't push us out of there. Undt so, around and around vee vent, around and around and around, for three days.

"Finally someone came along with a bigger boat and took us aboard. Undt so far as I know, Zam, that little boat is still there in the Fraser River, goink around and around and around."

He lived in Whitehorse at a time when television became popular. He started a TV antenna installation business, bought a truckload of antennas and a big ladder which he tied to the roof of his station wagon. On his first contract he realized he was terrified of heights and the fire department had to rescue him from the rooftop. So, he opened a TV repair shop. Nothing to it; just change tubes till the things worked.

People brought in their TVs and paid the inspection fee. But the new models didn't have tubes. They had "little black things" that were soldered right into the frame. But he couldn't shut the business down; he needed all those inspection fees. Finally he left for Dawson City.

One winter he leased a trapline and equipped himself with a snowmobile, traps, insulated tent, and set off along the Dempster Highway. I saw him

later that winter visiting the nursing station. He had frozen his eyes coming back on his Ski-doo in very cold weather.

"Did you get any furs?" I asked him.

"Nothing. I was so busy keeping the fire going and chopping ice for water that I had no time for trapping."

Later that winter I visited him at his house in Dawson. He had just tipped up a bottle of Crazy Glue instead of his eye drops and I snapped it out of his hand just in time. That spring he bought a huge old Ford car and stuck a taxi sign on it. The paint had faded badly and he drove it to Whitehorse for a body job. Oh how proud he was of his shiny taxi. His first call came on a sunny afternoon when a lady phoned from the Downtown Hotel. I happened to be sitting on the boardwalk outside the hotel watching two workers coating the porch and supporting columns with thick white paint.

The taxi pulled up; a woman staggered out of the bar and bumped into one of the white columns. She spun herself around and clutched a handrail to keep from falling then crashed into the next column. She straightened her hair with white paint and then, head down, aimed for the taxi. My friend screamed for her to stop but, too late. She fell against the cab and slid to the ground, leaving trails of white paint all over the side of it. Then she got up to make another try, grabbing a door handle. The driver pushed her back and they grappled each other until they fell into the dust and gravel of the street. The Mounties came and my friend was charged with assault. He never succeeded in getting the paint off his clothes or the taxi.

Later that summer he drove a load of tourists some 20 miles up the Bonanza Creek road. Something fell out of the engine and they had to walk back to Dawson in the rain and the dark. Word got around and his business slowed to nothing.

A couple of years earlier he opened a little sidewalk cafe in Dawson City. It was in an old log building that had been leaning and fading since the Gold Rush. While he sweated over the grill amongst the cobwebs and gloom, a lady friend of his served the customers through a trap door that opened onto the street. She had "big hair" with little sticks, leaves and puffballs caught in it here and there. She always managed to cough on the food as she passed it through the trapdoor. She had a peculiar, chronic cough that sounded like a cat hoarking up a hairball. The Health Department shut the business down later. A customer had seen my friend drop a wiener on the floor then brush it off on his sleeve before slapping it on a hot dog bun.

Then he opened a fish 'n chips stand in the back of Diamond Tooth Gertie's gambling hall. While he was catching fish in the Yukon River, his boat tipped over and he tumbled into the glacial waters. A rescue squad saw him go under for the third time but they managed to hook him into their boat. They stretched him out on a blanket beside the river and called the RCMP to report the death of my friend.

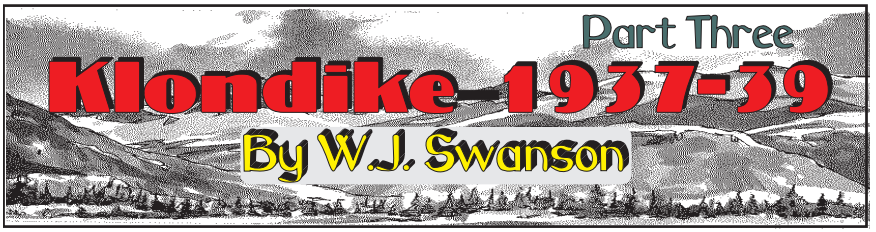
About twenty minutes later he sat up, belched some sandy water and

weeds, then headed to the bar for a drink. Someone told him his fish 'n chips stand had been closed by the health authorities.

It seemed that people entering Diamond Tooth Gertie's were troubled by the horrible stench coming from the back of the saloon. It was so thick their clothes smelled rotten when they left the place. The cause turned out to be a pail of fish that my friend had left under his counter, covered with a newspaper. The authorities estimated the fish had been there for several weeks.

I have only recounted a few of my friend's efforts to succeed in Dawson City. He had a very sincere, aristocratic manner and could squeeze bank mangers and friends for financing. I miss him when I drive to Dawson now. I could always find him losing money in a poker game, talking about his next great enterprise. He seemed content most of the time which proves that dreams are better than reality. If only he had managed to become a "character" before he died.

A Dawson street scene in 1976 (SH photo).



...Continued from Issue #10

Later that spring, some of the more enterprising, young fellows around town got the idea of panning the ground from under the floors of the old saloons. Gold dust had been used as currency in the old days; gold dust got spilled. The floors were generally made of rough lumber and there were cracks between the boards. The idea was quite successful. Some groups were taking out more than an ounce of gold a day.

