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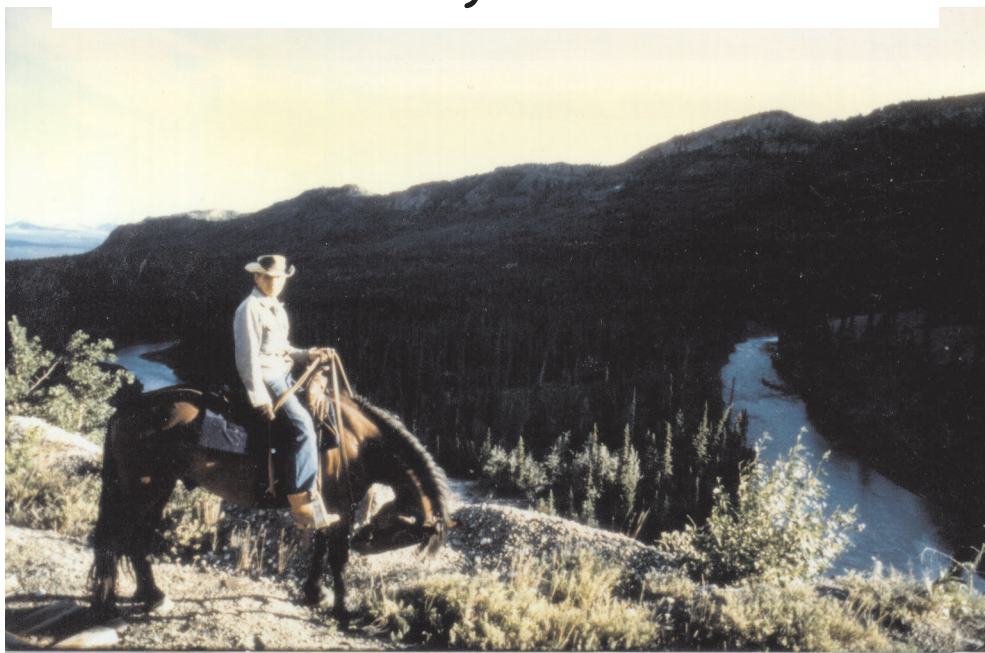
- THE BUILDING OF
THE WHITE PASS
RAILWAY
- THE FIRST
SIGNPOST
- STALKING WILD
MOSQUITOES

WHITEHORSE MOTORS

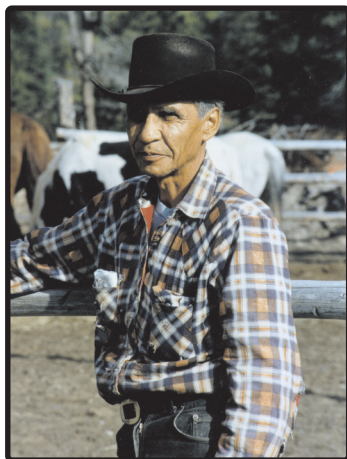


SALUTES

Art Johns, Trail Guide



Born at Carcross, Yukon, "educated in the bush," Art Johns has been guiding for 50 years. For the past few years he has been involved with the Southern Lakes Caribou Recovery program. The caribou population has increased from a low of 250 to over 1000 today. You might see Art with his guitar performing at country music gatherings.



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Click on these page numbers to go to that story. Click on page header (Yukoner Magazine) to return to the contents page.

ISSUE No. 12, JULY 1999

From the Editor	4
The Mail Run	6
The Soldier's Sign, by Darrell Hookey	7
Watson Lake, by Sam Holloway	11
I'm Scared of it All, by Robert Service	13
Stalking Wild Mosquitoes, by Lewis Billard	15
Grab Samples, by R.C. Coutts	26
Building the White Pass Railway, by W.J. Swanson	28
The Goldseeker, Part Six, by Sam Holloway	46
From the Publisher	61

Cover photo: Yukoner Andy Townsend and daughter Carli on the Keno summit. Photo by Sandy Nicholson.

Old Dodge, Yukoner Magazine office & print shop, and the editor.



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From the Editor

Since the last issue, I built an addition onto the addition at the back of this cabin. Actually, I built a floor, moved our new collator (for sorting pages after they're printed) onto it, then built the walls around it. I still have to assemble that new gadget and fire it up. Hopefully, it will sort all the pages properly for this issue. I won't know for sure until all the printing is done.

And then I learned some things about the Internet and threw a website onto it. You can find us at www.yukoner.com. If you don't have a computer, most likely you can log onto the Internet at your library or at a friend's house.

As most of you know, big changes have come to the Yukon during the last decade. Remember when you could sit in your truck and have a beer? Or walk down the sidewalk sipping on your bottle of Zing? They outlawed that in the early 80s and that sudden change in attitude foretold the future.

Since then, dozens of new laws have been passed, covering everything from seatbelts to discrimination. Now it's against the law to insult anybody but a white male.

Every year more parks are created, with the new areas being off-limits to prospectors. God help you if they see you with a gold pan in one of these huge parks.

Since the early 80s, the civil service in the Yukon has expanded exponentially. Almost every job here is a direct government position, or derives from the spending of civil servants. We are the most governed people on the face of the earth, with

something like three civil servants for every four persons living here. We have the federal government, the territorial government, the municipal governments, 12 First Nations governments and another kind of central First Nations government—all ruling over a shrinking population of 28,000.

The First Nations governments would like to see things as they were a hundred years ago, and the territorial and municipal governments want things as they are in “other jurisdictions” (which means they want the Yukon to be the same as the places they just escaped from).

There have been some benefits to all this: we don’t experience the “booms and busts” of yesteryear, not with the huge payroll from all levels of government pouring into the retail sector. And, affordable housing has been built for Yukon oldtimers so they don’t have to move to the south when they retire.

The bureaucrats have hounded the gold miners for the last 20 years, slowly driving them off their claims. Now with the price of gold spiralling downward and looking to stay that way, the rest of the miners will die out. We might as well take the gold miner off the license plate. The bureaucrats tried that in 1989 and couldn’t get away with it. But now, who knows?

This spring the territorial government and the City of Whitehorse joined forces to get rid of the waterfront squatters. They offered each squatter some money—not enough to buy a place in the city—and it was a “take-it-or-leave-it” deal. Some of these characters had been living there since the 1940s. Within one hour of a squatter taking a cheque, the bulldozers were smashing the old buildings down. Most of these oldtimers have never owned a vehicle because they could walk anywhere in town within minutes. Now they’re hitchhiking around the countryside looking for cheap property, which they won’t find.

The governments did try to move the squatters into some existing subdivisions. But nobody wanted them, citing a drop in property values. Why couldn’t we have just let all these people die in peace? And then flatten the waterfront and plant grass for the civil servants to take their lunch upon?

Ah, old Sam is getting bitter, you say? No, not very often. Just this once. The Yukon is still the most beautiful place on earth to live. Even if they do use boards and vinyl siding instead of logs to build houses nowadays.

So long for now,
Sam





Dear Sam & Dianne:

I read the Headless Valley saga by the late Don Sawatsky with great interest, being he outlined in detail some of the myths about this region.

In the mid 1950s, I was stationed for one year at the Smith River RCAF Emergency Air Base. I was employed by D.O.T. as an Aeradio Operator and meteorological observer.

As this base was situated in the South Nahanni area, there were many tales exchanged regarding the “headless” theory, but none were substantiated.

While in Smith River, I had the opportunity to explore the region as well as being involved as a spotter on a number of air searches for overdue trappers/prospectors.

The rugged and majestic beauty of this unforgiving Nahanni region will always remain in my memory. The Smith River air base was de-commissioned and closed in the 1960s.

My wife Annabelle (nee Adami) was born in Whitehorse and spent her childhood in the Fort Selkirk/Pelly Crossing area. She too has many stories to tell about her life in the Yukon.

We enjoy your magazine.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Verbisky

Duncan, B.C.

Hi Sam—

Thrilled to get your promo in the mail. I worked in the O.R. at WGH in ‘73 and have been back for the odd holiday-dogsledding, etc. Love the Yukon and can’t wait to get the magazine!

Sarah Haney

Bolton, Ontario

Dear Publisher:

It must be time to renew my subscription. I don’t want to miss the continuation of the Goldseeker.

All your articles are most interesting. When I taught in Whitehorse in 1953-56, we visited a little old goldminer in Dawson. I can’t remember his name but he took us down some steps into a tunnel—all iced . He had a beautiful rose blooming outside his shack door.

I’m glad I was up there at that time. We were back two years ago and it is so different. Love the scenery. We drove up the Alaska Highway. Paved!

P.S. Met my husband up there when he decided to try the North.

Sincerely,

Olga Routley

Prince Albert, Saskatchewan

The Soldier's Sign

By Darrell Hookey

It is an engineering marvel of the world. It is a 1,671-mile road cut through some of the most forbidding terrain in the world. And it was completed in eight months by 11,000 men in 1943 at a cost of \$140 million.

Numbers like these overwhelm the fact that the Alaska Highway was built by human beings. American troops a long way from home worked as long as 19 hours a day and suffered for it from exhaustion, yellow jaundice and exposure.

It was important work as the world was at war. The Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbour in Hawaii and by 1942 they had occupied the Aleutian Islands. Draw a straight line over a globe from Tokyo to Washington and you will see it runs right through the middle of Alaska and the Yukon. It would take 152,000 troops and tons of supplies to prevent a Japanese invasion of Alaska that would have drastically changed the course of the war.

The success of their mission is just one more impossible achievement of the generation who saved the world. Perhaps this is why one sign has attracted the attention of the world to Watson Lake. It is a human touch left by a member of this amazing generation. It simply says Danville, Illinois is 2,835 miles that way.

Danville was a typical railroad town. Its streets were lined with unique architecture and it was the hub of activity for surrounding farms. The only



Carl K. Lindley leaning on a sign beside the Alaska Highway in 1943.

thing making it special was that it was home to a typical soldier.

None was more typical than Carl K. Lindley. He was a Private First Class in Company D of the 341st Engineers. He was drafted into the US Army (he had hoped for the air force) and assigned to the engineers due to his experience with cutting timber and making mine props.

Carl joined the war effort leaving a father, Henry, a hard worker who cared for his family well, and a mother, Pearl, whose first priority was always her 12 children.

The family gathered together, along with his fiancé, Elinor, to say farewell to their youngest son. He was taken to the bus and was soon on a train to Dawson Creek, British Columbia. He was expecting to be sent to the South Pacific, but in the Army you go where you are sent.

He knew building the Alaska Highway was important work. They all knew the liberty ships couldn't navigate the northern waters so close to the Japanese.

They worked 12 hours on and 12 hours off. Work meant cutting trees, building bridges and moving earth ... each in quantities that boggle the mind.

This work was difficult enough without the temperatures that spanned 100 degrees Celsius or the mosquitoes and no-see-ums.

The terrain was a shock, too. Not only to the young city dwellers who had never used an axe before, but also to the seasoned engineers who watched entire tractors become swallowed by recently cleared permafrost turned to mud.

Off hours consisted of eating (beans that had been packed for the First World War), sleeping (in pup tents) and cleaning (if a river was nearby).

They were camped at the edge of Dawson Creek. There was nothing available in town, so they mostly stayed around camp talking, joking or singing. He went into town on his way to the camp and on his way home 15 months later. And one other time he was one of six men dispatched to help fight the Dawson Creek fire of February, 1943. The youngest of them, a buddy, died fighting that fire.

Home sickness affected one and all. Carl thought of his home town of Danville. He remembered family get togethers, holidays and home cooking.

One day in June of that year, Carl was helping build a loading ramp when a truck ran over his foot. He was sent to the aid station in Watson Lake to allow his bruises and torn tendons to heal.

Once he was able to walk around, he was ordered to replace a government sign and some trappers' signs that had been removed for the construction of the highway. He decided to add a sign of his own. He found some material around the aid station and used the same paint used for the trucks. Another sign had said Chicago was 2,700 miles away, so he added 135 miles for Danville.

Nobody took notice of the sign as it was one of many that had sprouted up along the Alaska Highway. And Carl doesn't remember seeing it again as he was sent to the camp at the Upper Liard River.

He made it as far north as Whitehorse and was then sent to Europe. After two years and five campaigns (including Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge), he celebrated VE Day 16 kilometres from the Austrian border. He had enough points to be one of the first to be flown home. He was flying over the Mediterranean Sea when he learned Japan had been defeated as well.

Carl was discharged from Camp Grant, Chicago, and he went home to Danville to marry Elinor. He worked as a photo engraver for three years and then went into printing for Sperry Univac. They had two sons, Ken and Gary, and he retired from printing in 1984.

This may sound like a typical ending to a typical soldier's life, but Carl is remembered as the man who put the first sign up in what is now called the Watson Lake Sign Forest. More than 20,000 signs now accompany a replica of the first sign he put up. Two thousand are added every summer although a lot of these are culled out. The local Lions Club tended these signs for years, and removed the rotted signs to make room for others, which is probably what happened to his original sign.

But everyone knew there had to be a first sign and townsfolk badly wanted to recognize that person who had put it up. The sign forest had become a world-famous tourist attraction that stopped cars and RVs from zipping through town.

Once visitors get out of their vehicles to take pictures of the signs, they are drawn inside the Tourist Information Centre where they are treated to displays testifying to the gruelling conditions of the highway's construction.

Finding the man who put up the first sign was a piece of detective work by Jim Christy, who had written a book on the Alaska Highway, Rough Road to the North. Margaret Wauhkonen, an employee of the Tourist Informa-



Carl Lindley and wife Elinor at the Signpost Forest, Watson Lake, in 1992.

tion Centre, had read the book. Between research and talking to acquaintances of acquaintances, she found Carl in Danville in February of 1984. The VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) helped her get in touch with him.

Only a short time before that, Carl had found out about the sign forest himself. A travel writer had called him from London, England, and told him of the Watson Lake tourist attraction. He had to struggle to remember the sign and didn't really grasp the enormity of what he had caused until he received a letter and video from Ken Spotswood.

