

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

Price:
\$4.95

ISSUE
No. 15

WWW.YUKONER.COM

- THE "OTHER"
HISTORIANS
- JEAN GORDON
- HERSCHEL ISLAND
- DOG-PUNCHER ON
THE YUKON, PART 1



**OBIE, OF BURLBILLY HILL, BURWASH,
YUKON, JULY 2002.**

THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

JULY, 2000

ISSUE
No. 15

www.yukoner.com

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

From the Editor	4
The Mail Run	5
The “Other Historians,” by Darrell Hookey	11
The Jean Gordon Story, by Joyce Hayden	18
I Married the North, by Elizabeth Reid	36
Fire in the Yukon, by Jane Gaffin	43
Herschel Island, by Don Sawatsky	46
A Dog-Puncher on the Yukon, Part One, by A.T. Walden	53
From the Publisher	62

Cover: Felicia Gordon of Whitehorse, July, 2002 [S.H. photo]

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



THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

Published four times
annually by:
GreenInk Publishing,
Whitehorse, Yukon.
Canadian Publications
Mail Agreement No. 1018000

Postage paid at
Whitehorse, Yukon

website: www.yukoner.com
e-mail: yukonermagazine@gmail.com

Publisher: Dianne Green

Editor: Sam Holloway

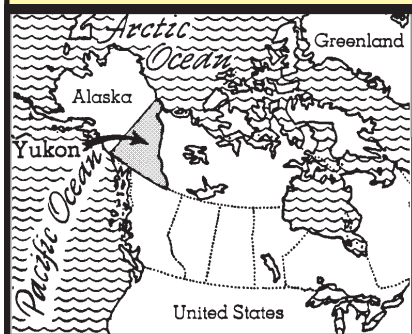
ISSN 1206-6974

Subscriptions,
\$24.00 (plus GST) for six issues

Back issues are available
at \$3.95 each (plus GST),
including postage.

GST No. 881101125RT0001

The Yukoner is produced entirely on
the premises at Army Beach, Yukon,
using computer-to-plate from an IBM
486 computer running Windows 3.1, to
an A.B. Dick 360CD press.



From the Editor

We're charging the same price for a subscription now as we did in 1989. A hundred years ago, writers made about the same money they get today. But other prices have gone up.

Last winter I saw a truck on a car lot in town that had a big sticker on the windshield: \$5995. I didn't see the fine print at the bottom of the sticker. I took the truck for a test drive and except for the plastic bumpers, it seemed pretty solid. I told the salesman what I could put down on it and he said fine.

I went back the next day to drive it home. The salesman was calculating the monthly payments and to me, they seemed awful high, more than I could pay. He punched the numbers again and came up with the same figure. What was wrong here?

Then I saw another number at the bottom of his sheet: amount owing: \$25,000. That sticker in the windshield meant \$5995 OFF THE TOTAL PRICE! I told the man that I once bought a brand-new Chevy Biscayne for \$2900. "How long ago was that?" he asked.

"A few years back," I said, and got into my old Dodge to drive home. I paid \$400 for it many years ago and it has steel bumpers. Starts at 50 below. I'll think I will stick with it and keep writing stories too.

Thanks for the many letters. If any of you have memories (and photos) about driving the Alaska Highway between 1947 and 1975, I hope you will send them along. We return all photos within a week of receiving them.

Sam

THE MAIL RUN

A black and white illustration showing a mail runner in traditional Arctic gear pulling a sled across a snowy landscape. The sled is loaded with mail bags. A team of dogs is harnessed to the sled, pulling it forward. The scene is set in a vast, open, snowy environment.

Dear Sam:

I spent many unforgettable weeks and months in the Yukon, including planting the Yukon flag on Herschel Island, rafting down the Firth River, hiking the Chilkoot Trail, many other hikes in Kluane, etc.

I was delighted to get Issue #13 with John Hatch's cover shot—didn't know there were any girls left at Silver City! Also happy to see my photo so nicely reproduced. It brought back many happy memories of events and moments in the Yukon from my many visits there. I take it from the photo caption that everyone in it is alive and well and still in the Yukon, except the late G.I. Cameron. He made the best sourdough pancakes ever tasted. The insert photo of me was taken by Jim Whyard 26 years ago.

That's a nice publication you are turning out. Congratulations.

Be happy you are living not in Toronto but in the Yukon! Count your blessings.

Best wishes with your efforts,

Richard Harrington

Toronto, Ontario



This is Richard Harrington 52 years ago (Dec., 1948). when he was travelling by dogteam in the Canadian Arctic. He is the author of numerous photography books, including Harrington's Yukon.



Dear Editor:

I enjoyed the story by Elizabeth Reid in Issue #13. Father Leveque was our Padre in 1947 when I was commanding officer at Fort Nelson. I remember him well and fondly.

J. Roberts

Naramata, B.C.

Hello Sam:

On page 33 of Issue #14, Betty Reid describes a Nahanni incident and mentioned Stan Turner and his wife Vera, who were operating a trading post there. I have just returned from a visit in White Rock, B.C. with Vera Turner who was the wife of Dick Turner who ran the trading post at Nahanni Butte. Stan was Dick's brother and was also trapping (but not trading) with his wife Kay in that area at the same time.

Regards,

Dick Thomas

Drumheller, Saskatchewan

Hi Sam & Dianne:

I would like you to print my name and address in *The Yukoner*. I love to write and get letters.

I've trapped just about 60 years but only the last 25 for a living (since I retired) in the Finlayson, Long Lake and Lapie Lake area. Now I am permitted to trap in a five-mile area around Ross River for seniors. I really just set a half dozen traps & snares around the landfill. I most always get a wolf & 6-7 foxes and a few lynx.. No marten here but one year I got 231 marten plus other stuff on a rented line at Wolverine Lake (near Finlayson Lake). I worked five years in the wolf kill at Finlayson Lake, skinning the wolves for the government. I built a cabin at Nancy J. Creek, 13 miles north of Finlayson Lake on the Campbell Highway.

I built a cabin and five line cabins on Line 321 at Lapie Lake, South Canol. I've made many good friends around here and other parts of Canada. I've had a few hairy adventures (put a Skidoo through the ice and got a bit wet, also broke through at a beaver dam, not really any fun). Got a couple of trophy-sized moose, a couple of caribou and several bears (no grizzlies although a I saw few and passed them up for different reasons, always looking for a real good one. I ran the chain saw over my knee cap, some damage but luckily I could take care of it myself and it got OK.

I have a bush radio, my call sign is "Far North" and I keep in touch with Don Taylor "514" the winter sched, which is very interesting and a lifesaver a couple of times for myself and others.



Was in the Rangers for a while but got too old to keep up with the boys. Sure do miss it though, there is no life equal to being alone in the bush. I was never lonesome and always had something to do. Mom and I can be together here in town much better. This October 17th will be our 69th wedding anniversary. I am 88; Mom is 85 on June 3rd.

Some of my best friends are in the Game Branch & the R.C.M.P. I have a little greenhouse and a small garden & lots of flowers. Mom and I do a bit of recycling beer cans and bottles, gets us outside and some exercise. I just sent a 2-year subscription to the priest here (Father Pierre Vegret) who has been a very good friend.

I always had a big dog out on the trapline and she was fighting twice with wolves and I ran up and shot them. One time I stood in my doorway at Finlayson Lake and shot three wolves. Two other times I killed bears on my porch (too close).

Take care, keep the little magazine coming, it's the best.

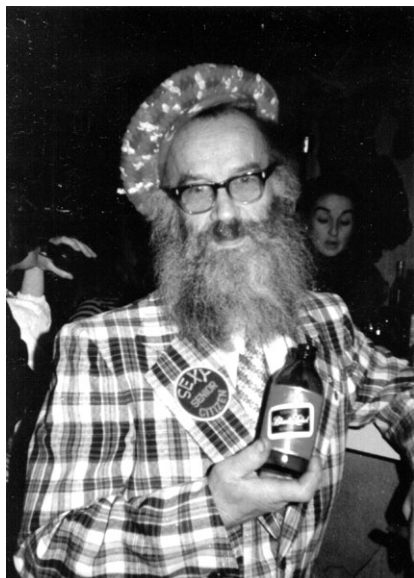
Tensley (Tin) Johnston

Box 34

Ross River, Yukon Y0B 1G0

Editor's Note:

In the last issue (#14) we ran two photos of Tensley taken by Kris Gustafson of the Yukon Government Renewable Resources Department. There was also a story that Tensley heard on his sideband radio. Please drop him a line when you have time.



Hi Sam:

Here is the picture I promised you of Johnny Friend. This is a very rare occasion to see him dressed up. He usually had on old greasy coveralls and always had a cigar at the side of his mouth. My husband thinks the occasion was the Academy Awards that were held yearly at the Watson Lake Hotel.

Johnny was a good-hearted man and would do anything to help you out. He is dearly missed.

Pat Cruickshanks

Watson Lake, Yukon

Dear Editor:

Thank you so much for another most interesting Journal. The article called Northern Roadhouses by Murray Lundberg really touched a soft spot with me, and I wonder what year the picture at Evaline's Roadhouse may have been taken.

My Grandfather Dave Ennis and his brother R.H. (Bob) Ennis went into the Yukon in the summer of 1896. In 1902 the Golden Clean-Up edition of the *Dawson News* credits them with the "first trail up the creek was made by D. Ennis, Billy Moss and R.H. Ennis, who first pitched camp at the mouth of Gold Run February 9, 1898. They prospected and afterward staked 108, 109, and 110 where gold was found, but not pay. Apparently no "pay" was found above 43 pup, although over the years the family had a number of claims lower down the creek..

Dave and Bob Ennis did settle on Gold Run Creek at No. 6. In 1905, Dave went out to Grenfell, Saskatchewan and returned with his bride to be, and his sister Madge Ennis. Dave and Barbara McDonell were married by the Rev. John Pringle at his home in Granville on November 6, 1906.

My mother was born out on Gold Run on October 14, 1907. I have some wonderful pictures of the family there. They continued to live at No. 6 Gold Run until 1912, when the family moved from the Yukon to Kelowna, B.C.

R.H. Bob Ennis and his wife had a home in Dawson City. Mrs. Ennis and their daughter came to Dawson City in 1901, and then moved back to Vancouver in 1911 with their daughter. Bob remained, spending some years living at Granville, until he was hospitalized in St. Mary's Hospital in Dawson where he died on April 3, 1923. He is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery in Dawson City.

My husband and I have travelled to Dawson on two occasions - 1978, and again in 1998. I feel so at home when I am there, and hope we will be able to visit again. I am still gathering information and trying to complete the family genealogy, so I have a reason to return.

Again, thank you for a great journal.

Lorainne McLarty
Kelowna, BC

Dianne and Sam :

Thanks for latest edition—keep them coming!

Enjoyed Jane Gaffin's piece about Al Kulan. She writes great mining stuff and has first-hand experience to back it up. But I have to tell you, that picture of Al being interviewed by me more than thirty years ago was not taken in our regular office—we never had such luxuries as steam radiators!

After a friendly prospector had burned down the old Star shack in the back alley off Second Ave. (demonstrating to friends in his second floor room at the old Whitehorse Inn that emergency flares would never start a fire!) we rented space on the ground floor of the Inn until a new office could be added on to the print shop and store on Main. That opened up a whole new world—the door into our office being close to the beer parlour entrance. Made a lot of new friends there!

I remember Kulan telling me during that interview that he allotted fifty cents a day for food when out prospecting; walked because he couldn't afford a helicopter. He had been one of the students in the first Prospecting Course given by resident geologist Dick Campbell, a night class in the old Whitehorse Elementary School. They expected a handful of students but the classroom was overflowing with men—and a couple of women. Campbell was a neighbour of ours, and had written the original course.

He had done field work in the Yukon and never forgot the kindness of northerners. When the message came from Vancouver that his small daughter was dying, the Wilkinson family rode up from their homestead at the Pelly, brought Dick down from the survey camp in the mountains, got him into Whitehorse and on a plane heading south. (Someone should have written a book about that family by now. They moved away from their home at the Pelly when traffic on the highway brought too many people. Mrs. Wilkinson ran her own trapline until she began receiving the old age pension. If you were invited in for coffee, the pile in the corner of the cabin might be the denuded bodies of squirrels...but Ethel and the boys had the latest state-of-the-art cameras and knew how to use them.)

The last glimpse I had of Al Kulan he was happily driving his Rolls Royce beside the airstrip at Ross River, chasing the grazing horses from the path of our on-coming plane. Only in the Yukon!

Keep those stories coming—there are a million still to tell.

Flo Whyard

Whitehorse, Yukon

Hello Sam:

Here is another story of a northern shoestring accomplishment:

History of the Nahanni Butte Store

In 1971 while serving as Economic Development Officer for the NWT government in Fort Simpson, I was instructed to relocate the Nahanni Butte Community Store (one of our projects) from the local school which required determining a suitable alternate location. The garage that housed the tractor was deemed suitable so shelves, counters, walk-in door and heater were all installed and goods moved. It was all set for winter.

The distant powers-that-be who had very little northern experience in logistics decided that the residents of the "Butte" really needed a larger, more picturesque building of their own to serve the needs of the community. I was to design a log building and submit the plans to the NWT fire marshal in Yellowknife for approval. The material was to be salvaged from the demolition taking place at that time of St. Pat's school in Yellowknife (including unwrapped batts of second-hand insulation). Fourteen-foot lumber was the design limitation but the ultimate load contained 2 X 12's of 23 feet in length.

September is not the time of year to commence a search for logs to fall, peel and prepare for construction but we were lucky.

A raft of 60 logs from a cancelled Inuvik hydro pole contract was in the water a mile away at the mouth of the Nahanni River. We negotiated the

purchase, towing and hauling to the site and a Fort Simpson elder, Ted Trindell, was recruited to supervise the erection of the log walls. Meanwhile back in Fort Simpson, I was instructed to attend a departmental conference in Fort Smith and while there, the truck load of material from Yellowknife arrived at the poplar landing on the Liard above the navigational barrier of the "beaver dam" in order to connect with the last summer upriver trip of Cooper's Barging out of Fort Nelson.

The Liard Highway had not yet been constructed. The driver waited at the beach for two days, gave up and unhooking his load, drove "bob tail" to Fort Simpson to find out news of the boat. While in town, the boat came and took other piles of freight on the beach but none of ours. This load of building material then had to be trucked into Fort Simpson for air transport to the Butte later.

My return to Simpson from the conference meant we had to get busy and the first trip accomplished the upward relocation of the counterbeam log course to allow for the installation of the front entrance door and the main and second floors. The second trip laid out the framing pattern for the roof.

Next trip disappointing progress due to high winds and snow, necessitating my remaining longer. Subsequent trips resulted in the final closing in and installation of windows and doors. My vacation was booked for December 17. On December 14, I was instructed to return to Simpson to accompany the Commissioner to a meeting with the Band in Wrigley. The commissioner failed to show and since my foreman couldn't be located, I returned to the Butte to work through the night, building the stairs to the second floor and installing the interior doors.

The store was still in use a couple of years ago and has served the needs and cravings of many Nahanni travellers, including prime ministers, authors and noted adventurers.

*Dick Thomas,
Drumheller, Alberta*

Dear Dianne & Sam:

I read the Yukoner from cover to cover and enjoyed it very much. I am an old logger, logged nearly all over B.C. Vancouver Strait, Queen Charlottes, most of the bays and inlets on the west coast. Started pulling a seven-foot bucking saw east of Chilliwack when I was 13 years old, cutting firewood for \$1.00 a cord. That was in 1928. I retired from the woods in 1980 from Mac Blo in Port McNeil. I have nearly been killed six times in the woods but I still don't have an ache or pain.

My father was in the gold rush of '98 in the Yukon. He came from Ireland and that's where he ended up. He always wanted me to go to the Yukon but I was usually logging on my own or away somewhere.

I wish I had listened to him because I think I would have really loved that country. I am 84 years old and still go river fishing and hunting in the hills in the fall.

*Howard McKee
Chilliwack, B.C.*

The "Other" Historians

By Darrell Hookey

Historians can be a bookish lot, working in obscurity in our universities and government offices. Their work is important to Canadians as we define ourselves and project our image abroad.