I stood and watched one group working the underfloor area of one of the old saloons on Front Street; they were using a wash tub in place of a gold pan so they could handle more material in each washing. While sluicing off the water and muck there could be seen, coming to the surface every so often, a large yellowish blob that created considerable interest. The workers thought they'd found a large nugget, but on recovering it they found someone had melted down a piece of brazing rod and dumped a blob of yellow brass into the tub.

While waiting to go to work that spring I had received letters from several friends and relatives asking about work prospects around Dawson; I had written to them stating I thought prospects would be good; however, as spring approached workers began arriving in increasing numbers until I began to doubt the advice I had given so, being concerned they might not find work, I wrote again to each of them pointing out my concerns and suggesting it would probably not be a good time to come north.

In time I heard from all but one of those to whom I had written, each saying they had decided not to come. From one person I'd written; however, I'd had no reply and was becoming concerned that my letter might have gone astray. Then, just a day or so before I was scheduled to return to work, I was walking along Third Avenue when I came face to face with Graham Mitchell, the school chum I'd been concerned about.

Following an initial greeting and a couple of thumps to his chest, I asked, "Didn't you get my letter?"

He replied, "Oh sure, I got your letter but I decided to come anyway."

Although I felt rather like I was deserting him, I had to get back to work - I believe it was the following day that I returned to work at Lower Sulphur. But Graham did quite well on his own; he found odd jobs around town to keep him occupied and about three weeks later he began work on the stripping-crew at Middle Sulphur - about six miles from Lower Sulphur.

I also met several fellows from the Chilliwack area, some of whom I'd

known previously; among them Ike and Julie Hendrix from the Chilliwack Valley Motorcycle Club and John Storey from the east Chilliwack area.

It was early April when I began work that year - what a relief to get back to work. I'd also learned that we were getting a pay increase; if my memory serves me correctly, in 1937 the labour crews worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and we were paid $0.55 per hour straight time. In 1938, probably because of the arrival of an overabundance of work seekers in Dawson City that spring, the working hours were reduced to nine hours a day for seven days a week. We were then paid $0.55 for up to 48 hours each week and $0.60 per hour for anything over 48 hours. When the water started to flow that spring I was again given the job of operating a monitor on the stripping gang and, because monitor men worked 12-hour shifts for seven days each week, my total pay increased somewhat.

I enjoyed working on the monitors, particularly right after start-up in the spring and those last weeks before shut-down in the fall. During those periods, with several hours of darkness each night, I viewed some of the most fantastic displays of Northern Lights I've ever seen or hope to see. Some nights I'd block the monitor in position, sit down and just watch the display for half an hour or so. There were continually moving patterns of those lights, greens, blues, reds, yellows and all colors between - to watch them created an almost-hypnotic sensation. Martin Larsen often spoke about the Northern Lights and he would say, "Sometimes I felt they were trying to talk to me." - a beautiful, unforgettable sight.

Bill Swanson operating monitor (or nozzle) at Lower Sulphur. August, 1938.

While on one of my trips to Granville Camp, I met a couple of interesting people: One was a tall, lean, red-haired fellow of about my own age. We rode in the back of a truck from Dawson, over the Summit and down along Dominion Creek. There were several of us on the truck and, although we talked much of the way, I don't recall any names being mentioned. The red-haired fellow, as I recall, got off at Upper Dominion camp; his name, I'm now sure, was Pierre Berton.

Another, John Hayden, was a welder working at Granville Camp - an Indian and a real outdoorsman. A few years previously John had been guide and dog team driver for an expedition sponsored by the National Geographic Society into the St. Elias Mountains, in the southwest corner of the Territory. Another winter he had spent trapping in the Blackstone River country northeast of Dawson and in late 1938 he chartered an aircraft to fly him, and his dogs, into the headwaters of the Macmillan River. He spent the winter there trapping, then mushed back to Dawson before the spring thaw.

As a contrast, I worked with another fellow on the Lower Sulphur stripping crew, Murray Stevens, who had been in the country for more than 15 years. Each year he would save a fair stake and announce that he was quitting the country; but it took him many years to get past the first bar in Dawson - I'm not sure he ever did.

One of our first jobs that spring was to carry out repairs to the intake. Water for our stripping operations was taken from Australia Creek, at a point about six miles south and a bit west of Granville Camp. From the intake, water was pumped across the valley and about 325 feet up the side

of the hill. From there it was conveyed by ditch along the hillside, to the three camps along Sulphur Creek.

Leaks had developed around the base of that intake structure so a crew, about eight of us, rode a trailer pulled by a D-4 cat out to make the necessary repairs. A few of the men on that project were: foreman, Jack Patterson; engineer, Redge Haskins; workers, Dave Keeling, Murray Stevens, John Dahl, John Fairweather, one or two others and me. We camped at the intake site where the mosquitoes fed on us for a week or so while we repaired the base of the intake. We then returned to the main camp.