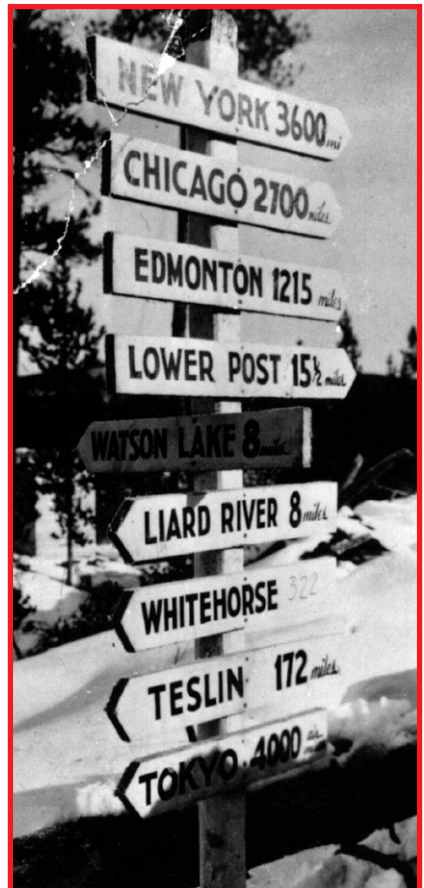
That was the beginning of a flurry of letters and phone calls as Ken was helping organize the anniversary celebrations of the Alaska Highway.

Margaret and her husband, Wally, had been in contact with the Lindleys all along as she was beefing up the Tourist Information Centre's display on the Alaska Highway. They even tried to raise money to bring the Lindleys to Watson Lake to see what he had started. Eventually, they turned the job over to the committee organizing celebrations of the Highway's 50th Anniversary. Along with corporate donations, the Lindleys were able to fly to Watson Lake for a ceremony at the sign forest in September of 1992.

They were treated like royalty during their nine-day trip. They toured a mine, rode in a helicopter, saw a banquet room named for him and visited a school where a mural of the highway construction includes a younger version of himself with the first sign.

Despite a hectic schedule, they were able to meet twice with the Wauhkonens who had become friends through their many letters.

These days, Carl likes to keep up with happenings in Watson Lake. His garage has two shelving units full of magazines and books that have profiled his sign forest. He's glad the sign he made, on a whim, has played such an important role in Watson Lake. But mostly he and Elinor are grateful for all the new friends they have met because of it.



This photo (actually, a postcard) was sent to the editor in 1992. The back of it read, Watson Lake Signpost, 1945, Taku Trading Company. S.H.

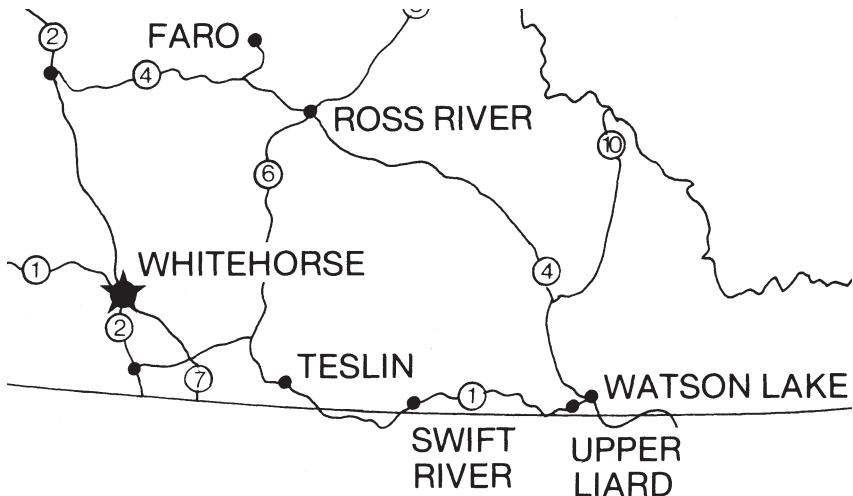
The Town of Watson Lake

The lake was named after Frank Watson, a Yorkshire Englishman who started for the Klondike in early 1897 from Edmonton, Alberta. Fighting his way through unmapped country, he arrived on the Upper Liard in the spring of 1898. He found the country very appealing and, with his illusions of easy gold in the Klondike completely dissipated, he decided to stay in this region to prospect and trap.

He married a Kaska lady by the name of Adela Stone who came from a large family in northeastern British Columbia. In 1912, they made their home on the shores of what is now called Watson Lake. They had four children, Arnow, Edna, Bob and Alice. When construction of the airport began, the place became too crowded for Frank so he moved his family to nearby Windid Lake. Shortly afterwards, he died of pneumonia. Adela continued to live according to her Native Kaskan values. She spoke Kaska at all times and, even in her 90's, set rabbit snares, chopped wood and sewed moccasins. She passed away in March of 1987.

Originally, the Kaska First Nations people called the lake Tasdagiluge or Lu Cho which meant Big Whitefish Lake, a very appropriate name because even today, there is an abundance of whitefish in this lake.

In 1939, the site for an airport was surveyed along the lake. Because of the threat of Japanese invasion during World War Two, a chain of airfields was built across the Northwest and in the spring of 1941 operations for construction began on the one at Watson Lake. The first stage was the shipment of supplies by boat from Vancouver to Wrangell. It was then necessary to tranship by river boat and barge some 160 miles up the Stikine River to Telegraph Creek and from there by truck 76 miles to Dease Lake (after this section of the original trail was made into a passable road). At Dease Lake



the equipment was again loaded into barges and boats and transported down the Dease River to Lower Post on the Liard River. There, a 26-mile tote road had to be built to the airport site at the lake.

Two runways approximately 5000 feet long were built, along with administration buildings and staff quarters for both RCAF and Dept. of Transport personnel. housing, school, hospital, post office—everything was located on this site at the north end of the lake. The town of Watson Lake as we know it today did not exist. Work was completed in the autumn of 1943, an amazing feat considering that there was no highway — just that tote road from Lower Post.

It was in February of 1942 that the U.S. War Department decided to construct a highway on a route connecting a series of air bases from Fort St. John in northern B.C. to Delta, Alaska in order to provide a military overland supply route. On November 20, 1942, the opening of the Alaska Highway took place at Solder's Summit near Kluane Lake and was heralded as one of the greatest engineering feats of all time.

During 1943, a fellow by the name of Appleyard constructed the first building on the present day townsite just across the road from the army camp of soldiers who were working on the highway construction. At that time, the location was called The Wye because it was located at the branch of the Alaska Highway and Robert Campbell Highway in the shape of a Y. This first building was a trading post with rooms to rent upstairs. Over the years the building has been improved and modernized and today is known as the Watson Lake Hotel. The first house was built during 1948 by the late G. Dalzeil. In 1987, his heirs opened it as a Heritage House.

It was natural for businesses to establish on the Alaska Highway and as they did so, a gradual exodus took place from the airport at the north end of the lake. A Watson Lake Wye label was used for a while but eventually the name Watson Lake prevailed. Today, most of the businesses are located on both sides of the Alaska Highway which runs through the centre of town. S.H



I'm Scared Of It All

By Robert W. Service

I'm scared of it all, God's truth!
So I am;
It's too big and brutal for me.
My nerve's on the raw and I don't give a damn
For all the "hoorah" that I see.
I'm pinned between subway and overhead train,
Where automobillicies swoop down:
Oh, I want to go back to the timber again —
I'm scared of the terrible town.

I want to go back to my lean, ashen plains;
My rivers that flash into foam;
My ultimate valleys where solitude reigns;
My trail from Fort Churchill to Nome.
My forests packed full of mysterious gloom,
My ice-fields agrind and aglare:
The city is deadfalled with danger and doom —
I know that I'm safer up there.

I watch the wan faces that flash in the street;
All kinds and all classes I see.
Yet never a one in the million I meet,
Has the smile of a comrade for me.
Just jaded and panting like dogs in a pack;
Just tensed and intent on the goal:
O God! but I'm lonesome — I wish I was back,
Up there in the land of the Pole.
I wish I was back on the Hunger Plateaus,
And seeking the lost caribou;
I wish I was up where the Coppermine flows
To the kick of my little canoe.
I'd like to be far on some weariful shore,
In the Land of the Blizzard and Bear;
Oh, I wish I was snug in the Arctic once more,
For I know I am safer up there!

I prow! in the canyons of dismal unrest;
I cringe — I'm so weak and so small.
I can't get my bearings, I'm crushed and oppressed

With the haste and the waste of it all.
The slaves and the madman, the lust and the sweat,
The fear in the faces I see;
The getting, the spending, the fever, the fret —
It's too bleeding cruel for me.

I feel it's all wrong, but I can't tell you why —
The palace, the hovel next door;
The insolent towers that sprawl to the sky,
The crush and the rush and the roar.
I'm trapped like a fox and I fear for my pelt;
I cower in the crash and the glare;
Oh, I want to be back in the avalanche belt,
For I know that it's safer up there!

I'm scared of it all: Oh, afar I can hear
The voice of my solitudes call!
We're nothing but brute with a little veneer,
And nature is best after all.
There's tumult and terror abroad in the street;
There's menace and doom in the air;
I've got to get back to my thousand-mile beat;
The trail where the cougar and silver-tip meet;
The snows and the camp-fire, with wolves at my feet;
Good-bye, for it's safer up there.

To be forming good habits up there;
To be starving on rabbits up there;
In your hunger and woe,
Though it's sixty below,
Oh, I know that it's safer up there!

Editor's Note::

What a pleasure to present some ballads by Robert Service, many of which are now in the public domain. You can find a short biography of Service in *Collected Stories*, Vol. 1.

A well-known history professor, who has written several books about the Yukon, calls Service's poetry "doggerel." The professor is wrong.

Robert Service, more than any writer, living or dead, captured in words how it feels to live in the Yukon. We all know that Dan McGrew and Sam McGee were made-up stories, just like we know about Santa Claus. But other stories by Service ring with the truth of our existence.

"*The Telegraph Operator*" describes the lonely existence of men living in isolated cabins. "*Lost*" tells about being caught unprepared in the dead of a Yukon winter. "*Goodbye Little Cabin*" describes how it feels to bid a well-loved log cabin farewell.

The poem presented here is one of my favourites.

Stalking Wild Mosquitoes in the Yukon By Lewis Billard

Exactly 50 years ago this summer, I spent three months with a survey team in the Yukon. Commissioned by the federal government's Defence Research Board, the Northern Insect Survey set out to document the living habits of insects in the Yukon, particularly the mosquito.

In 1949 the Cold War was on and somehow I got the idea that our job was to help protect the Canadian forces from problems with the mosquito if Russia decided to attack the United States by way of northern Canada. This notion was probably based on rumor or imagination but it makes a good story!

There were four of us on the survey team: the leader, Dr. William (Bill) Judd from McMaster University, James (Jim) Calder, a taxonomist from Ottawa, Paul F. Briggeman from Lloydminster, Alberta, and me. I had just received my Bachelor of Science in Biology from Dalhousie/Kings University and there I was travelling around the Yukon with three experienced biologists!

We climbed many of the hills and mountains in and around Dawson City, Whitehorse, Mayo and Keno and travelled the roads and river valleys, including the gold dredge tailings in the Klondike River valley. We took hundreds of insect samples, gathered plant specimens and photographed the areas visited.



Lewis Billard on Mount Haldane, 20 miles north of Mayo, July 25, 1949

For my own pleasure, I took 534 black and white negatives with my folding Kodak Vigilant camera. I had the negatives processed at the former RCMP barracks in Dawson City, which was our headquarters for the survey.

While in the Klondike, we had the use of a Chevrolet 4 x 4 army truck. We carried jerry cans of gasoline because we were lucky, on some trips, to get seven miles to the gallon climbing hills and driving over rutted roads. Paul once had to make adjustments to the distributor on the engine because it had rotated and gone out of sync on the rough roads.

As I mentioned, our job was studying insects and there were plenty of them. At mile 56 on the Sixtymile Road (Top of the World Highway now) we collected 30 mosquitoes in 15 minutes. From a 5,000-foot rocky plateau at the 57-mile point on the same road we collected 62 mosquitoes in 15 minutes. At mile 57, clouds of mosquitoes sounding like violin strings swarmed around us. One of my photos shows my back covered with mosquitoes.

Dawson was not as much of a tourist area then, but I was fascinated by

Oldtimers from the days of '98, St. Mary's Hospital, Dawson, August 25, 1949



its gold mining history. It had been just 50 years since the Gold Rush and there were plenty of oldtimers and artifacts around to tell that story. In Keno, we met Ken Maynard, a '98'er and former prospector, who showed us his extensive garden of vegetables. At Hunker Summit we met Joe Fournier who ran the Summit Hotel on The Loop, 20 miles southeast of Dawson. He operated the hotel during the 1920s and into the 1950s.

In one of my photos I show Paul as he met Gordon Walmsley, an electrician with the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Ltd. Gordon had a telephone set in his bicycle carrier. He was taking it to a private house to be installed. I jokingly wrote on the negative holder, "the first bicycle with a telephone."

There were still some '98'ers on the verandah of St. Mary's hospital at the edge of the "slide." Moosehide Village, downstream from Dawson City, still had many lived-in homes and one evening Bill Judd and I visited the village in the company of the ladies of St. Paul's Women's Auxiliary. We travelled downstream in the Yukon Diocese boat. The photos I took show a prosperous place, including St. Barnabas Church and the mission school. Bill bought some slippers but I am sorry to say I have no souvenir of the three-hour trip.

In the fall of 1949 I returned to Dalhousie/Kings University to study for my Education degree. When I left the Yukon I had \$700 in my pocket, 534 photo negatives and a small pocket knife with a gold nugget welded to its side, the only gold I took from the Yukon.

Lewis Billard is a retired school teacher. He lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.



First bicycle with a telephone. Gordon Walmsley, electrician with the YCGC on his way to installing a house phone. Talking to Fred Bruggeman, holding a ladle to gather larvae and with an insect in his left hand. Dawson.



Ken Maynard, a former prospector by his home.
Keno, Aug. 7, 1949



Boarding the ferry across the Klondike River, Aug. 9, 1949
Note hand-turned wheel and cable



Boarding ferry at Dawson, June 22, 1949

Left to right: Ferry driver, Paul Bruggeman, Dr. Bill Judd, Jim Calder
R.C. Hospital in background



Dawson, June 9, 1949

Looking east along King Street



St. Mary's Hospital, Dawson, Aug. 25, 1949.