If there were "historian superstars", the Yukon could lay claim to a home team that is full of them. We have Ken Spotswood, Jim Robb, Roy Minter, Flo Whyard, team captain Pierre Berton and many others.

But there are even more. There are others who have unique ways to promote the north. And just because they don't deal in cold facts with an authoritative delivery, many Yukoners and visitors do not consider them "historians".

They are the unappreciated and the unrecognized historians of the Yukon.

They make the cold facts easy to find and easier to understand. They entertain us with our own history. They let us touch our history with crafted momentos. And they pull all of the facts together in a humourous snapshot.

Please take notice of these other valuable members of the team.

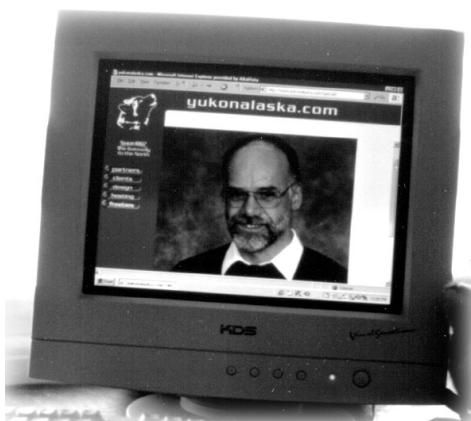
It all started with his love of the north. He is now the Internet's "Northern Ambassador".

As a 10-year-old, **Murray Lundberg** would tape Robert Service poems to his bedroom walls. A job in a mine 15 years later, in Stewart, BC, showed him just how interesting northerners could be. They tend to have a wide range of experiences and seldom get in a rut.

And the scenery ... the north has it all. Ancient glaciers and majestic mountains, historic rivers and secluded lakes, endless forests and northern lights.

The only reason Murray is the host to 20,000 World Wide Web surfers everyday, is because it is the most efficient method to show off his beloved home to the world.

And it is not enough to encourage tourists to visit. He wants them to leave the downtown cores and their modern hotels to see the real Yukon. Drive for one hour in any direction from any town and they can pitch a tent beside a rambling river and allow the "magic and the mystery" to slowly soak in.



Murray Lundberg on his computer screen.

Or they can escape from the tour bus driver for a night and talk to some real Yukoners.

Murray also wants the world to learn the truth about the north. Not just Canada's north, but the entire northern circumpolar region. As one of 800 expert guides with "About.com", Murray shows Web surfers where to find authentic and useful information about his specialty—the north.

His two gateways—canadafarnorth.about.com and arcticculture.about.com—allow potential tourists, students and northern enthusiasts to access Web sites he has personally vetted for content. Along with his own gateway—yukonalaska.com—Murray's Whitehorse home office is the Number One portal to information about the north.

It is almost impossible to avoid one of his Web sites when using a search engine to find information on the north.

Murray is one of the most trusted Web masters to the north as well. The government of Greenland has given him unprecedented access to information. The Alaska State Troopers are reaching out to the public via his network for information on a manhunt; the government of the Yukon asked him to host a chat on changes to the Yukon Act; and universities around the world collect information from his Web sites.

The trust he has built is a great source of pride to him.

The idea that many people learn about the north from television makes Murray cringe. They take history and make a soap opera of it.

The Web allows people to find real quality information. If they have a question, they can email the author. If they want to learn more, they can link to related Web sites. Or they can visit a chat room or add a posting to an electronic bulletin board.

Murray believes he has achieved his goal in life: He earns a living introducing the world to his northern home.

It was Vaudeville shows that entertained the Stampeders 100 years ago, just as the Frantic Follies Vaudeville Revue entertains tourists today. Stampeders would come to town from the dredges and mine shafts along the Klondike's creeks looking for some entertainment. They wanted to laugh at the comedians, be amazed by the magicians and even flirt with homesickness as the headliner belts out a tune from gentler times back home.

Today's tourists want to break out of their RVs and tour buses to sample some Yukon history and culture. They want to suspend their purported sophistication and laugh out loud at corny jokes, slap stick and most anything else that will amuse. They want to be amazed by the depth of talent of a troupe that plays 50 different instruments. And they want to flirt with homesickness as the headliner belts out tunes from gentler times.

Lyall Murdoch and **Grant Simpson** do not call themselves historians and they don't intend to educate their audiences. But as co-owners of Whitehorse's Frantic Follies, they want to entertain their guests in the spirit of the Klondike Vaudeville Show.

They want to give their audiences a taste of Yukon history. But more

than that, they want them to remember Whitehorse fondly as the place they laughed ... a lot.

To accomplish this task, they had to adapt 1900 entertainment to something more fast paced. Lyall says he wouldn't attend a truly authentic vaudeville show since there were a lot of gaps. The master of ceremonies (usually the owner of the theatre and not necessarily suited for such a job) would introduce a singer, then a magician, then an animal act, then a comedian.

"A joke book from the turn of the century is not funny at all," says Lyall. The material depended upon comedic geniuses to pull it off. Grant adds that a lot of the jokes were racial slurs that would not be appreciated today even in the name of authenticity.

So they have cleaned up the humour, made it funny and still relative to the 1900s. Grant offers an example: He wanted to add a contempo-



Lyall Murdoch (top) and Grant Simpson.



The Frantic Follies of Whitehorse. [Richard Hartmier photo]

rary joke about taking an entire package of Exlax to cure a cough ... the patient would be afraid to cough (da-dum-dum). Exlax was changed to castor oil because they didn't have Exlax at the turn of the century.

Lyall's late brother, Jim, was a driving force behind the Follies' birth 31 years ago. He researched the era of Vaudeville from books found in obscure sections of bookstores and rare recordings. This is a process Grant and Lyall continue to enjoy today.

As the musical director, Grant either wrote or found contemporary songs and "ragged them". He said any song could be changed to sound like it would have in 1900. He just leaves the melody alone and then simplifies the harmony.

Manipulating songs to sound a certain way was also used in 1900, as classical music was adapted according to the ragtime rules. Familiarity is the same motive Grant has for his audiences today.

The resulting atmosphere in the theatre welcomes the audience members with a ragtime piano playing in the background as they are shown to their seats by young ladies in period costumes. The Master of Ceremonies is introduced with a flourish and he immediately paints a picture of the Klondike at the turn of the century.

The audience has thus been prepped for Gold-Rush-flavoured entertainment. And it is delivered at a fast pace as characters from one sketch find themselves in the next with one quick scene change. And running jokes are intertwined with audience participation.

But what Whitehorse visitors are not prepped for is the quality of the entertainment. The buffoon from one sketch five minutes ago is now delivering a tune with a wicked intensity on the banjo and then serenading an audience member with a barbershop quartet.

From The Minstrel Show's groaners to the well-choreographed and surprisingly humorous presentation of The Cremation of Sam McGee, the audience is treated to a full package.

But between all of that, the audience can take a peek at characters inspired from the streets of Whitehorse and a scene from inside a snow-bound cabin that is timeless.

Lyall and Grant want to blow the audience away every time to get that word of mouth advertising working its way up and down the highway.

And to encourage their 35,000 to 40,000 guests each season to pause to appreciate the Yukon a little more, they leave them with a verse from Robert Service's *Spell of the Yukon* because, really, he said it best.

Jan Wotton does not call herself an historian ... she is an "hysterian". As the owner of the Carcross Barracks, she greets a thousand tourists a day in the persona of Sgt. Calamity Jan, of the Royal Carcross Mounted Police.

"I'm looking for scalawags, scoundrels and dance hall loungers," she will announce to the startled passengers of a tour bus.

Although she is only five-foot-two, she stands tall in her Stetson and red serge. And she is pretty sprightly for someone who claims to have come over the Chilkoot Pass in 1895 to establish authority over the lands.

Just as the Northwest Mounted Police were tasked a few years later to control the stampede of would-be millionaires on their way to the gold fields of the Klondike, Sgt. Calamity Jan continues this good work today by locking up “undesirables”.

A few good-natured tourists are accused by their mischievous seatmates of various trumped-up misdemeanors and they are hauled off to the jail inside the store. Camcorders capture the scene and everyone enjoys a belly laugh before checking out the Yukon-made crafts for sale.

Jan says visitors will soak in the beauty of the Yukon, but they will remember their experience at the Carcross Barracks with fondness because the memory is delivered with humour. And when they look back on their visit, she hopes they also remember the lessons she has managed to slip in.

Such as the fact the Northwest Mounted Police played a vital role in the growing communities and did it under difficult living conditions.

Customers can inspect the construction of the building, a canvas tent with vertical logs making up the outside walls. Built in 1920 by Johnny Williams, there were no more large logs for a horizontal construction since boat-building Stampedeers had used them up.

Today there is still no running water and the building is heated by a wood-burning stove.



Tutshi Heather (left) and Sergeant Calamity Jan at the Carcross Barracks Gift Shop.

Although the cabin really was used as a police barracks, its present use gives an additional glimpse of the northern lifestyle at the turn of the century. Just as trappers and native people visited a Hudson's Bay Post to trade goods, the Carcross Barracks is a hub for Yukon artisans.

And a favourite spot to conduct business remains the area around the wood stove.

Almost everything on the store's shelves was made by Yukoners and sold on consignment. There are even trade beads that could have been crafted a hundred years ago.

The inventory still offers clay sculptures, shaman masks, moose-hide moccasins, snowshoes, hand-made knives, fur clothing and baskets woven of red cedar, pine needles or silver birch.

Jan bought the building in 1991 and added the house next door a few years later. The house, built in 1898, was joined to the store with a boardwalk. It includes an ice cream bar, which isn't very historically accurate, but at least they have ice worms hanging out of the cones as a tribute to Stroller White's creation in the middle 1900s.

Sgt. Calamity Jan, along with Tutshi Heather (Bourbonnais) and Hurricane Helen (Savoy), are either the first Yukoners many tourists meet, or the last. Therefore, they feel a serious responsibility to ensure the experience is educational ... and wacky.

A Caldwell poster makes people stop and stare.

It's easy to spot her distinctive style. A few moments spent scanning one of her many scenes from the Yukon's past, the viewer is rewarded with a chuckle. Caldwell fans know there are hidden jokes throughout her posters. If you don't see it the first time, you'll see it the next time or the time after.

Chris Caldwell says the longer people look at her posters, the more they will learn the historical facts behind the scene. And the humour helps viewers put themselves into the scene.

This is important because Chris wants people to "understand" the issues and concerns of the day and not just memorize the facts and figures.



If she is to be considered an historian, Chris feels it is only in a “side-ways fashion”. She prefers “chronologist of our times”. Which is a fancy way of saying she shows a snapshot of one scene that pulls together the elements of the time.

These elements have been discovered and recorded by “real, lettered historians” such as Jim Robb, Roy Minter and Ken Spotswood.

Chris will spend 11 months researching the subject of a painting. From the Internet to the archives, she will pull together dry facts and testimonials. Photographs from every possible angle will be blown up and studied. Old Sears catalogues will suggest the fashions worn by the subjects. And she will immerse herself in the sport or the job or the activity she is depicting to get even the smallest detail right.

Casual observers of Chris’ art would be shocked to find that these whimsical cartoons are loaded with facts and authentic in spirit.

But she will throw in “romantic fiction” to make it more interesting for the viewer. Her “Hero in Red Serge” depicts a rugged Mountie overcoming an attacking bear with one hand, clutching a baby in the other while charging over a snowy mountain pass. It isn’t factual, but the details are authentic and it is true to the romantic image of the Mounties.

Another poster, 1995’s “The Discovery of Klondyke Gold — 1886”, shows the exact moment gold was discovered in Rabbit Creek. Although there are conflicting accounts of this moment, Chris was able to include the key elements.

Although George Carmack registered the claim, it is widely believed that Skookum Jim found the first nuggets, so it is he who is shown at the water’s edge with a handful of nuggets.

It is also believed that Kate Carmack was away at a fishing camp with the local Han women. But attempts to rewrite history, saying she is the one who discovered the gold, are at least acknowledged by showing her in a hammock. Chris says she serves as a reminder that when a woman is in camp, she is in charge.

Besides helping the Yukon remember the 100th anniversary of the discovery of gold, she has helped the RCMP commemorate its 100 years in the Yukon with a series of posters.

And the image of the Yukon has been furthered by commissions from the Yukon Quest International Sled Dog Race, Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous and from many other events and organizations.

Her body of work presents Yukon history in a way Yukoners like to have it remembered.

A webmaster, two entertainers, a storeowner and an artist.

It is important to note that all have a passion for their vocation and all rely heavily on bookish historians.

But, more importantly, they are proud of the Yukon and thrilled to share its rich history and beauty with the world. □

"Just Call Me Charlie"

The Story of Jean Gordon

By Joyce Hayden

The story of Gertrude Jean Gordon, the first woman elected to Yukon Territorial Council, is excerpted from a new book by Joyce Hayden. "Yukon's Women of Power" chronicles the history of the Yukon through the biographies of 19 Yukon women who have participated in the territory's political evolution.

A community activist and outdoors-woman, Jean Gordon was elected to Yukon Territorial Council on September 11, 1967. At age 49, after living more than half her lifetime in the Yukon and much of it in the bush, she responded to her community's challenge, ran for, and won, a seat on Council.

1967 was Canada's people of the Yukon Canadian colony. The eral civil servant cho-Indian and Northern made all the real de-life of the territory. A with seven elected pected to offer advice Commissioner's deci-of the Yukon was begin-many people wanted the independent member of inance of Yukon. With her no non-Gordon was part of that early struggle for self-government in the Yukon.



Centennial year and the were tired of being a Commissioner, a fed-sen by the Minister of Affairs (DIAND), cisions in the daily territorial council members was ex-and approve the sions. The population ning to grow, and territory to become a Confederation - the prov-sense, down-to-earth politics,

With her husband Wilfred, Jean Gordon had been placer mining for gold out on Hight Creek, near Mayo, a central Yukon community of about three hundred people.

They were following in the footsteps of the men and women who, in the 1880s, '90s and early 1900s, came to the Mayo district from around the world. They came looking for gold buried in the sand bars of the Stewart River and its tributaries. Some of those same miners found and stayed to mine large deposits of silver, lead, gold and zinc in the nearby mountains.

Many of those early prospectors married Northern Tutchone First Nation women. There they raised their families and built the little community

of Mayo Landing, on the banks of the Stewart River. Their descendants, along with members of the Na'cho Ny'a'k Dun First Nation, still form the central core of that community. For Jean and Wilfred Gordon and their daughter Betty, it was the best of both worlds — wilderness and community. They loved their community and their rural lifestyle, and believed it worth preserving.

Gordon, a five foot, two inch, one hundred and eight pound placer miner, wasn't afraid to speak her mind, and never had been. She freely admits, however, that you won't find many statements by her in the Votes and Proceedings of the day, that era's version of Hansard. That was her choice. She treated her own role as a political pioneer with the same irreverence and touch of humour that she uses when she talks about the exploits of the men on Council. Perhaps that is the mark of a true pioneer — one who sees what they do as just ordinary. She was simply, in her own words: "putting my money where my mouth was."

At the first meeting of the new Council, Gordon introduced herself to her male colleagues by saying: "Just call me Charlie." She wanted to be treated as an equal, and from her point of view, her gender was never a problem. Given the times, before the Women's Liberation Movement began in the north, her direction to Councillors to call her Charlie is understandable. "When we were in the back room, they called me that," she says, with laughter in her voice. People hadn't called her Charlie before: "I chose that name because I was little, and had short hair. I could have been a man with a high pitched voice, and I wanted to be treated equally." She believes with conviction that she was.

No feminist, she saw her job almost as an extended role of mother to the young men on Council, and perhaps even to the territory itself. In the bush, and at the family's placer mine, Gordon worked like a man, yet at the same time willingly filled the role of traditional wife and mother. "The Members of Council knew that if they did something that I didn't like, they would get an earful afterward." She believed that the other Councillors respected her because the ideas she had were relevant.

In the 1990s, the living room of Gordon's little home in Mayo overflows with antiques, souvenirs, treasures and memories. Her constant companion for many years was a little Pomeranian dog called Pepi, who would snuggle beside her in her comfortable easy chair. Jean Gordon allowed her memory to slip back, first to her Scottish ancestors and then to her childhood, young womanhood, marriage to Wilfred Gordon, motherhood, and the early years in British Columbia and the Yukon. As she remembered, nostalgia softened her face and touched her voice.