Granville was the camp farthest from Dawson, about a 50 mile drive; therefore we didn't take three days off to go to town unless it was absolutely necessary. One of my fellow nozzlemen (monitor operators), John Fairweather, had to go in once. He'd had a few beers one night that left him with a bad taste in his mouth next morning. To freshen his mouth a bit, he took his false teeth out and tried to wash them in the high pressure jet of water. His plate disappeared and he had to get another.

Early in the stripping operation that year, we washed away a complete skeleton of some large animal. We first noted the bones about three feet below the muck surface and, as we washed away the thawed material, more of the bones became visible as others disappeared in the water jet. At one stage we could see a long section of the spine, then the ribs and other bones. I once paced the length, from skull bones to end of spine, at about 18 feet. Someone said it was a moose, but moose don't get that big - I now believe it was the skeleton of a mastodon.

I knew him only as Taddy; partly bald with a fringe of grey hair around the lower parts of his scalp, of medium height and with a reddish complexioned face that always seemed to be on the verge of a smile, he owned the only retail store within about 12 miles of Granville camp. That general store, "Taddy's", where one could purchase anything from a chocolate bar to a pair of rubber boots, was housed in a log structure that must have been built around the turn of the century. All wares were piled haphazardly on several log tables running the full width of the room (Ed Mirvish could have copied Taddy's style for Honest Ed's in Toronto.) I believe that each of the workers from Granville Camp made the one-mile pilgrimage to Taddy's about once each week. And, of all the men who arrived in camp needing credit, I knew of no one who was refused.

In 1991 I drove the loop from the summit, down Sulphur Creek to Granville and back along Dominion Creek. A mile or so east of Granville I looked for, and found, the remains of Taddy's store. The roof had caved in, walls had fallen over and some of the logs had disintegrated from rot. But I had the feeling that, if I were to come back about midnight, I just might see Taddy's ghost haunting the remains.

One of the oilers on dredge No 6, operating near Granville camp, had a bad accident that summer. He'd been working on the stacker conveyor when

part of his clothing caught in a roller, pulled his arm into the works and tore it off at the shoulder. He fell onto the conveyor belt and was dumped off the end of the stacker along with numerous stones and boulders. I was told he then got up and walked about 100 yards, around to the front of the dredge where he could be seen, before falling unconscious. After spending several months in the Dawson City Hospital, he married his nurse and they left the Yukon. When I last saw him, about one and a half years later, he was coping very well with his one arm, working as an accountant for a logging company.

Looking forward to another winter, I decided to leave the job ahead of most of the workers and see if I could pick up a winter job in the underground, silver and lead mines, around Keno. Should I find no work there, I had decided that I'd go "outside" for the winter.

Leaving Granville camp early in September, I stopped a couple of days in Dawson then flew to Mayo. In Mayo I hitched a ride with Spike MacDonald, a truck driver I'd known in Dawson who was then driving for the Mayo Mines. We drove the 30 miles or so to Keno where I made a fruitless contact with the Silver King Mine, and a similar contact with another mine operating near Elsa. I then returned to Mayo as a disappointed work seeker.

Then, with my mind made up to go south for the winter, I continued my flight with Northern Airways, flying first to Carcross, then, via Atlin, to Juneau. In Juneau I boarded a ship to Seattle, caught a bus back to Canada and arrived at my sister's place, near Aldergrove, just before midnight.

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After visiting my family in the Chilliwack/Vancouver area, I'd stopped for a couple of months at my sister's place, near Bentley Alberta, and it was from there that I intended to make my way back to the Klondike. I timed my departure to coincide with the travel excursion fares when one could purchase a return ticket on the train at a cost that was usually lower than that of a normal one way fare. But, after hitching a ride to Edmonton, I decided to try and save money by riding the freights to Prince Rupert.

It was still quite cold in mid-March as I walked to the railway junction at Calder, just north of Edmonton, hoping to find a freight going to Rupert. Just as I arrived, a long freight began pulling out of the yards, going west. Without even asking anyone about its destination I climbed aboard, but before I'd even got inside a boxcar a brakeman appeared with a stick in his hand and told me to, "Get off" - I did. On my way back across the railway yard I asked one of the workers where that train was going. His reply, "Up to the Peace River country." In my mind I thanked the brakeman for chasing me off that car; it was still damned cold in the north, and I certainly wasn't dressed for the long, cold ride to the Peace River - I'd have probably ended up as one of those unidentified statistics found in an empty boxcar.

While walking back towards the center of town, I gave up the idea of riding a freight so early in the year and bought a round-trip, excursion ticket, to Prince Rupert - I was on my way. My ticket was coach only, so I would

sleep in my seat. I had my money, somewhere in the order of $50.00, rolled up in my pants pocket, sufficient cash which I was sure would get me back to Dawson. But, while sleeping, my money either fell onto the floor and was picked up or someone picked my pocket; I'll never know just what happened, but when I awoke all but a few coins of my money had disappeared.

On arrival in Prince Rupert late the following evening, I had, as I recall, coins amounting to 17 cents in my pocket. The train operated only twice weekly between Edmonton and Prince Rupert so I decided to go to the police station and see if I could sleep in the jail. I could, and I spent three nights as a guest of the Provincial Government. The beds were not the best (a blanket on a large block of concrete) and the food was not of the best cuisine, but I was warm and I wasn't hungry.