"Keno" leaving Mayo, on the Stewart River, August 4, 1949



On Hunker Summit, 20 miles S.E. of Dawson,
Joe Fournier's home, June 19, 1949



Lewis Billard at cabin 31 on Sixtymile Road, 31 miles west of
Dawson. June 26, 1949



Dawson, June 18, 1949. Left to right: 4, Cheryl Patricia Ellen Lloyd
1, Gordon Caley 5, Barbara Elinor Gibbon
2, Johnny Walter Colburne 6, Larry Cole
3, Nancy Elizabeth Slack



Indian homes at Moosehide Village, June 28, 1949



Looking north along First Avenue toward "slide" on Moosehide Mountain. Dawson, June 9, 1949.



Abandoned general store, corner of 3rd Avenue and Harper St., June 15, 1949. [Editor's Note: Just this year, the City of Dawson decided to demolish the old store before it collapsed, (see inset photo) perhaps injuring someone. A Whitehorse businessman, Don Cox, bought the old store and says he is going to try to save it. It is called the "most photographed building in Dawson."



Boarding ferry at Dawson, June 22, 1949. Left to right:
Ferry driver, Paul Bruggeman, Dr. Bill Judd, Jim Calder
R.C. Hospital in background



Whitehorse Main Street, June 4, 1949



Whitehorse, June 6, 1949. Novelty shop, Main St.



Whitehorse Main St., August 27, 1949



Introduction

Until about 1945, the life of the Canadian prospector had altered very little. For over a hundred years they went to the bush in the early spring and returned in the late fall. There were no breaks or holidays. Many went to the bush and stayed for a year or two at a time, spending the summers prospecting and the winters trapping.

The life was laborious with everything carried by canoe (no motors) and on their backs. In the West, horses took the place of canoes. They carried a minimum of supplies, pared down to the most necessary staples; flour, beans, rice, baking powder, salt and a very few other odds and ends. They lived mostly by the rifle and the fish line and net. Their major tools were the axe and shovel.

They were a breed apart, independent to a fault, self-reliant to an ultimate degree and above all eternally optimistic. They lived lonely lives without really realizing that they were lonely. They were perhaps the only really free men in the world. Almost always they travelled in pairs. Long experience had shown that a minor accident to a lone traveller could often be a fatal one.

Each man was an individual and had his own peculiar idiosyncrasies and habits. These were not understood by townspeople who observed them but were understood by other prospectors.

Here are a few stories to illustrate their characters.

QUIRKS

Sam Carson and his partner Jim Cameron had been in the MacMillan River country for two years. They had not seen another white man in that time until one day in the fall. As they climbed a low, wooded ridge Sam stopped and signalled Jim. They listened and heard voices further ahead. As they approached, the voices became clearer and more understandable. They were speaking English and belonged to white men. A loud argument was in progress.

* A grab sample is a representative piece of rock from a vein or mineral deposit, taken to show the character of the deposit.

"It sounds like Joe Black" said Sam.

"Yeah, but who is he talking to?" replied Jim, "and what are they arguing about?"

The argument was loud.

"No you can't have those six inchers, I need them to build the cache!"

"I have to have them or I'll never get that cupboard made."

"I don't give a damn about the cupboard, the stuff can be piled in a corner."

"That's sloppy and just like you would do it."

The voices were becoming angry so Sam and Jim thought it best to step out and visit. They approached and found Joe Black cutting logs for a cache. They looked around but saw no one else. Joe made tea and they visited for several hours. Joe told them he had been in here alone for nearly three years, hadn't found much gold but had some good furs—and intended to go down river in another week or two for a visit outside.

Saying good-bye, the boys set out for their own camp. Sam remarked to Jim that it was about time Joe went outside for a while.

"It's not a bad sign when a man talks to himself but it's getting closer to the edge when he answers back."

"But Joe was never a mean man," said Jim "and I just can't figure out why he wouldn't lend himself the nails!"

TABOOS

Later in the fall Sam and Jim decided to go outside for a visit and a spree before returning for the trapping season. They had furs to dispose of and some gold that they had won from a poor creek. Plus they needed more supplies for the coming season.

Arriving in town, their first stop was the saloon. While drinking, they looked about them and saw few faces, none of them familiar.

They queried the bartender and were told that everyone was at the trial.

"What trial?"

"Why, they are judging Axel Swanson for murdering his partner Dan Long."

The boys hurried down the street to the courthouse and sat through the proceedings. Axel pleaded guilty and was sentenced to be hung in a month's time.

The two old-timers returned to the saloon. They were depressed and saddened.


"I don't think that they should hang Axel." Sam said to his partner. "These city guys will just never understand."

Jim's position was more conservative. "Abel broke the law and has to pay the penalty even if it doesn't seem fair."

"They shouldn't hang Axel because it was Dan's fault that he killed him. He just knew that he shouldn't have kept hanging the big frying pan on the little frying pan's nail!"

R.C. Coutts is the author of *Yukon Places & Names*.

Engineering the White Pass Railway



By W.J. Swanson

Part 1

The Route and the People

The Klondike gold rush was triggered by the discovery of gold in California in 1849, almost half a-century earlier. As the California placer deposits were worked out or taken over by large consortia, the prospector-trappers (those loners who lived by prospecting during the summers and trapping during the winters) began moving northwards through the mountains, each looking for his own big strike. That northern migration of Forty-niners eventually resulted in a number of major mineral finds, including the Cariboo gold rush, a smaller rush to the Dease Lake area in north-western British Columbia, several finds in Alaska and eventually the “big find” in the Klondike.

By the time those prospectors had migrated as far as northern British Columbia, the main river systems of the North were quite well known—many of them having been explored under the auspices of the fur trading companies. By that time, spurred on by the Alaska Purchase during the latter 1860s, the Canadian government began taking an interest in that vast northwestern land then known as the Yukon District. In May, 1887, William Ogilvie, along with his survey party, was sent by Ottawa into the Yukon District to survey and establish the 141st meridian—the boundary between Canada’s vast Northwest Territories and Alaska. About the same time Dr. George M. Dawson was sent into the same general area to obtain geological and topographical information about that vast unexplored region; and, by the summer of 1895, a detachment of 20 members of the North West Mounted Police had been established at Fortymile, in the Yukon District, under the command of Inspector Constantine.

Until the onset of the Klondike stampede and the resulting vast movement of men and materials into the Klondike area, the most common route into the Yukon District was by way of St. Michael, Alaska, followed by a trip of more than 1,600 miles up the Yukon River during its short navigation season. Another less popular route, for those who didn’t have the time for a long river trip or those who had to travel when the Yukon River was frozen, was by way of the Lynn Canal and over the Chilkoot Pass, or one of the

other passes through the coastal mountains, to the headwaters of the Yukon River. From there travellers could proceed by boat or raft down the river. Most early trekkers of the '98 stampede went that way after packing their supplies over the Chilkoot Pass.

Other routes were used. After White Pass became known, many trekkers chose to travel by that route. Some travelled by way of the Chilkat Pass. Others travelled to St. Michael and up the Yukon River. Some chose the route via Telegraph Creek, up the Stikine River and through the Teslin area. A lesser number found their way up the Liard River, through the Teslin area to Dawson. A few arrived in Dawson City by way of the Mackenzie River, the South Nahanni and the Pelly River systems and a few more, after navigating down the Mackenzie, then up the Peel and Blackstone Rivers, crossed the Ogilvie Mountains and eventually reached the Klondike.

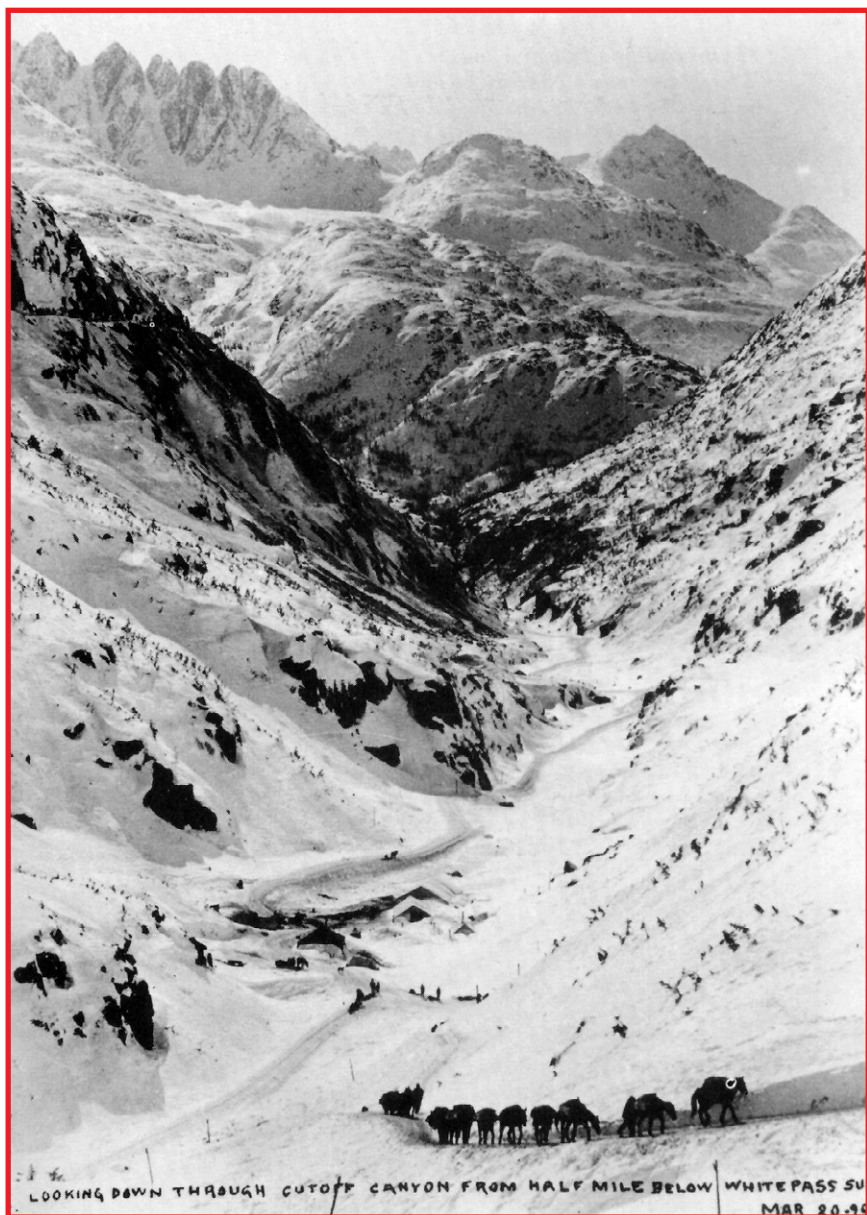
Whichever way the miners and would-be-miners travelled, it was a long, costly and physically demanding trip. A shorter, more convenient route was needed and many promoters, entrepreneurs and developers were anxious to supply such a route with the construction of a railway—providing they were able to find a financier willing to back such a venture.

But, as promoters and developers were quite aware, aside from engineering, several major problems remained to be settled before construction of such a railroad could begin. The Alaska purchase had been finalized in 1869 but the U.S. Government had not yet passed the necessary legislation allowing the issue of permits for construction of an international railway through Alaskan territory. There was also the problem of getting construction permits from both the Province of British Columbia and the Government of Canada. The location of the international boundary between Alaska and British Columbia had not been established; and customs and immigration facilities had not yet been organized for that crossing of an international border. Such was the state of affairs when the British Columbia Development Association (also referred to as the Syndicate), an English company incorporated in 1895, began looking in that direction for possible investments.

The English civil engineer and his guide left the small settlement of Dyea, at the head of the eastern arm of the Lynn Canal just a few miles northwest of Skagway in the Alaska Panhandle, and made their way up along shore of the Taiya River. Following a well-discerned trail they proceeded through a narrow, restrictive canyon for a few miles and, on coming out of that narrow confine, found their view blocked by rugged mountain ridges and high mountains whose peaks were hidden within a dense layer of altostratus cloud hanging over the narrow valley. The time was March, 1896. The engineer, Ernest Edward Billingham, a robust man with a receding hair line and the wide handlebar mustache common among men of that era, had been sent north by the Syndicate to assess the possibility of constructing a railroad from tidewater to the headwaters of the Yukon River system. While carrying out his pacing and compass survey, Billingham

took particular note of recent snowslides and of a natural gradient that was not conducive to railway construction.

On approaching the upper reaches of the valley the natural grade increased to about 70 percent, which meant that for every 100 feet of horizontal measurement, the ground increased in elevation by 70 feet. (The route they were following took them through the notorious Chilkoot Pass which



LOOKING DOWN THROUGH CUTOFF CANYON FROM HALF MILE BELOW WHITEPASS SU
MAR 20-96

reached an elevation of about 3740 feet at its summit. This is the route through which the majority of the early gold-seekers would pass when in trekking across the mountains during the Klondike gold-rush of '98.

The Chilkoot Pass, one of the principal access routes to the Yukon River system, had for many years been controlled by the Chilkoot Indians. The trail from tidewater to the summit of the pass lay entirely within their tribal lands and was the shortest-known route from tidewater to the interior. For many years they had earned an income guiding and packing for travellers through the pass.

On reaching the summit of the Chilkoot Pass, Billinghurst decided, based on his experience, that unless someone was prepared to finance the construction of a tunnel several miles in length, the Chilkoot Pass was not a practical route for a railway. But, through discussions with Captain W. Moore, Billinghurst learned of another route through the mountains just a few miles farther east.