"My great-grandparents on my father's side were born in 1796, on the Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides Islands of Scotland. There they had two sons. One never married, but the one who did emigrated to Cape Breton

Island in Nova Scotia, where he and his wife had twelve children. My father was number six. My mother was the middle child in her family. She met my father in Stewart, BC, where they were married. After the wedding, they went together to his job in Alice Arm, BC. Both of my parents were of Scottish descent — Matheson and McIvor on my father's side, and my mother's family names were Guthrie and Broadfoot. Dad was Highland, Mother, Lowland Scottish."

Gertrude Jean Matheson was born to Christena Ann Guthrie Matheson and George Matheson in Vancouver, BC, on March 6, 1918. She spent the first half dozen years of her life with her parents in Alice Arm, on the west coast of British Columbia. In 1924, when she was six years old, the family moved back to Stewart, BC, where her father worked as a miner and a carpenter. While there, he helped build the first log fish ladder at the outlet of Meziadin Lake on the Nass River.

The Matheson family lived some distance from town and far from the only school in the area. Jean remembers: "My schooling was kind of unusual. We were living four miles out of town, and there was no transportation. After Christmas on the year I was nine, Mom got in touch with the teacher and arranged for him to come out every two weeks and assign work for me. For the month of June, I went into town and stayed with friends. We moved to town that summer, and when I started school in September I was in grade three." She adds proudly: "So I did twelve grades in ten years and I passed all of my finals without having to write any supplementaries [exams]."

Jean Gordon comes from a family of three. She has one brother, George Hector, who lives in Washington State, and a sister, Olah, who died when she was only twenty. Her brother George also came to the Yukon, to work on a Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation dredge. He left the north and moved to the United States. Eventually he worked on the Suez Canal, dredging the channel for modern shipping. Later, George travelled around the world as a dredging and heavy construction consultant.

"When my sister Olah died, she left a son, who I wanted to raise with my daughter Betty. However, his dad wouldn't let me have him." She adds with a mischievous grin: "When Olah's son Reginald was fifteen years old, he came to visit us, and didn't leave, so I got him anyway."

Like her mother before her, it was in Stewart, BC, that Jean Matheson fell in love with her husband-to-be, Wilfred Gordon. In 1988, Lynette Bleiler told Wilfred's story in the Mayo Historical Society's book, *Gold & Galena*. Because their lives were so intertwined, his story is in many ways Jean Gordon's story too. The following is a paraphrase of a portion of what is written in *Gold and Galena*:³ Wilfred Gordon was born at Harris, Saskatchewan, in 1912 to Elizabeth and Henry Thomas Gordon. He lived in Saskatoon, North Battleford and Edmonton, before moving in 1919 to Grande Prairie, Alberta. In 1929, he went placer mining for an Uncle in Tulameen, BC, then moved on to Barkerville, and finally up to Stewart, where he met Jean Matheson for the first time.

In 1934, in the midst of the Great Depression, Wilfred came to the Yu-

kon. He managed to scrape up enough cash to buy a ticket from Prince Rupert, BC, to Skagway, Alaska, and then took the little narrow gauge railway to Carcross, Yukon. There he ran out of money. It was January, in the dead cold of a Yukon winter, and he had little in the way of warm winter clothing. There was no choice, so he, and a friend, Bill Scott, walked the 72 kilometres from Carcross to Whitehorse. From Whitehorse, he made his way on to Dawson City, sitting with fifteen other people on the top of a load of mail. Once there he found work driving horses and hauling wood. Wilfred spent several years in the Dawson area working, and saving his money.

In 1937, Wilfred Gordon became the first passenger out of Dawson City on Grant McConachie's newly formed air service, Yukon Southern Air Transport Ltd. It was making its first flight as an official carrier of the Royal Mail for the Canadian Post Office. That air service later became Canadian Pacific Airlines. Wilfred was on his way to Stewart to ask Jean Matheson to marry him. They were married on September 20, 1937, when Jean was nineteen years old. The Gordons spent fifty-six years together, almost all of them in the Yukon.

With the money Wilfred had saved, the newlyweds went to Vancouver for the winter. Before long, Wilfred's uncle persuaded him to go to work in a mine at Hope, BC, while Jean stayed with his parents in Vancouver. They didn't much like being separated, so Wilfred quit his job, and in January, 1938, in the dark cold days of a Yukon winter, he and Jean headed for the Yukon.

They stayed one month in Dawson City, then moved out to the tiny mining community of Granville on Dominion Creek. There, Wilfred worked as a teamster and general all-around hand hauling loads of wood on horse drawn



Jean and Wilfred with pet bear cubs circa 1938. (Jean Gordon Collection)



Jean skinning out a coyote, circa 1943/44. (Jean Gordon Collection)

sleighs for Andy Taddie, who owned the roadhouse. Jean kept house, and for extra income helped Wilfred run a trapline.

The next spring Wilfred won \$2,700.00 on the ice pool at Dawson. (Almost every spring since the early 1900s Yukoners have placed bets on the time and day the ice will go out of the Yukon River at Dawson City). It was a lot of money in those Depression years. He had been cutting sixteen foot lengths of wood for three dollars a cord. That was very hard work for very little money, so they were happy to have a little nest egg, as Jean called it.

Their daughter Betty was born in the Dawson Hospital in August of that year. There was no Medicare and no Hospital Insurance, and hospital confinement was expensive, so the ice-pool money was appreciated by the young couple.

Wilfred Gordon went to work for Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation (YCGC). There he looked after 'Australia Ditch' and the dam that was the water supply for YCGC when they were stripping gravel for their gold dredging operations. Wilfred, Jean and Betty lived and worked at the intake on Australia Ditch. It was there they grew their garden, marvelling at how quickly things grew in the endless daylight and warmth of a Yukon summer day.

In the short, often bitterly cold, dark days of Yukon winter, they trapped and sold furs. They also hunted for moose and caribou from their snug little cabin on the Creek. It was a happy, self-sufficient time for the Gordon family. They lived that fiercely independent lifestyle until the company shut the operation down in 1944, when Jean was twenty-six years old.

Jean Gordon looks back at those early days on the Creeks with laughter and nostalgia: "We had three cub bears that we raised. Wilf, my brother George, and a friend were out hunting moose in January, and found a bear's den. They scratched the old lady and then discovered there were cubs in the den, so they brought them all home. Our dog treated them like they were her own puppies. When we got them they were so small you could put all three of them in a cigar box.

Another time, Wilfred caught a bitch wolf and two pups. He brought the pups home, and scared the daylight out of me. I'd never seen live wolves that close before. He hollered: 'Jean, come out and see what I've got!' When I went out and looked, and they blinked their eyes, I jumped back and yelled: 'They're alive!' Everything else he had brought home had been dead. He kept those wolf pups, intending to raise some part wolves for our dog-team. But the female never came in heat." Jean proudly recalls that both stories were published in Alaska Magazine.

For a young woman who had grown up, not in the wilderness, but in a small mining community on the west coast of British Columbia, this was all pretty strange stuff. Jean Gordon grins as she remembers: "I was only twenty or so years old when we were out there on the creeks. When I was young, my family had two Indian boys from the Nass River country staying with us while they went to school. I learned a little bit about the outdoors from them, but the Yukon and real wilderness was all new to me." She learned quickly,

and after a year in the bush she was helping with the trapline and cutting wood like a born Northerner.

Jean Gordon learned to skin out and stretch hides to dry and sell. “The other guys that were trapping didn’t bother with squirrels, but their hides were worth seventy-five cents to a dollar each. So any squirrels they got, they brought to me, and I skinned them out, stretched them and hung them up to dry.” She enjoyed that life, and her eyes glint with amusement as she tells a story about Betty: “I was giving Wilf a haircut, and Betty was sitting on a chair behind us. Earlier she had been watching me skin out a squirrel. All of a sudden she said: ‘What’s those little things inside the squirrel that look like mice, Mommy?’ I nearly ran the clippers right over Wilf’s head.”

The Gordon family lived on Dominion and Australia Creeks for seven years. When Betty was old enough to go to school, Jean decided that she wasn’t going to raise her in isolation. “I could have taught her, but she was a little like her dad, a bit shy and on the introverted side. She’d never had other kids to play with because there were very few around on the Creeks, so we decided to move to Mayo so Betty could go to school.”

“After my father, George, died in 1941, my mother Christena came to Yukon to cook for Elmer Middlecoff at his placer operation on Hight Creek, some twenty-five miles from Mayo. In 1943, Mother married George Andison who was a butcher for Burns & Co. in Mayo. Wilf didn’t like the idea of moving to Dawson, so we came to Mayo, where we already had family.”



Jean, Wilfred & son-in-law Howard Lone placer mining on Hight Creek.
(Jean Gordon Collection)

Wilfred Gordon talks about their 1945 move to Mayo, in the book *Gold & Galena*: “We came via our trapline over to the Stewart River and caught the White Pass boat Neecheah on its way up [the Stewart River] in the first part of June.”⁴ (In later years the Neecheah was dry-docked in Whitehorse, and in the late sixties served as a restaurant called the Captain’s Locker. Today it sits proudly in front of the Transportation Museum in Whitehorse). In Mayo, Wilfred went to work for White Pass & Yukon Route as a longshoreman, and when Rupe Steeves quit as wharfinger [longshore boss], Wilfred got his job.

Meanwhile, Jean Gordon and Betty were getting settled into their new home. Betty began to make friends with other kids and Jean got involved with community life. “Betty had a tough time of it. I tell all of these young women: ‘Don’t have just one child. They have nobody to fight with and nobody to play with and they don’t learn to fight their way in the world.’ By the time she was twelve or fourteen, Betty could handle anyone. She was like her grandfather Gordon in that.”

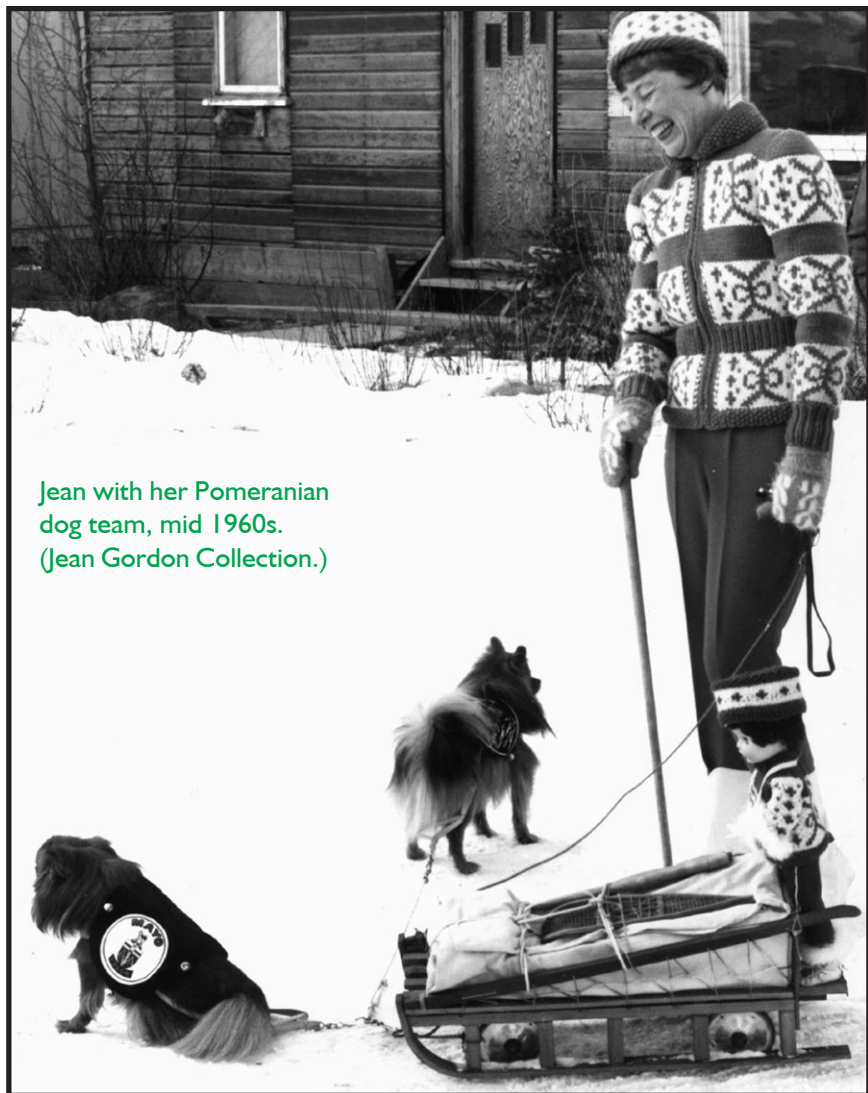
Mayo continues to be Jean Gordon’s home. “When we came to Mayo, I started getting involved in the Women’s Auxiliary, IODE, the Mayo Community Club, as well as church work. I took tickets for the local movie theatre for seven years. I kept the books for the theatre, too.” Simon Mason-Wood, Jean’s longtime friend, who grew up in Mayo, remembers that theatre: “When the Community Club used to have shows, Jean took the tickets at every show, and there were two shows a night. I was only fourteen years old, but I was the projectionist. At that time they had a curfew in Mayo for everyone under sixteen and the movie was never over until after curfew time, so Jean would have to walk me home.” He adds with considerable amusement: “I could run the projector and watch restricted movies, but I wasn’t allowed to be out without an adult after nine o’clock.”

Later on, Gordon kept the family account books, wrote a weekly column for the *Whitehorse Star*, was an Insurance Agent, and helped with a small newspaper called the *Stewart Valley Voice*. “That’s a story in itself,” she says laughingly, but doesn’t elaborate. In 1995, she still helped put out the *Voice*. Blue eyes brimming with memories, Jean Gordon talks about those early years in Mayo: “It was such a tightly knit little community then, and we always did things together. On Saturday, every woman made something to eat — it didn’t matter what, and on Sunday we all piled into Anderson’s old Hayes truck and drove out to Five Mile Lake for a picnic, or we went to Sullivan’s to pick blueberries. Or we might take our river-boat and go up the Stewart River for a picnic on a sand bar. We were all accustomed to river travel.”

Jean used to go hunting, too, mostly for birds. She remembers drifting down the Stewart River in a row boat one spring: “We saw a flock of geese, and Wilfred yelled: ‘Shoot, shoot!’ So I grabbed the .22 rifle and went ‘ping’ and I got one. Another time, we were hunting ducks with a shotgun — actually it’s a skeet gun, a .28 gauge single shot. I kept one shell in my mouth, one in my hand and one in the barrel. Wilfred had a pump gun, but I could get off just about as many shots as he could. One time some spruce hens

were sitting on a tree near our cabin, and Wilfred hollered ‘get the gun and shoot them.’ I waited ‘till they flew before I fired, and got all of them. The darn birds didn’t have a chance.”

Jean Gordon has tried her hand at many things, including writing: “I’ve always enjoyed writing. I wrote two biographies for the Whitehorse Star, and they were reprinted in Gold & Galena. One was about Matt Butijer and the other on Alice Cantin.” Gordon, however, has not yet written her autobiography. Talking about writing the history of Mayo, she says: “I started out with a list of people who had been in Mayo for twenty-five years or more. There were about fifty people that had come in and spent their lives here.



Jean with her Pomeranian
dog team, mid 1960s.
(Jean Gordon Collection.)

After they died, it was their children who were here. There's a lot of those people gone now, but it's the kind of community that will always, always exist. A lot of people have come and gone over the years, but there is a core community that stays."

In 1964, after the Stewart River flooded the town, the people of Mayo talked about moving the village out to the gravel bench, just beyond the Minto bridge. Jean disagreed. She didn't believe that it would work: "There were people in town who thought they could just pick up and move their old shacks out to this new townsite. Even the business people didn't understand that once you move something, it has to be brought up to code under territorial regulations. And of course some people would still stay here, in the old town. People are accustomed to living by the river."

It seems some people were also talking about consolidating with the mining community of Elsa. "But Mayo is where people's roots are, and they are not going to move, especially after living here for so many years." Gordon is speaking primarily of the Na'cho Ny'a'k Dun, Mayo's First Nation people. "They have lived downstream and across this river for many hundreds of years. It's often difficult for two cultures to live together, but this is one of the few communities in the Yukon where, in general, the two peoples, native and nonnative, get along. There are individuals who differ, of course, but it's kind of nice to be able to look at a young kid, and say 'oh, you must belong to such and such a family.'"