One of the detainees at the time was a young Scot, a pleasant fellow who I talked with at some length. But, when I asked what he was "in" for, he just mumbled something about, "not important," and stopped talking. I finally learned the reason from one of the other boarders: That young Scot had been at a dance, had a few beers and wanted more but was broke. He'd asked several people if they would loan him the price of a beer but no one offered. He then left the dance hall, went out into the pouring rain and turned up a short time later, outside the dance hall, with an armful of umbrellas which he was selling for ten cents each - just the price of a glass of beer - he'd broken into a store and stolen them.

While in Prince Rupert, I arranged to send a telegram, collect, to Chappie Chapman, a store owner in Dawson with whom I'd had previous dealings, asking if he would advance my fare to Dawson. But, when the time came for the train to leave on its return run to Edmonton I'd still not had a reply from Chappie so, using the return portion of my ticket, I got back on the train and began the long ride back to Edmonton.

With visions of eating very little on the train, I was determined to make my few coins last all the way to Edmonton. When we stopped in Smithers, however, an elderly fellow boarded the train and sat down beside me; he walked with an obvious limp and I learned that he had lost the lower part of one leg in an accident and had it replaced by a wooden one. He owned a small ranch and was shipping, by the same mixed train, a carload of cattle to Vancouver - and he was looking for someone to help him water and feed his cattle during a few hours stopover near Jasper. After I'd told him my story and offered to assist in the watering and feeding of his cattle, he bought my meals on the train and paid me two dollars for helping with the cattle - that done, he continued on to Vancouver and I went to Edmonton.

Still wondering how I would get back to the Yukon, on arriving in Edmonton I decided to send a telegram to my oldest sister, asking if she could loan me $50.00. Being young and inexperienced, I expected a reply back in an hour or so but it didn't come so, being very cold and very broke with nowhere to sleep, when evening came I began hitchhiking back towards Bentley. Soon a huge, semi-trailer, tank truck stopped and I climbed in. After talking to the driver for a full minute or so, he asked if I could drive a

truck. On getting an affirmative reply he said, "Well how about driving this one for awhile. I've been driving steady since yesterday morning and I'm beat." He stopped and, while I walked around and got in the driver's side, he slid across the seat, leaned into the corner of the cab and was asleep almost immediately. I looked down at the controls of the truck and realized it was different than any I had driven before. It had two gear shifts and it was night so I couldn't see to read any instructions; but I reached for the nearest shift, got the rig moving and drove all the way to Lacombe, the highway-town nearest to Bentley; there I woke the driver and we pulled-over at a small cafe for coffee and a snack, courtesy of the driver.

After the semi had departed for Calgary, I wandered around Lacombe during the midnight hours until I found an old implement shed where I could get out of the icy wind. I had only a light summer sleeping bag and I crawled into it with all my clothes, even my boots, on. The temperature was probably about minus 10 degrees F and there I shivered through the rest of the night.

The following morning I hitched back to Bentley and borrowed a few dollars from my sister and brother-in-law before leaving again for Edmonton; there I found $50.00 waiting in answer to my telegram. I bought another excursion ticket to Prince Rupert and, on arriving there, found a ticket to Dawson waiting for me that Chappie had arranged. Back in Dawson a few days later, I called in to see Chappie and thank him for helping me in my time of need.

Shortly after my arrival back in Dawson the Yukonia Hotel, that stood at the southeast corner of Front and King Streets, was destroyed by fire. On seeing smoke billowing out of the building about mid-afternoon, I went down to assist the volunteer Fire Department. During the afternoon the temperature was bearable, but it was still early April and the temperature dropped to well below freezing at night. I was tending one of the fire hoses and, by about nine o'clock in the evening, a foot-long cone of ice had formed on the outlet end of the nozzle; my clothes were soaked, coated with ice and stiff from frozen spray. By about three o'clock in the morning I was chilled right through and, feeling I had to get warm, turned my job over to someone else, returned to the Occidental Hotel where I was staying and went to bed. Returning late the following morning I found the fire was out, except for a few smouldering spots, and the standing walls of the burnt-out building were coated with inches of ice. That was the only major fire in Dawson City while I was there.

Being among the first to start work at Lower Sulphur that spring, I worked for a couple of weeks on preparatory work before the water began flowing, then went back to work on the monitors again.

One rather unusual thing happened that spring. Two of the seasonal workers announced that they were bringing their wives to the jobsite to live with them. One of the fellows arrived in camp with a small canvas tent which he erected out behind the bunkhouses - his wife was scheduled to arrive about a week after he did. Just a few days before his wife was due to

arrive I went out and looked over his camping setup - it was pathetic. Other than the bush out behind the tent, there was no toilet facility; there were no cooking facilities other than an open space to build a fire in front of the tent; and there was no floor of any kind, other than the damp ground, to sleep on.

