
THE
YUKONER
MAGAZINE
ISSUE
No.16
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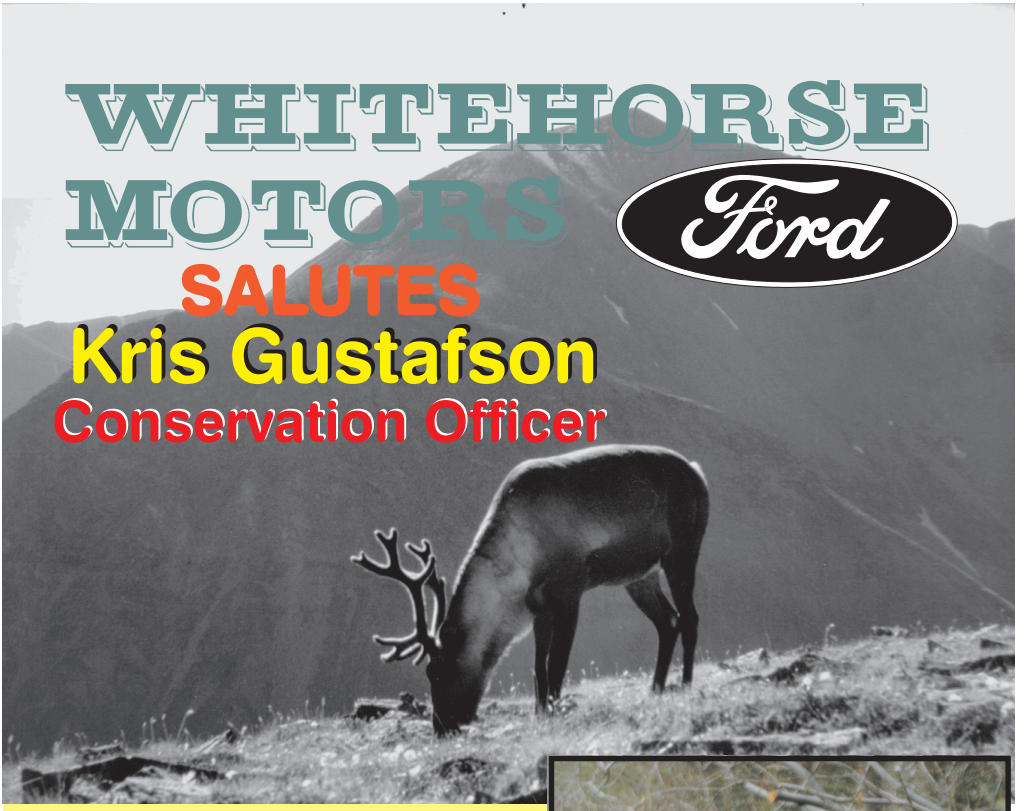
• Two Journeys to yesteryear: Dawson City and Fort Selkirk
• Yukon Sean from Toronto

Kris Gustafson

Conservation Officer



Conservation Officer Kris Gustafson knows most of the hunters and trappers in his district – plus most of the problem bears, including some monster-sized grizzlies. Kris has worked with the Field Services Branch of the Yukon Department of Renewable Resources for 20 years.

Raised in Whitehorse, he discovered early his love of animals and the bush, and as a teenager had a small trapline going. He worked on construction jobs to finance his education and, in his words, now he has the "perfect job."

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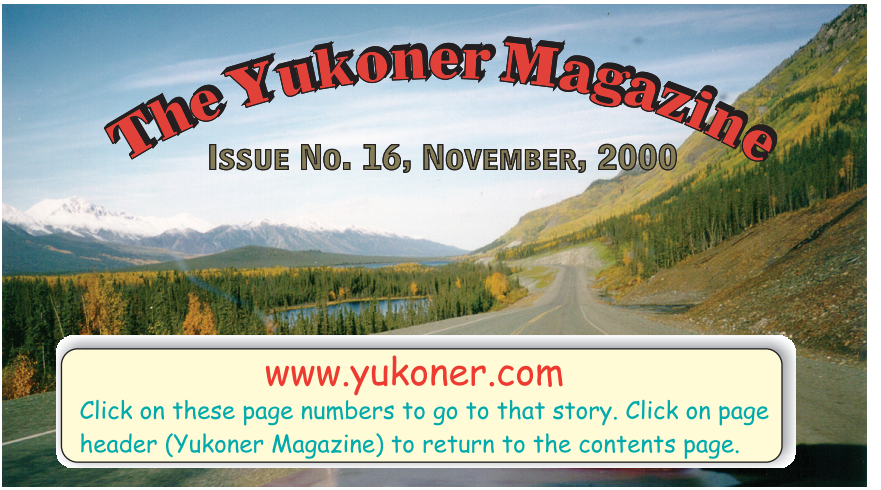

Cover:
Anna Crawford on the Yukon River footbridge at Whitehorse. [John Hatch photo, summer, 2000]

Below: Old Dodgie, office & print shop, and the editor. The Yukoner Magazine is produced entirely on the premises here at Army Beach, Yukon.

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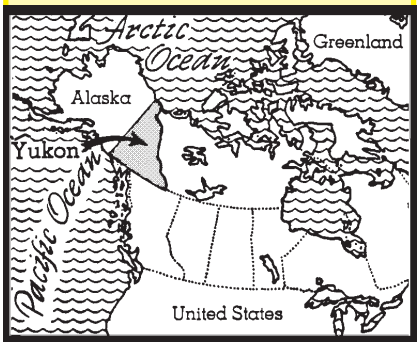


From the Editor

So, how did I get on a licence plate? (see inside front cover.) Last summer I took our writer, Darryl Hookey, on a gold-panning expedition around Whitehorse. A photographer from *The Yukon News*, Jillian Rogers, came along and took some photos and the *News* ran Darryl's story in their newspaper.

Roy Pawluk saw the photo and created the figure on the licence plate and lapel pin. I'm hoping we will sella pile of them because they will be easy to mail out and will bring up our revenues.

When I was editor of *The Yukon Reader*, we tried selling coffee mugs. They all broke during shipment so I ordered plastic cups. They didn't break but the artwork had a reaction to sugar and would disappear. I had to refund the money to some folks while others just lived with the problems. But the licence plates and pins are made from metal and should work out pretty well, I hope.

There are always going to be some mistakes in the magazine. We go over it and over it, but, like sluicing the same yard of gravel in the Klondike, more colours will always turn up in the pan.

I keep changing parts on the old press. If I keep that up, someday I will have a brand new press. If only we could do that for ourselves. I will be glad when winter really sets in, with the lake frozen and nice, dry 40-below weather. It's the very best for arthritis, rheumatism, somnolence, aestivation, oscitation and some of my other ailments.

So long for now,
Sam

The Mail Run

Hi, Sam:

As I was flipping through the last issue of your Yukon Magazine to decide what to read first, though it is usually your editorial, I could not believe that you put Drumheller, Saskatchewan as the residence for Dick Thomas. It caught my eye immediately, as I know both places so well, and they are so very, very different as there certainly is no other place in the world like Drumheller, and I guess that could be said of Saskatchewan too.

Then, when I read the letter from Dick Thomas, where you had apparently mixed up the Turner family names, I thought, "Oh, my goodness, Sam will surely be on their blacklist now, but I did get a good laugh when I thought of Drumheller in Saskatchewan, but to tell the truth it almost was assigned there years ago, when it was all called Assiniboia, and the provinces were being divided up, and they moved Medicine hat into Alberta at a later date, and it is just southeast of Drumheller.

But don't worry. I'm sure you are not. Did you read the editorial by Cooper Langford in the July *UP-HERE* magazine regarding so many people write and put Whitehorse into the NWT, and I think I may have even done that years ago. So we all cannot be perfect.

Lois Argue
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Dianne,

We are delighted to receive every issue of The Yukoner Magazine. So many places and events are rekindled in our minds from our tour of the Yukon in '83 and '93. Of all the tours and other trips we have taken, our tours of the Yukon are the most memorable. Please renew our magazine for another year.

Beulah and Elmer Newson
Summerside, P. E. I.

Dear Sam,

I am particularly interested in reading what you have to say about Dick Turner and his wife, Vera. I have both of Dick's books, Nahanni and Wings of the North. I also have read everything R. M. Patterson had to say about northern B. C. and the Nahanni country.

After spending 35 years as a salmon gillnetter in the central coast of B. C., Phyllis and I finally got to Yukon and Alaska in 1993 and as far as Yellowknife in 1995. Saw Albert Faille's cabin in Fort Simpson and two of his little river boats that were collapsing from lack of care. A guy in Fort Liard told me that Dick Turner had died and that his son was living in Fort Nelson. Enclosing a copy of my book, "Tales from Finn Bay." You may get a kick out of some of the stories.