Captain Moore had been sailing the coastal waters and rivers since first arriving on the British Columbia coast in the latter 1850s. He was a rough-and-ready entrepreneur who could recognize an attractive business venture when he saw one. Moore was well aware that Dyea, the coastal access to the Chilkoot Pass, had no deep water areas where adequate docking facilities could be constructed. (Capt. B. L. Johnson, an old-time coastal skipper, once told him about a few trips he made to Dyea while working with the Union Steamship Company. The ship would be beached on the outgoing tide. Cargo was then unloaded over the side from where it was hauled to high ground using teams of horses driving across the wet-sand beach. The ship would then be re-floated and they would sail on the next high tide.) Captain Moore, being fully aware of docking conditions at Dyea, had begun looking for a site where a wharf could be constructed to accommodate large ships. He found such a site on the east side of the northwest arm of Lynn Canal, about five miles southeast of Dyea, along a deep-water bay the Indians called "Skagua"—that area would later be called Skagway.

Moore had previously talked to a Tagish Indian, known as Skookum Jim, who told him of another pass through the mountains which was much lower than the Chilkoot Pass, and he guided Moore to the summit of that mystery pass.



Captain W. Moore [University of Alaska photo]

In 1896, Skookum Jim, his sister Kate, brother-in-law George Carmack, and Dawson Charlie would discover that rich, gold-bearing ground along the south branch of Rabbit Creek, later called Eldorado Creek, that started the Klondike Gold Rush. Skookum Jim was known as a capable trapper and hunter and, knowing the country well, was in great demand as a guide.

Being a practical man with considerable foresight, Moore had taken soundings along the shore of that deep-water bay near Skagua, and had begun construction of a wharf in that area. He had also begun construction of a sawmill near the head of the bay, and had posted notice of location for 160 acres of land adjoining the head of that bay as well as for a 600-foot strip of foreshore along the harbour area. He had also begun clearing land and had started construction of the first trail along the Skagway River towards that still unnamed, pass through the coastal mountains.

Later, Moore told Ogilvie about the pass to the east and, although Ogilvie did not survey the pass, he named it the "White Pass" after the Honorable Thomas White, Member of Parliament and, at the time, Minister of the Interior.

On returning to Dyea following his survey of the Chilkoot Pass, Billinghurst travelled by canoe to Skagway, then proceeded along the Skagway River and on towards the summit of the White Pass. Although travelling was difficult alongside the Skagway River—there being no established trail to follow. As he proceeded with his survey, it became evident that, although considerable rock work would be required, the east side of the Skagway River Valley would provide a stable route with a maximum grade of between three and four percent—a feasible grade for such a railway. On reaching the summit of the pass and finding it only 2,865 feet above sea level—about 875 feet lower than the Chilkoot Pass—Billinghurst was quite confident that he'd found the best route for building a railroad from tidewater to the headwaters of the Yukon River system.

Billinghurst was aware that Captain Moore had established rights to construct a docking facility in Skagway, had posted notice for land at the head of the bay and had begun work on construction of a wagon road through the White Pass to Lake Bennett. Realizing that if the Syndicate wanted to proceed with the construction of a railroad through the White Pass they would, at some point in their negotiations, have to come to an agreement with Moore concerning docking facilities and the right-of-way along the Skagway River. With the approval of Charles Wilkinson, his superior, Billinghurst made an agreement with Captain Moore. In return for an agreed financing sum, the Syndicate would receive a 75 percent interest in all of Moore's Skagway assets.

With the above agreement in place, the Syndicate needed someone to watch over its interests, work with Moore and his sons on their Skagway development plans and proceed with a detailed survey of the White Pass with a view to constructing a railroad. The man selected to serve, at least temporarily, in that position was John Henry Escolme, an English engineer,

who arrived in Skagway in late June 1897, about three weeks before the first prospectors along with their shipments of gold arrived in San Francisco. With the arrival of other ships at other ports, gold fever soon spread to Vancouver, Seattle and Portland—and from those ports to the rest of the world—the Klondike gold rush had begun.

Within days the population of Skagway began to increase, and that influx continued until the town site became a hodge-podge of tents—thousands of them each with its own pile of tarpaulin-covered freight—sprawled across the foreshore and on up the valley where trees were stripped from the ground to make room for tents and provide fuel for fires. Much of the ground for which Moore had posted notice, was occupied by the squatters and was, eventually, incorporated into the town site.

To further complicate the problems facing the Syndicate, an American Joseph Acklen, an ex-congressman and lawyer, got together with George Brackett, a civil engineer, Norman Smith, and a few other locals, and formed a company to build and operate a wagon road from Skagway over the White Pass to Lake Bennett. That wagon road was to be followed, if possible, by a railroad. About the same time two different companies began promoting, and constructing aerial tramways over the Chilkoot Pass. And several companies requested permission to construct railways from the interior of British Columbia into the Yukon area.

Probably the most blatant railroad proposal, which created considerable adverse comment in the press, was put forward by Mackenzie and Mann and supported by several members of the Canadian Government, to construct a railway from Telegraph Creek up the Stikine River and on to Teslin Lake. For that 200 or so miles of railway, Mackenzie and Mann were to receive 25,000 acres of land for each mile of operating railway, plus land in the Klondike bordering 960 miles of creeks (to be alternate blocks of land six miles by three miles) and all gold recovered from that land was to be subject to a royalty of only one percent rather than the ten percent royalty paid by miners.

That proposal met violent opposition from the mining fraternity as well as from other Canadian railroads. The miners complained, and rightfully so, that by donating half the gold bearing creeks to the railway company who would be paying only a one percent royalty on gold recovered rather than the ten percent paid by individual miners, the Canadian government would, effectively, be handing over control of all mining in the Klondike to a private company. Opposition to the bill was so great that it died on the Senate floor.

Because of the bottleneck of the Chilkoot and White Passes, thousands of gold seekers were stuck in Skagway. That great horde, all anxious to get moving to the gold fields, attracted other men who looked upon that huge mass of humanity as men to be swindled and skinned: The most notorious

of those “bunko artists” and “confidence men”, who arrived in Skagway during the fall of 1897, was Jefferson Randolph Smith more commonly known as Soapy Smith.

Soapy's parents had sired three lawyers, three doctors, a minister, a farmer, and Soapy, who would become the best-known of all the Smith family. Within a few months of his arrival he would be looked upon as the Boss of Skagway. He operated a telegraph office and, for a price, would send a telegram and, within a few hours, provide a reply to that telegram, sent collect, even though no telegraph facilities existed in Skagway. His operations also included con jobs, protection rackets, knifings and hold-ups; and he operated a safety deposit system where a miner's gold would be safely kept—so safely that even the miner would never get it back. While directing his many henchmen Smith put on airs of being an honest man who was able to understand, and get along with, the scam-artists and other undesirables in the town. He had everyone duped except the town surveyor, Frank Reid, and a few of Reid's followers who had been keeping an eye on Soapy's operations for some time.

In the meantime George Brackett, with the promise of financial backing plus much urging by Acklen, decided to assume “rights by possession” and, using that portion of the road previously developed by Moore, proceed with construction and operation of a wagon road through the White Pass. Within a short time, Acklen dropped out of the venture and Brackett undertook to promote and operate it himself. He expected to recoup his investment and show a profit within a short time, but again he had trouble providing financing. Although a capable manager, Brackett had little in the way of financial backing. Aside from a \$15,000 donation by J. J. Hill, president of the Great Northern Railroad, and donations of \$22,500 by Sir William Van Horne, president of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, Brackett appeared to



Brackett's wagon road leading out of Skagway. [Roy Minter collection, White Pass photo]

have financed his venture from his own savings plus promises to pay. Eventually, because of those problems, Brackett was forced into selling to his rival, the Syndicate, for the sum of \$110,000.

The Canadian government had been acting, although somewhat slowly. Early in 1898 the North West Mounted Police established border patrol camps at the summits of both the White Pass and the Chilkoot Pass. That symbol of authority, backed up by the Canadian flag and a couple of machine guns, effectively established the international boundary at those points and, in addition to maintaining law and order, it allowed the police to collect customs duties on all goods entering Canada that had been purchased in the United States. That same action permitted both the governments of British Columbia and Canada to issue construction permits for construction of a railroad through their respective areas.

Also, in early 1898, the U.S. Congress introduced a bill to extend the United States land laws to the territory of Alaska—that Bill was passed on January 21, 1898. It was a bill that Brackett, as well as the Syndicate, had been waiting for. Different companies working within the two passes, as well as vying with each other, were trying to promote their individual routes and thus take business away from their competitors. All had been operating without a permit from the U.S. government, but with passage of that act by Congress, a permit could be issued and, no doubt, the organizations involved used all the political pressure available to ensure the permit was issued to their organization.

The Pacific Contract Company Limited was formed to represent the interests of the Syndicate, Wilkinson, who had represented the Syndicate in the U.S.A. and Canada, and Close Brothers & Co., a newly formed company to represent the Close family of London who had a long background of banking and commerce in England. At its formation, therefore, that company had a controlling interest in Moore's Skagway facilities. It would eventually purchase Brackett's wagon road; and would, still later, purchase the aerial tramways being erected to transport freight over the Chilkoot Pass. Thus the Pacific Contract Company Limited, formed for the purpose of building a railway from tidewater to the headwaters of the Yukon River System, already had control of the Skagway marine terminal and would soon further solidify its control.

Members of the above organization, along with a few others, met in Skagway to finalize plans for constructing a railroad through the White Pass. Individuals attending that meeting included Sir Robert Tancerd, a railway consulting engineer; E. C. Hawkins, chief engineer of the group, who had recently completed construction of a large irrigation project in the mid-western United States in which Close Brothers had been involved; and John Hislop, a Canadian engineer who was Hawkins' assistant. The group met in Skagway's St. James Hotel on April 10, 1898.

On March 31, 1898, Michael James Heney arrived in Skagway.

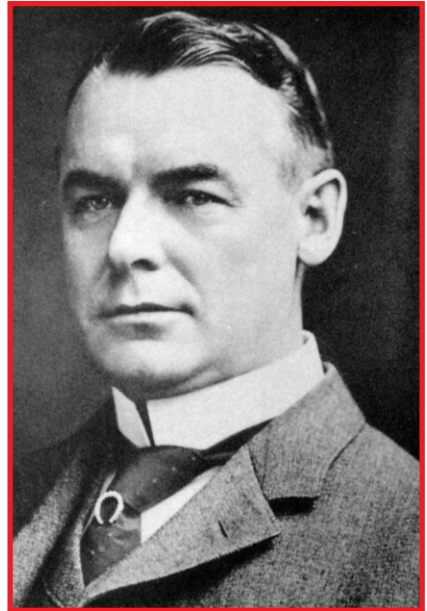
Heney, in his early thirties, a clean-shaven man with a dynamic personality, was no stranger to the north country having supervised the construction of a hydraulic gold-mining operation at Anchor Point, on the west coast of Alaska's Kenai Peninsula, the previous year. He had heard much of the great influx of miners to the Yukon, and had questioned all knowledgeable persons he'd met on the ship to Skagway, as well as those in Skagway following his arrival.

The son of Irish parents, Heney had left his home in the Ottawa Valley as a teen-ager and found work as mule skinner in one of the Canadian Pacific Railway construction camps. While performing well at his work Heney also learned much about contracting and engineering for railroad construction and, during 1884 and 1885, had worked with the survey crew through the mountains of British Columbia and along the Fraser River.

On arrival in Skagway, Heney looked over the port facilities in Dyea and Skagway. He talked to Captain Moore, looked over the cable-tramway facilities in the Chilkoot Pass, walked over the White Pass and on to Bennett. He looked down on Dead Horse Gulch where the bones of many pack horses lay bleaching on the rocks and he examined, with a practiced eye, the east side of the Skagway River with a view to the construction of a railroad. He recognized that constructing a railroad through such a frigid, mountainous area would test the mettle and stamina of both survey and construction crews—but he looked upon such a project as a challenge.

On arrival in Bennett, Heney talked to numerous individuals, particularly miners returning from the Klondike. From those conversations he concluded that the Klondike would be a gold producer for some time and that a railway to the head of navigation on the Yukon River, or possibly to Dawson City, would be a viable enterprise. He'd also come to the conclusion that, if such a railroad were to be built, he'd like to be the man to build it—it would be a challenge he'd like to meet and the answer to the miners' transportation needs.

Having just returned from a walk through the White Pass, from Bennett to Skagway, Heney booked a room at the St. James Hotel where, entirely by chance, he met Hawkins. They talked for a while. Hawkins was impressed by the man who had just



Michael J. Heney [Roy Minter collection]

walked in from Bennett—about 40 miles over a rough trail. He was also impressed by the fellow's knowledge of railroads and, particularly, his knowledge of the proposed railroad through the White Pass. He then asked Heney if he would join their meeting that evening, which had been under way for most of the day. Heney accepted.

During that meeting, which lasted far into the night, Heney, sometimes referred to as "The Irish Prince," convinced others in the meeting that he'd done his homework well. He answered all their questions with genuine enthusiasm without omitting any of the adversities. He then assured his listeners that the railroad could be built. He recommended it be built with a three-foot gauge rather than the standard four-feet-eight-and-a-half inch gauge, but cautioned them that the cost in that harsh northern climate, where temperatures could range far below zero for several months of the year, would be double the cost of similar work in southern Canada or in the United States.

He then added, "I would like to be the man to build it."

Later that night Heney was asked if he would consider taking on the position of general foreman and be responsible for hiring and supervising the workmen, should the company decide to go ahead with construction. Heney agreed. It was also decided that Hislop would remain in Skagway and prepare for a final survey that would begin as soon as approval was received from London.