Wilfred worked for White Pass for several years, then went guiding for Big Game Guide Louis Brown, whom he had met in Dawson. Later he went into the wood and timber business on his own, and sold timbers to the Elsa mine. Help was hard to find, so he gave part of his business to his brother-in-law, Don Baker. That didn't last for long. They had a fire that burned all of their equipment — truck, station wagon, tools and power saws, as well as the garage they were stored in. In the 1960s, after the fire, Wilfred and Jean decided to go gold mining. Whatever Wilfred worked at to support the family, Jean was always there helping and backing him up.

Jean and Wilfred staked some ground out on Hight Creek, where they settled into placer mining. It wasn't very profitable, and Wilfred says, in *Gold & Galena*: "By the time I found out where the gold was coming from, we were broke again. So I went back in the wood business by myself and sold wood to the [Yukon] government and to the Department of Indian Affairs. Then in early 1970s I staked some ground on the upper end of Hight Creek as well as on Rudolph Gulch and started mining there."⁵

One winter before she was on Territorial Council, Jean trained her two little Pomeranian dogs to pull a miniature dog-sled. Then she entered them in the Yukon Sourdough Rendezvous parade in Whitehorse. Simon Mason-Wood tells that story: "Jean spent a lot of time training those little dogs to pull a sled. She made a little whip, like a regular dog-team whip, and a miniature sled and harness. She had them so well trained to gee and haw and whoa, that they never got flustered. Jean walked behind them in the parade. She had even made herself a special toque and Indian sweater, as well as a matching outfit for the little doll 'dog-musher' on the miniature sled to wear."

Jean Gordon's life was busy, and about to become busier: "What happened was that things would come up, and people in Mayo would discuss them, and because I was kind of mouthy, I would say: 'Oh, this should be done, or that should be done.' People would say, 'well, Jean, you should run for Territorial Council.' That went on and on. When Wilf and I were placer mining on Highet Creek, some issue came up on the radio, and I started talking about it. Wilfred said: 'If you want to run for Council, go ahead.' So there it was — I had to make a decision." Referring to Wilfred's backing, she says: "You have to have family support. There was no way that I would commit to running politically without his approval."

Like most Yukoners of the day, Jean Gordon was impatient with the way the Yukon Territory was being governed. She thought it was time for Yukon people to take charge of their own affairs. Never one to shirk responsibility, she ran for Council because she wanted her part of the Yukon to have a strong voice. Thus, at age 49, she began a new phase in her life. For Jean Gordon, it was a new challenge, and a new adventure. As a girl and young woman, Jean Matheson had always been a bit of a risk-taker. Her marriage, and her life in the Yukon bush had reinforced that inclination.

"So, I threw my name in the hat." She wasn't entirely new to Yukon politics, having helped organize former Mayo Councillor Ray McKamey's successful campaign. "The last time Ray McKamey ran, he was off in the bush. His wife and I knew he was going to run, so we went around town and got his nomination papers signed, and did the whole shootin' match. I was his Official Agent. When he came out of the bush, he was in Council. So campaigning wasn't new to me. I had done it all before."

The election was held on September 11, 1967, and Jean Gordon won. "I ran against Ed Kunze that first time, and there was no animosity, because we were friends." The three hundred or so people from Mayo elected her because they respected her wisdom and her common sense, and knew that she would speak out on their behalf. There were no political parties involved. All territorial Councillors ran as individuals, because, in the very strictest sense, political parties did not exist in the Yukon. There was no process to register them, so Yukon political parties were not officially recognized by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada who, under a contract with the territory, was responsible for conducting elections in the Yukon.

So, Jean Gordon, placer miner, became Jean Gordon, politician. Thus began three years of intense lobbying, practical political deal-making, and for the first time in her life, travelling. At age forty-nine, she was ready for new ideas and new experiences. It meant leaving her comfortable home in Mayo for several weeks at a time, and living in a motel in Whitehorse, sometimes by herself, or with her mother. It also meant many long hours of travelling, often in bitterly cold weather, and on icy winter roads.

As she talks about that time, it becomes apparent that appearances meant little to Jean Gordon: "I drove an old beat up Volkswagen Beetle. It had been rolled when I bought it, and Wilf and I put it back together. Podge (Padraig) O'Donohue, who was YTG's Legal Adviser, didn't think it was a

classy enough vehicle for a Territorial Councillor.” Gordon, in her down-to-earth fashion, told him: “I don’t expect to have this job the rest of my life,” and kept her Volkswagen. “My license plate was number sixteen. Councillors could pick their license plate numbers from the first twenty or so, so I said: ‘I want sixteen.’” When the House was called into session, Jean drove to Whitehorse, the capital of the Yukon, a distance of about 425 kilometres from Mayo. When the session ended, she drove back home.

It was during her term that the elected members of Council initiated the beginnings of a Government and Opposition. Gordon remembers that it was about 1969 when four members of Council joined together to hold the balance of what few powers the elected members had: “There was Ken McKinnon, John Dumas, George Shaw and myself. We became a sort of Cabinet, or the forerunner of Cabinet. If we didn’t agree, items didn’t pass Council.” It was the first step toward responsible government for the territory. They were the seed of what was, in the early 1980s, and is again in the 1990s, a six member Cabinet.

There is very little written about Jean Gordon in newspapers of the day. Ken McKinnon, who has spent most of his adult life immersed in Yukon politics and the Yukon’s quest for constitutional responsibility, was on Council for two terms. He was the leader of the quartet, and he says of Jean Gordon: “She was very supportive of me and my belief in constitutional government.” McKinnon, who finished a nine year term as the Yukon’s Commissioner in May of 1995, goes on to comment on Jean Gordon’s abilities as a constituency representative: “She was certainly effective at lobbying, and she did a really good job for her constituency. She was totally independent, totally capable of taking care of herself under any situation, and she just longed to get back to Mayo each time she had to be in Whitehorse. To her, Whitehorse was just too big a city with too many pretensions. All she wanted to do was get back to Wilf and the bush and back to being free once again.”

McKinnon is obviously fond of Jean Gordon. “She was always a delight, and just a marvelous person, tough, and fun to be around. There was a lot of pressure on her to do things, and to change things, by a lot of people who were extremely persuasive. People like [Territorial Councillor] Norm Chamberlist and [Commissioner] Jimmy Smith. Jimmy was the consummate politician. He was always working behind the scenes. But Jean had made up her mind that the approach that we four were taking to move the territory toward constitutional government was right, and no one could divert her. Jean Gordon was absolutely straight and honest, and just the quintessential rural Yukon woman. I admired, respected and immediately liked her.”

McKinnon remembers with laughter the 1967 term on Council: “To John Dumas and myself, because we were both young bachelors, Jean Gordon was almost like having a surrogate mother on Territorial Council. Around town, Jean used to refer to us as ‘her boys’ and was always doing her utmost to ensure that we were on our best behaviour.” Jean Gordon understood quite clearly that she was one of the catalysts for changing how the

Yukon was governed, and that Yukon people wanted to be able to respect their Councillors. She also knew that everyday life must go on, and that part of her role was to ensure that life was good for Yukon people — especially the people of Mayo.

Jean Gordon liked the travelling and the intrigue of politics. The highlight of her years on Council was a trip the entire seven member Council and Commissioner James Smith made to Ottawa in December of 1969. Their mission was to lobby Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau (Lib), for more autonomy for the territorial government.

For the trip, Gordon made herself new clothes: “I had owned, for over nineteen years, a beautiful piece of MacBeth tartan. I made it and some suede into a cape and wore it on our trip.” They flew to Ottawa to ask the Prime Minister for three seats on the promised Executive Committee, as well as an additional eight members on Council. “We met with him and with Jean Chretien, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs. Ken McKinnon was our spokesman.” Her face lit up with laughter: Ken can speak extemporaneously for a considerable length of time, and he didn’t miss a point. Norm Chamberlist said a little, and Commissioner Jim Smith did too. Jean Chretien was there, but he didn’t speak much English then. We were in Ottawa for two days, and we were in Trudeau’s office for a fair length of time — about an hour and a half, I guess.”

McKinnon remembers: “When we went down to Ottawa to do the actual negotiations, we presented the position that three elected members on the Executive Committee was the only number that could possibly work if we were going to set up this new system of responsible elected government. The Prime Minister had offered us only one. We were totally unwilling to accept only one member on Ex-Com. It would have been an impossible situation for that person. When we got there, it was apparent that the Prime Minister had had his briefing, and had made up his mind that he was going to compromise on two. I think that decision had likely been reached through discussions with Jean Chretien.”

Back home, Jean Gordon was busy with community affairs: “When Governor General Roland Michener came to the Yukon, there was a reception in Whitehorse that I was to attend. I also had to organize something here in Mayo for him, and I wondered what on earth I was going to do. Then I thought: ‘I’ll get the people that are, in a way, my critics, to organize the reception in Mayo,’ so that’s what I did.”

“Therein lies the key to getting things done — you can’t just stick to your own little group. Most people who criticize and argue have respect for you, because they can talk to you. When criticism gets back to me, I’ve always gone directly to that person and straightened it out. I don’t like being enemies.” In that way, Gordon is like most of the other women who followed her into politics.

Of those busy days in Whitehorse, Jean Gordon says: “Council sat for six or eight weeks at a time. My stepfather, George Andison, had died in 1968, so I took my mother with me. When we got to Whitehorse we stayed in

the Ben-Elle Motel, now the Gold Rush Inn, and she was my cook. Then, Macauley Lodge, a home for seniors, (named for Norman D. Macauley, an early Yukon pioneer) was opened in Whitehorse and my mother decided to move in there. When I went back to Council in January, I asked her if she wanted to come out of the Lodge and stay with me, and she said she thought she would just stay where she was.”

In her home in Mayo, in the mid-1990s, Jean Gordon lights another cigarette and talks about Council’s tour of the new site of Anvil Mines in Faro, Yukon, in the spring of 1970: “There were four hundred men, Flo and myself. We were the only women on the tour.” She was referring to her own role as the only female elected member, and to Flo Whyard, who was editor of the Whitehorse Star at that time. “It was a construction site, and we were real oddities. The men almost had to come and touch us to see if we were real.” However, sexism reared its ugly head, ruining some of the pleasure of the day. “When it came time for lunch, all of the Councillors were sitting where the fellows sat. I was facing the door, so I could see who came in, because I wanted to say hello to the many people working there that I knew. Podge O’Donohue sat across the table from me. He said: ‘You’re getting a real inspection — all those fellows are sitting so they can look at your backside.’ It wouldn’t have bothered me, if he hadn’t said something, but, after that, I felt like I was exposed.”

Gordon still has, on display in her home, one of the table centrepieces from that luncheon, with the flags of Japan, USA, Germany and Canada in it. The opening ceremony was filmed, and they were told that within twenty-four hours the film would be shown in Ottawa, Tokyo, New York, and Berlin, where the investors in the mine came from.

The lobbying of the Federal Government by Council members paid off. On February 3, 1970, Commissioner James Smith announced the establishment of an Executive Committee for the Yukon. On June 17, 1970, DIAND Minister Jean Chretien telexed instructions to the Commissioner, telling him to establish an Executive Committee. It was to include two elected members of Council, the two Assistant Commissioners, and the Commissioner [as chair].

On June 26, 1970, the Yukon Act was amended to extend the length of Council to four years and reducing the time limit for disallowing legislation from two years to one. It also extended the powers of Council to pass laws relating to the administration of justice in the Territory (other than the conduct of criminal prosecutions), and on June 30, 1970, Sessional Paper No. 33 was tabled re: the appointment of an Executive Committee.⁶

Thus, the long journey toward responsible government, that had tentatively taken its first timid steps in 1961 with the creation of the Advisory Committee on Finance, edged another step forward. Although Jean Gordon helped make it happen, she was not given the opportunity to be part of the Council that took those next steps toward responsible government. Instead, she helped pave the way for the second woman on Council, Hilda Watson, to make history.

Those were heady days in Yukon politics. The control Yukon people now have over their daily lives came about because of the persistence of people like Jean Gordon and her colleagues. They were determined that the Yukon become responsible for its own affairs. Jean Gordon provided a thoughtful, reasonable, nonabrasive, common-sense balance to the deliberations of that Council. Her life as a placer miner in rural Yukon no doubt gave her an insight that was sometimes lacking in the urban male members of Council.

Jean Gordon's memories of those years is, for the most part, positive. She was neither awed nor silenced by the verbosity of her all-male colleagues. But Jean didn't care much for the formality of Territorial Council. She was more comfortable sitting in the smoky back rooms of government than sitting around the Council table with all of the professional bureaucrats: "I had my say either before Council met, or after." Like many Yukoners of that era, she firmly believed that the Territory should be called 'Yukon', as if it was a province, rather than 'the Yukon,' as in 'the Yukon Territory,' the phrase that was, and still is, most often used.

In 1970, when she was fifty-two years old, Jean Gordon ran for a second term on Territorial Council, but was defeated. In her characteristically blunt fashion, she says: "You can't beat a campaign of booze and bullshit." Not one to sit around and mope, she took a bookkeeping course at the Yukon Vocational & Technical Training Centre, now Yukon College, in Whitehorse.

She was later employed by the Department of Manpower (Employment & Immigration Canada) to run an Outreach Program in Mayo. As well, Gordon did the books for the local garage and for various community organizations, and filled out Income Tax Returns for Mayo residents. Jean Gordon had always worked well with both the First Nation and non-Native people of Mayo, and she says that she was encouraged by her First Nation friends to go after the Outreach job.

At age fifty-seven, and as vital as ever, Jean Gordon was interviewed for the book *Yukon Women*. It was a 1975 International Women's Year project that was published by the Yukon Status of Women's Council. In it Gordon says:

I enjoy other people's battles. That's how I ended up on Territorial Council. It's always the same old thing: 'Why doesn't somebody do something?' Well, if you don't do something yourself, that something won't get done So I finally tried it. It's a fascinating experience.

One term isn't very long, it takes you at least two years to learn the procedure and what you are doing. But I felt I did accomplish things, maybe not directly, but the years I put in, I think helped We were a good Council. We had differences in various ways, but on major issues we were together. When we had our problems we went in the back room and threshed them out there

You have to have the confidence of the people. If they have that confidence in you, you shouldn't have any problems. I had experience in things

— not political experience, but people experience, personal experience. I'd grown up in a mining community, and I knew what placer mining was about; my husband and I trapped, [and] I've been in business . . .

I was Charlie on the Council. When we had our first conference meeting, I made it very clear that I didn't want any special privileges. I don't see myself as a woman primarily. I'm a person first and then a woman and the two really complement each other. If you've got something to offer it doesn't matter whether you're a male or a female. I just figured that anything anyone else could do, I could do too, maybe do it better. Size never really entered into it. When everybody says, 'Oh, you're so little', I don't feel little, I feel pretty big.⁷

Jean Gordon, who is very creative, remembered with considerable humour: "While I was an Outreach worker I did a test. I learned that there were only two spheres of work I shouldn't tackle, and one of them was dress-making. I found it very amusing, because I had made all of the costumes for a play the community put on a few years ago." She has been sewing, knitting and doing creative handicrafts for most of her life: "I once knit a tablecloth from ordinary store string. I've made and sold quite a number of heavy wool sweaters, some of my own design, all knit in one piece, because I hate sewing them up. Usually, I take a size I know that fits, outline it on graph paper, and knit it backwards so it doesn't have to be sewn, and I always line my sweaters."

Her friend and Mayo resident Simon Mason-Wood says of Jean's talents: "She's a fantastic knitter. She knits fine, fine thread into doilies, tablecloths and decorations. Even cataracts didn't stop her from knitting." (Gordon has since had successful cataract surgery). She has also learned traditional First Nation crafts. "Quite a few years ago I made a caribou skin jacket. I sent it to Dawson City for the handicraft exhibit that's held during the 17th of August Discovery Day celebration. I told my friend to make sure that it didn't get entered in the Indian Handicrafts. But that's where it ended up, and I took first prize. I don't know what people up there thought, but here in Mayo it was quite a joke, even to my Indian friends."