The Mail Run

Harry Allen
Campbell River, B. C.
PUBLISHER'S NOTE: Yes, I am enjoying your book and I think some of our readers might too.

Dear Editor and Publisher:

My father, Lewis McLaughlan served in the Mounted Police in the Yukon from 1898 until he left to go overseas in World War I. I was born in Whitehorse, August 22, 1912 and retired from the Mounted Police in 1964. I am very interested in the Yukon, having returned twice since leaving as a child.
Don McLauchlan
Calgary, Alberta

Dear Sam and Dianne,

Here is a little bear story for *The Yukoner*. When I took over the trapline #321 on the South Canol near Fox Creek, my wife and I set up two tents while we built a cabin. We had our food in one tent and slept in the other. Well, while we were in town for supplies, a bear visited us and ate all our food and tore that tent to bits and broke the ridge pole in the other one. In our food supplies my wife had a large can of Epsons Salts and that must have appealed to Mr. Bear 'cause he ate it all, with drastic results. Some of the bear sign going away was chest high on some trees and he didn't come back again. I got quite a laugh seeing my wife going along taking pictures of his retreat. I still laugh over it.
Tensley Johnston
Ross River, Yukon

Dear Sam:

I was pleased and delighted to see an old fella with a guitar standing evidently on a street in Whitehorse (cover, issue #15). I would bet that I am this fella's senior, being well into my eighties. I am a damnyankee. Have every one of your publications, as well as having lived these last two decades in Canada. I have been to your fair city of Whitehorse and been a guest more than once at the High Country Inn. Your fair city is without a doubt the cleanest city that I have ever visited and I have been in many across the world.
W. R. Jaycox
Victoria, B. C.
Dear Folks:

I do have some old snaps we took when living at Marsh Lake and Whitehorse area. Not the best. Black and white. If interested, would get some prints made and send them on to you.

THE MAIL RUN

Would it be worth while doing a story on Mike and Mary Nolan who owned and ran the Marsh Lake Lodge at Mile 883? Mike was an ex-RCMP man. Mary was an army nurse during the Second World War. I think they met at Whitehorse and were married. Then built the lodge at Marsh Lake. Mike also ran a big game outfitter's business. Took out hunters from around the world. We had to get our mail at the lodge from the camp where we lived. When I walked up to get the mail there was always three huge husky dogs come running to meet me. I was scared to death of them. Managed not to get eaten up by them.

When we left Marsh Lake Camp in 1952, Mary and Mike had a little farewell do for us at the lodge. Mary ended up with M. S. I visited her at the Penticton Hospital around 1978. I'm glad we got to know them as friends.

I tell my son and grandchildren I'm going to write about our experiences when living in the Yukon but haven't done it so far.

Do enjoy the Yukoner so much. My first husband with whom I shared our Yukon days passed away in 1976. My second husband, Les, enjoys the Yukoner, reads it from cover to cover.

Yours truly,
Dorothy Stuart
Ponoka, Alberta

Ripped off a Yukon bulletin board, author unknown

An American decided to write a book about famous churches around the world. For his first chapter he decided to write about famous Canadian cathedrals.

So he bought a plane ticket and took a trip to Vancouver, thinking that he would work his way across the country from west to east. On his first day he was inside a church taking photographs when he noticed a golden telephone mounted on the wall with a sign that read "$10,000 per call". The American, being intrigued, asked a priest who was strolling by what the telephone was used for. The priest replied that it was a direct line to heaven and that for $10,000 you could talk to God.

The American thanked the priest and went along his way. Next stop was in Calgary. There, at a very large cathedral, he saw the same golden telephone with the same sign under it. He wondered if this was the same kind of telephone he saw in Vancouver and he asked a nearby nun what it's purpose was. She told him that it was a direct line to heaven and that for $10,000 he could talk to God. "O.K., thank you", said the American.

He then travelled to Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa Montreal, and the Maritimes and in every church he saw the same golden telephone with the same "$10,000 per call" sign under it.

The Mail Run

He then went north to Nunavut and Yellowknife and found the same phones. He finally travelled to the Yukon and in Whitehorse he saw the same golden telephone, but this time the sign under it read "10 cents per call."

The American was surprised so he asked the priest about the sign. "Father, I've travelled all over Canada and I've seen this same golden telephone in many churches. I'm told that it is a direct line to heaven, but in all the other provinces and territories, the price per call was $10,000 per call. Why is it so cheap here?" The priest smiled and answered, "You're in the Yukon now, son. It's a local call".

My Dog Judy, 1975 to 1985, By Tensley Johnston

It was 60 below the day Judy was born. The first two little fellows dropped on the ice and died even before they were born, but when Judy came, Punch pulled her onto her stomach and licked her furiously to get her dry and never let her be still for at least the first hour of her life. I wanted to make a bed for them but the fellow that owned Punch said,"No," that Yukon dogs had to be tough to survive.

Well, Judy lived and I got her when she was about two weeks old by taking the mother dog too. She grew to be a big, black and grey dog and was very intelligent, very loyal and stayed close to me all the time. In later years she was fighting with wolves two times when I ran up and shot the wolves and many other times she let me know when wolves or bears or people were around. The native people around Ross River always , "the old man and the big dog." The native kids always said, "Candy Man," with good reason.

In the fall time, Judy would go along the lakeshore with me and she'd catch and kill muskrats and she'd throw them up in the air 8 or 10 feet and they'd be dead when I'd get to them. I'd skin them and she'd eat the meat 'til she had all she wanted, then she'd bury the rest. She was never a good sled dog but a real good pack dog. I had her 10 wonderful years and I admit I cried like a baby when she died. I'll never forget her.

A Romance of the Klondike
The Kathleen Wheeler Story

By Anne Tempelman-Kluit

Breakfast with the hangman, dinner at Government House and dancing until dawn on the sternwheeler, *S. S Casca*—all memories from three-quarters of a century ago, but to 96-year-old Kathleen Wheeler they are as vivid as yesterday. Such memories," says Mrs. Wheeler, her brown eyes dancing, "It seems that everyone who has ever spent any time in the Yukon never forgets."

People whose names read like a who's who of Yukon history were friends and neighbours – and pupils to Mrs. Wheeler. As an adventurous twenty-one-year old, she taught Grades One and Two in Dawson City in 1925 and 1926. The Bertons were neighbours – she was Pierre Berton's grade one teacher – Victoria Faulkner was a close friend, Percy de Wolfe's daughter lived with her family for a while and she and her husband attended Government House dinners hosted by George and Martha Black.

But such events were in the future when, in 1925, leaving her home in Lethbridge, Alberta, Kathleen Ball embarked on her journey to the Yukon, her first trip alone. She recalls dancing under the stars on the *Princess Louise*, as the boat plied its way along the Inside Passage, and making friends with another young woman bound for Dawson, to nurse at St Mary's Hospital. Their lives were to take parallel paths for many years. They each met their future husbands within a few days of arriving in Dawson, married and had their children within a few months of each other and lived four houses apart in Dawson. Their children played together, and still sometimes meet at Vancouver Yukoners' meetings.

Kathleen Wheeler in the 1920s

After the four-day trip to Skagway, the passengers boarded the

White Pass for Whitehorse. "Spectacular!" recalls Mrs. Wheeler. The train stopped at the Summit for customs, manned by scarlet-coated Royal Northwest Mounted Police. After brief formalities, the passengers ate lunch in a nearby shed. "For the first time I found myself served with a choice of moose, caribou or bear followed by raspberry rhubarb or strawberry pie for dessert."

The little train continued its journey over the narrow gauge tracks to Whitehorse, where passengers once again boarded a vessel, the *S. S. Casca.* That two-day journey to Dawson was the highlight of the trip for the young teacher. "There was dancing in the evening while we were crossing Lac La Berge, and it was difficult to break up such a delightful party while the long daylight lasted," she recalls. But, eventually everyone went to bed to be rudely awakened a few hours later when the Casca hit a sandbar and was stuck high and dry. Several trees were uprooted before the sternwheeler was successfully winched off the bar. Along the riverbanks the passengers saw caribou, moose, bear, fox and eagles. Every five or six hours the boat stopped to load huge piles of logs for fuel.

Kathleen Ball arrived in Dawson on the 14th day of August 1925. She would stay for nine years. Three days after her arrival, during Discovery Day celebrations, she met her husband-to-be, John Wheeler, manager of the Canadian Bank of Commerce. Wheeler was also a recent arrival, from Briercrest, Saskatchewan. Discovery Day then, as now, was a combination of sports day and local fair, reflects Mrs. Wheeler.