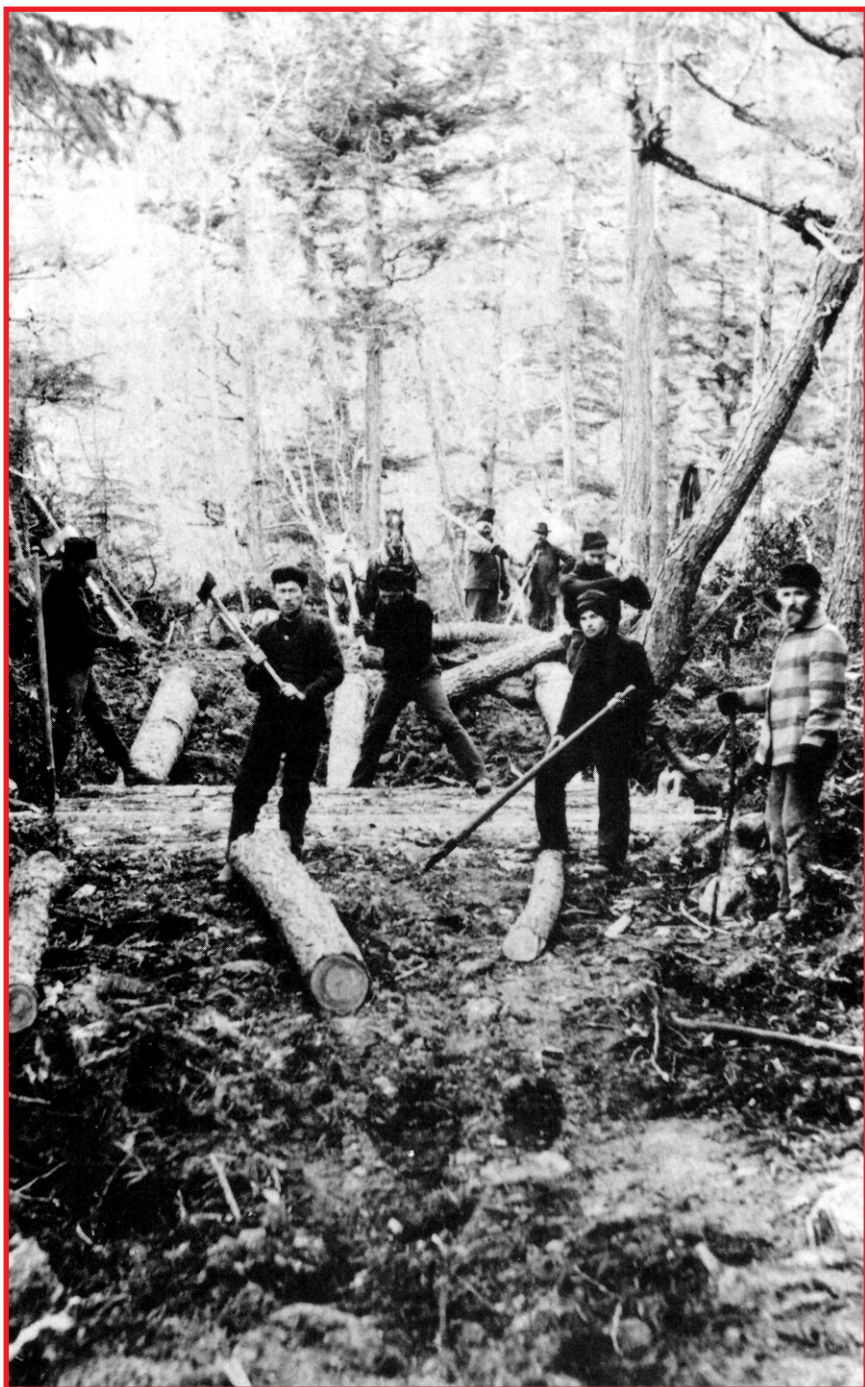
The key men were all in place; Hawkins being the manager, Heney the foreman in charge of construction, and Hislop responsible for engineering and surveying. (In modern day construction the positions would probably be listed as; Hawkins, Project Manager; Heney, Project Superintendent; and Hislop, Project Engineer.)

Part 2

Beginning Construction

Although the three key men had been assigned their positions on a tentative basis, financing still had to be approved and, in addition to other pending problems. The Spanish-American War broke out in April 1898, thus creating a drain on the availability of certain materials as well as manpower.

Hawkins, in Seattle awaiting approval of financing, made arrangements to set up a purchasing and shipping office there. Although he talked to steel suppliers about the purchase of rail and other materials, he refrained from actually placing any purchase orders pending financial approval. He also prepared an application for a railroad right-of-way from Skagway to the summit of the White Pass. That application was forwarded to Washington to be processed immediately after Congress passed the bill that extended the Homestead Act to Alaska. At the same time Hislop, in Skagway, continued his survey to establish the most economical route through Skagway and up along the Skagway River to the summit of the White Pass; at the same time he was becoming familiar with Skagway's politics and getting to know the town's leaders.



The beginnings of the railway north of Skagway. [Roy Minter collection]

In the meantime, the Syndicate and their associates had incorporated in order to accommodate a larger group of financiers. The Pacific and Arctic Railway and Navigation Company was formed to apply for the rights to construct a railway. Then, on May 14, 1898, immediately following the congressional move to extend the Homestead Act to include Alaska, that recently formed company became the first organization to file on a preliminary route to construct a railroad from Skagway to the summit of the White Pass; The Pacific and Arctic Railway and Navigation filed its preliminary survey for a right-of-way along the west side of the river, apparently in an effort not to interfere with Brackett's wagon road,

Considerable consternation arose a few days later when a party by the name of Paul Mohr filed on a parallel survey to construct a railroad along the east side of the river. Just who Mohr was, or who he represented, remained somewhat of a mystery; but Mohr allowed his survey to lapse a few months later and, no doubt, the lapsing of that filed survey removed a good deal of concern from the minds of Hawkins, Heney and Hislop.

With the extension of the Homestead Act to Alaska, several companies put forward new proposals to provide transportation services to the Klondike. One company opened an office in Victoria and began advertising the "Great Through Winter Route from Victoria to Dawson City." The Canadian Pacific Railway announced plans to carry northbound traffic to the Klondike; and the Mackenzie and Mann renewed its efforts to provide these services. Those proposals no doubt induced the financial people to rush their decision and, about the end of May 1898, Hawkins received approval to proceed with railroad construction.

Both Hawkins and Heney, then in Seattle, had things ready to move. Within five days of receiving notification to proceed, they dispatched two shiploads of materials and 100 workmen from Seattle to Skagway. At the same time Hawkins activated his purchasing organization, arranged purchase of ties, rails, spikes, hand-tools, rolling stock, construction supplies for camps and other buildings and, last but not least, much hand-drilling equipment and tons of black powder and dynamite for blasting the miles of railroad grade out of the rock face.

Because of limited financing and international boundary problems, it was decided to concentrate primarily on that section of the railroad from Skagway to the summit of the White Pass. By the time that section was nearing completion, the international boundary problems should have been settled and the rail could be completed to Lake Bennett. Then, it was estimated, with the railroad operating from Skagway to Bennett, income from transporting freight and passengers over that section of the route would pay for completing the railroad to Fort Selkirk—at that time being considered the northern terminus.

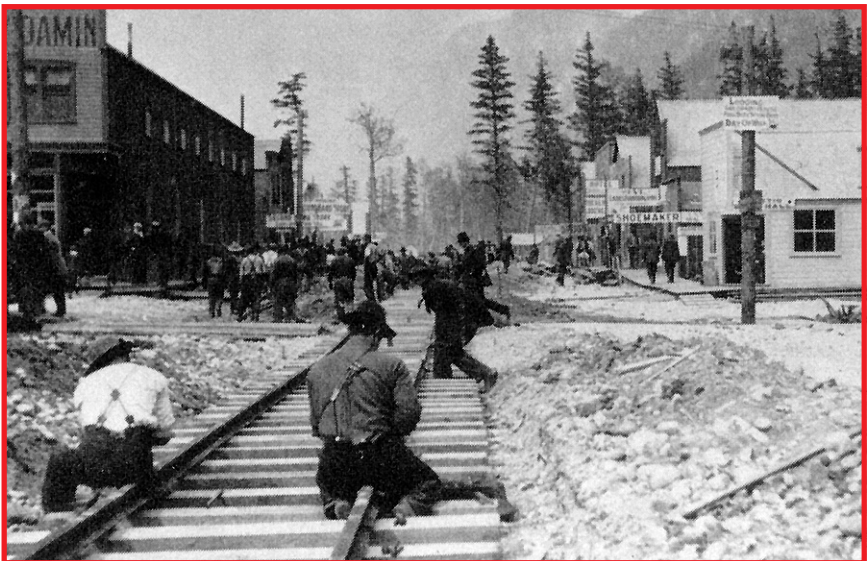
Also, in order to utilize railroad rolling stock to transport as much of the railroad materials as possible to the construction sites, laying the rail had to begin at the docking area and proceed through Skagway—but a right-of-way through the town had not yet been granted.

Skagway's council appeared to be in favor of granting a right-of-way along Broadway, the town's main street, but that route was opposed by the Broadway businessmen who wanted the right-of-way to be along the bluffs, east of town. That eastern bluff route, however, was occupied by squatters who claimed the land by right of occupation. The town council and the Broadway businessmen were at a stalemate; both wanted the railroad but they could not agree on the route it should take through town.

In a meeting on the night of June 14, 1898, the businessmen undertook to raise sufficient money to buy-out all the squatters along the east bluff route, but the following evening it became obvious they had not been able to meet that commitment. Under pressure from the construction staff, a motion was passed directing the council to grant a temporary right-of-way along Broadway, and that action was scheduled to take place the following morning. But on waking the following morning, the residents of Skagway found a railway construction crew tearing up Broadway and laying a rail line along the center of the street—following a line of stakes that had been installed by a survey crew during the night. The right-of-way through Skagway had been settled.

Heney then pushed on with dogged determination. With his workforce numbering in the hundreds, within three days he had completed about one mile of track through the town and, using wagons, had leap-frogged men and materials ahead to begin construction of the first bridge across the Skagway River.

The reason for crossing the river onto the west side was that Brackett's wagon road, which was then in limited operation but had not yet been purchased, followed the east side of the river and, if the railroad followed the



Laying the first rails in Skagway. [Roy Minter collection]

same general route, it would have to cross the wagon road several times thus interfering with Brackett's operation. The obvious answer was to cross the river, build about four miles of railroad along the west side, cross the river again, cross the wagon road and begin blasting out the rock-cut for the long climb to the summit. By that time Hislop had completed his survey which indicated that, in the slightly more than nineteen-and-a-half miles to the summit, the maximum grade would not exceed four percent and the curvature would not exceed 16 degrees per 100 feet of chord—steep grades and tight curvatures for a railroad but within operational tolerances.

But that analysis was based on a preliminary survey. Before rock excavation could begin, the approximate center-line of the railroad had to be staked and a profile of that center plotted to establish final grades. With that completed, cross-sections of the grade would be taken. Where cross-slopes were quite uniform those cross-sections may have been as much as 50 feet apart; however, where cross-slopes were steep and variable, the cross sections may have been as close as 20 or even ten feet. By plotting those cross-sections, it could be established just where, along the upper slope, rock excavation would begin—that line of beginning-of-rock-excavation had to be established and marked before rock drilling began.

On receiving approval to proceed with construction, Hislop would have had his first survey crew in the field for about two months and three or four more crews would have begun work following the first one; each crew would have been responsible for an allotted section of the railroad location between Skagway and the summit of the White Pass. Their information would have been passed to the central engineering office in Skagway where the overall plan, profile and sections were plotted and shown on the final drawings.

For one who has never taken part in such a survey, it is difficult to understand just how much work is required before construction can begin. For example, consider a section called Rocky Point, about three miles beyond the second crossing of the Skagway River. The original rock slope was between 70 and 75 degrees, which meant that for every ten feet horizontal the ground surface rose approximately thirty-two feet. A survey-crew member would first have to climb to the top of the rock, somehow anchor a rope there and let himself down the rock face, stopping at intervals so instrument men could measure horizontal and vertical angles from which the slope of the outer rock-face could be calculated. After taking those measurements and passing them to the engineering office for plotting, that survey member would have to repeat the exercise to mark the upper point where rock-excavation would start—all that to take place before the first blasting hole was drilled—and much of that work was done when the area was still in the grip of a northern winter.

After the rough grade had been prepared, the survey crew had to lay out the final centre line of the track, including the beginning and end of each curve which had to be super-elevated to accommodate a certain train

speed, and each curve spiraled-in at beginning and spiraled-out at the end. When the center line had been completed, the elevation of each survey point had to be marked with a cut or fill to bring it to its pre-calculated elevation and each grade change indicated. All that information had to go on the completed drawings complete with reference points and bench marks along the line so, at a later date, a survey crew could go into the field and pick up the survey, within a few 100 feet, anywhere along the line.

Construction camps had been established along the survey line between the second river crossing and the summit so drilling and blasting could proceed at several locations. It was along this portion of the project that the value of Heney's request for a three foot gauge became evident: By reducing the gauge from the standard of four-feet-eight-and-a-half-inches to three feet, he had reduced the volume of rock to be removed by more than fifty percent—a substantial saving in labour, materials and time.

Drilling rock for much of the blasting was being done by the double-jacking method. Each drilling crew consisted of three men. The first member of the crew held the drill-rod in place while the other two men pounded it with six- or eight- pound sledgehammers. After each blow, the holder would rotate the rod about 45 degrees before the next blow—the prime requirements of the rod-holder were calm nerves and steady hands. Following 20 to 40 feet of drilling (depending on hardness and texture of the rock) the rod would be exchanged for a sharp one and the dull rod returned to the nearby blacksmith-shop to have the hardened point ground and sharpened. (Some drilling operations used removable bits but it is doubtful they were used for double-jacking on the White Pass project.)

In his selection of black powder for the bulk of the blasting operations, most of which were in sidehill cuts. Heney had costs in mind. Black powder, having the slowest burning rate of virtually all commercial explosives, tends to heave rather than shatter and therefore breaks the rock into very large fragments. Those large chunks or slabs of rock that hadn't slid down the hillside following the blast were rolled, pushed or levered over the side for disposal—the fact that the disposed rock interfered with the flow of the river below was not considered a problem in those days.

With the survey from Skagway to the summit nearing completion, Hislop directed one of his survey crews to go to the summit and proceed to locate the route from there to Lake Bennett. On arriving at the summit, however, the surveyor in charge was informed by the North West Mounted Police that, on orders from Ottawa, the company building the railroad was not allowed to continue its survey into Canadian territory. Since the police had a Gatling gun to enforce their orders, the surveyor decided not to argue.