Jean admits that drawing and painting are not among her many talents. "I envy anyone who can draw the things that they see. I can see them in my mind, but my fingers won't bring it out. I make things that are geometrical or mathematical. For example, a few years ago I bought a bunch of beads and made neck bands and headbands on a bead loom, and then I thought: 'If I can do that, I can do pictures, too.' One of my pictures had nine thousand beads in it. I make my own graph paper, because beads aren't square. If you use ordinary graph paper, when you make it up you've got to compensate for the distortion." She also made a crochet hook out of a six inch nail and crocheted a pretty rug out of scrap material.

One of Gordon's many treasures is a man's 'coon skin coat, and with some amusement she says: "I still wear it when it gets really cold. I bought it from an estate, and I relined it and mended the fur." According to her, the

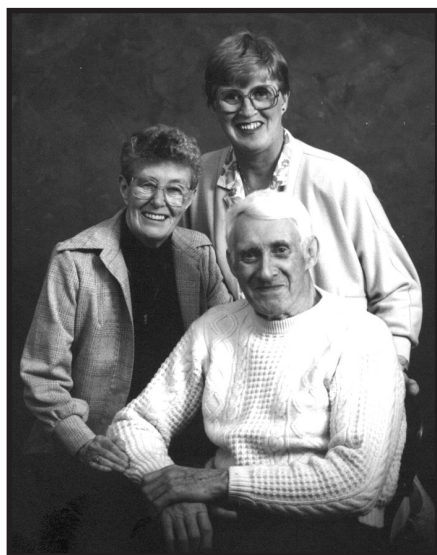
best thing to use to mend fur is fabric glue. Laughingly she describes the garage in her backyard as a warehouse of sorts, that contains the overflow of the many things that she and Wilfred collected over the decades. "There's a lot of things the Transportation Museum in Whitehorse should have had, such as old harnesses. Unfortunately some of it got thrown out, or burned in the fire."

It seems that a lifetime is not long enough for Jean Gordon: "There are so many things to do. I don't feel I am going to live long enough to do all of the things I would like to do. I would like to have been a geologist, a doctor, an anthropologist or a teacher. But there's just not enough time." Looking back, she says: "The first time someone called me a politician, I nearly hit them, because to me, politician was a dirty word. But if you take politician in the true sense of the word, it means someone who is concerned about what happens to other people. I realized then, I've been a politician all my life."

When she talks about politics, Jean Gordon still speaks passionately about more self-government for the Yukon. However, she has come to believe that the territory isn't ready for provincehood. She doesn't like the confrontation that party politics brings. "I liked Council the way it was, without partisan politics. I know you have to have division, but I would have liked to have seen the Territory form its own political parties, with their own philosophy. They could have taken policies out of any older party, made their own policies, and stayed completely away from old-line party politics. I think that it would have been so much better."

"Compromise is difficult, but I believe it would have worked in this territory. Of course, compromise has caused some real problems in the Northwest Territories, because of the contradictions over there. The First Nations people in the Yukon Territory are closer, more integrated than they are in NWT. So many NWT communities are completely native, and completely isolated, and they have so many different cultures."

Like many longtime non-Native Yukoners, Jean Gordon has little patience with newcomers to the North. "The problem in party politics is with those people who come in from south of sixty (the sixtieth parallel) and raise hell. They bring all of their personal baggage with them. We're off here in the



Jean, Wilfred and their daughter Betty, October, 1987.
(Jean Gordon Collection)

boondocks, and they seem to think we are stupid, that we don't know anything, and they're going to smarten us up." Then she says philosophically: "I guess I did my own share of rabble-rousing in those early years." She adds, somewhat nostalgically: "Politicians are never a hero at home. You don't get compliments and very, very rarely do you get thanks. If you go to another community, the laurels you receive are just crazy."

On September 20, 1987, Jean and Wilfred Gordon celebrated fifty years of married life. At age sixty-nine, Jean Gordon, who has always been slim and physically fit, wore her wedding dress to their 1987 fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration. They were still mining on Upper Hight Creek, and living life to its fullest. In 1991, Jean was one of five women honoured by the Women's Directorate of the Yukon Government. On International Women's Day she was feted for her contribution to the Territory. In a March 20, 1991 article in the Yukon News, reporter Dave White wrote: "She [Gordon] says the award came out of the blue. But listening to her talk about her life shows the Women's Directorate made a wise choice in picking the feisty Mayo resident to honour." In that article Jean Gordon says: "I've always gone to bat for the little guy, that's what pushed me into politics."

Wilfred Gordon passed away on May 31, 1993, and Jean, by then seventy-five, continued on alone. Still very active in her community, she expects to continue for a good many more years. Commenting that she comes from a family that lives well into their nineties, she says with a wide grin: "I could be around for a while yet, because my mother was ninety-two when she died and my aunt was ninety-seven."

Jean fills her days easily. "I knit, and watch TV, and I'm sorting fifty odd years of collection. We have gathered up a lot of stuff for Yukon Archives. When the Pioneer Hall was here we were collecting things for a museum, but some of the things we had there, like old photographs, were lost when the hall burned."

Gordon has been reappointed to the Yukon Water Board for several terms, and before that she was a member of the Yukon River Basin Study group. She says of her volunteer work: "It's interesting, it's stimulating, I meet people with other ideas, and it keeps the grey matter working. It keeps me from stagnating. I'm sort of like a cat, I can just sit around and do nothing, then I get up and go like hell." And so she does.

Her life has been a dichotomy of traditional and nontraditional, tough Northerner and caring activist, placer miner and politician. In many ways she epitomizes the lives of many rural Yukon women, then and now.

In 1999, Jean Gordon is still healthy, and active in Mayo. She has been the Yukon member on the Coordinating Committee for the International Year of Older Persons for 1999. She conceived and organized the planting of 34 birch trees in Mayo's riverbank park - one tree for each senior living in Mayo in 1999 and she also continues to take a very active part in putting out Mayo's local paper - *The Stewart Valley Voice*.

I MARRIED THE NORTH

By Elizabeth Reid

More Tales of the Arctic 1945-53

DIAMOND CEE

'Why would a person volunteer to go North? One would have to be an absolute idiot to offer to serve in the Arctic. If you are being punished and that is your sentence, well, that is a different kettle of fish. But that life's not for me.'

Such was the statement I overheard while attending a conference on Northern Affairs. I guess it was a popular conception because several friends and a few tactless relatives asked us why we consented to go to Fort Liard, Northwest Territories, to an R.C.M.P. detachment that had been closed for over twelve years. A place so isolated near the Nahanni Mountains that it received supplies once a year by freighter, mail four times a year by air and had no direct communication with the outside world except when the Hudson's Bay Company manager kept a daily schedule by wireless each evening at six o'clock. Indeed, why?

Well, you see, my husband had been posted north at Aklavik and Arctic Red River for three previous years and while there, was bitten by the "Arctic Bug". It festered into a chronic longing to return. So we did.

The reason the police wanted to open the neglected detachment was that some of the younger natives living in that area had become a bit aggressive. They had had 12 years with no police intervention and non-native families living along the river grew more and more apprehensive about their errant behaviour. They requested police protection from the capital in Ottawa. To be more specific, there were only two non-native families living right at Fort Liard. Jack Sime was the independent fur trader, with his wife Peggy, and there was Hudson's Bay Company manager John Forrest and his wife Bea. Both families had infant daughters.

Introduced to this group was the cause of most problems - "Diamond Cee", a self-proclaimed 'Medicine Man'. The natives really feared him because he told them he could make 'bad medicine' on them. These natives belonged to the Slave band and held several superstitions, but this one really struck fear into their hearts.

On special occasions these local people held Tea Dances where they danced in a circle to the beat of parchment-thin drums. They shook bags of mystical herbs and animal parts, chanting as they danced. It was after one of these fetes that someone reported hearing Diamond Cee brag about murdering a young child by striking the youngster's head with a tin cup. The body was placed in a box and hoisted up into the branches of a tree - a tree grave.

Earlier, Jim had hired a guide and interpreter named Willie McLeod.

Intrigued by the murder story, they decided to investigate.

Willie knew the area where the tree grave was reported to be and before long they located the little coffin. Carefully they lowered it to the ground. Inside they found the skeleton of a small child. The hair appeared to have grown quite long but upon close examination they could not detect any sign of violence. Carefully replacing the tiny box back up in the tree, they left. Willie swore Jim to secrecy.

A few weeks later, while Jim was away on patrol, Diamond Cee got roaring drunk on homemade wine and, losing control, assaulted his wife. She ran away from him and headed for the detachment. Upon reaching our back door she pounded urgently on it and burst into our kitchen. Diamond Cee was gaining on her as she fled into our bedroom and hid behind the dresser. He tried to follow but stopped when I stood in front of the bedroom door, blocking his entry inside.

"Where do you think you are going?" I asked him.

"I'm going to take my wife home and teach her a lesson", he snarled, drunkenly unsteady on his feet.

I was plenty scared of this drunken, big man but I tried not to show it. I said "Get out - right now!"

He just stood there, not moving, glaring at me. I reached around the bedroom door and pulled open the top dresser drawer. Not taking my eyes off him I put my hand in and felt Jim's service revolver lying on top of his shirts.

I pulled it around and pointed it at his chest. He threw his hands up and said "Go ahead, shoot me, shoot me", all the time backing crookedly towards the kitchen door. I slowly walked towards him as he retreated.

Luckily for both of us the door was still open and he disappeared into the dark. Right then I slammed the door shut and locked it. I didn't know if the gun was loaded or not, but then neither did Diamond Cee!

Later he was charged by the Justice of the Peace and received a month in jail for disorderly conduct and assaulting his wife. Being sent to jail was not a harsh sentence. We didn't have a cell and any prisoners we had lived in the office. Fortunately for me it was a separate building and prisoners were usually only confined at night. Through the day they worked alongside the two men in charge. Although Diamond Cee considered himself the Medicine Man and above manual labour, he did his share and we had a record amount of winter firewood that year.

While he was in custody, he received the same meals as we prepared for ourselves and once he said, "I feel good, missus". Eventually he tried to teach us some of the Slave language but the vocabulary consists of under 100 words, one word having several meanings. For instance the word "klea" could mean gas, dog, flour or lard! The context depicted the word to be used.

Diamond Cee and his wife brought us a gift of moccasins when our posting was up and we were leaving the settlement. Obviously he bore no resentment for his time spent in custody.

First Haircut

"Look, my boy, you need a haircut. Soon you'll look like Buffalo Bill." Actually I was grossly exaggerating because it wasn't anything like that, but Jim always kept his hair short. He'd look pretty silly with long hair, if for some reason he suddenly had to appear in his Stetson, so he admitted it was long and since we had been supplied with clippers - manual ones - he suggested that I take a stab at it. I thought to myself, "good choice of words".

He sat on a chair straddled so he faced the back of it in order that I could get closer to the back of his head. First I combed it, then went around a couple of cowlicks to find a part. I started down at the neck and went up the back of his head a ways. He never told me that you're supposed to release the handles when you wanted to stop, and I just stopped and pulled the razor back. You should have been there. You'd think there was a bag of cats. The air was blue, I never knew he could talk like that but I did see a big clump of blond hair still caught in the razor. There weren't any roots visible on the blade so I wasn't too concerned, but to put it mildly, I knew he was annoyed.

He had a mirror in each hand so he could monitor progress in the back but that made me very nervous. My hands were so sweaty I kept dropping the comb. He conceded it was only a week between a good or a bad haircut. But he did look a little moth eaten at the back. Too bad, because I was the only good barber in town. Years later when we returned outside and lived in Ottawa I was very much surprised that my hair cutting skills hadn't improved that much.

There was an official opening, which he had to attend and at the last minute he asked me if I could trim his hair - this time he had electric clippers.

I got halfway up his head when the clippers broke - actually broke. He jumped up, whipped off the cloth from around his neck and tore out the door. He drove straight to the barber who kindly let him into the shop two minutes before six o'clock. Jim said, "Can you give me a trim?"

My wife started but the clippers broke."

"It's a good thing" replied the barber.

Fresh Food

How we loved getting fresh meat! After eating very salty, boiled dinner or canned sausages for three or four months, anything fresh had great appeal. Even the vegetable supply was dehydrated and the best of that was dried cabbage. We made up instant potatoes, mixed in a can of corned beef and added reconstituted cabbage - suddenly you imagined a real Jigg's dinner.

Once I cooked a roast beaver. We ate it cold but it was a bit stringy. Another time, the purser off the Hudson Bay boat gave us a piece of caribou. What a gift — much like beef tenderloin. It didn't provide us with ample extended energy, but like fresh moose meat it was a grand treat.

Of course there was a bountiful supply of fish. In a lake about 40 miles

away were lake trout weighing 40 or 50 pounds. These giants had a very strong flavour and the natives used them for dog food.

In the fall of our third year we were very fortunate to receive a hind-quarter of moose meat. A native brought this in from the mountains and Jim happily swapped tins of canned meat for it. The weather was still quite warm so we had to protect the game from hordes of flies, not to mention other interested animals. Jim took the large cut of meat and hung it up near the top of the windcharger where it would be safe. The strong sun and wind dried a heavy casing around the meat — nature's way of preservation. When we needed fresh meat, Jim climbed up the charger ladder and cut some off. We felt very fortunate for these meals and the native fellow had a reserve supply of food if game was scarce while on his trap line.

After freeze-up, late in the fall, a large native family with a complement of small children and pack dogs arrived at the settlement. They had walked 40 miles from Trout Lake to stock up on supplies before setting off for their winter trap lines. Most of them had to arrange for "jaw-bone"—a local term for credit either with the Hudson Bay store or with the independent fur trader. They obtained a quantity of flour and tea, matches, salt and maybe a toy for the younger ones.

The women picked out the brightest coloured duffel cloth to make liners for their mukluks or moccasins and fine cloth for parkas and trim. Thread was a brightly-coloured luxury since they usually sewed with *babishe*. (The women did most of the heavy work, including making the *babishe*. They took sinew from the back of a moose—a strip that ran from the neck to the rump. Stretching it between two trees until it dried made it possible to cut it in very fine strips, almost as fine as thread but very strong. This unique material was used to sew their footwear together and the coarser strips were used as snowshoe lacing and webbing).

With all their purchases recorded and piled together, the men congregated to talk and smoke with the rest of the group. The women and children stood by patiently until told to pack the dogs and get ready to leave, the dog packs averaging around 40 pounds.

Jim had a special constable and interpreter named Willie. An incident began with a visit to the Hudson Bay store when a group came in from a large camp. Francis Arrowhead, the Chief of his camp, told Willie a story about his most recent moose hunt.

While making camp, he had pitched his tent in a nice, sheltered spot. During the night he awakened to a steady, low noise that seemed to be just outside the tent. Deciding to investigate in the morning, he went back to sleep. Imagine his surprise when he discovered he had slept on top of a bear den. The group listening to his story thought this was a great joke — a snoring bear!

Jim and Willie returned home discussing what they would have done if they had discovered the sleeping bear. Right then and there they decided to go and check out the camping spot. Harnessing the two dog teams, Jim and Willie took off to locate the area Francis had described. It wasn't long be-

fore they approached the sheltered spruce stand. They tied their teams, then approached the side of the hill. Ahead of them a small column of vapor escaped from a frost-encircled opening. Jim pointed "Here's the den." Kneeling, they listened for any sounds from within the den. They heard a soft, rumbling noise and knew they had found the sleeping bear.

Willie said, "Let's wake him up." He cut a long pole and sharpened one end. Inching the stick down through the narrow den opening, he twisted it and pulled it back up. A clump of black hair clung to the end — sure enough there was a black bear asleep in a den below. He poked and twisted several more times, each time retrieving another small clump of dense black hair. Finally the bear had enough and with a roar he charged up from his winter quarters. Willie took careful aim and shot him. Enlarging the entrance to the den the two men dragged the bear out. Between them, they loaded the bear on the toboggan and brought him home. The skinned-out carcass was divided equally but I got the best deal — suet for the Thanksgiving pudding and the dense hide for gleaming black bearskin mitts.