"There were booths for competitors showing garden produce needlework, jam, jellies, pickles, cakes and pies. In the evening everyone gathered for the big dance of the summer – black or white tie for the men and new gowns for the ladies. I was amazed to see little children, many of whom would be my new pupils the next week, dancing beautifully with each other."

She was equally amazed to find her first class had 52 pupils! Families planning to go outside on the last boat in October sent their children to school for the first few weeks. Other pupils came from the Anglican Hostel in

Jack Wheeler and dogteam. He is talking to a miner.

Dawson, home to about 30 children whose parents lived in the bush. When the last boat left, Mrs. Wheeler's class shrunk to 32 students ranging in age from six to fifteen, five of whom only spoke their native language. "That was easier to handle," she comments with a wry smile, "although there were still special problems."

Life outside the schoolroom was exciting for a young, attractive, unattached woman, although Miss Ball soon found that Jack Wheeler, 14 years her senior, always seemed to end up as her partner at dinners, picnics and dances that fall. As well, a Federal election was held in 1925 and incumbent Conservative M P George Black was running again. George and Martha Black spent their summers in their Yukon riding and young Kathleen, with Jack, took part in much of the elaborate entertaining around the political couple.

Plane on river gravel bar

There were thousands of caribou around Dawson at that time, "just like ants," recalls Mrs. Wheeler. Most Dawsonites killed two caribou each fall, "winter feeding for their dogs," she says.

When the long, golden days of fall ended and ice began to float on the Yukon River, many Dawsonites went "outside" for the winter. Mrs. Wheeler remembers feeling a little lonely and homesick when the last boat, the last link with "outside" for many months, left in October, rounding the bend in the river with a farewell blast and three plumes of smoke. People waving goodbye on the dock immediately began to make plans for Christmas.

Dawson may have been isolated, but those remaining had fun in winter, the population then was about 800 people. Mrs. Wheeler describes attending frequent six- or seven-course elaborate dinners, all prepared from scratch by the hostess. Refrigerators were unknown; instead most homes boasted a hole dug into the permafrost where milk, butter and vegetables kept crisp and cool. Popular winter activities included the curling club, card parties and town dances which were well attended, spirited affairs.

By mid-December daylight had dwindled to a brief period around noon. Mrs. Wheeler says that the blue twilight that passed for daylight for most of the day was "eerie," but she adds, "You could just read the newspaper by the window at noon, but by 2 p.m. the moon and stars were out." This didn't stop the children playing outside or sliding down the hills on garbage can lids after school," she comments. It may have been dark outside, but inside the cabins and homes it was bright and busy as everyone prepared for Christmas. Most gifts were ordered from the Eaton's catalog in August, to arrive in Dawson on the last boat. One problem was that everyone knew what their gifts had cost, and sometimes received more than one of the same thing. Gifts to friends and relatives outside mostly came from Charles Jeanerette's gift shop where he sold jewellery and spoons made of Yukon gold.

A week before Christmas, the community attended the Christmas Tree

Jack Wheeler with his dogteam

party in the Arctic Brotherhood Hall. Every child in town received a gift, purchased with funds generously supplied by the old prospectors and placer miners who came into town for the event. Presents ranged from life-sized dolls to electric trains, and the excited children eagerly awaited the event. On Christmas Eve, gifts would be piled in the sleds to be distributed around the town. If it were too cold to take little children out, the high school boys played Santa.

In his capacity as President of the Fraternal Order of Eagles, Frank Berton escorted the young teacher to the fraternity's Christmas party during her first Dawson December. "I had some reservations about going with a married man, especially since I had never met him, but after mentioning my problem to friends I was completely reassured for he stood high in the admiration of everyone," Mrs. Wheeler remembers. Mrs. Berton was outside with the two children, visiting family, she adds.

New Year's Eve was also celebrated in style. The Arctic Brotherhood Hall with its beautiful hardwood floor was again the setting for the dance, providing the temperature was not below minus 40 degrees. Then the huge hall was impossible to heat. "People came out of the bush for the dance," says Mrs. Wheeler. The dance was fancy dress for all members of the family. Mrs. Wheeler recalls her three-year-old daughter going as Napoleon in black and red oilcloth. Babies were left tucked up in the hall's cloakroom, snug in discarded winter coats. Little children danced with each other and at 10 p.m. came the big moment—judging the best costume. After refreshments and welcoming in the New year, the babies were awakened, coats reclaimed and, tired but happy Dawsonites trudged home New Year's Day was traditionally a time for visiting between homes.

About January 10th the sun begins its long climb up the sky and Dawsonites climbed the Dome or walked miles to a point in town to catch a glimpse of it. After that, everybody settled back to wait for the break up of the river ice, and the return of the riverboats. "The first year I taught, the ice went out on the third of May. When the loud bell range announcing the ice was moving, all my pupils ran out shouting "Ice. Ice." Everybody in town came down to the river. "Bets ranging from 25 cents to $100 were made on the exact second the ice would break up.

Kathleen Ball and Jack Wheeler married on Saturday, June 25th, 1927.

The sternwheeler "Whitehorse" caught in the ice at Dawson

It was a beautiful day of 24-hour daylight, Mrs. Wheeler recalls. The owner of Dawson's only greenhouse had hoarded flowers for her bouquet and she carried two roses, pink geraniums and lady slippers found in the hills around town. Wild honey suckle decorated the house. "In Dawson, one did not send out wedding invitations. Everyone who wished us well came anyway and made a wonderful reception. "Bank staff had no holidays, it was impossible to send in a replacement for a few weeks, so their honey moon would be necessarily brief, at a camp Jack Wheeler owned about two miles up the Yukon River. The bride-to-be had hung new curtains in the cabin and put a new quilt on the brass bed.

The rector of St. Paul's church performed the ceremony and after the reception, the young couple left in their boat for the hour-long river trip. Mrs. Wheeler says she'll never forget the sight that awaited them as they opened the camp door. A neighbour's cow had stepped from the side of the hill to feast on the cabin's grass roof and the animal's weight was too much for the old cabin's roof beams. The cow fell through the roof. The bed was covered in mud and the cabin full of debris. The unfortunate cow had broken her leg and was eventually found by her owner who had to shoot her. Dawson's butcher had fresh beef for sale.

The Wheeler's acquired two camps, a summer camp about 20 miles up the Klondike River and their winter cabin about four miles up the Yukon River. Almost every Saturday afternoon after her husband came home from the bank, the family would pack their dilapidated old car with the two children and big pots of caribou stew, which could be stretched to feed many extra mouths. Unexpected guests in summer were expected.

The river yielded delicious grayling and in the fall the Wheelers caught enough to freeze and save for the winter. The fish were wrapped in newspaper and stored in the woodshed, safe from the ravenous huskies. The young wife cooked bear, moose, porcupine (it tastes like chicken) ducks, geese and ptarmigan. She particularly remembers the wild raspberries and making berry jam, and meeting the occasional bear in the berry patch. "Life seemed perfect in those days," says Mrs. Wheeler. Moose tramped around the cabin, or fed near the river, bears "lots of bears," fished for the salmon that came up the river to spawn each fall, or ate in the berry patches. The haunting cries of loons and owls were some of the "sounds around you that just penetrated."

Few guests made their way to the family's winter cabin, which they bought for five dollars. The Wheelers would harness up their husky, Peter, and snowshoe behind the sled. Their tiny daughter, Shelagh, was tucked into the sleigh wrapped in a robe of caribou skins. The baby slept in a wheelbarrow in the cabin, "which she loved." Northern lights often provided the entertainment for the family on the long hike home on Sunday night, along with the howling of wolves. "They made the journey a pure joy," recalls Mrs. Wheeler.

In Dawson, The Wheeler's home was the Lachappelle House, which is now an historic site. They were close to the Berton family with whom they alternated Christmas dinner for many years. Frank Berton, his admiring neighbour recalls, was a man of many talents. He tutored students in Latin and Greek, taught shorthand and typing and when the local dentist left for the winter, he was the town's dentist, "which he did with considerable skill."