Hawkins, on hearing about the survey crew being stopped, contacted the company's legal representative in Chicago who, in turn, contacted legal representatives in Ottawa to have the situation corrected. It seemed that,

although the Canadian government had given their approval to construct a railroad from the Yukon boundary to Fort Selkirk, and the British Columbia government had given permission to construct a railroad from the summit to the Yukon boundary, the Canadian government had not given their permission to cross the international boundary at the summit of the White Pass.

Although word came back, through the legal representatives, that permission had been granted to cross that international boundary, on attempting to proceed, the survey crew was again stopped by the police. The same process was repeated several times, apparently each time on orders from a different government department, and the short northern summer was almost over before the survey continued.

Shortly after construction began, the Boss of Skagway, Soapy Smith, attempted to extend his operations to the construction camps and thus benefit from Heney's 'no drinking or smoking' rule. That order, in view of the danger involved in blasting and rock removal, was quite in order. If someone wanted to get himself soused, he could do so in Skagway far away from the tons of black powder, dynamite and steep working areas. But Soapy, with his eye only on financial gain, sent one of his henchmen to erect a drinking and gambling tent near a construction camp where the first of the drillers and blasters were being housed.



Removing the debris from a blast. [Roy Minter collection]

Heney, on hearing that such a tent had been erected, ordered Smith to remove it; but Smith, saying he had a right to open a business establishment there, refused to comply. Looking up at a huge rock hanging over the recently erected tent, Heney then called his foreman over saying, in a voice loud enough that Soapy's henchman could hear, "That rock is dangerous; I want it blown out of there by morning." Heney then left the area.

The foreman, an older construction worker by the name of Hugh Foy, had his orders; early the following morning he had one of his powdermen load a blasting charge under the rock. He then sent a man to wake Soapy's henchman, then the only occupant of the tent, and tell him the rock was ready to be blasted, but Soapy's man refused to move. Foy then entered the tent and told the fellow, who was still in his bed, "The explosive charge is in place. In one minute I will order the charge to be fired. The fuse has been cut for a one minute burn, then the rock will come down." The henchman still didn't move.

Foy stepped out of the tent and called to his powderman, "Fire," before taking shelter behind a rock. A few seconds later Foy was joined, behind the same rock, by the terrified henchman—still in his underwear—and they both watched the huge slab of rock demolish the tent. Soapy's man then returned to Skagway in bare feet, clad only in his long-John underwear.

Soapy Smith, it seems, decided thereafter to confine his operations to the town of Skagway where there would be no dangerous rocks hanging over his establishments.

Part 3

Construction—Skagway to the White Pass Summit

The hills resounded to the ringing sound of steel on steel as more than 100 men, wielding sledgehammers, pounded on sections of drill-steel held in place by half that number of workmen. Except when changing steel, or slowing to improve or alter the swingers stance, each sledgehammer struck the top of a bar of drill-steel about once every three seconds. With all men working, therefore, the uneven beat would ring out from the workers at a rate of about 2,000 beats per minute (small wonder hard-rock miners of that day developed hearing problems.) Each drill-rod would slowly chip its way into the rock leaving a hole of between one-and-one-quarter and one-and-one-half inches in diameter. Holes were drilled at about 30-inch centres, both ways, and several lengths of drill-steel were being used. For example, if drilling to blast a ten-foot lift of rock, they would be drilling holes six to ten inches below finished grade (depending on the rock) and they would be using four or five different lengths of drill-steel so as to maintain the top of the rod within an easy striking range of one-and-a-half to four feet above the ground. As each hole was drilled to its required depth and blown clear of the resulting rock-dust, the top of the hole would be plugged with rolled-up grass, a wad of moss, a rolled section of burlap, a plug of wood or other material that would not disintegrate from the elements and would keep unwanted materials from getting into the hole.

With all holes along a predetermined section of the bench completed, powdermen (or blasters) would take over that section. They would check each hole for depth and cleanliness, load each hole with black powder—tamping it to maintain maximum density of explosive, place an igniter near the top of the hole and stem the top of the hole to prevent shotgun-effect (blowing out the top of the hole.)

The charges would be arranged by electrical timing, by the use of detonating cord, or sometimes by cutting fuses to a predetermined length, so that the outer row of holes would fire in sequence along the face of the lift, followed by the second row, the third row, etc. The firing of the blast would be done after most of the workers had returned to camp—others, still working in the area, would be moved out of harm's way.

Before the trestle could be built; therefore, it was necessary to blast a bench out of the rock face to serve as an abutment on which to seat the northwestern end of the span. Beyond that trestle a 200-foot-long tunnel would carry the grade to the next section of sidehill cut.

Working with ropes and suspended platforms, drilling and blasting crews managed to blast out a notch in the rock, which was eventually enlarged to serve as a benched-out working area where a blacksmith shop, including a forge, was set up to maintain the drilling equipment used in the tunneling operation.

Because the drilling of horizontal holes by single- or double-jacking was extremely difficult as well as dangerous, a coal-fired boiler was also set up, probably on the same bench, to generate steam required for the operation of steam drills used in the tunneling operation.

Black powder, because of its slow burning property, was not a suitable explosive for the tunneling operation; rather dynamite would be used. Nitroglycerin, the explosive agent in dynamite, explodes almost instantaneously—so fast that if one detonated a charge of pure nitroglycerin under a boulder, the boulder would be pulverized before it had time to move. Dynamite strengths, categorized as 40 percent, 60 percent, etc., identify the percentage of nitroglycerin in that classification of explosive; therefore, the higher the percentage, the faster the burning or detonation, the higher the cost, and the more care required in handling. Also, in general, the higher the percentage the finer the rock-breakage. And, because all rock removed to construct the tunnel would have to be disposed-of manually, a fast-burning blasting agent would have been used; probably a combination of 60 percent and 90 percent dynamite.

To be continued...

The Goldseeker

Part Six

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Day after day we hacked at the frozen ground, standing in the smoke from the still-smoldering ashes, sweating, cursing, wondering how much farther to bedrock. Then one day Jim's pick rang and bounced off solid rock. Anxiously, we melted snow in the tent and used the water to pan these hard-won gravels taken off the bedrock.

Nothing. We dug a horizontal shaft along the bedrock, hoping to pick up the paystreak. Nothing in that direction so we dug the opposite way. Still nothing.

Every morning I walked up and down the slopes of the ridge, looking for dry wood to burn in the shaft or in our tiny Klondike stove. Ice built up on the inside walls of the tent and when the heat from the stove melted some it off, the tent steamed up, dampening our sleeping robes and clothes. Then it was out into the frosty air again and down into the shaft.

After we dug in four directions from the vertical shaft, I was ready to leave my partner and head back to Dawson. I was lowering Goldfever Jim down the shaft with the windlass when he yelled for me to stop and hold the line. I heard him chipping away at the sides of the shaft then...

"Yeeeehawwwww! Waaaaahoooooooo! Bring me up! Hurry!"

I winched him up out of there and he jumped into the snow beside the shaft. He peeled his fur hat off his head and flung it upward where it came down on some high willows, out of reach. Then Jim scampered into the tent and set our frozen pail of water on the stove. I could see his eyes rubbing around in his head and felt my own heart beating faster.

We had to wait for the stove to heat up, for the ice to melt. At last he poured water into a pan then pulled some dirt from his coat pocket. He swirled everything around in the pan.

"There, Hank! Do you see it?"

I gazed into the pan then grabbed it from his shaking hands for a closer look.

"I don't see anything."

"Look!" His finger quivered as he pointed at something in the pan. Then at last I saw it: a tiny yellow sliver, no larger than the point of a fine sewing needle.

"Doesn't look like much to me," I said.

"You damn fool you, Hank. Don't you know what we're onto here. That's float gold."

"Float gold? It floats?"

"My God, man! It means it floated down from up above. From the Mother Lode, for God's sakes! The sharp edges mean it hasn't travelled far and that it broke off from a vein of pure gold. We're onto the source of all the gold in the Klondike! We're rich, Hank!"

"So how do we find this Mother Lode? Under all this snow?"

"We'll go looking for an outcrop. It'll be sticking up out of the ground; we'll see it if we look hard enough. We'll pack up in the morning and head on up the valley here. This is what I've been looking for all my life, Hank."

I thought to myself, 'All this on the strength of that tiny sliver of gold. But what else could I do but have faith in old Jim? I had no money, no job, and enemies all over the Yukon. I couldn't even go to see Beth; I would be hanging around Dawson like a common beggar. Courting the richest woman in town. No, I would go up the mountainside with my partner.'

We started out with our packs in the morning. It was about mid-December; the hours of daylight grew shorter and the further we went, the deeper the snow. It was coarse, sugary snow so when we stepped in it, our boots pushed down to the frozen earth beneath. Old Jim puffed and swore but never stopped for a break until it got too dark to travel. We camped under some willows and took turns sleeping, with one of us always awake to feed the fire. The northern lights whooshed and crackled above our heads, warning us of the cold days and nights ahead.

Every time Jim saw a boulder or an outcropping he chipped away at it with his rock hammer. He put all these samples into his pockets until his coat weighed as much or more than he did. We stumbled up one side of the valley then the other, back and forth, back and forth. All this meant we made very slow progress up the mountainside but even so, I could see that pretty soon we would be above the treeline. How to stay warm then?

On our third or fourth day of this expedition, Jim broke off a piece of rock from an outcropping and turned it over and over. He hammered off another piece and examined that one, then another.

"We're here, Hank. This is it."

We ate the last can of beans, used the last bit of flour to fry some bannock, and drank coffee boiled from old grounds that had been used at least twice. Jim had worn himself out. He spent more energy convincing me that this was indeed a rich spot, even if no one could see it until spring. We decided that I would hike into Dawson for more supplies. We staked two claims, marking the corners by cutting off trees and using an axe to carve a flat surface on the high stumps, where we scratched our names with a pencil.

After that, Jim stayed in the tent, coughing and wheezing and complaining how weak his legs were. I wanted him to come with me; I would carry him if I had to, but he waved the idea off as too ridiculous to even think about.

I left him there in the tent, with a supply of firewood piled up outside. He would have to live on a few strips of rancid bacon and powdered eggs

until I returned. It had grown colder every day up here on the mountain and Jim warned me it would be a lot colder in the valley below, although there would be lots of warm cabins along the route. I made a face mask from the leg of some woolen pants and wound extra socks around my mitts. Then I set out over the narrow trail.

The wind coming over the mountain had blown the winter's snow down into the centre of the little valley—right onto the trail. The only other way out meant chopping my way through heavy brush. So I floundered along, wishing I had a pair of snowshoes, sweating under my layers of clothes. The snow in this region never packed; it formed a layer of crystals that blew apart when I stepped in it. I knew now why Goldfever Jim had stayed in the tent. When the hours of daylight ended in mid-afternoon, I had yet to reach our first camp.

Moonlight glared off the snow-covered sides of the little creek valley. I stopped to rest and felt the cold wrap itself around me in a coil, ever-tightening as I stood there. No food, no money, only a sliver of gold reflected in the eyes of my partner up there on the mountain—that was the state of my fortunes. I imagined old Jim in the tent, feeding the little stove, with perhaps a twitch of a smile on his wrinkled old face as he thought of me on this snow-buried trail.

Then I came upon our old diggings. From there the trail dropped almost straight down into the valley of Eldorado Creek. Surely I would see a cabin along there, with the smoke from its chimney going straight up like an arrow, marking the presence of the humans within. I slid down through the narrow passage among the tangle of willows, tumbling over and over. Hard snow stuffing itself into the back of my shirt felt like hot steel pellets against my bare skin.

At last I came down onto the main road below. I still lifted my legs high as I stumped along, not accustomed yet to the absence of deep snow on the trail. But where was everybody? It couldn't be much past seven in the evening so they wouldn't all be asleep as yet. I saw a group of brown shadows to my right, on the other side of the frozen creek. Cabins. But no smoke, no light.

All down my back the skin burned from the melted snow then turned numb. Again the cold wrapped around me, squeezing my chest and legs. I couldn't feel my knees bending but I kept walking, knowing that only a little further along I would find a warm cabin. Then came a horrible thought.

Christmas. The miners must have gone into town for Christmas. That's why I made the only sound in this valley as my feet crunched along on the brittle snow. Would they have locked all their doors? It was said that before the Big Rush no one ever locked their cabins. You could help yourself and leave some kindling for the next man. But in the fall I had seen armed guards watching over the strongboxes and sacks of gold as they freighted it to Dawson over this same road.

I tried the next cabin I came upon. I lifted the latch and the door opened. It seemed colder inside here than it was outside. And black as a mine shaft. I bumped into the table and yanked off a mitt so I could feel around for a

candle. Something fell onto the floor and broke. Where was the stove? I had no matches with me. I had left the few we had with old Jim. Where would these fellows keep their matches? I brushed my hand along a counter by the wall. I couldn't feel anything in the ends of my fingers; I could only tell about where they were in the dark.

The moonlight outside guided me to the door and I got back onto the trail. Cheerful memories began to fill my mind. I thought about Christmas on the old farm and the sweet voices of my sisters singing. I had heard that a person freezing to death often had pleasant thoughts near the end. I felt like lying down in the soft snow beside the trail and letting myself drift into a wonderful sleep.

It has been said that you can't hear the northern lights, that they make no sound whatsoever. But on that night on the Eldorado trail, I heard them crackling and whooshing just above my head. I looked up to see them frolicking in tight bands of colour all over the sky, then they would shoot down to disappear on the road where it wound its way through the steep valley below me. Always, the lights would race from everywhere in the star-filled sky and then dive into the same spot. A moment before, I had thought only of surrendering to sleep there in the snow beside the trail, to look up at the man in the moon and laugh with him... now I found myself following the northern lights.

What are they, crazy? I thought. Why are they going to the same place all the time? Is that their home? Maybe there's a gold mine there. I'd have to tell Goldfever Jim he picked the wrong spot. All the while I stumbled along on my stovepipe legs, my eyes fixed on the home of the northern lights. From time to time I stopped to watch where they went down, my body shaking as I stood, my teeth clattering, my time running out.

I came around a long bend in the trail and saw a wisp of smoke coming up from a little creek gulch flowing into the main valley. I stopped and stared. There it was again: smoke.