But, on the last night before his wife was due to arrive, a group of workers, feeling sorry for her, got together, straightened up the tent, put a wood floor in it, placed a few rocks in front of the tent to form a fire pit, fashioned a couple of benches around the fire pit and constructed a bush type outhouse - not ideal but a great improvement. The fellow was rather a simple sort; I couldn't help but wonder how long the marriage would last.

Bill Swanson cutting moss for intake repair, Australia Creek. About May, 1938.

The other fellow who'd brought his wife to camp was much better prepared: He'd rented a small log cabin from Taddy and, although there was only one room, it was quite liveable. One morning, while on my way to breakfast, I saw that fellow in camp and asked what he was doing there so early. He told me that his wife had chased him out of the house - then he explained why: They had only an outdoor toilet so, for convenience, they were using one of the old "thunder mugs" that was kept under the bed. The fellow, being somewhat of a practical joker, had put about half a bottle of Eno's Fruit Salts in the bottom of the dry pot. His wife got up during the early hours to relieve herself and the mixture foamed up and overflowed onto the floor. He thought it was a great joke, but his wife wasn't amused. She sent him off to work without breakfast that morning. But he spent the following night at home so he must have been forgiven.

I worked again as a nozzleman (on the monitors) at Lower Sulphur that summer of 1939. In general it was an uneventful year as far as work was concerned. But, I had talked with several people who had worked in New Zealand on a dredging operation there. I had also heard about a dredging operation starting in New Guinea. I'd no idea how to get to New Guinea, but I did have information about New Zealand so I decided I would go there. I applied for, and was issued a passport, on which I listed my profession as mechanic; I then booked passage on the MV Niagara that, as I recall, was scheduled to sail about November 20, 1939.

But plans change: Rumors of war had been heard around the camp for

much of the summer. Great Britain declared war on September 3rd and the following day I quit my job. Other travels were forgotten. I'd heard it was going to be a short war and I wanted to get involved before it was finished. After catching a lift to Dawson City, I booked passage on the SS Klondike, one of the last riverboats to leave Dawson that year.

The trip up the Yukon River was a memorable one. I had heard of the terrible Five Finger Rapids and made a point of being on deck, to observe, as the crew winched the old sternwheeler up the fast water and through the easternmost channel. As we passed by the protruding rocks, I vowed that one day I would travel down that river in a canoe - I haven't done it, yet.

From Whitehorse I proceeded by rail to Skagway. There I received a shock. Canada was at war so, in order to change money from Canadian to US dollars, we were charged a fee of 20 percent. Until war was declared the exchange rate had been almost at par. But there was no choice; I bought American money, booked passage on the Princess Louise and arrived in Vancouver a few days later.

In Vancouver it was my intention to enlist immediately - I could go home for a visit later. I called at the recruiting offices of the Air Force, the Navy and the Army. Everywhere I got the same reply, "We are not recruiting just now." After several days of making the rounds I was still not, and had no idea when, I might be in uniform - I was very frustrated.

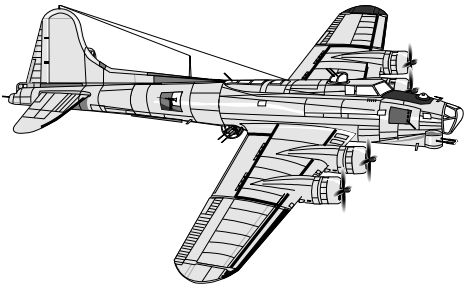
But, the World's Fair was under way in San Francisco at that time so, with a bit of money in my pocket, I bought a bus ticket and went off to see the fair. While there, even more inspiring than Sally Rand, was a display of and a tour through, one of the very new B-17 aircraft on display by the US Army Air Corps showing the latest in aviation technology. I'd always been interested in flying and, while in the Yukon, had actually signed up for and had begun a correspondence course in aviation.

I think I drooled a bit as I walked through that aircraft - what a beautiful monster it was. When I left the aircraft, walking backwards so I could look at it just a bit longer, I was determined to learn to fly. I didn't know just when, or how, but sometime, somehow I was going to learn to fly.

On returning from San Francisco, I first went to Vancouver for another try at the recruiting offices - still no luck. But, while at the RCAF recruiting office, I was told that they expected to be signing up some Wireless Operators soon. So, about November 1, 1939, I enrolled in a course of Wireless Telegraphy at Sprott-Shaw School, then located on Robson Street, just north of Granville, in Vancouver.

There was more to radio and wireless telegraphy than I had first anticipated, but I stuck at it and eventually attained a morse code speed of about ten words a minute, and I'd even begun to get a vague idea about what went on inside a radio set. Then one day, during the latter part of February, I decided to try the RCAF again. On that occasion they took my name and gave me a test in Morse code, which I passed. I also had a medical check, filled out more papers and the following morning, February 20, 1940, along with several others, I was sworn in as a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force.

So, I did manage to get involved in the war - just five years and eight months before it was finished. I went overseas in August, 1940, as a Wireless Operator. About two years later I re-mustered, returned to Canada, trained as a pilot and finished the war with a Coastal Command squadron based in Iceland - flying, of all things, those inspirational B-17s.



A Dawson street scene in 1976 (SH photo).

The Goldseeker

Part Five of Ten

"Beth!" I screamed. "Beth, it's me!"