Mrs. Wheeler on the Yukon River

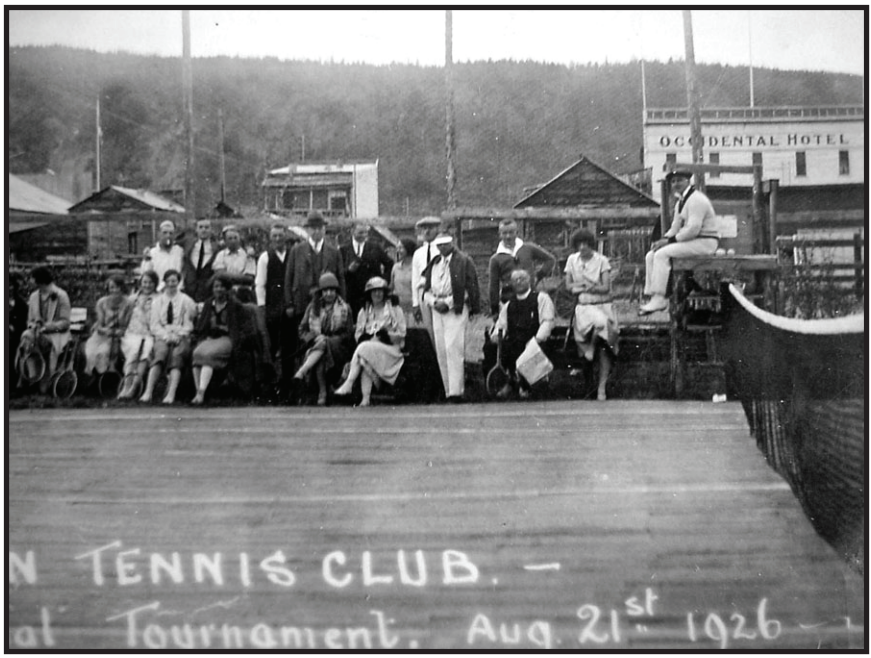
Potentially painful fillings were accomplished with the aid of a glass of neat scotch whiskey for the patient. Unfortunately, Frank Berton couldn't help the town's only doctor, who died of appendicitis.

One winter Berton decided to build a boat. Such was his enthusiasm that Jack Wheeler decided to build one as well. "The two men had a lovely winter working on their boats and helping each other. When spring came, my husband put a ten horsepower outboard motor on our boat, which was strong enough to handle the six-mile an hour current on the Yukon River. We never attempted the Klondike River. Many of the small islands in the Yukon were flooded at break up and the little pools left behind were quite deep and in summer warm enough to swim in." Often during the long summer days the two families, four adults and four children, spent a day on an island. While the children swam the man sometimes practiced golf along the edge of the sandbar "although many a golf b all was lost to the river."

Only a few Dawson homes close to the river had running water. Other houses had water delivered twice a week. A Dawson Hotel charged $1 a bath.

The long hours of daylight produced wonderful vegetables and Mrs. Wheeler says her garden yielded the "best celery I ever ate." Dawson restaurants were "pretty good" and she recalls the beautiful clothing in Madam Tremblay's store. "She also sold needles and thread and things."

She also remembers a fruit store on Main Street called Apple Jimmy's. "Apples were a dollar each. There were no coins in circulation in Dawson smaller than 25 cents. No nickels, dimes or pennies. When you bought an



ice cream you paid a quarter and along with your ice cream got a little certificate, which was good for another ice cream cone. All the children in town were very careful with those little bits of paper."

It was little bits of paper, greasy $20 bills that led to her meeting with the hangman. Proud mother of new infant s on, Mrs. Wheeler was spending the night in Whitehorse, on her way back to Dawson after a summer "outside" in 1932 "As I came out of my room in the morning the man in the room next door came out too and we walked to the dining room together. There was only one vacant table so we shared it. The man was agreeable and charming company. After breakfast I went to the desk for a newspaper and the clerk said, "I saw you having breakfast with Mr. Ellis. He is a charming man for a hangman."

Mr. Ellis had been about his grim business in Dawson, hanging Barney West for the murder of an old prospector, Axel Envolsen. Envolsen often bragged about keeping his considerable wealth in a money belt that he wore day and night. The temptation was too much for Barney, the slightly simple butcher's delivery boy with a weakness for whisky. Barney attempted to rob Envolsen one night, but the old man woke up and Barney hit him on the head – too hard – with a blackjack. Barney, who delivered Mrs. Wheeler's meat when it was too cold for her to venture to the shops, often stayed to play with her small daughter and drink hot chocolate in the warm kitchen. Mrs. Wheeler was surprised that Barney, who had been so gentle with her daughter, had been involved in such a violent crime.

Caribou crossing the Yukon River

"Poor Barney. Where else in the world would you know a murderer?" she wonders.

In 1934 Jack Wheeler was transferred to Nelson, British Columbia, the first of many moves. The couple were married for almost 30 years when Jack died in 1956. Mrs. Wheeler lives in Vancouver and still keeps in touch with many Yukon friends. One of her great joys is her collection of photograph albums, for every picture brings back a precious memory of her years in the Yukon. Memories that continue, she says, "to enrich my life." ◆

Kathleen Wheeler in 1999

The Wheeler House in Dawson, as it was when Kathleen lived there.

Fur Trade Days in the Yukon

Story and Photos by Jim Kirk

Canadian history had always been one of my favourite subjects, particularly the exploration stories of the west, the arrival of settlers, the fur brigades and so on. Little did I think my first job after leaving school would be with the Hudson's Bay Co. as a young fur trader. I wasn't aware the fur trade still existed until I learned in 1938 it was still a thriving industry and the H.B.Co. had some 350 trading posts operating across northern Canada.

I wasted little time in submitting an application to join them and in due course signed a three-year contract as an apprentice clerk. My first assignment was Fort Selkirk in the Yukon Territory. I was elated! Some of my friends thought I was crazy! My parents had mixed feelings. The only thing I could remember about the Yukon from our school text book was the Gold Rush of '98. and, although it was north of the 60th parallel, they were able to grow potatoes there.. Some of my friends knew little more, most knew even leas. Some thought it was in Alaska. My father knew that Robert Service was a famous poet who once lived in the Yukon. He recited a couple of verses he remembered of the Cremation of Sam McGee."

It was early winter 1938 when I left Winnipeg by train for Edmonton where I was to report to the H.B.Co. District Office for further instructions. There I was outfitted with a Three-Star sleeping bag, some additional winter clothing and told I would be flying north in the morning.

Edmonton's airport was a snow covered field with one small wooden hangar within the city limits. I would be flying with United Air Transport with pilot Jack Moir in CFBDM, a three-place, single engine Waco aircraft on skis. It was late afternoon when we settled down into deep snow on a field on the edge of Grande Prairie. The U.A.T agent met us with his car and drove us into town for the night.

Next morning after a lengthy warming up procedure followed by some taxiing up and down to make a bit of a runway we took off for Charlie Lake, (Ft. St. John). There we landed on the frozen lake in front of a cabin on the shore which was the airline's office and living quarters and where we bedded down for another night.

Morning three: I was greeted by pilot Sheldon Luck who told me his aircraft, a Ford Tri-motor, which we were to use, was out of service and we would carry on with the Waco. We had some supplies and mail for the H.B.Co. at Fort Nelson so landed on the Bear River in front of the trading post and were invited in for a quick lunch.

*The photos in the web version of this magazine are high resolution - you can zoom in on the smallest details.

We were soon on our way to Watson Lake where we landed in front of a small cabin, the only building in sight. At that time it was not known whether Watson Lake was in B.C. or in the Yukon. Sheldon left the aircraft motor running while he ran in to get a radio report on the weather from Teslin Lake. As it turned out the report was not favourable and he flew an alternate route to Whitehorse. It was almost dark when we touched down on the airstrip up above the town. The agent met us in a pick up truck and while winding our way down the narrow. road I was surprised to hear Sheldon tell the driver to slow down or he might kill us all! This from a man who had flown an aircraft with few instruments-and literally by "the seat of his pants" through narrow mountain valleys. When we arrived safely at the hotel he seemed thankful to get out of that truck!

Whitehorse was an interesting, busy little town of about 500 population. Electric power was supplied from a small generating plant at the south end of town. Drinking water was distributed by tank truck for five cents per bucket. It was the end of steel for the narrow gauge railroad that began at the coast at Skagway, Alaska. The initials of the White Pass & Yukon Route being W.P.& Y.R. were often dubbed, "Weather Permitting You Ride," or "We Push & You Ride." Whitehorse was also the head of navigation for the British Yukon Navigation fleet of sternwheelers that operated all through the summer carrying supplies to the small settlements along the Yukon River and to the then Yukon capital city of Dawson, more than 400 miles to the north.

On the morning I was to leave Whitehorse, I was directed to Fairchild aircraft CF-AXK, one of the old reliable "bush planes" of the north, which was warming up outside the hangar. When the side door was opened I could see the aircraft was filled with crates of eggs except for a couple that had been removed by the door leaving just enough space for me to sit.