It was a cold but sunny day when I put my young son out to play. He was warmly dressed and I thought now I can finish my baking in peace. With no one to keep him company he wandered around in the snow pulling his little toboggan. His black and white teddy bear was the passenger and he gave it a merry ride for a few minutes. Every so often he'd call out "Come out, Mom". Soon however his interest faded and he started to whimper so I knew he would want to come in shortly. Suddenly the whimpering changed to a frightened cry, one of alarm. I went out to see if something was wrong. There he was, holding onto the top of a 45 gallon steel drum and his lower lip was frozen to the top of the container. Apparently he had climbed up on the front of the toboggan to see what was in the steel barrel and on leaning over his mouth stuck to the edge. Blood was pouring down the front of his parka and I panicked. My first thought was to pull him off but something stopped me and I ran into the house and got a dipper of warm water. Pouring this over his top lip, I freed him and lifted him off safely. Although he had a sore tongue and the inside of his lip was ragged it would heal quickly; it must have been intuition on my part, certainly not brains because I acted instinctively. I was grateful for some inner source guiding me. Maybe an angel on my shoulder? It must be noted that the nearest doctor was 200 miles distant.

Another time this youngster escaped a tragic accident. Jamie had gone with his father to the Roman Catholic Mission and was told to stay in the toboggan, snuggled in the eiderdown while his father went in to see about buying a knife. The dog team was tied to a post in front of the church. While Jim was selecting the proper knife he heard a commotion outside and looking out the window he saw the team of seven dogs in a snarling, savage fight. Jim flew out of the Mission and dragged the tangled mass back into an orderly line. He lifted the frightened but unharmed child to his feet. Apparently Jamie had climbed out of the toboggan and patted one of the dogs and the whole team turned around to play with him, knocking him down

and the dogs were fighting on top of him. Luckily he had fallen face downward and his parka hood protected his head.

The dogs were punished with a length of frozen hose; they remembered this and barely looked at the boy for several days.

Health

Living six years in comparative isolation we were very fortunate to enjoy good health and no serious accidents. Once, however, our three-year-old son Jamie suddenly became ill — very high temperature, sore throat and could not swallow any food. Since we were 200 miles away — by canoe or dog team — from the nearest doctor or hospital we were very worried.

The Hudson Bay store manager had a wireless set and he sent out a message -blind — hoping someone would pick it up. We were very lucky when the RCAF at Fort Nelson picked up the call for help and the next day a plane landed in front of the detachment. It was piloted by R.C.A.F. officer Paul Gibbs, accompanied by Dr. Vic Shearer and an airline mechanic. Because it was the day before Christmas, they said the real reason they responded so quickly was because of the sick child. Jamie was diagnosed as suffering from strep throat and he received the appropriate medicine, consisting of antibiotics to avert any serious complications.

The plane and crew then took off to return to the air base where their families awaited their return so they might attend a Christmas Eve party that night. Suddenly the motor coughed and sputtered and the mechanic told Paul to look for a suitable place to put the plane down. They saw that the shore along the frozen river was the smoothest landing space and with skill and a bit of luck they touched down safely.

Both pilot and mechanic checked the engine closely and finally found the source of trouble. They looked at one another and said, "We're sure lucky that's all it is. This would be a heck of a place to spend Christmas Day. Can't you imagine what the wives would say?" They took off and flew to Fort Nelson just in time to head off a search and rescue team that was getting ready to initiate a flight to locate the overdue plane. Our angels of mercy arrived home safe and sound.

For the most part the Slave band natives were a pretty healthy lot, considering the conditions under which they lived. There was an occasional case of tuberculosis, maybe caused by close contact in tents and also the fact they neglected to change into dry clothes when they got wet. The women wouldn't go out, even on the hottest days in summer without a sweater. They didn't want their arms bare. And even babies wore a hat and sweater in the summer time, as well as wool socks and moccasins.

But their babies were kept fairly clean and you never heard of diaper rash. They didn't use cloth diapers. They used moss and there was a good supply of it. The moss was placed in the bottom of the back pack and the baby on top - upright of course - and then the pack was strapped to the mother's back. Sometimes the packs were made of hides but usually they were can-

vas. And some were supported by a back board. The family could travel long distances and in the spring this is the way they returned to the settlement from the mountains after living there all winter. Their dogs also carried backpacks, which held most of the families' belongings.

When a new baby was about to arrive, a horizontal bar was placed on top of two upright supports. The mother would lean over this bar and the baby would drop onto a clean bed of moss. It would receive the first and only bath of its life, although sometimes the young boys would later swim in the river in the summer, but the women and girls never swam.

The natives didn't think my husband could predict reliably when a baby would arrive. One day an anxious father-to-be paddled across the river to the detachment and urged Jim to return with him and see why it was taking so long for his wife to deliver their baby. He went back with the husband to the tent where the expectant mother was leaning over the horizontal bar — and thinking the event was not going to happen immediately he told them it would be a while yet and left. The natives had the laugh on him as the new addition was born before he got back across the river.

One day in late spring a mother arrived at the detachment carrying a crying baby in her arms. She wanted help desperately and in those days they always turned to the police. She brought the little one to the house and through our interpreter wanted to know what to do.

We laid the baby on a blanket on our kitchen table in front of a window. Removing the two layers of clothes an ugly open sore was revealed. It was red and weeping, very angry-looking, almost resembling mange. I didn't have any idea what it was and Jim was reluctant to have them stay in the kitchen because it could have been something very contagious. We had no supplies to treat such a condition, just disinfectant powder. Cleaning the wound with warm boiled water, we gave the anxious mother some sulfa powder carefully wrapped the little one up and the mother left.

The baby died the next day. As far as our medical references could determine, it had a condition called scrofula. We felt totally inadequate and, knowing how helpless that mother felt, it was in our minds what would we have done had it been one of ours. □



Betty Reid, top left, with John Forrest and his wife, Bea. My son Jamie is in the photo with Bea's young daughter, Patsy Forrest.

When Global Warming Hit the Yukon

By Jane Gaffin

Two Whitehorse-based pilots flew a Great Northern Airways DC-3 loaded with construction supplies to Faro on Friday, June 13, 1969. The afternoon was another scorcher. The month would mark the hottest, driest June in the Yukon's history.

While mid-summer temperatures might be expected to average about 15 degrees Celsius, that particular June the mercury was stuck in the 35-degree range with no relief in sight.

The last rain was only a dim memory in people's mind. Forests were parched from thirst.

Superintendent John Gass sat in his Yukon Forest Services office expecting a nasty event to happen. He didn't have long to wait.

Joe Redmond guided the DC-3 onto the Faro airstrip behind Rose Mountain, near where the minesite would be. He and his companion, Harry, helped off-load the sweet-smelling lumber and other freight destined for the townsite.

When completed, the town of Faro would house 1,200 people in brand-new bungalows, apartment complexes and rows of townhouses.

The town was part of the infrastructure for the gigantic lead-zinc mine that Anvil Mining Corporation was grooming to bring into production in the fall.

Quite a distance to the west, a small lightning strike smacked a tree. The spot fire had been reported to the authorities.

When flying up-valley, heading for Whitehorse, the pilots could see some slate-colored smoke streaming up from the hill.

That evening, a dispatcher phoned Redmond at home to fly a rush charter back to Faro in the Aztec.

On board was the territorial fire marshal, accompanied by some brass from Anvil Mining Corporation, which had offices at Wood and Fourth Avenue.

"The town was gone," related Redmond in a later interview. "The fire was that fast."

The lightning had ignited a tinder-dry forest into a fast-sweeping fire that quickly rampaged beyond human control.

The world looked like it was coming to an end. The smoky sky hung in a low overcast. The gray was tinged rosy pink as tongues of reddish-orange flames caught the underbrush, crawled up dry trunks to brittle needles and gambolled across the crowns of the trees.

It licked at the bark. Splintering noises sounded like kindling splitting across the knee.

Healthy trees exploded with great poofs as if doused with gasoline, then toppled in a heap of blazing black sticks.

The smoke had crept in silently over the gravel runway and obscured visibility, already diminished by dusky midnight conditions.

The pilot and passengers didn't relish being trapped in there. They made a hasty retreat and would examine the ruins later.

The ruins were substantial. The one fire wiped out about 12,000 hectares of timber and \$2 million worth of construction materials.

Only two blackened townhouse shells protruded from the ashes for a Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation inspector to view.

On Sunday afternoon of June 15, a young mining engineer freshly graduated from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, stepped off the CP Air flight into the oven at Whitehorse.

"It was really hot, 93 degrees Fahrenheit," recalled Jim McLachlan who had enquired about a job with Anvil Mining Corporation back in March.

"I was made an offer right away. I was more than happy."

He went to the Capital Hotel, heralded as the mining hotel in those days, and flopped exhaustedly across the bed to rest for the afternoon. It was an effort to breathe, much less move.

"Everybody was baked," recounted McLachlan who had no way of knowing that the place where he was going to work was a bin of cinders.

The next morning, he went to the Polaris Block to sign on. "Everybody had long faces with the realization of what had happened. That was my introduction to the Yukon."

The mine did go into production on schedule, though McLachlan had to live in a bunkhouse a little longer, awaiting re-construction of the town where he was elected mayor first in October of 1994.

The surrounding countryside, which was once an ugly heap of charred sticks, revegetated itself into a picturesque summer landscape of poplar groves and a thick pink carpet of fireweed.

The year that Faro went up in smoke, roughly 350,000 hectares of forests burned throughout the Yukon.

By early September of 1969, roughly 300,000 hectares had been burned by 97 separate fires in protected zones. Another 30 fires wiped out about 52,000 hectares in unprotected zones.

"It was a lulu and we were sure glad to get that wet weather in late July and August," said forester John Gass, following one of the big record busters in terms of loss of forests and valuable property.

The same summer, fires broke into thickly wooded back yards in Porter Creek and Crestview near Whitehorse. Frightened residents removed a few special belongings and evacuated homes, never expecting to move back into them again.

"I never saw such a build-up," added Gass who partially blamed the frantic season on the high number of human-caused fires which doubled the misery of forestry crews.

The bush was so dry, every fire was a bad fire as soon as it started, he said. By the time the normal number of lightning-caused fires began, the fire fighters were already swamped with battling human-caused fires.

While upwards of 300 men fought Yukon forest fires at any one time, over 600 fire fighters were on the total payroll for the 1969 season.

“It’s expensive!” exclaimed the forester. “In addition to helicopters and small aircraft flying forestry contracts, two Mitchell B-25 bombers were brought in from Edmonton during the worst part of the season.”

As a comparison, Gass described the previous season as “normal”. In 1968, 76 fires burned about 7,000 hectares in protected areas and another 10 fires burned another 6,000 hectares in unprotected areas.

Yet, in 1967, a total of 92 fires burnt 130,000 hectares which was 10 times more forests than was destroyed in 1968.

Thirty years later, history repeated itself. The fire seasons were similar in terms of dryness, temperatures, lightning and people careless with campfires, smoking materials and brush-burning.

The resources of forest protectors were stretched to the limited in 1998-99.

The normal budget of \$11 million for suppression cost nearly tripled to \$31 million in 1998 and more than doubled to \$25 million in 1999.

The fire-management program that Yukoners are familiar with today, actually flowed from the Faro fire.

Until then, fire management was a group of forest rangers stationed hither and yon without infrastructure and not much in the way of aircraft support.

As a fallout from that cataclysmic season, the federal government budgeted money to create infrastructure in order to provide better protection to people, property and communities.



The village of Grise Fiord in the High Arctic, in 1978. Photo by your editor when he was there repairing the power plant for Northern Canada Power.

Herschel Island

Story by Don Sawatsky

Photos by Richard Harrington



A mile off the Arctic coast of the Yukon Territory squats a tiny pimple of barren treeless rock and ice. Weathered ancient buildings stare vacantly out into the Beaufort Sea and a small cluster of crosses in a cemetery nearby is all that is left of what was once one of the wildest, most lawless, northern outposts in North America.

It is Herschel Island, named in 1826 by the Arctic explorer, John Franklin, after the noted British astronomer and chemist, Sir John Frederick William Herschel, and is one of the only natural deep sea ports along the western Arctic coast.

Herschel Island attracted American whalers to its natural deep sea harbor of Pauline's Cove after British explorer F. W. Beachey wrote in his report of 1888 that "...we saw a great many black whales—more than I remember ever to have seen even Baffin's Bay."

The comment sparked a rush of American whaling vessels to check out the report that whales abounded "by the hundreds" in that area of the yet unexplored Arctic.

They moved along the coast until they reached the island that Beachey had referred to and, by 1890, were ready to winter in Pauline's Cove. By July of 1891, the first two ships were freed from the ice and the hunt began. They caught 60 whales, a windfall for one season's work, particularly when one considers that a season was only about six weeks long.

It amounted to \$600,000 on the open market, a virtual fortune. Each whale produced an average of a ton of baleen, the flexible strips of whale-bone which hangs from the upper jaws of the bowhead whale. This elastic bone, which was used in manufacturing whips, parasols, corsets and other necessities of the 19th century, brought \$5 a pound. Then, of course, there was the whale oil which brought another healthy income.

It was a bonanza.

Next season there were four ships out of the whaling port of San Francisco and with them came building materials with which to build warehouses and housing on the sandspit of Pauline Cove. With them, too, came the Eskimos who had been attracted to the big ships by the possibility of trade with the white whalers. But it was no bonanza for the Arctic natives. In fact, it was the beginning of the end because they were corrupted by liquor, infected with strange diseases and their women were used as trade items for the unscrupulous whalers.

Next year—1893—the whalers hit real paydirt. By the end of that short Arctic whaling season, four ships had taken 300,000 pounds of baleen, worth

over \$1.5 million. One ship alone caught 55 whales while another captured 52. It was, by far, the “largest catch in the history of whaling,” commented one observer.

By November of that year, there were seven ships settling in for the winter, anxiously awaiting the next season and another expected fortune in baleen and whale oil.

But, word of the lawlessness, greed, murder and wholesale prostitution that highlighted life at Herschel inevitably got out to the outside world and the whalers soon had company. He was Rev. I. O. Stringer, an Anglican missionary who spent much of his life in the western Arctic. The stories he had heard of the cruelty and immorality that characterized Herschel did not do justice to the actual facts.

Stringer was astounded at the wholesale slaughter of the whales and the social genocide that was being performed on the innocent and trusting Eskimos. “I flatly believe that a few years will see the salvation or the ruin of the Eskimos at Herschel Island,” he wrote. “It seems a pity that the Canadian or British governments are doing nothing. Of course the British and Canadians will realize what they have lost when it is too late. Next year there will probably be many more ships from San Francisco.”

He was right. Stringer left Herschel only to return the following year, in the fall of 1894, to see with amazement a fleet of 17 ships wintering in the harbor. He came armed with a petition which was signed by himself and three other men—Archdeacon R. McDonald, John Firth, the Hudson’s Bay factor at Peel River and another HBC official, J.C. Camsell.

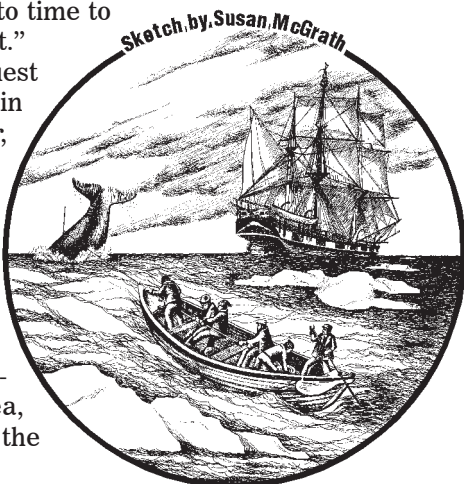
The petition was addressed to the “Captains whaling in the Arctic Ocean” and read:

“Some of the Eskimos and Indians have been in the habit of receiving liquor from some of the whaling ships wintering at Herschel Island.

“This is strictly forbidden by the laws of Canada and we would earnestly request you use your best efforts to prevent this in future both in the interests of morality and for the welfare of the natives; and also to ask those who may replace you from time to time to co-operate in this desirable object.”

The gentle, if not naive, request was greeted with complete disdain and promptly ignored and Stringer, after leaving the island in November, noted wistfully that “it does not seem to have done much good.”