Where were my lights? They had raced away to another part of the universe. No matter. I had a new goal. Only my thoughts were alive in my frozen body and they focused on the smoke. I crunched along and the column of smoke grew larger as I approached it. There, down in a gully, was a tiny cabin built of unpeeled logs. Loose bark frayed out from the logs and a tarp had been strapped over the roof. A stovepipe stuck out at an odd angle near one end of the roof.

I pulled up the latch and leaned against the door. It wouldn't open. I pounded on it, my voice croaking for someone to answer. But no one did. I slid along the wall to a tiny window, thinking to break it. I had to get in to that warmth inside.

A pair of eyes and teeth appeared on the other side of the glass. No face, no body, just eyes and white teeth. What the hell is this? I thought. The eyes grew larger as I yelled and then a curtain or blanket swung across the window. I heard voices inside, a male and a female, arguing. Then the door opened a crack and I lurched toward it. Between the frame and the door I saw again: eyes and teeth but no face.

Then a male voice. "Hoe de lantun in yo face."

I saw the lantern come through the crack in the door. A black arm held it out and I grasped the handle. That voice: I had heard it before somewhere.

"Hoe de lantun up, sah."

I lifted the light above my head and now two pair of eyes watched me. I imagine they saw the ice crystals in my beard and mustache and not much else. I reached up and yanked off my headgear.

"Now can you see me? I'm Hank. A miner heading for Dawson. I'm going to die out here."

"Hank? Yo all said Hank?"

"Yes. That's my name."

A chain rattled and fell against the back of the door and it swung open. I toppled into the cabin and two pairs of black arms held me and led me over to a chair. They set the lantern on the table and stood looking down at my face.

"Yessah. It's you all rat."

"And who are you?" I asked. "How do you know me?"

"I'm Ben. From de yellow ship."

"Ben! Is that really you! By God, it is! How did you get here? How come you folks aren't in Dawson for Christmas?"

They bowed their heads. They wouldn't be welcome in the white society of Dawson. Along with anybody from the Orient or characters of unsavoury reputation no matter what race.

The Power of Laundry

In the early 1930s, the population of Whitehorse numbered about 500 people. Demand for electricity was mostly commercial and industrial. Residential use was chiefly limited to powering electric lights and radios.

It was that backbreaking, loathesome task—the family wash—that was the first domestic chore to be mechanized. Electrically driven wash tubs with mechanical beater arms began to appear in Whitehorse. Soon after came the electric iron.

To accomodate these popular new devices, the Yukon Electrical Company was obliged to make electricity available—for the first time—on Monday mornings for washing, and on Tuesday mornings for ironing. Such was the power of laundry.



THE YUKON ELECTRICAL COMPANY LIMITED
An **ATCO** Company

They set a steaming cup of tea before me on the table. I tried to lift it up but my shaking hands slopped the tea onto the dirt floor. Ben heaved another log into the stove and I got up to get closer to the heat. He was as shy as ever but when I stuck out my hand, he grasped it and held it in both of his. We smiled and I glanced over to see his woman smiling too. Three friends, were we, in that tiny cabin in the Klondike. It felt to me like we had been that way since the beginning of time.

“Do you know what brought me here, Ben?”

“Luck

“Yeah. I guess you could call them Luck.” of

The woman was a prostitute from ‘Frisco. Ben had come along with her over the Chilkoot Trail and she set up shop on Eldorado Creek. The miners came only at night, ashamed to be seen here in the light of day. But business was good. At the far end of the cabin a small door led to a dugout in the side of the gulch. Ben stayed in there while she entertained. If a miner got rough with the woman, Ben came out of the darkness and bopped him on the back of the head with a blackjack. The miner would wake up later, wondering how he got that big lump on his skull.

Ben had hidden himself in the engine room coal bin for the remaining three days of the journey to ‘Frisco. When the ship docked, he waited until the gangplank had been run out and raced down it to freedom. Fearful of running into the captain or crew of the yellow ship, he waited until it departed for home before he went around to the shipping company offices, hoping to arrange my rescue. Whether he succeeded or not, he didn’t know. I always suspected that the Mate had visited some old sailing pals and told them to pick me up if they could. He seemed to be the sort of person who would do that.

In the meantime, I slept on a cot in Ben and Averella’s cabin, still shivering under the blankets. Unable to sleep, I thought about all the events of the past few years and how my life seemed to be so different from other people’s—in one respect, at least.

From listening and watching, I could see that human beings usually tried to control their own destiny. They educated themselves for certain jobs or professions, or like Jordy, became traders in the necessities of life. Even great singers or athletes, if they had the talent, had to propel themselves toward their chosen goal. Most people lived and died by their own choices.

Ever since I had climbed out of the well down on the old farm, I had felt as though a power greater than myself was controlling my fate. That same controlling force had led me into the most horrible circumstances—and then just as surely, had pulled me out of them. Could it all have been just blind luck and misfortune, or was there really something out there that guided our lives if we let it? In my own case, was I being pushed along toward some sort of happy destiny... or was I just taking the easy road, unwilling to grab the reins?

My thoughts turned to Beth. I had yet to learn how she had made it to

the Klondike. I knew for sure that she must hate what she did every night at the Monte Carlo, parading her beauty before the lusting eyes of the miners. She had probably arrived here with no money and no worldly skills of any sort. So she used what destiny had provided: a face and form so beautiful they could gain her the richest man in the world. But then she would have to give herself away, to someone who could turn out as brutal as her father.

But this Jesus business had me worried. Would she lock herself away in a convent? Or become a nursing sister, loved by all the sick and feeble souls of this world, but denying her own true love? And that man had to be me, Hank Carlsbad, her friend and soul mate since the day we had first seen each other.

I resolved before I drifted into sleep that I had had enough of destiny. I would find a good living here in the Yukon, and I would have Beth as my wife, all by my own thinking and efforts. I would find a gold claim of my own and take my own riches from the frozen earth. Then I heard Ben's hand strike the wall as he thrashed in his sleep, and I listened to the pot-belly stove cracking as the fire in it died down and the metal shrank. Averella sighed, probably in gratitude for this Christmas Eve, when our world was celebrating the birth of Jesus, whether in church or at a drunken party. At least they weren't doing it here.

In the morning, a bowl of lumpy porridge and strong tea. I promised to stop by again and then marched down the Eldorado trail. A grey mist had settled into the lower part of the valley, held down by cold air that hurt my chest as I hurried along. I slowed the pace and breathed more slowly, remembering stories of men who had died on the trail as ice crystals formed in their lungs. My boots crunched and squealed on the protesting, hard-packed snow. Before long I came to Fauntleroy's cabin and saw a thick column of white smoke rising straight up from the chimney.

Clemmy answered my knock and took my hand to lead me inside. She was always so grabby and clinging but this time I could tell she was worried about something.

"Faunt is in Dawson. At Father Judge's hospital. He took a bad spell and hit his head against the woodpile. It was right after I told him the news."

"What news?" I asked.

"He's going to be a father."

"So soon? You know for sure?"

"Yes. It'll be born in late spring, in June. Fauntleroy says you are the only person in the world who can help him."

"Well," I said, "when he comes home, I'll show you how to do it. Although it might now work any more."

I told Clemmy about my partner up on the mountain above Golden Gulch and that I had to send food to him before he starved. However, I would go and check on Fauntleroy as soon as I got into town. She packed me a lunch and I hurried over the trail, arriving in Dawson just before noon.

Father Judge met me at the main door to his hospital built of logs. Said

to be in his forties, he looked to me like a very old, very tired man. I could hear his chest rattle as he puffed along the corridor in front of me. We came to a pair of huge feet sticking out over the end of a cot.

"Father, don't wake him yet," I said. "Tell me, is he going to be okay?"

"Yes, my son. He suffered a terrible blow to his forehead and there may be some complications but he will recover. Now tell me, have you seen Elizabeth since your return?"

"Elizabeth? Oh, you mean Queen Beth. No, I haven't."

"You should see her. She is about to take certain vows in my church and I want her to be absolutely sure it is the right decision. She will be here this evening. Can you come to see her then?"

"Yes. I'll be here."

The priest gently shook the sleeping mass on the bed. Faunt sat up, his eyes trying to focus and then his long teeth flashed at us. He still had a bandage wrapped around the top of his head.

"Hank! Did Clemmy tell you the news?"

"She sure did."

"And Hank, I've been talking to your queen. I told her everything. She's forgiven you, Hank. But she wants to join the church and work with Father Judge."

"Faunt, I have to go and see Jordy right away. I'll come back later and we'll get you out of here."

I turned to speak to the Jesuit but he was bending over another cot down the line. I came out of the hospital, almost blinded by sunlight that glared off the snow. I hurried down Front Street. A couple of dogteams flashed by me, heading out of town with their sleighs piled high with gear. I saw shovels and picks sticking out of one load and wondered where they would be going in this terrible cold.

Jordy's big tent had a crowd of men around it and I pushed my way through them. He saw me at the entrance and called out, "Let that man pass. Hank, come on up here to the counter."

He leaned over the counter and cupped his hand over my ear.

"Did you stake any claims?"

I held up two fingers. He grinned and grabbed my hand to shake it up and down. I told him we had to send grub to Goldfever Jim. Jordy answered that he had already sent a big load up there by dogteam. In the meantime, Jordy had a lot of outfits to sell. Every man in Dawson, sober or drunk, was headed for Golden Gulch. Even a few hardy women were trying to put together an expedition to the Mother Lode of all the gold in the Klondike.

"But Jordy," I said. "All we did was brush the snow off a few rocks up there. Those claims might not be worth anything at all."

"Here, Hank. Go have some fun," he said, handing me a roll of twenty dollar bills. Then he waved me off so he could tend to business. The crowd opened up for me and I went back out to the street. More dogteams and groups of men pulling sleighs were hurrying out of town.

I saw the big sign above the Monte Carlo Saloon. I shouldn't go in there,

I thought. Jack Smith and his goon squad would try to throw me out as soon as they recognized me. But I opened the door and walked in, trying to see in the darkness after the blazing brightness of the street. I bumped into a table not far from the entrance and sat down at it, and even in the dimness, I could tell I was the only customer.

The barman came over to stand above me and I could see his handle-bar mustache twitching as he looked down at me. "What'll you have?"

"Prune juice. And make sure there's no booze in it."

"That'll be three dollars."

He came back with my change and the drink. I sniffed it carefully. This was no time to get drunk. From the corner of my eye, I thought I saw a face peeking out from one end of the stage curtain. The curtain trembled and was still. I kept an eye on the door and slid my chair around so I could make a fast run for it if trouble started. I knew why I had come. It was to sit and imagine all the geezers staring at Beth every night. And I thought to myself, 'I'd rather she became a nun.'

I finished the prune juice and was about ready to leave when the barman fetched another drink. He scooped three dollars from my change on the table and walked away without saying a word. Again I smelled the glass. It seemed okay and I sat there, enjoying the warmth from the two, red-hot barrel stoves that squatted in the centre of the floor, feeding their smoke into one chimney that also glowed red in the semidarkness.

Two barmen glided toward my table, each carrying a drink, their feet moving silently over the sawdust-covered floor. They were exact twins and when they set the glasses down on my table they walked away in unison, leaving only one glass behind.

I tipped up the glass. This one had rum in it. I knew I had been tricked. They had given me a Mickey Finn with the prune juice. I should have suspected when I got such fast service from the barman, who usually stayed behind the counter letting customers fetch their own drinks. I shook my head and stopped seeing double for a moment. I had already tasted the rum; it tasted good, it smelled good, I loved the colour of it and the shape of the glass it was in... what the hell, I can handle it.

Like magic, another glass appeared on my table. This time I missed the two barmen, only catching a glimpse of one person striding back to the long counter that ran down one side of the saloon. The people who operated the saloon knew that if I started to drink, there was no stopping. I was as powerless over it as an engineer in a runaway train, or a farmer looking up at hailstones smashing down on his crops. In a flash, I regretted my decision on the trail to abandon the gods—or to have them abandon me in the midst of the evil I felt in this room.

I reached for the glass of rum but my hand stopped. I pulled back from it and scraped my chair away from the table. I stood up, getting set to head for the door and daylight when the room started to swirl and I fell forward onto the table. It tipped to one side and I slid to the floor. I spit chunks of coarse sawdust out from between my teeth but other than that, I couldn't move. Then everything went black.

I wakened with two soft mounds of flesh pressed against me. Then I felt a poisonous wind of sour whisky blowing against my face. A lamp burned dimly on a table beside the bed and I saw the face of the big lady from the riverboat—the same woman who had been pounding on Clemmy. I moved back from her and her huge arms clutched me more tightly. I turned my head to get away from her whisky breath and then the door to the room opened.

Someone turned up the lamp and ran for the door again. I lay there in the glare of the lamp reflecting off the bright wallpaper. A woman stood in the doorframe looking down at us. It was Beth.

The door closed again and I freed myself from the riverboat lady. I searched the room for my clothes: gone. I whipped the blanket off the woman and wrapped it around myself. At the end of the hallway I saw a door and ran for it, flinging it open to face a blast of cold air from outside. A stairwell led down to the street below and I raced down it in my bare feet. It was only a couple of hundred yards to Jordy's tent.

His big dog barked and snarled as I pounded on the door, jumping up and down so my feet wouldn't freeze. At last Jordy opened the door, his hand in the collar of the dog. I tramped in to stand by the stove while he stared at me, not saying a word.

"Jordy, I need another outfit."

"I can see that you do," he said, pointing to racks of clothes along the wall and a shelf loaded with longjohns and socks and such.

"Then I need a paper and pencil."

He stood there, his face like a question mark, and I told him to wait until tomorrow. I would give him the story then. He went over to his cot and lay down and his dog crumpled to the floor beside the bed, never taking its eyes off me for a second. I addressed the envelope to Beth, care of Father Judge.

"Either you quit the Monte Carlo or I will burn it to the ground, after I have settled with Jack Smith and his crew. The men you are working for are more evil than you can possibly imagine. I would rather you take up with the Church than to stay where you are. My love for you is the same as always. It is only misfortune that has kept us apart. Hank."

I sealed the letter and looked over at Jordy and his dog. They were both awake and watched as I found myself a new set of clothes. Then Jordy got up and came over to the table.