My baggage was stowed in what-

Jim Kirk, Hudson's Bay Company fur trade apprentice to the Yukon, at home in Winnipeg, December, 1939.

[All photos courtesy of The Yukon Archives, Kirk Collection]

ever empty spaces remained. I was informed we would be going to Dawson to unload the eggs and I would be put off at Fort Selkirk on the return leg.

At about noon we landed at the Dawson airstrip, some 13 miles up the Klondike River. While the aircraft was being unloaded the pilot and I walked to a nearby roadhouse for lunch. The feature item on the menu was "moose-burgers" which was my introduction to moose meat.

Following lunch we returned south to Fort Selkirk, my final destination after ten days on the road, and in the air from Winnipeg.

Fort Selkirk consisted of about 14 whites and some 80 native people. The settlement was built on a bench along the Yukon River across from the mouth of the Pelly River where an old H.B.Co. Post had been located over 100 years before. The present Post was the dividing point between the white settlement to the north and the natives' village upstream to the south.

The white settlement consisted of the RCMP barracks, three or four trappers' cabins, an Anglican mission with a small log school house, a Taylor & Drury store and a small telegraph office. The latter consisted of a single wire carried on poles along the river bank while the river was used in place of a return ground wire. At each settlement along the river the wire would be run into someone's house and hooked up to a crank style telephone powered by a set of batteries. Occasionally in the evenings some local chess players would get into a game with players some 200 miles away in Dawson by telegraphing the moves back and forth.

The H.B.Co. store was an old log building that had once belonged to trading partners Schofield & Zimmerlee. A small log cabin next door was

Jim Kirk enroute from Edmonton to the Yukon via United Air Transport "WACO" CF-BDM, February, 1939.

our living quarters. We used up a hundred cords of wood each winter stoking the cook stove and heater plus the large barrel heater in the store. There were two warehouses plus a long attic above the store for storing much of the year's supply of merchandise. The large warehouse had once been the Savoy Hotel," known as "The Queen of the Yukon Trail." It even provided dog kennels for those travelling the winter trail with dog teams. A part of the building was set aside as the community ice house for ice hauled from the river during the winter.

As an apprentice clerk I was expected to learn the many facets of becoming a Company Post Factor or Manager. I was expected to help out wherever required, whether it was store and office, outdoor chores or household help. In the latter I was fortunate as my mentor, John Forrest, was a married man and Mrs. Forrest capably looked after the cooking department.

Although we had no indoor plumbing we managed bath night with some preparations: lots of melted snow, setting up a portable rubber bath tub and serving notice to the rest of the household that the kitchen would be off limits for a while. Then baling out the tub, mopping up the floor, folding and putting away the tub. Come summer it was much faster to jump in the river! One elderly trapper told us he always had a bath every first of July—whether he needed it or not!

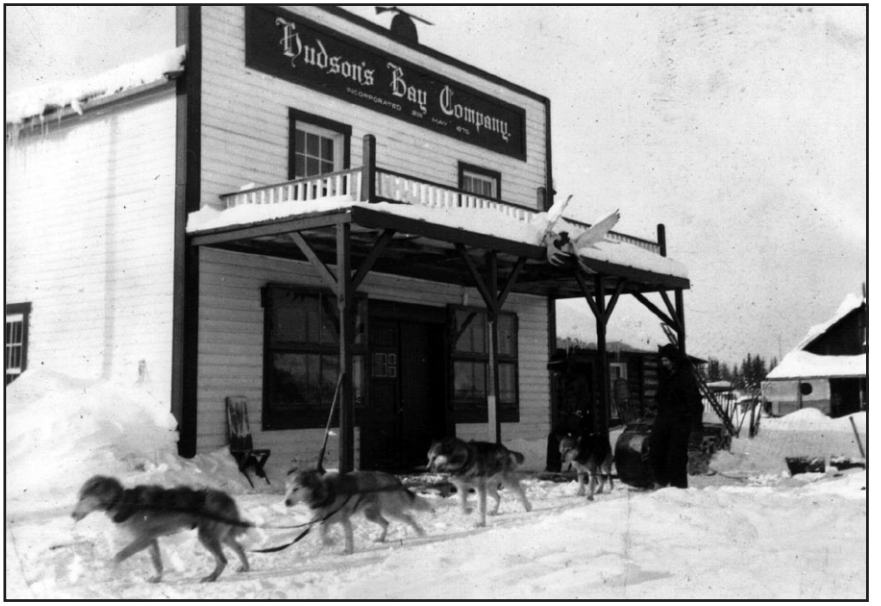
I spent many of my evenings trying to learn the local "Stick" or "Wood Indian" language. They would get quite a laugh at my attempts in trying to

RCMP "Cam" Cameron with Alex Coward heading out on winter patrol. Behind them is the H.B. Co. log warehouse, living quarters and store, Fort Selkirk, February, 1940.

converse with them but at the same time encouraged me to keep trying. They nicknamed me "Black Bear" because I had dark hair on my arms which they noticed as I usually worked with my sleeves rolled up. They teased me that I didn't need to buy winter underwear as I grew my own! Copper Joe, one of the native elders told me the Indian people always kept their shirt collar open and never caught a cold but white men always kept their neck closed up tight and always had "much cough."

As spring approached we became increasingly busy as trappers began arriving with their fur catches. The native trappers usually arrived back first by dog team while there was still snow on the ground. After the ice in the rivers went out the white trappers arrived in their long "tunnel boats" from up the Pelly River and its tributaries. By mid-April and into May the population of the settlement began to mushroom. There was a kind of festive air in the community. The sun was getting stronger and daylight becoming longer. Knots of people would be seen here and there discussing their past winter's activities and inquiring after happenings in the "outside world." There was a monthly mail service by dog team from Minto, (25 miles south) during the winter but after the snow melted that service was suspended. Other than via the telegraph line we might get some news from "Cam" Cameron, the RCMP constable who operated a small short wave radio. Later on we installed a radio on which we could pick up Fairbanks, Alaska and also London, England from which we first heard the buildup to the start of W.W.II.

A few of the trappers occasionally met on the front porch of the store to



RCMP Cameron with his team at Fort Selkirk, March, 1939.

exchange a story or two. When I had a chance I would sometimes listen in to some of their yarns. They were fascinating! Some of the old timers were natural story tellers. Some of them stretched the truth a little but it only added to the story. In one such tale the narrator told of a trip coming down the Pelly in the Spring. His boat was powered by an old Model T engine. When he ran out of gas he poured some kerosene into the fuel tank. The old motor coughed and spluttered and fired and he continued on until he ran out of kerosene. He then poured a bucket of river water into the fuel tank. The old motor coughed and spluttered and then died. He said, "I guess that river water was just too cold!"

In late May word was received over the telegraph line that the first steamer had left Whitehorse heading down river. This caused a stir of excitement throughout the settlement as many were looking forward to their first mail of the year, some of which would be Christmas parcels and the latest mail order catalogues. Also, there would probably be a shipment of fresh fruit and vegetables: a treat everyone enjoyed after using canned or dried items all winter.

The first sign of the steamer was from the dogs.

They could pick up the vibrations from the paddle wheel some distance up river and started howling in unison. The children then began running to the boat landing calling out, "Steamboat, steamboat." Gradually the rest of the population would take their places along the river bank. We would close the store, run the flag up the pole and open the warehouse above the landing. Then, right on cue, with a long blast from its whistle, the steamboat appeared 'round the bend about a mile up river.

RCMP Cameron returning from patrol, Fort Selkirk, 1939.

The ship, while pushing a barge loaded with freight, slowly nosed into the landing with its paddle wheel rotating slowly. The gang planks were swung out into place and the deckhands began pushing their loaded carts of freight ashore. It was almost pandemonium as everyone pitched in to help sort and carry the freight into different piles. Mail sacks were hastily carried up to the small post office. Visitors and others who had gone Outside for the winter were welcomed. If a crate of fresh fruit showed up, it was quickly taken over to a corner and opened so that some of the more anxious could get their first taste of the season.

After the ship left we continued moving freight into the store or into the larger warehouse to make room for the next load of freight that would be following. That evening Bob Ward, the missionary, put on a wiener roast for the village to celebrate the occasion.

The second boat wasn't far behind as we were awakened by its whistle about 3.00 a.m. Although it was almost a month before the longest day of the year there was sufficient light to see to unload the four tons of freight and 21 more bags of mail. Most of the bags contained Christmas parcels. After five months we finally got to open them!