My chair clattered backward into another table as I leaped to my feet. All eyes in the crowd stared at me in amazement then turned toward the stage—but she didn't answer. Again I cried her name; the eyes flitted back to me and then to Beth.

"Hank! Is that really you?" She was trying to see through all the glaring lights of the stage and the smoke drifting over the floor.

"Yes! I'm here!"

"Come to my room upstairs." She turned then and disappeared into the curtains at the side of the stage.

"This is just part of the act!" someone said. "She'll be right back, you fellows. Nobody has ever gone to her room!"

Goldfever Jim stood up and gazed at me before he headed for the doors. I followed him and called his name as he walked down the street but he kept going, moving faster when I called again. I turned into the dark alley beside the dancehall where I saw a stairway leading to the second floor. I had my hand on the rail and started climbing when I heard Jack Smith call out from above. I saw him outlined above me with his two bullies hulking beside him.

"You've made her sick. She has to rest a while before you can see her. Come back in half an hour."

"No! I'm coming up there right now."

I made it the first landing before looking up again. Three long gun barrels pointed at me from above, each one aimed for my heart.

"Half an hour, Jack?"

"Yes," he said. "Now move yourself out onto the street until then."

I walked back into the saloon. Every face turned to stare at the man who had a date with the Frozen Queen. I could see them pondering why I came back. To satisfy their curiosity, I said in a loud voice that I had to wait for her to get ready. 'What did that mean? To get ready?'

I waved them off. Should I have a drink? No. Not now. I knew that once I tasted rum, I had no more power over it than I would over a snowball careening down a mountain, heading for disaster. A couple of fiddlers sat on stools up on the stage, waiting to start the nightly dance. The Ladies of the Evening stood about like wilted flowers waiting to be plucked. All eyes drifted

toward me then looked away. Nothing could happen until they knew the situation with myself and the Queen.

I was a celebrity. The envy of every miner and cheechako in the Klondike. But I could feel the resentment in the air. For so long now they had held the image of Beth in their hearts, a goddess so beautiful she could fill any man's dreams for a lifetime—but unattainable to earthly mortals. They could return to their dingy little cabins and burrow into the frozen muck but just before they dropped into exhausted sleep at the end of the day they could think of Dawson City, of lights and music—and Queen Beth.

And here I was, about to take that dream away. Suddenly Jack Smith strode out into the centre of the stage. He held up a small sheet of paper and called for silence.

"Henry Carlsbad, if he be in this room, hear this. The lady Beth will not see you, tonight nor any other night. She says that you have betrayed her and for you to go back to the woman you brought into the Klondike with you. A woman named Clementine."

Again I leaped to my feet and my chair clattered to the floor behind me. "That's a lie! You've told her a bunch of lies, Jack Smith."

"Gentlemen!" called Jack Smith. " This man is calling me a liar. But I have 30 witnesses to swear they saw him land here with another woman. I think we need to teach him some manners and I'm assuming none of you will interfere."

He came down the steps and was joined by three others. They marched toward me and I backed up toward the door, pushing it open behind me. Then I stood may ground. They would have to come at me one a time.

Then I remembered my vow to Beth: to forsake violence for the rest of my life, as I had forsaken all other women. I turned and ran down the street. I looked back to see Jack Smith's thugs outside the door to the Monte Carlo. They stood there and laughed. I could hear more laughter from inside the building. Then Jack Smith came out and looked down the street to where I crouched in the semi-darkness.

"She's all mine now, Hank. Haw haw haw."

He was the last to go back inside. But he didn't quite make it. I drove my fist into his kidneys and he fell through the door. His goons rushed at me and I punched the first one. Blood squirted from his nose and the others hesitated. Something caught my arms from two sides and I found myself powerless to move. Jack Smith's goon squad stopped in their tracks and watched me being hauled away by the Mounties.

"Thirty days for disturbing the peace," said the judge the next morning. They set me to sawing and splitting wood in the police compound. All this wood went to heat the police barracks. The prisoners got three meals a day, no visitors allowed. The guard brought me a letter from Fauntleroy in which he explained that all our supplies had been hauled to their cabin. And to come for a visit as soon as I got out.

I heard from the other prisoners a few details about Beth. She had rejected the company of all men in the Klondike save one: a priest named

Father Judge. This frail priest ran a small hospital that was filled to overflowing with men sick from scurvy and disease, from frostbite and self-inflicted gunshot wounds. Beth came to help him every Sunday. It was said that when she walked among the patients, even the worst of them forgot their pain and smiled at the angel among them. Father Judge called her his Mary Magdelene and wanted her to quit the Monte Carlo and flee the devils of her past, and to become a nun. But she would not, not yet. It was also said that she was the richest woman in the Klondike but a good part of her gold went to support Father Judge's hospital.

I decided I better go to see this holy man. I would tell him that this woman belonged to me and that no power on earth or in heaven could keep us apart for very long.

After a month on the woodpile, the Mounties let me out of jail one frosty morning. My feet crunched on the hard-packed snow as I walked along Front Street till I came to Jordy's bulging tent. He was sitting by his stove reading and hardly gave me a glance as I slumped into a chair beside him.