"Want to sell a share of your gold claim? Besides the percentage you owe me for the grubstake?"

"Sure I will, Jordy."

We sat there until daylight, going over figures and making out the paperwork. A man burst in off the street.

"Have you heard, boys? The Saint died in his sleep last night."

"The Saint? You mean Father Judge?"

"Yep. He's gone. They'll be announcing the funeral sometime today."

Father Judge's passing meant nothing to Jordy. We finished the paper-

work on the sale of three-quarters my claim to his company. He counted out as much cash as he could spare then weighed out the rest in gold. I would still get a percentage of any gold that came out of the mountain. I told him again that we had only brushed the snow off a few boulders and outcrops of what looked like solid granite.

We shook hands on the deal and I walked down to the hospital. A middle-aged nun answered the door and I inquired about Fauntleroy. He was feeling fine and had left for home already. The funeral for Father Judge was two days hence and she was expecting a huge crowd. I showed her the letter to Beth but the nun wouldn't take it. I'd have to give it to the "lady" myself, she said, and she had a queer expression on her face. Disgust? Hatred? I couldn't tell for sure. Maybe the nun was just having too busy a day.

I took a room at the Royal Alex hotel and walked down to the saloon. All eyes turned my way and I squeezed up against the bar, my back burning from the hostile stares. I had started a small gold rush and was connected in some way to the Queen of the Klondike. That's all they knew about me. I ordered rum and handed the bartender my roll of money.

"A round for the house," I said. "Doubles."

He counted heads and peeled off some bills from the roll and gave the rest back to me.

I turned to the crowd and yelled, "You'll come up for your drinks, all of you. And any man who thinks he's too good to drink my booze can wait for me out on the boardwalk. I'll take on the whole works of you if I have to. And you ought to know that the Queen of the Yukon hates my guts. She's fair game for any of you louts. Just make sure you've never been in a scrap or helped any damsels in distress. Then she might think you're okay."

I looked at every face as they stared back at me. The biggest man in the room, with hair sticking out everywhere from under his fur hat so that only his flattened nose was visible, scraped back his chair and clunked up to the bar. He took a drink from the bartender and tipped the glass toward me. Then he gulped it down and held his glass for a refill. The bartender looked at me and I pulled out the roll again.

Every man came up for his drink and a few more. They toasted me, one by one, and I swung around to pick up my own glass. My hand closed around it but the glass wouldn't move. Thinking it might be glued by slopped-over rum, I pulled on it harder. It stayed fast where it was.

I swung around on my stool to see every eye in the saloon looking at me and the glass. Back and forth, back and forth went their eyes. I gave the glass a little twist to break it loose but it would not come up off the bar. I slid off the barstool and walked toward the door. A few men standing by the entrance moved out of my way. As the door swung shut behind me, I could hear them roaring to each other inside, exclaiming what a strange son-of-a-bitch this Hank fellow was.

Now they had a new story to spread around the Klondike. It seemed to me that all they did in this country, besides dig for gold, was talk.

I went down the Bank of Commerce and deposited most of the cash and

gold, and got them to put my agreement with Jordy in their safe. I decided to hang around town until the funeral and I strolled up and down the streets. I stopped in front of the Monte Carlo. Beth's face stared back at me from her poster. She was lost to me, I knew, unless the gods had other plans. I ripped the poster off the wall and tucked it under my arm. As I started down the street again, the door opened and a woman staggered out.

It was her, again, the big lady. She cried out for me stop but I kept walking. She floundered along, calling my name and people stopped in their tracks to watch us. I sighed and waited for her, looking up into her bloated face.

"I'm drunk," she said, "But my mind is clear. They paid me to go to that room. You didn't even wake up."

"I know. And if I pay you some more, will you take me to Beth's room? And we'll tell her what happened?"

"Jack Smith has a guard in the hall. He's always there."

I reached in my pocket for the letter and handed it to her. She saw the name on it and nodded.

"I want to get away from this life, too," she sobbed. "Just like Clemmy did. Get myself a Lord."

"Come out to their place. I'll speak to Clemmy and she'll say it's all right."

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. In fact, I'm going out there today. Now you take that letter to Beth."

I headed toward my hotel and saw some half-frozen men trudging into town. They had returned from the big rush to Golden Gulch and I pulled my cap down over my eyes as I walked along. I found a note pinned to my door from someone named Alex MacDonald. Then I remembered that he owned the hotel and was said to be involved in almost every mining operation in the Klondike. He wanted me to stop by his suite of rooms.

He answered my knock in a booming voice, sounding like an uneducated version of Fauntleroy. I walked in and wiped my boots on the mat by the door before stepping onto the thick carpet.

"I'm buying your claim," he said from his armchair by the window.

"I already sold a forty percent interest. And the rest of it, I'll keep for now," I said.

"Everything is for sale at the right price, my boy," he said, lighting a huge cigar that looked very small in his big round face. "I hear you've been having some conflict with Jack Smith."

"Nothing I won't settle myself."

"I own part of the Monte Carlo," he said. I watched his face through the smoke surrounding his head as he puffed furiously on the cigar. He looked down at the floor, not once lifting his eyes to meet mine. "How I got that interest was by trading some claims to Swiftwater Bill for his half of the business."

"Only half?"

"I might be able to buy some more of it if I get Jack in the right mood and he's broke again. Which is most likely. I hear he gambles a lot these days, trying to take his mind off Queen Beth."

"Get me 51 percent of that hotel and the balance of the claim is yours," I said. "But I have to tell you sir, that there might not be anything there. We only think there's gold in that mountain. Goldfever Jim could be just guessing."

"Jim has been in the country a long time. He's due for a strike. That's why everybody rushed in there. They know he's due. The country owes it to him."

"Well," I said, "that doesn't make a lot of sense to me but I'm just a greenhorn. When can you make the deal?"

"Give me a couple of days. Make yourself scarce so Jack Smith doesn't sniff anything."

"All right," I said. "And if you get that percentage, I want our deal to be a total secret. Nobody must know. I want your word on that."

He pushed himself up out of the armchair and we shook hands. Again he wouldn't look into my face but I noticed a glint in his eye, as if secret arrangements, percentages and perhaps revenge were worth more to him than any dollars he had in the bank.

I stuffed some wrinkled clothes into my pack and left the hotel. As I passed the Monte Carlo I heard a woman sobbing. Sitting on the front steps, wrapped in a thin blanket, with a small grip beside her, was the big lady.

I sighed and went over her. She looked up at me with tears streaking through the rouge and mascara on her face. Bright red lipstick had smeared onto her chin. Her breath made whisky clouds in the cold air and I pulled her to her feet.

"C'mon," I said. "We'll take a walk. Jack Smith fired you for giving Beth the letter, right?"

"Yes," she sobbed. "But she never got it. They took it away from me. I'll tell her what's in the letter when I see her, though."

"Thank you very much," I said.

We stopped by Jordy's where I bought her some warm clothes. Jordy told me about grubstaking most of the men who had rushed to stake claims on Golden Gulch.

"You're making me a rich man, Hank."

"I sure hope so, Jordy. By the way, this is..." I turned to introduce my new friend but she had slumped into a chair by the stove. Jordy's black dog had its head in her lap and she stroked its ears gently.

"Hey!" yelled Jordy. "That dog'll take your hand off there, whats-your-name!"

She looked over at us and smiled.

"My name is Gertrude Small, Gert for short. You want to sell this dog?"

"Turk! Get over here!"

But the dog stayed by her side. Gert smiled at us through the mess on her face.

"How much for the dog, Jordy? Everything is for sale at the right price, isn't it?"

"In this case, yes. You can have the damned mutt for nothing. Take it with you right now."

We wrapped ourselves in our winter gear and headed down the street, side by side. I pulled the flap of my parka over my face. Gert remarked on a poster she saw announcing Father Judge's funeral. I was glad to be reminded of it and wondered as we strolled along how Faunt and Clemmy would welcome these two strays from the streets of Dawson. And what would Beth think of it all when she heard?

The black dog padded along by Gert's side as we walked up the Bonanza Creek road. I kept my head down and parka hood closed whenever we met anybody on the trail. We arrived at Fauntleroy's cabin and he met us at the door. The smell of bread fresh from the oven and of soap and linen wafted out with the heat from the roaring woodstove.

He still had a lump in the centre of his forehead and it went well with his bat-wing ears and long teeth. Clemmy came out of their little kitchen and I couldn't help staring at her. She had lost her bread-dough colour; her cheeks were pink and her eyes glowed brightly as she smiled at us. I supposed her to be in about the fifth month of pregnancy. I felt a little whirring my gut as I wondered if I'd made a mistake pairing her up with Fauntleroy. But, too late now.

"Do you folks remember Gert? Can you use some help out here? She's not with me, by the way; I just brought her along for a visit. Say, Faunt, you look different. Kind of normal, if you know what I mean."

"Hank, since I cracked my head on the woodpile I haven't had a seizure. I always felt them coming on but now it's like it's never gonna happen again."

We left Clemmy and Gert at the table, talking like old friends, and went outside. The cold hit us after the heat of the cabin but I had to tell him about the hotel deal—and I asked him if he would be the manager of it if the deal went through.

We shook hands on it. He wouldn't tell Clemmy until we knew for sure and then I told him about the episode with Gert at the Monte Carlo.

"After all she's done to you, Hank, you brought her out here?"

"It was on account of her that we rescued Clemmy. Remember?"

"Yeah, you're right, Hank. It feels like the gods are with us, doesn't it? I'm going to be a father; my seizures have stopped—for now—and it looks like we might be partners in a dancehall. Not bad for two guys from the nuthouse, is it?"

"Except for one problem, Faunt. I don't know what will happen to Beth. I have a feeling she won't be so welcome at the church now that Father Judge is gone."

"We'll work on it, Hank. At least you know she doesn't want anybody else. I hear Jack Smith has done everything but get on his knees to her—but she won't even give him a smile."

We went back inside to see the women with their heads together at the table, the black dog lying at their feet. I left my coat on, having decided to stay at Jordy's that night and attend Father Judge's funeral the next day. Again I tramped over the trail to Dawson, thinking as my feet crunched and squealed on the hard snow. It seemed that everybody had a life except me.

So many people had come for the service that they held it outside with the new priest speaking to the crowd from the steps of the church. Gamblers, dancehall girls, miners, Indians from Moosehide, rich and poor, Father Judge had loved and cared for them all. The priest on the steps said all the right words but as I studied his sharp, unforgiving face, I had a feeling he was glad to see the old priest go to his grave. They slid Father Judge's coffin onto the back of a sleigh and we followed it along the streets to a small graveyard at the bottom of the Dome Mountain.

I had been searching the crowd for Beth but couldn't see her anywhere. I caught up to the sleigh and asked the only nun I knew if she had seen the lady from the Monte Carlo. The nun's lower lip curled into a sneer and she turned away.

After the funeral I stopped at Jordy's to warm up. I headed for the Bonanza trail again, following Big Alex McDonald's advice to stay out of town until he made the deal with Jack Smith. When I reached Faunt's cabin, I found they had a visitor. It was the big gazooney from the Alexandria Hotel. He still wore his fur hat and he sat at the table gazing across it at Gert. She had washed off her paint and powder and tied her hair into a tight bun at the back of her head.

"Hank," she said with a big smile that crinkled her nose, "I want you to meet the finest bushman in the Yukon. This is Manfred."

He shook my hand and I looked into his pale blue eyes. Or, I tried to. One eye was gazing over my right shoulder and the other seemed to be looking at the ceiling.

We sat around the table, shoulder to shoulder, while Clemmy and Faunt brought out trays of caribou meat, baked beans and bannock, with raisin pie for dessert. Then they joined us in the stifling heat of the little cabin. A large coal-oil lamp on a wall shelf sent flickering shadows around the room, and the cabin walls cracked as the temperature dropped outside.

We were a band of adventurers, all of us far from our homeland, but none at the table had any regrets. With the meal finished, Manfred and I lit our pipes. It was time to talk and to listen. We turned to the stranger among us, to hear what this veteran of the northland could tell us—about himself and the country.

To be continued...

From the Publisher

Arrmy Beach has lost one of its long-time denizens. John Walin died alone in his Army Beach home on a sunny day in June. His much-loved border collie, Tracker, waited in the yard without food for nearly a week until a neighbour just back from vacation realized that something was wrong.

A dedicated recycler, John saw beauty and utility in other people's discards. Old porch railings, window frames with and without panes, burned-out barbecues, and left-over bits of carpet were among his stock in trade. Sitting in his beat-up red Toyota, John spent many hours at the Whitehorse city dump waiting to scoop up treasures as soon as their owners dropped them off there. Evenings and weekends he frequented our Marsh Lake dump. Junk was John's passion. More than once I saw his face light up as he described his latest find.—"Not a thing wrong with it." "Just like new." "Still in the wrapper."—John sold his vision of a re-usable, re-fillable and repairable world and his neighbours bought it. Over the years we came to regard John Walin's scrap pile as our local hardware store and we saved many a trip to Whitehorse because of it.



Born and raised in Whitehorse, John was the proud descendant of a Klondike stamper. In 1898, John MacPherson, John's grandfather, climbed the Chilkoot Trail. After mining in Dawson for 10 years, MacPherson moved to Whitehorse, married and, eventually, opened his own blacksmith shop. The MacPherson home that John's grandfather purchased in 1910 is among the oldest residences in Whitehorse.

John must have inherited his grandfather's talent for bashing metal because he was not shy about taking on some big jobs. This spring he decided that his rusty Toyota still had some life in it. All it needed was a new chassis. So, at age 62 and in failing health, he cut the body off his old beater and hoisted it onto the frame of a nearly identical truck. John claimed he needed a truck to haul the junk out of his yard. He said he was cleaning up his place but no one took this threat seriously.

In early June, Sam and I paid what would be our last visit to our neighbour down the road. Sam needed a small window for the latest addition to his print shop. John beamed from ear to ear when Sam selected a 14-inch square window and declared it "perfect." Sam dug into his pocket for five dollars but came up a few loonies short. "I'll have to pay you later," Sam said. John answered, "I'm not going to worry about it," and I'm sure he never did.