Before the day was over a third steamer arrived in the evening with a few more tons of assorted freight. This meant we were working almost round the clock moving cargo off the landing to make room for the next load. With the lengthening days it was hard to keep track of the time. We just worked until we were tired, laid down for an hour or two and went back at it again. Two days later a fourth steamer arrived to unload a further 15 tons of freight. In the midst of all this two more trappers arrived with more than $5,000

Ione Cameron and Dale Devore with "Sheep" beside the H.B. Co. warehouse, Fort Selkirk, May, 1939. Note the old fur baler or press at left. Ione (Ione Christenson) is now the Yukon's senator in Ottawa.

worth of furs to sell. Most of the Company's Yukon furs were shipped directly to the fur auctions in London, England because of their fine quality. Many of the white trappers figured they had to have a minimum of $1,500. for their winter's catch to make it worthwhile.

We had a fur baler set up in the large warehouse where we made up bales weighing over a hundred pounds. The coarser pelts such as beaver, wolf or otter were laid down first followed by the finer skins like fox, lynx, mink & marten with squirrels & weasels in the centre, then reverse the layers back to the coarser furs. They were all enclosed in heavy sacking material and pressed down into a compact bale with screw jacks. The bales were sewn along the seams with a special baling stitch then tied with specially coloured rope for H.B.Co. identification with metal seals fastened over all knots. More than a dozen such bales would be made and cleared through the RCMP and royalties paid to the Yukon Government and then shipped to Montreal.

Mail arrived once or twice a week but except for a quick scan of our personal letters the mail just piled up until things quieted down later on in the summer. On the 21st of June I wanted to see for myself the midnight sun and sat up until after midnight reading some newspapers from home. The darkest time was around eleven but I was still able to read the papers quite easily, then the sun began to appear on the other side of a large hill down stream to the north.

The CASCA usually carried most of the passengers including a few tourists. While the vessel was unloading cargo, the tourists went ashore to take photos and explore the village. They were usually disappointed in entering

Fairchild aircraft at Fort Selkirk, February, 1939.

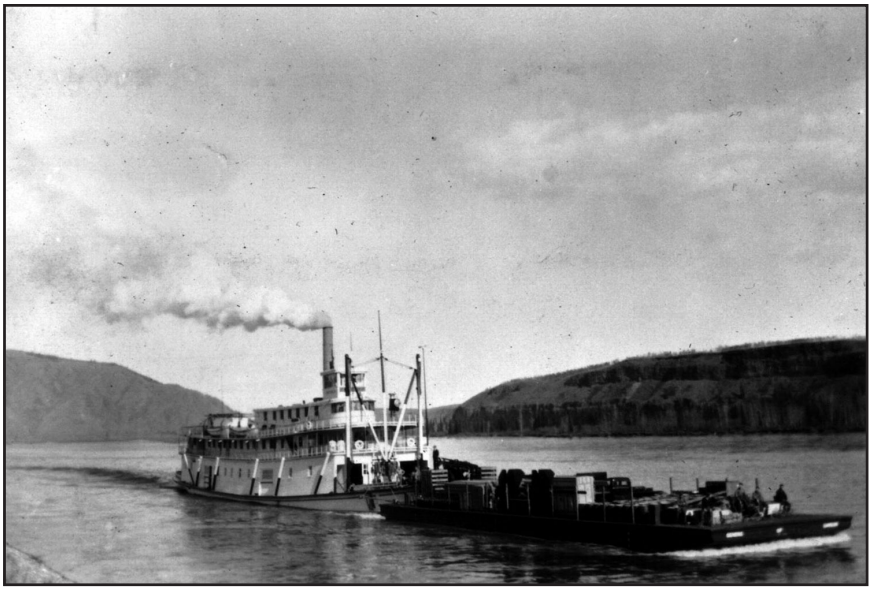
our "fur trading post" not to find furs laying about on the counters or hanging from the ceiling and none for sale. I recall writing home about the tourists having to pay a considerable amount of money to visit the Yukon while I was being paid to live there. I enjoyed the work and the life and was not too concerned about what pay I received.

During that busy summer I reached my 21st birthday without even realizing it for some days. I was now eligible to vote and later on in the year we had a federal election. The day after I had cast my first ballot I was approached by one of the locals who said, "So you're a Liberal, eh?"

I was somewhat taken aback as I thought the voting was by secret ballot. However, he went on to explain that everybody around there voted Conservative except Frenchie who always voted Liberal, "but this year there were two Liberal votes and you're the only newcomer." So much for my first voter.

The river was the main connection between Whitehorse and Dawson City and just about any time one looked out there was some type of vessel drifting by on the seven knot current. It might be a 100-cord raft of firewood for Dawson with three or four men manning large sweeps fore and aft to keep the raft in the middle of the channel. Then one might see some drifters. heading to the next sandbar to try their luck at panning. When the ice floated down river it sometimes churned up the river bottom and deposited small amounts of gold dust on the sandbars.

There were plenty of mosquitoes. One old timer told us a story of a chap rowing a boat across the river when he heard a loud buzzing sound.



The Aksala (Alaska in reverse), first boat of season arriving H.B. Co. dock, Fort Selkirk, May, 1939.

He looked up to see two mosquitoes carrying a young deer. Then he heard one say to the other, "Let's drop this, here comes the big guys after us!"

Numerous wood cutters received contracts from the B.Y.N.Co. to restock the landings with cord wood for the steamboat boilers. The fleet burned hundreds of cords each season. We usually contracted for a hundred-cord raft in sixteen-foot lengths for our own use. Some natives were hired to haul the firewood out of the river to the store. A four foot Swede saw or bow saw was used to cut the wood into the required stove or furnace lengths. With mid winter sunrises around 10:00 a.m. I was able to write home to say I was out sawing wood at least an hour before sunrise!

Early in the fall we were busy "grubbing up" the trappers who were leaving for their trap lines. Those with tunnel boats, (propeller in a tunnel to prevent hitting snags or shallow bottoms) usually left first to reach their winter cabins before freeze up. Those with dog teams were able to wait until after two or three snowfalls. Steamboats began tying up for the night due to darkness by mid September and one by one each vessel completed its last run for the season. It wasn't unusual for the last steamer to make its return trip to Whitehorse in the midst of a heavy snowfall. Then the village settled down to a more or less quiet winter.

In the fall of '39 the B.Y.N.Co. inaugurated a weekly mail service with one of their smaller ski equipped aircraft. Although it was limited to only first class mail we welcomed it even though we would have to wait until late spring for our Christmas parcels.

Christmas in the white part of town was quite an occasion. The women folk arranged to have Christmas dinner each evening at a different house. Each kept something saved for their turn such as a green vegetable or other treat. Between Christmas and New Year's we had five different Christmas dinners . . . especially enjoyed by the children and the bachelors! Menus varied from chicken to duck to turkey to goose. In the opinion of this bachelor the ladies really did themselves proud!

After I had been in the Yukon a year I remarked to one of the old timers that I could consider myself now as a sourdough." However, he wasn't so sure as he remarked, "No, I don't think so. You cheated when you arrived during the winter. The book says: "When you've seen the winter come and have seen the spring ice go, you can drop the name Cheechako and become a sourdough." So you've got to wait til the next spring ice goes." Then he laughed and added, "Well anyway, you've spent a year here and I hope you liked it." I assured him I had.

During January, temperatures remained between 40 and 60 below and for a few days it was minus 68 F. At that temperature I discovered the kerosene in a lamp out in the back porch had turned to slush! A couple of times in the early spring "Chinook" winds from the south raised temperatures as much as 60 degrees in 24 hours or less. It was an experience to go out of doors and feel the warmer air, even though it may still be below freezing.

Along with canned and dried food we used smoked salmon that had been caught in the fall, dried and hung out in the warehouse alongside slabs

of salt pork. Otherwise moose meat was a fairly staple item. One trapper used to bring us in a piece of moose meat from time to time and we remarked to him once on the good quality of his meat. He replied, "Well, I tell ye, I always go up and feel their ribs to see if they're good enough to shoot."

That winter we began buying good quality squirrel skins for 25 cents each. I had just purchased a bundle of squirrel from a young native boy while a local white trapper was standing by. From the proceeds the young lad picked out some grocery items and after he had left the trapper inquired if the boy had purchased the items with the squirrels. When I told him he had he was quite surprised and said, "Well, I guess I'll hang onto my squirrel skins from now on. I gave that young chap those squirrels; I've been giving him squirrels all winter." He thought they were only worth a nickel a piece.

On April 28th we received a message from Dawson City saying the ice had officially broken up at 2:00 p.m. I walked out to the river bank and watched the chunks of ice beginning to move and declared myself officially a sourdough." About a week later flocks of ducks, geese and sandhill cranes could be seen or heard winging their way north. One evening a large number of cranes landed on a sandbar in front of the settlement. For a while before dark they kept up a noisy chatter letting us all know they were back. By day break the next morning they were all gone, probably to let another settlement further down river know they had arrived.