A Danish adventurer, Christian Klengenbergh, who spent several winters on Herschel, estimated there were about a thousand Eskimos living in the area, mostly coming from Alaska. In the



winter they traded their services as hunters and in the summer they hired themselves out as whalers. They also traded their women, usually for a bottle of liquor.

C.E. Whittaker, Stringer's assistant and a man who spent 50 years among the Eskimos of the Arctic, noted:

"The petty officers depended on local women and girls for their pleasure. Intoxicants was one of the means of enticement. When girls were not obtainable, wives were enticed away from their husbands, or men were induced to rent out their wives."

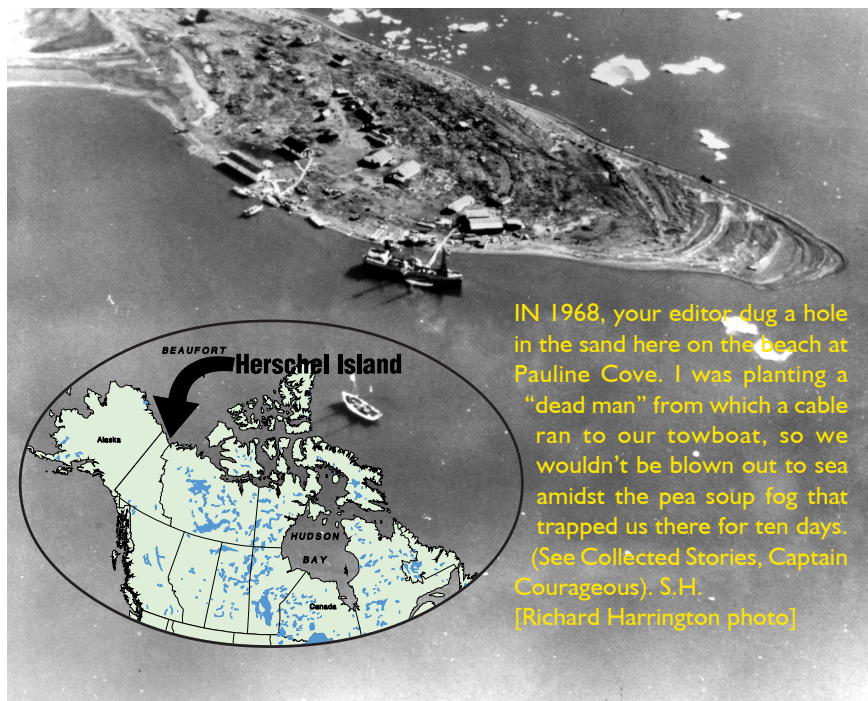
Liquor was handed out liberally in the winter of 1894-95 and, according to Whittaker, "the scenes of riotous drunkenness and lust which this island has witnessed have probably never been surpassed."

The crews of the whaling vessels, particularly the 700 or so foremast hands, were, as Stringer once described them, "odd specimens of humanity."

But Klengenberg was not as charitable. He described many of them as "blackguards who should have been dropped through a hole in the ice."

The famed Arctic explorer, Roald Amundsen was impressed with the cordiality of the whaling captains when he made a brief visit to Herschel in 1905-06 but he later expressed some misgivings as to the goings-on behind closed doors.

"The things on board some of these American whalers were not as they ought to be there can be little doubt; but, having no positive proofs, I prefer not to mention the many and queer tales I heard during my sojourn here."



IN 1968, your editor dug a hole in the sand here on the beach at Pauline Cove. I was planting a "dead man" from which a cable ran to our towboat, so we wouldn't be blown out to sea amidst the pea soup fog that trapped us there for ten days. (See Collected Stories, Captain Courageous). S.H.
[Richard Harrington photo]

Many of the hands on the ships had been, quite simply, shanghaied by boarding house keepers in San Francisco who received a bounty per man. They were to be given a share of the profits from the catch, but in reality their earnings were docked for various necessities during the expedition and by the time they returned south they usually received a token silver dollar for their services while the captains and senior officers split up the entire take.

Once in the Arctic the men were prisoners with no chance of escape, although several men attempted to walk south in an effort to reach Fort Yukon or one of the trading posts in the southern Yukon. They were either never heard of again or they returned with frozen feet or hands.

Klengenberg, an officer on the island during 1894-95, wrote later: "It was agreed that officers should be severe when offences and defiance became too serious and keep their mouths shut when they went south. So I am not telling all."

Rev. Whittaker described many of the whaling captains as arbitrary, iron-willed and unscrupulous—the true rulers of their icy domain. "Their word was law, without any court of appeal." Many of them were oblivious to the human degradation, the disease and death they caused among the natives or the fear and pain they inflicted on their own men. Not all the captains were monsters, however. Stringer noted that several brought their wives along on the journey and "were extremely kind and....above average in many ways."

But, they were not the majority. By that winter, conditions among the natives had become critical, their entire life-style and social make-up completely destroyed by the liquor and laws of the captains. Stringer was appalled and sickened at the degradation and could only write: "I do not wish here to go into the moral status of Herschel Island."

But the wild, wanton winter of 1894-95 was not to be ignored by Rev. Stringer. In the spring of 1895, he met with the whaling captains and told them in no uncertain terms that the situation at Herschel was appalling. He threatened that federal Canadian authorities would be called in to take steps to correct the social decline unless the captains co-operated.

Actually, it was somewhat of an empty threat because several letters written to Ottawa complaining about the situation received nothing more than a cursory reply and no action. But, Stringer was not to be put off so easily.

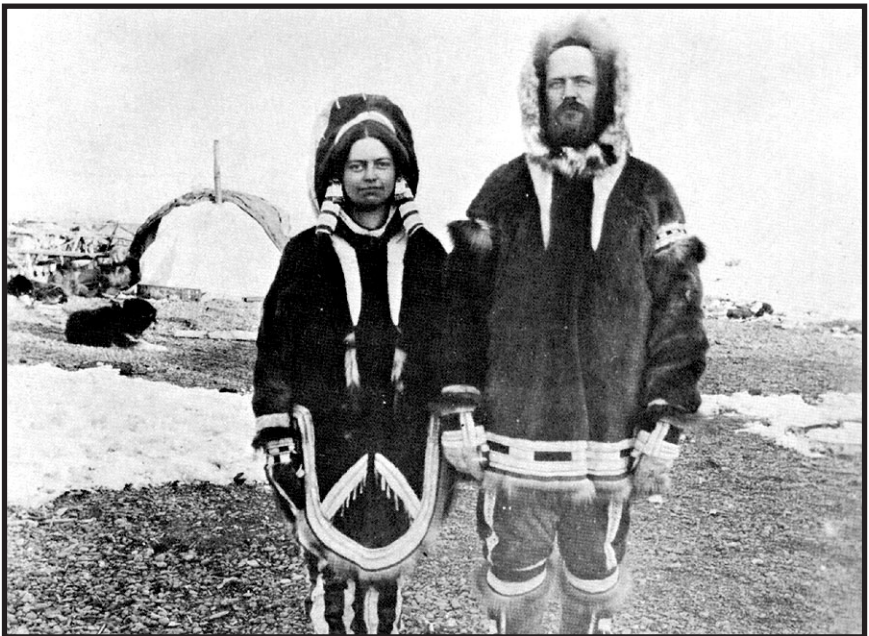
The captains attempted to sooth the good reverend's moral outrage and even suggested that Stringer set up a mission on the Island. The captains kicked in \$600 to launch the mission—the first on the Arctic ocean. In August of 1896—at the same time that gold was being discovered in the Klondike 500 miles to the south—Rev. Stringer and his bride of only weeks arrived on the island and settled into one of the Pacific Steam Whaling Company's buildings.

They taught school, translated the Bible into Eskimo, doctored and offered singing and shorthand lessons to any foremast hand who was interested.

This civilizing effect—small as it might have seemed—made the long, lonely months of winter a bit more bearable. Even Klengenberg, no church-goer himself, described Stringer as a “fighter who put the fear of the Lord into several who were better for it.” Stringer’s uphill battle to stamp out the devastating effects of the lawless captains received some support from the Hudson Bay Company. The HCB threw its weight into the attempt to stamp out the notorious whalers’ although this rule was prompted not totally out of Christian charity but rather more because the company had lost considerable fur trade with the Eskimos to the liquor- dispensing whalers.

The Company complained to the federal authorities about the unfair competition to which they were subjected by the operations of “these intruders in the far north.” They protested that while the Company had to pay duty for all goods brought into the country, the whalers did not; that the alcohol being supplied to the Eskimos was having a decidedly debilitating effect on these fine people; and, finally that the government should take note of the destruction of “very valuable fisheries by these foreign intruders.”

But, as was the case in so many other matters, Ottawa was not interested in a tiny dot of land so far north. They did nothing until 1903. With the Alaska Boundary dispute simmering, Canada finally enforced its jurisdiction over that notorious corner of the far-flung Dominion. In August of that year the North West Mounted Police established the most northerly detachment in the world at Herschel Island. But, the damage had been done. The wild days of 1890’s were over and the police were exactly six years too late. The



Isaac and Sadie Stringer at Herschel Island in 1898. [Anglican Church photo]

only advantage in establishing a Mountie post in that distant Arctic island was to make a show of Canadian sovereignty in an era when the Americans were running up the stars and stripes wherever they happened to set foot.

But, with the disappearance of the whalers, the natives drifted east back to the Mackenzie Delta country and west into Alaska. Their leaving left only a Mountie post, a church and 20 empty buildings.

Staff Sergeant F. J. Fitzgerald, one of the first Mounties to head the Herschel outpost wrote gloomily in 1908-09: "There is no ship wintering in our waters this year...when there are no ships wintering at Herschel Island. I think it is one of the most lonesome places in the north." But, Herschel didn't die completely. The small struggling community was held together by the fine natural harbor, and the permanent Pacific Steam Whaling Company buildings—a sign of permanence in a land of "ifs."

Besides these physical things, Herschel later became a major Arctic center for the Eskimos who had been forced back to their traditional fur trapping after the whalers left the country. Free traders, some sailing converted whaling vessels, arrived every year loaded with trade goods from the south and traded furs for southern goods. Despite the collapse of the whaling markets of the world around 1906, with the introduction of feather bone and spiral steel springs, Herschel Island managed to stay alive on a revitalized fur trade. The price of baleen fell from \$5 a pound to 40 cents. Except for one or two whaling vessels that harvested whale oil, as well as furs, Herschel would never see the fleets of ships again.

Herschel was thriving once more, at least during the short summer months. Here is a description of the community, written in 1914:

"Herschel Island is a busy place in July and August. Perhaps 25 or more Eskimo whaleboats and a dozen two-masted, Mackenzie-built schooners, were assembled here to trade with incoming ships. With the recent decline in the whaling industry in the western Arctic and smaller probability of ships wintering at Herschel Island, the Eskimos from the Mackenzie Delta and from the west had a still greater incentive than formerly to be at the island to trade during the short open season."

The following year, the Hudson's Bay Company established its first Arctic Ocean post on Herschel and the island outpost once again flourished. But, again it was only for a short period of time. By the beginning of the 1930's other centers began to spring up in the western Arctic and Herschel began to decline again, this time never to recover. In 1932 the RCMP moved their subdivision headquarters to Aklavik, NWT, and maintained only a summer detachment on the island. By 1937 the Anglicans had also left for Aklavik, followed the next year by the HBC.

Henry Larson, who was famous as skipper of the Mounted Police vessel "St. Roch", noted in 1944 after a brief visit: "Once a thriving Arctic metropolis, Herschel Island had been abandoned."

The Mounties who also once used Herschel as their largest sled dog-breeding headquarters, reopened their post on the island in 1948 but Arctic development had bypassed Herschel and in 1964 the Force locked the detachment door and left for good. □

How the Yukon Almost Lost Herschel Island

In 1972 Stuart Hodgson, Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, interpreted the N.W.T. Act as including all Arctic islands as part of his Territory. The Yukon's Commissioner at the time, James Smith, heard of this declaration by his eastern counterpart. As those of us who know him can attest, Jim Smith is a man of action. He organized a party to land on Herschel Island, travelling by charter aircraft from Whitehorse then by helicopter to the island. They raised the Yukon flag on barren tundra and settled the argument once and for all. Jim hired a trapper, who was living there a time, to be caretaker on behalf of the Yukon (he was also left with more flags to plant). S.H.

Raising the flag on Herschel Island, June 18, 1972. From left to right: Hilda Watson, Ron Chamberlist, Chris Pearson, Jim Smith, and Keith Fleming.



[Richard Harrington photo]

A DOG-PUNCHER ON THE YUKON**1896-1902***By Arthur Treadwell Walden***Part One****Editor's Foreword:**

The following story, published in 1928 by the Houghton-Mifflin Company, is the finest account of the Gold Rush period that I have read, and I have read many.

Arthur Walden went home with nothing but memories to show for his years in the North. He began to breed dogs in New Hampshire and that breed is still in existence (the Chinook). He raced his dogs with some success and, at age 56, joined the Admiral Byrd expedition to the South Pole. The Admiral later wrote that "Walden's team was the backbone of our transport."

His lead dog Chinook, who had been Walden's constant companion since 1917, disappeared into the Antarctic mists and was never found.

When he got back to the States in 1930, at the beginning of the Great Depression, Walden found himself deeply in debt. He sold his kennels and went to work for the new owner as a breeder and trainer. For the rest of his life he worked with the Chinook breed of dogs. He died in 1947 while saving his beloved wife (Katherine Sleeper Walden) from a burning house,

You might find a copy of *A Dog-puncher on the Yukon* in an antique bookstore or even your local library.



Arthur Walden and Chinook in 1928.

**CHAPTER I
ACROSS CHILKOOT PASS**

WHEN I made my first trip into Alaska in March, '96, very little was known in the East about this country, except for the tourist trip from Seattle up what is called the 'Inside Passage' to the vicinity of Juneau and back. This takes in practically all the scenic region, but it is

only a small part of Alaska; and no one who has seen only this section of the coast can form any idea of the land where men suffered and died for love of gold, two years later.

Southeastern Alaska is entirely different from the rest of the country. One great difference between the coast and the interior is the climate, which is tempered by the Japan Current west of the Coast Range. I have seen it raining in Skagway, when, thirty-five miles away over the mountains, by the meandering line of the railroad, it was sixty below zero. There is very little in common between the two sides of the mountains, even to the inhabitants. I do not mean to give the idea that it is always warm, with no snow, on the coast, but the country there does not have the intense cold of the interior. It has a wet climate while the interior is more or less dry.

We made the trip from Juneau, where we had outfitted, to Dyea, in a small tug loaded with men and dogs bound for the interior. The tug was completely housed in, and everybody, including the dogs, slept on the crowded enclosed deck, as there were no berths. Most of the men were, like myself, what is; called in the jargon 'Cheechakos' or newcomers. A few old-timers or 'Sourdoughs' were going back after a winter spent in the States. Every one was busted and had only an outfit consisting of more or less food, together with a large supply of faith in his own good luck. It was food and not money we needed after landing.

The trip was about one hundred miles up the Lynn Canal, and very rough. We had to seek shelter for several hours until the gale blew itself out. Almost every one was seasick and lay around on the covered deck, cold and miserable. I remember one large and very sick man who was lying on his back with his head toward me. My collie dog Shirley, whom I had brought from home, was lying beside me, and for some unknown reason he got up, walked over to this man, scratched his hat off, and with the other paw raked the whole length of his bald head. The yell the man let out raised the whole boat and sent Shirley back to my side, where he lay down as before. The man seemed to think it was all a part of the seasickness, and, as he was large and powerful, I did not care to enlighten him.

Dyea was the last town on the coast, at the mouth of a small stream called the Dyea River; and at the beginning of the Chilkoot Trail. The town consisted of a trading post run by Heron and Wilson, and a dozen or more Indian shacks. Here our tug anchored about a mile out, at the head of the Lynn Canal, and our outfits were put on a lighter which was warped in-shore. There was a good deal of floating ice which complicated matters. When there were horses to unload, they were backed over the side and made to swim ashore.

The beach and the country for half a mile back were destitute of snow, and as we depended on snow for our sleds we had to have our outfits hauled across to the snow-line by a pirate horse-team which took our last dollar. There we made our first camp in Alaska, along with about a hundred other men who were getting their provisions up the trail by repeated 'back tripping' or relays.