"You're not very welcome in this town, Hank. The miners are all saying you've betrayed their queen, that she might become a nun, all because of you. "

"Not because of me, Jordy. Because of her English blood, and her goddammed father. I'm not telling you any more, else it'll be spread all over the Yukon. Now, are you still willing to grubstake me? To go up on Goldfever Jim's ground?"

"Well, he left a couple of days after you landed in jail. He sold me a share in his claim and if you want to go up there, you can work with him. I'll pay you a wage if you bring back some gold."

"All right. Get me an outfit together and I'll come back later to pick it up. Jordy, loan me a pen and some paper, will you?"

I sat there scratching away, dipping the pen into the ink, looking for ways to tell Beth how I felt, and the truth of everything that happened and why my letters never reached her. Jordy gave me a brown envelope and I took the letter down to the little clutch of tents and half-finished building that served as Father Judge's hospital.

They called him the "Saint of Dawson" for his work in helping the sick, while growing ever sicker himself. I found him there kneeling by the bed of a woman from one of the dancehalls. His large brown eyes shone in his skeletal face, whether from disease and weariness, or from the fever of his faith, I couldn't tell.

"Elizabeth?" he queried, as he peered at the letter through his round glasses. His worn clothing hung in tatters on his bony frame and I saw his hands shake as he held the letter.

"Queen Beth," I said. "Will you give it to her when she comes?"

"You know the young lady well?"

"From childhood," I answered. I could see the curiosity in his face.

"She is very special here in Dawson," he said. "Among the miners."

"I know." I turned to walk out and glanced at the lady he had been treating. Her bed had been surrounded by hanging sheets to give her privacy from the men. I recognized her as the big woman who had been throttling Clemmy on the sternwheeler. Just behind her was a row of beds, each filled with a goldseeker beaten down by scurvy or the Dawson disease, typhoid fever. They had been gravely weakened by their trek into the Land of Gold and many of them would be buried here.

"Is she all right, Father?" I said, pointing to the woman. She seemed okay on her trip in here."

"I think she will recover," he said. "She suffers from too much alcohol—and despair. 'Tis the fate of most of the dancehall women."

"What about Beth? I mean, is she going that way too? "

"It's a different kind of despair she has, my son. She has never told me her troubles. I pray every night for her soul to come to God for healing. It is my intuition that she has a calling."

"A calling?" My stomach tightened with fear at the words. His intelligent eyes took in my reaction.

"Could it be, my son, that of all the men in this valley of gold, only you and I have seen beyond her beauty, to the person inside?"

"But how can a dancehall woman, one who takes money from men, have a calling? Won't your church refuse her?"

"The church is full of good people. But we always make room for the lost ones. It is for them that we exist."

"Will you give her the letter?"

"Yes."

I trusted him to give her the letter. but as I walked away I felt more troubled than if I had never brought the it to him. I should have given the letter to one of the girls from the riverboat to take to Beth. Anyhow, I believed it best for her to read it before I attempted to see her again.

Jordy had made up a pack for me. He had me sign a paper promising a percentage of any gold I might find on Golden Gulch. I shouldered the pack and, stumbling under its weight, set out for the bridge across the Klondike River. I said hello to men I met along the street but none would return my greeting.

By mid-afternoon I had reached Fauntleroy's cabin. A lean-to covered with a tarp had been attached to the cabin. I lifted a flap to enter and saw a shelf lined with books. A row of benches covered the rest of the dirt floor. I knocked and heard big feet shuffling toward the door.

"Hank! You're back. Look. This is my classroom. I teach the miners to read and write. Every other day I teach philosophy and we study Shakespeare. They pay me in gold, Hank. Look here."

He grabbed a lard can from his bookshelf and held it out with two hands. I looked inside. The can was half-filled with gleaming nuggets. We stepped inside the cabin which was cheerfully decked out with curtains, a tablecloth, and a fancy cover on the bed. Still only one bed here, I noticed.

I walked back to Jordy's tent to fetch my pack. Dawson was the most expensive town in the world; I had not a penny and were it not for my grubstake from Jordy, I too would be lying on a cot at Father Judge's hospital. As I walked along Front Street I could feel a hundred pair of eyes staring my way. I had become famous in a town where the main pastime was gossip.

I crossed the bridge, hunched over from the weight of the pack, grateful to be leaving the milling crowds but sad, too. I had two hopes: that I would find gold on Golden Gulch, and that Beth would believe the letter I had left with Father Judge. As I strode along the trail beside Bonanza Creek, I felt the hostile stares of the miners as they stopped their work to watch me pass by.

Then, a couple of hours later, I came to Faunt's cabin. He, or someone, had built an addition onto it. I knocked on the new door and I heard Clemmy's sharp voice yell for me to come in. Inside, against the wall of the original cabin, stood a shelf lined with books. Along another wall, three hand-operated washing machines squatted, with piles of tattered clothes strewn on the floor beside them. In the middle of the floor were at least a dozen chairs lined up like you would see in a country school.