We received word from Whitehorse that the CASCA (the first boat) was due to arrive at Selkirk May 24th. We were all ready to welcome her, nag flying and all but she didn't arrive. The next morning a plane landed and an official of the B.Y.N. told us the CASCA was aground in Hell's Gate, about twelve miles up river. He asked if we could organize a work crew to go up to give a hand. A half dozen of us were rounded up and one of the larger tunnel boats was made available. When we reached the site we found the barge, which the CASCA had been pushing, had been cut loose and was partly up on shore below the canyon while the CASCA was stuck broadside across the narrow Hell's Gate like a cork in a bottle. We put to work helping the boat crew putting "deadmen" or anchors along the shore from which cables were taken to winches on the ship's forward deck. She was unable to free herself with her own winches but by that time the YUKON. had arrived and tied up a short distance above the canyon. While we were moving cables from the YUKON to the CASCA the AKSALA (Alaska spelled backwards) arrived and we then moved her cables down from winches to winches to winches. With all steam winches working the CASCA was gradually pulled out into mid-stream.

Our attention was then given to the barge. It had to be lightened by moving a quantity of its freight ashore then the barge was pulled back into the main stream and reloaded. We had worked almost non stop for 36 hours on the "rescue job."

Although we were dead tired when we arrived back at the settlement there were now three steamboats waiting to unload. By the time the third

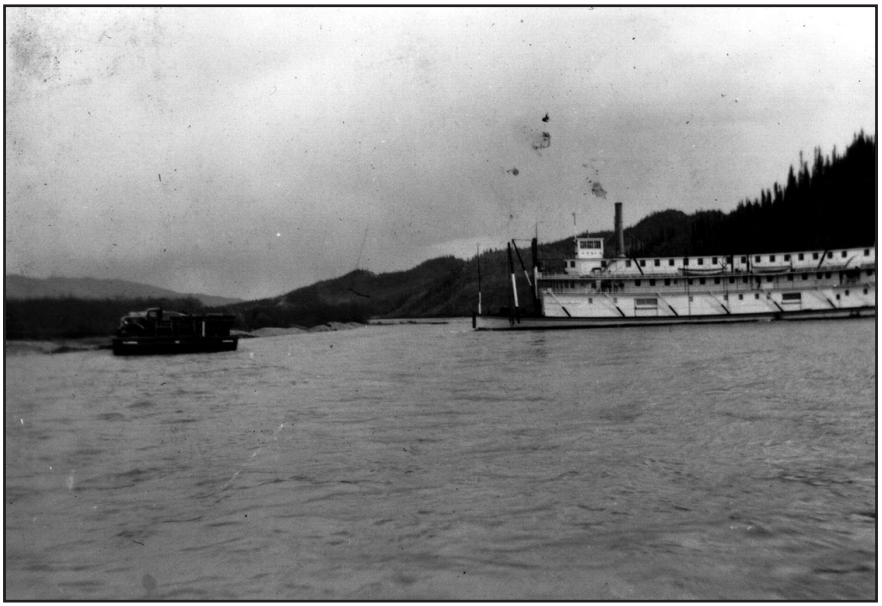
vessel departed we just fell asleep on top of some bales of sugar there in the warehouse.

First class mail had been received fairly regular during the winter months up until the spring when the planes were unable to land on skis on our airstrip for lack of snow or on floats on the river because of ice breaking up. The three ships unloaded all the mail that had been accumulating at Whitehorse, including our Christmas parcels. However it was days before I was able to find time to open any of them.

During the past year the H.B.Co. had taken over a small business at Stewart River and thus began operating their third Post in the Yukon. At the end of June I received word to proceed to Stewart River to help with the arrival of their freight. I thought it was only a temporary posting so packed a few items of clothing and personal gear and caught the next boat heading down river.

The Stewart River settlement was located on an island near the mouth of the Stewart River about 110 miles north of Fort Selkirk and about 85 miles south of Dawson City. It had only a small population of white trappers and prospectors as well as an additional group of summer dock workers. Stewart was a transfer point for freight heading up the Stewart River to Mayo and silver ore being shipped out from the Mayo mine.

As it turned out I remained at Stewart for the next five months and had to send for the rest of my belongings. I never did get back to Selkirk and regretted not having the chance to say a proper good-bye to all the good friends l got to know.



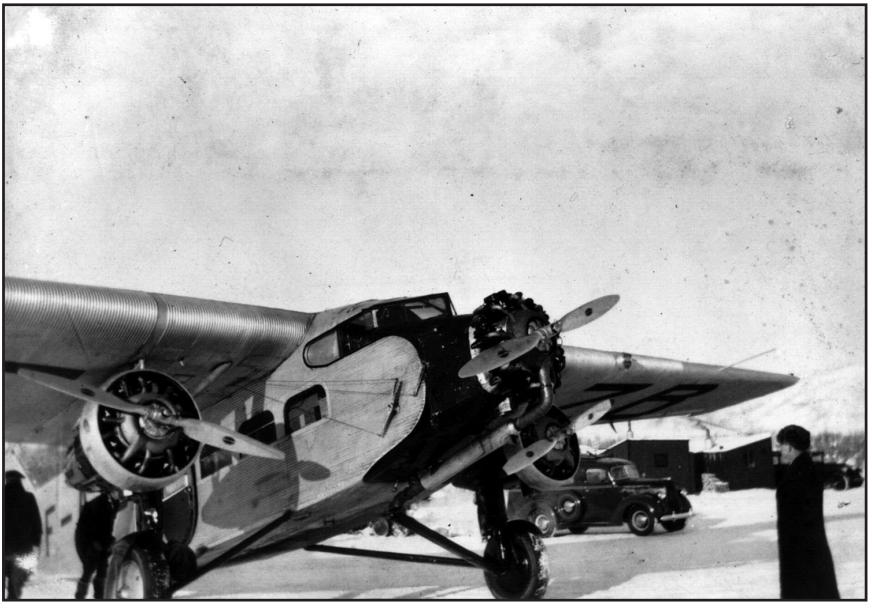
The Casca and barge aground in Hell's Gate, 12 miles above Fort Selkirk. Freed after 36 hours with help from the Yukon and Aksala. May 25-26, 1940.

The Company had just built a new dwelling which was quite an improvement over the log cabin at Selkirk. A new store was being built to replace the small log building which had been the store, post office and living quarters. The new store would not be completed until the fall and I was asked to stay on to help with the move into the new building.

An old Model-T Ford truck, used mostly for moving freight from the dock came with the property. It took two people to get it started! One went to the rear and placed a pole over a log of wood to lift the back wheels off the ground. The other was at the front to crank and get the motor running. He then got in behind the wheel and when ready signalled for the rear wheels to be lowered. The old truck took off with a jolt and a spray of dirt. I appreciated having the use of that old truck which made it much easier hauling freight than on my back! There was an old pack horse, belonging to one of the prospectors, which was allowed to roam at large. When the truck balked at starting I hitched the horse up to pull the truck while I steered!

Many of the old prospectors were as much characters and story tellers as the trappers up at Selkirk. One such chap told a yarn concerning a large nugget he had discovered in one corner of his claim. Before digging it out he decided to check the boundary line and to his dismay found that two thirds of the nugget lay over on another miner's claim. "Well," he said, "being honest like I am I couldn't rightly take that whole nugget, so I carefully lopped off my share and covered it over again. I ain't goin' to tell old Joe where it is; no, he's goin' to have to find it for himself!"

The prospectors usually traded with gold dust and flakes which they often carried in leather pokes" or pouches and sometimes in small pill bot-



Ttri-motor Ford at Dawson airfield, February, 1940.

tles. One day a prospector came into the store quite upset with himself. He had carried in his trouser pocket a bottle of dust and the cork had come loose. While walking from his camp he absent mindedly threw what he thought was dirt from the corners of his pocket out onto the trail. By the time he realized his mistake he had thrown away about half an ounce of gold!

The Post Manager at Stewart, paddy" Houston and his wife had a baby daughter and part of my household chores was assisting with the daily laundry. This meant the filling and emptying of laundry tubs for the daily quota of diapers and hanging same out on a fairly long clothes line. The latter I tried to do as inconspicuously as possible so as not to be noticed by others in the community. I got the impression I was not only serving as an apprentice to the Company but to a baby! It was explained to me that it was good training for me, when I might have own!