On April first we left the coast for our journey into the interior. The real work of getting into the Yukon began here, and each man, unless he was rich enough to hire some one to carry his outfit over to the lakes at the headwaters of the Yukon, was absolutely dependent on himself. The Indians were charging one cent per pound per mile for packing, and were not overly eager to work, even at that price.

I remember one party of three who had come from the East and were camping out when we arrived. They became discouraged hauling their own stuff, and tried to beat the Indians down. Now an Indian is always ready to go up on his price, but never comes down. After a good deal of haggling, one Indian called the leader of the party 'Cultus- Boston,' which means in the Chinook jargon, 'no good American.' The satisfied expression on the white man's face was indescribable, as he explained to his friend that 'even the unsophisticated aboriginals recognized us as cultivated Boston people!' These men never reached the summit. About the only men who had their goods packed over were the traders and gamblers.

Every one had provided himself with a seven-foot long and sixteen-inch wide Yukon sled and pack-straps. Two men generally went together for the mutual help afforded and economy of camp outfitting. More than this number gave cause for dissension, and goodness knows there was enough trouble with only two. A lone man, if he could get along at all, certainly had the best of it, although I have known men who could not even get along with themselves.

The large majority were hauling their outfits themselves without any dogs. My partner was hauling his own sled, but I had my dog Shirley, whom I had broken to harness, to help me. For the first few miles we crossed an open flat, following up the Dyea River, walled around by steep rocky mountains with timber near the base. Suddenly a canyon opened out of this wall like a huge doorway. It was a rift opening into the mountains, down which a glacial torrent cascaded into the plain.

The rift was sheer rock and was from fifteen to fifty feet wide, and a hundred or more feet high, with a few trees clinging to it; the grade through it was steep, over a series of waterfalls. The stream had frozen while the water was at high level, after which it had dropped, taking the thinner parts of the ice with it, so that we had to go around holes on a narrow ledge of ice where the raging torrent was twenty or thirty feet below us. In some places pole bridges had to be made, almost like ladders; in others there was only a narrow rim to crawl around on. The later the season the harder the traveling, as the ice was giving way. It was so thick before the thaw started that a band of horses had been taken over it, but at this time only dogs and men could do the work. From one hundred to one hundred and fifty pounds was all that a man could handle alone, with help over the bad places.

The canyon then opened out into a round valley called 'Sheep Camp.' This was the headquarters of the mountain sheep hunters who camped here in the last timber on this side of the range. Here every one made a more or

less permanent camp, and the outfits were relayed up to it. The valley is like a basin, surrounded by high rocky mountains impossible to climb, with a sharp notch cut in the rim. This notch is the notorious Chilkoot Pass. From Sheep Camp to the foot of the pass was five miles of steep grade. A horse weighing a thousand pounds was barely able to haul a load of three hundred pounds on a narrow Yukon sled, with two men to help him. The snow was very deep, but was so hard that it would bear the horses up.

At one spot on the rim of the basin there was an overhanging glacier, which two years later broke, in the warm weather, letting loose a flood of water that cleared everything out of the valley, including two huge boulders called the 'Stone Houses.' As there was nobody on the trail at the time it did no harm. But a snow-slide a short time before had killed a large number of prospectors. Over sixty bodies were found.

When the foot of the pass was reached, everything had to be packed on men's backs for the last twelve hundred and fifty feet. The grade was so steep that a man standing in the footholds cut in the hard snow could touch the wall in front of him without losing his balance.

Horses were fastened in a rope sling and led up the trail on a long rope, with a hundred men or more to each horse, until the horses lost their footing, when they were hauled up to the summit lying on their sides. They were then led through the sharp cut, blindfolded, backed over the edge, and slid down the other slope on their backs to Crater Lake, some four hundred feet below. This was not as rough as it sounds, and was the only way of getting them over. I did not see a horse that was either hurt or frightened, but then they were Western ponies. The following year, when thousands of people tried to get into the country over the newly discovered White Pass, twenty-five hundred or three thousand horses were killed.

Besides the bad traveling and hard work getting over Chilkoot Pass, terrible storms often raged for days, making it impossible to move from camp. When men were caught halfway up, pack and load had to be abandoned and a stampede made for camp. Quantities of goods were lost during the winters, and the Indians made a business of picking them up when the snows went off.

A curious thing happened up here, which for some unknown reason affected us very queerly and was a good deal talked about. The weather had turned cold. A man was driving a team composed of the usual long-haired dogs of the country, together with one short-haired greyhound. One morning the short-haired dog was found frozen solid, standing up: there he stood with his tail between his legs, his back arched and his head down. The owner was very much criticized for the treatment of his dogs. There were some short-haired dogs on the trail, but men were always careful to let them sleep in their tents.

We stayed at Sheep Camp until all our outfit had been relayed up and pushed on ahead to the summit; then we broke camp and moved completely over to Lake Linderman. It took twenty-three days to get our twelve hun-

dred pounds over the twenty-three miles from tidewater to the lake. Here timber began again, and another camp was made until the outfit left on the summit could be relayed down. This was comparatively easy, as it was nine miles, all downhill, through canyon, bleak and barren, which was completely frozen. From here on it was good sledding on the lakes. Men camped along the shores where good timber was found, and built their boats for the trip down-river.

There are five of these lakes in a string, which are really a widening of the river, and the source of the Yukon. Except for Mud or Marsh Lake, which is shallow with flat shores, they are surrounded by high mountains.

Lake Linderman, the first of the string, is only six miles long. This is connected by a short, swift stream with Lake Bennett, which is twenty-seven miles long. A sluggish stream called 'Caribou Crossing' connects this with Tagish Lake, which is twenty-five miles long, and into this, halfway down, Windy Arm comes in. A gale always blows down Windy Arm.

Tagish Houses are at the foot of Tagish Lake. These 'Houses' are mostly Indian graves. The Indian in this section cremates his dead and packs their ashes in nicely made, brass-bound wooden boxes, which are put in small slatted houses built on posts.

I remember a man who found one of these boxes in the woods. Not knowing what it was he took it to use for a grub-chest, and did not discover his mistake until some days later, when the widow and some other Indians called at his camp for something to eat and recognized it. After scaring the poor prospector almost to death, they allowed him to keep it on payment of most of his~outfit. He did not want it by this time, and neither did the widow: but he paid well for his mistake and was the laughingstock of the river. Later on the Canadian Government put in a customs house here.

At the head of Tagish Lake we found good timber, and five or six other camps, and we decided to stay there a month or six weeks and build our boats, as we had no teams to haul our stuff over the ice and had to wait till the lakes broke up so that we could go on by water. It took days to build these boats. They were whip-sawed from round logs, placed on a scaffolding and ripped into boards with a long saw operated by one man above and one below. We called these locally the 'Armstrong Sawmill,' and they certainly were a test of friendship.

After finishing our boats and before it was time to launch them, everybody went hunting, but without much success. We had an old hunter with us who was always boasting, but he never had any luck at all. When my partner and I, who were young at the game, proposed to go off hunting, this old chap derided our efforts, and said he would eat at one sitting all the game we brought in.

I had taken Shirley with me so that in case we wounded any game he would track it. Well, we hunted and hunted and hunted, and all we could find were tracks, and there were plenty of those. Finally we scared up a partridge and began to shoot at its head with our big '45 rifles. Whether we killed it or not I don't remember, but all at once Shirley raised a tremen-

dous racket in the woods and we started over, knowing he had found something or other of importance. We rushed over to the sound from different angles, and right in the center of a clearing was a large spruce tree up which a bear was climbing. I was a little ahead of my partner and yelled back to him, 'Hurry up, because there's a moose here and he's climbing a tree.' I certainly had moose on the brain.

Then we began to shoot, and the bear slid down out of the tree. I don't think she had any idea except to get away, but my partner happened to be standing in the middle of the path she chose. What would have happened I don't know, but the minute she started to run, Shirley slipped up and bit her from behind, and the bear whirling on him the dog jumped off to one side. This was repeated over and over, while we kept pouring lead into her from our repeaters.

Finally she dropped and we came up to her. Shirley was still worried, darting in and snapping at her and jumping away again. At last he realized she was dead, when he boldly swaggered up and got her by the throat and hung on. She was certainly dead; she had nine balls through her, strung along in a line from her hind foot all the way along to her nose. Why Shirley didn't get shot I don't know.

Looking up in the tree I discovered three little puff-balls in the top branches looking down at me. We shot one, but it was so small and cunning that we decided to capture the others alive, so while Billy got the sugar sack, which we carried our lunch in, I climbed up the tree as far as it would carry my weight, and started to cut the top off. I worked here with a dull old knife, and then we changed places, Billy climbing up while I slid down to catch the bears as they dropped.

It wasn't long before the top of the tree came down, striking on its tip end without hurting the cubs; in fact they didn't even loosen their hold. Grabbing a bear by a hind paw in each hand, I managed to get them into the sugar sack before they realized what had happened, and then began a tempest in a tea-pot. Such snarling, yelling, and screeching I have never heard.

Billy all this time was adding to the noise by yelling to me from the tree-top not to let them go. I was shaking the cubs up and down in the sack to keep them from biting their way out, when suddenly the commotion stopped, and I could hear the little rascals licking the sugar off the inside of the sack. These were the smallest bears I have ever seen: they were about the size of small cats. I weighed one of them three months afterwards and he then weighed only six pounds.

Of course we were tickled to death with our find, not only on our own account, but because we had beaten the old hunter. We went back to camp with the three small bears, one dead and two alive, leaving the old mother bear, as she was too heavy to pack.

The old hunter was a stingy old devil and was the only man who had any raisins in the whole camp. These he would not give away or sell. But he was a man who would bet on anything, so I told my partner to go over to his camp, and when he was asked what luck we had, to tell him we killed a bear. This he did.

Of course the old man didn't believe him, and after a little fencing Billy bet him that we had actually killed a bear, his raisins against a partly used can of condensed milk that we'd saved up. Everything was going very well until they got down to the quantity of raisins, when Billy, expecting to get the bet raised, told him we had got four bears. This disgusted the old hunter so much that he wouldn't bet under any conditions, and we never got even a smell of the raisins. At that it was just as well, for we found that in our absence one of the little bears had appropriated the condensed milk.

Early the next morning four of us started back to bring in the old bear. My partner and I were some distance ahead of the others when we thought we discovered another enormous bear, the largest I have ever seen. There he stood on a small knoll, in the early morning light, turning slowly around. He was so large that we decided we would wait for the other men to come up. Then we thought we would get a little closer, and that bear got smaller and smaller until at close quarters it turned into an enormous porcupine. We killed it, but didn't tell the other two men what we had thought it was.

What the mother bear weighed I don't know, but I know it took the four of us to carry her home. A peculiar thing about this bear family was that the mother was brown, two of the cubs were black, and one was brown, and one of the black cubs was twice as large as the others. I have an idea it may have been a stray she had picked up somewhere.

My partner's pet bear broke his chain and got away. Mine was always getting away, but we had the good or bad fortune to catch him again each time, and much to our sorrow we had him with us in the boat all the way down the river.

One or two things are worth mentioning about this little bear. One was that if you turned your back he at once tried to poke everything out of the boat into the river. This wasn't so bad when the things would float, but at one place we had pulled the boat up on a sand bar, and gone back a couple of hundred feet to get firewood to cook dinner, when all of a sudden Billy turned around and said, 'Look at that damned bear!' There he was, standing on the gunwale, pushing everything possible overboard, sour-dough box, pans, tobacco tins, everything, working with every single foot independent of the other.

Rushing down to the boat Billy picked up a rock almost as big as his head and slammed it at the bear, but falling short it struck one side of the boat, breaking a plank which took us almost half a day to repair. The bear gave us one look, and dived down under the canvas that covered our plunder.

By this time both of us were pretty well clawed up. He was just as nice as could be up to a certain point. We could pet him, and he would play all kinds of antics for half an hour at a time. But he always ended up by flying into a rage and tackling everything in sight. The only way to quiet him was to chuck him overboard and let him tow for a while. Then we would pull him in, and he would sit on top of the canvas, eyeing first one of us and then the other, with the expression, 'Just wait till I grow up!' When we got

to Circle City I traded him off for a camp outfit to a man I didn't care much about.

In this and other camps there was quite a lot of quarreling going on between partners who had seen too much of each other. But usually there was nothing of a serious nature, and it was generally settled by a division of all the property. As a rule these 'divorces,' as these were called, were accomplished without any trouble: things that couldn't be divided were tossed up for. But occasionally men would get into the frame of mind where no fair division could be made, as neither man would allow the other the least advantage, even temporarily.

In one of these extreme cases the outfit was divided until they got to the boat, which, as luck would have it, was a double-ender. They cut the boat across the middle, each patching the cut end up. They cut the tent exactly in half. The axe, the stove, and the one gun they possessed in common were thrown into the Yukon. Then each man went down the river by himself. The division was made before a crowd of men who offered suggestions and advice of the most ridiculous kind, but the two men went serenely on with their work, apparently oblivious to the jests of the crowd.

At this time, although the lakes hadn't begun to thaw, the light frosty snow of the country had completely disappeared, and the flowers were blooming.

It was while here that I got my first lessons in baking bread in the ground. The method was this: A shallow hole was dug in the sand and a fire lighted in it and allowed to burn out, thoroughly heating the ground all around it. While the ground was being heated, bread was made of sour dough, put between two gold-pans, and allowed to rise. Then the hot ashes and dirt were scooped out of the hole and the gold pans put in and covered with ashes and hot sand. The bread was allowed to stay in about an hour: if left in too long it wouldn't burn, but the crust would get thicker. The loaf came out a rich golden brown and very delicious. This of course was only done when conditions were favorable.

A great competition started up in the different camps as to who could bake the biggest loaf, and a man, hearing of a dishpan some one had ten miles back on the trail, walked over and borrowed it, and beat us all.

We also learned to jerk meat while we were waiting for the ice to go out. Lean meat is cut in thin strips and dipped in very strong boiling brine, after which the strips are hung over a light rack of branches and allowed to grow dry and hard. A smoky fire is kept burning near by to keep the flies away. The meat when done was about as tough as leather and almost as black. It was really very good and sustaining; it could be stewed, but we preferred it raw and carried little chunks in our pockets.

As the river between the lakes began to break up, we saw a great many migratory birds come in, geese, ducks of many kinds, and some swans. We were able to kill a few birds, but they were very poor eating, being thin after their long flight. It was certainly nice to feel that they had come up from the South, as it gave us the idea that spring was coming.

We found it interesting picking out the different kinds of geese and ducks. Even a few loons drifted in, and the air was constantly full of birds. Not many nested around here. They went farther north toward the mouth of the Yukon. Years later when we were going down the Yukon in a small boat, we got lost among the islands below the Flats. We took the wrong slough and went some distance inland and away from the general travel, thus passing through one of the so-called 'goose-pastures,' where the noise was almost deafening and the geese could have been counted by the thousand.

... to be continued



The inside of a DC-3 on a flight from Resolute Bay to Arctic Bay in the High Arctic, in 1979 (SH photo).

From the Publisher

For my money, there's no better place in summer than my water front cabin at Marsh Lake. Even a wet summer like this one is a treat. The sand dune we live on is lush with wild grass, roses and aspen trees. The air smells of fresh lake water and the tiny blossoms of native plants.

But living in paradise can be a curse. We don't have much time to relax and enjoy the Yukon summer. After the long winter there's always a mountain of tasks that awaits us, things like washing windows, fixing vehicles, building fences and getting firewood.

At least once each summer we escape to Kluane country for a few days. After Marsh Lake, it's our favourite spot in the Yukon. This year we travelled in Sam's old truck and took the two dogs with us. Having the dogs along gave us a good excuse to slow down and enjoy the scenery.

Sam took this photo at the Slim's River where it enters Kluane Lake. The background mist is really a cloud of glacial dust blowing across the river delta. The Alaska Highway crosses the river here, then continues in a northwesterly direction along the lakeshore. This is grizzly country and I've seen adult and juvenile bears alongside the highway more than once.

Again we stayed at Burwash Landing. The village survived last year's fire and I liked the wide-open spaces where the trees have burned. Some local people were clearing the fields of blackened rubble and planting grass. The lodge was abuzz with mushroom pickers and dealers from far away who have come to get rich off the mushroom crop that follows a forest fire. Even in paradise there's work to be done.