Clemmy ran to me and threw her arms around my neck. Close behind strode Fauntleroy and I stuck out my hand so he could grab it. He squeezed and grinned and at last I freed myself from Clemmy and shook loose my hand before he crushed it. We went into the original cabin and sat at the table. Clemmy pulled down a glass jar from the cupboard and turned it over above the table.

Gold nuggets clattered out on the surface of the table and some rolled onto the floor. The grins on their faces got to me, and I too smiled for the first time in a month. Faunt had been teaching the miners everything from classic literature to modern poetry while Clemmy took in washing, cooked and cleaned for the miners. Soon they would be able to buy a gold claim of their own.

Then I had to recount the story of everything that happened to me in Dawson. Clemmy offered to go and see Beth to tell her about my faithfulness. She cooked a grand meal for us all, out of cans and packages of powder, and I stayed the night, sleeping on some blankets beside the bookshelf. In the morning I set out, promising to stop by on my way down the creek.

I swung up the trail winding along beside Eldorado Creek, and tramped along as the valley grew smaller and the trail steepened. The snow here was twice as deep as it had been at Faunt's cabin. I stopped at a small miners' camp to ask about the distance to Golden Gulch. They lowered their gaze and would say nothing, nor did they offer a cup of tea nor a friendly word. I knew what side of the creek that the gulch was on and I walked up this little valley and that one until I came to a small path leading almost straight up.

Willow brush crowded the trail on both sides and I stumbled in the snow as my pack caught on overhanging branches. It didn't seem to me like much

digging had been done along here. Then the little creek valley levelled out somewhat and I heard a man's voice cursing. I stopped to listen and recognized Goldfever Jim. I yelled so as not to frighten him, remembering all the guns he said he owned. But where the hell was the gold mine?

"Who's there?" His voice echoed off the steep-sided gulch. I looked around the small clearing in the brush and saw his camp, but no Jim.

"Where are you, Jim?"

"Over here. Down here, for God's sake!"

His voice came from a mound of earth beyond the little tent. I saw smoke rising from the ground and walked over to it. There, down in a deep hole amongst the smoke, was Goldfever Jim. He climbed up a small ladder that leaned against the side of the hole and his smoke-blackened face appeared. His feverish eyes glared at me.

"For God's sake! Where have you been? I've been hauling this dirt up the ladder by myself: nobody to work the windlass."

"I've been in jail. I thought everybody knew that."

"Not me. I came straight here after that night we saw your Queen. I'm almost out of grub. Did you bring any with you?"

"Yes," I said. "How about this claim? Are you getting any gold yet?"

"We can't be getting gold, for God's sake! Not until we hit bedrock. Throw your gear in the tent and let's go at it. We'll set up the windlass and take turns digging and hauling."

"Jim, what are all these other holes I see in this clearing? Did you dig them?"

"No. Some other fellows were here first. The silly fools went down in all the wrong places."

To be continued...

The ice bridge across the Yukon River, going to Dawson City from the Top of the World Highway, spring 1977 (SH photo).

From the Publisher

Most Canadians are obsessed with the weather and Yukoners are no exception. Without a doubt, Yukoners who understand the weather are happier, more prosperous and live longer.

A successful placer miner I once interviewed practised what he called "sky mining." In the placer business, mine operators want to get as many hours of sluicing in before freeze-up as possible. Without water (Yukon summers can be extremely dry) there's no sluicing, and no gold recovery. This fellow, whose family has worked the same ground on Hunker Creek since the Gold Rush, claimed he could read the clouds. When the rain started, his crew and equipment were primed to take gold from the ground. I think he's retired now and spends winters in Venezuela.

For those of us stuck with 40 or 50 below, CBC radio's morning weather report is required listening. Without this critical information, our highways would be lined with broken-down vehicles and our hospitals filled with hypothermic, frostbitten wretches.

At our house we have a digital thermometer that gives us a second-by-second readout in glowing red numerals of both inside and outside temperatures. This information is critical. Should we plug in the block heaters installed in our vehicles? Will cotton long johns do today, or must we put on itchy wool ones? Felt-lined Sorels or leather boots? Do we need a big log for the stove that will smolder all day or an armful of small ones to make a fast blaze?

Here the weather goes to extremes. Almost every year the Yukon sets records for the weather. The territory has the greatest annual range of temperatures in North America. Between the hottest summer day and the coldest winter night, there's a difference of nearly 100 degrees.

Overall, Yukon winters are mild compared to those in our neighboring territories to the east. But, when the thermometer drops, it falls farther than anywhere else on this continent. I've noticed that Army Beach can be colder than any other spot on CBC television's northern weather map. Move over Old Crow, Iqaluit and Pangnirtung. We've got you beat.

Army Beach, like most other Yukon settlements, sits at the bottom of a cold air trough. We're surrounded by mountains which block warm, moist Pacific air from entering our valley. While nearby Atlin, B C and Juneau, Alaska enjoy balmy winter weather, we're stuck with dry Arctic air.

I'm told that the way out of the cold is up. We would gain at least ten degrees by joining the moose and mountain sheep on Michie Mountain.

Or we can collect Air Miles and visit our friends and family who live in warm places, which is what I did in February. Thanks folks!