By late October we had finally moved into the new store and the old log store became another warehouse. It was great having the extra working room. The last steamboat had long since gone south and the days were getting noticeably shorter and colder and we were cut off from the outside world. There was no landing strip for an aircraft at Stewart and no mail service until after freeze up when a monthly dog team service from Dawson would begin.

One morning a trapper came in to report caribou being seen over on the mainland. Later in the day we walked down to the river and saw several herds stretched out along the far shore. Some were swimming towards the lower end of our island, using it as a stepping stone on their way across the wide Yukon River. During the night it snowed and the next morning we saw hundreds of tracks passing right through the settlement. After they noticed our activity they moved back down to the lower end and continued their migration. On the third morning caribou were still heading across the river but this time they were walking as the river had frozen over during the night. Some of us went out on the ice to shoot a few older bulls as a meat supply for the village dogs. While migrating their meat wasn't suitable for table use. If not too badly marked the hides were kept for leather. Some people also kept the organs: heart, liver & tongue.

After freeze up we ran a wire across the ice to connect us to the telegraph line on the far shore. Shortly after we received word the first dog team had left with mail for us. The next day I received word from District Office to proceed to Whitehorse to help out there over Christmas. The ice had frozen too rough to permit an aircraft to land anywhere nearby so I would have to travel to Dawson with the mail courier. I quickly gathered some of my gear together and scribbled off another change of address to family and friends.

The mail team arrived late in the afternoon with about 300 pounds of mail that had been held for us in Dawson. I quickly glanced through my mail and stuffed it in with my gear to read later on at Dawson.

Five-thirty came early the next morning and after a quick breakfast I

went out to help the mail courier, Walter DeLynn, get the sleigh packed and the dogs in harness. After we had loaded the outgoing mail, some freight, our grub plus more food for the dogs, there was only room for one bag of my belongings plus my sleeping bag. The rest of my stuff would be shipped to Whitehorse whenever transportation was available. I hoped it wouldn't be too long.

We got away at 7 a.m. It was 38 below and still dark. The dogs soon picked up their trail from the previous day and started off at a good pace. Walter usually travelled with six dogs in harness plus one spare running free. Every two or three hours he would change over a dog in harness with the spare to help keep the team fresh. We would be on the trail ten to twelve hours a day for the next three days. Occasionally we would have to go up on the river bank to travel around rough stretches of ice. We took turns with one of us breaking trail for the team while the other guided the heavy sled through the rough bush sections along the banks. It was often necessary to do the same on the river to get around areas where the ice had piled up during the freeze up period. It was strenuous enough work for me keeping the sled from tipping and must have been tiresome for Walter travelling alone. The only time we rode on the runners between the handlebars was to apply the foot brake, a piece of bent strap iron with teeth cut in the end to drag on the ice, packed snow or when going down hill to prevent the sled overriding the dogs.

About mid-day we stopped for a quick lunch break and to give the dogs

The Wilkinsons ready to leave with Lanken and Larsen, the "Moose Creek boys," for McMillan River, August, 1939. This is a typical "tunnel" boat," a style of houseboat used by Yukon trappers.

a rest. Back on the trail we travelled until well after dark until we heard the sounds of dogs barking up ahead. It was where an elderly retired rancher lived but we could see no light from his cabin up on the bank. After banging on the door and getting no answer we went around to a side window and shone a flashlight inside. We could see the old gent lying on the floor in a pool of frozen blood from what was apparently a self-inflicted rifle shot. There was nothing we could do there except go around the back to check his dogs. We opened up his meat cache and took out some carcasses of meat which we placed near each dog. We would report it all to the RCMP when we reached Dawson.

We continued on to a woodchopper's empty cabin which we reached about 8 p.m., after about 36 miles and 13 hours of travel. While Walter started unhitching the dogs, I went in to get a fire started in the small airtight heater. Then we moved our grub box and sleeping bags inside and got supper started. Walter fed the dogs dried salmon which was stored in the forward part of the sled. Following our meal we crawled into our sleeping bags and fell asleep on the spot!

As on the previous day, we were out on the trail by about 7 a.m. We took turns driving the team and breaking trail when needed. It was still early in the freeze up period and stretches of Walter's trail from his trip up river a few days before had disappeared with ice still cracking and settling as the water level continued to subside. Water sometimes ran up on top of the ice. If we couldn't get around it we were forced to detour up through the bush. On one occasion where the bank was steep we had to drive through a flooded area. Walter and I had to get on the sleigh while the team pulled us through the hundred feet or more of slush on top of the ice. At the other side we stopped to wipe the dogs' feet dry to prevent possible freezing or cutting on the rough stretches of ice.

After about 30 miles of travel for the day and less than 20 miles to Dawson we came to an empty telegraph cabin where we made camp for the night.

Day three found us off to a good start but we soon encountered a head wind developing. As the cold wind increased we were forced to walk with our heads down and much of our face covered. It slowed us down considerably. When we reached Dawson late in the afternoon the temperature was 38 below with the wind about 15 m.p.h.

After putting the mail off at the Post Office I checked in at the Westminster Hotel while Walter delivered the freight items and took the dogs back to their stable on the outskirts of town. We had arranged to meet at the RCMP barracks where we reported the death of the elderly rancher. They were not surprised to hear it as they knew he was in poor health and they had tried earlier in the fall to persuade him to move into Dawson for the winter.

Back at the hotel I went into the barber shop for a hair cut and shave to remove the three days' growth of beard. The latter turned out to be a mistake. After having my face exposed to the freezing north wind all day my face was like a piece of raw meat. It felt fine at the time of the shave with the

hot cloths and lather and the after shave cream but a while later, after I washed up before supper, all fury broke loose. I had one sore face!

A couple of days later the flight to Whitehorse brought home to me the amount of time required to travel a distance by dog team before the advent of the bush plane. It had taken us three days to travel 85 miles and when we flew out of Dawson we covered more than 300 miles in less than two and a half hours!

I met my new boss. who was a bachelor and was staying at the Regina Hotel, a couple of blocks down the street from the H.B.Co. store. He arranged for me to also have a room at the same hotel. Living there was a luxury for me with no water to carry, no wood to cut, three meals a day, no dishes to wash. I could send out my laundry and had an electric light in my room!

The Whitehorse store was a smaller operation than Selkirk or Stewart. There were two other stores in town: Taylor & Drury and Northern Commercial. With supplies arriving regularly by rail all year round there was no need to have large warehouses nor more than a few weeks' stock on hand. There was also an Outpost at Frances Lake which was supplied from the Whitehorse store. It saved the trappers in that area having to travel to Whitehorse to sell their furs. The work load for me was considerably less. There were two local residents hired to look after stocking shelves and sales. Andy, the boss, and I both helped out in the store when needed but mostly looked after the buying, handling and shipping of some of the nicest furs Andy and I had seen. We often had to pay over budget to purchase extra fine

Tri-motor Stinson, US mail carrier, enroute to Nome, Alaska (Hans Mirow). Grounded by snow, ice, fog, September 15-19, 1939.

lots of fur because of the intense competition, not only in town but from fur buyers who came up from Vancouver. Andy had 17 years of fur buying experience across northern Canada and I learned a lot from him.

We were kept busy during the pre-Christmas rush and often had to go back in the evenings to catch up on the office work. It was originally decided I would be sent south after Christmas, either to Port Simpson, on the coast north of Prince Rupert, or 110 miles inland to Kitwanga, a totem pole village on the Skeena River. However things continued to keep busy and Andy applied to District Office to let me stay on until after Easter when most of the trappers would have brought in their catches. I still hadn't received my gear from Stewart and had to purchase some suitable clothes for Christmas. I had to make more purchases before Easter as my belongings didn't catch up to me until June!

Before Easter we had a visit from the District Manager from Edmonton. He brought news that the Company had decided to close out their merchandising operation and we were to sell off as much of the stock as we could before June. The remaining stock and equipment would be shipped down to Selkirk and Stewart. The Company planned to continue buying fur with one of their buyers in Vancouver going to Whitehorse each winter. I was asked to stay on to help with the close out and then Andy and I would leave for Edmonton and a month's furlough. That sounded great!

Word soon got around of our sale and we were kept busy packing and shipping orders for miles around.

H.B. Co. store and post office at Stewart River, 1939. Note Model-T Ford truck.

It was early spring, 1941, months before Pearl Harbor, when numerous flights of American medium bombers began landing on the small airstrip above Whitehorse. They were on their way to Fairbanks and the Aleutian Islands of Alaska. About the same time a train load of G.I.'s arrived from the deep south of the U.S.A. Probably none of them had ever seen snow before and there was still lots of it piled up outside the White Pass station. I was picking up some freight when I overheard them arranging to take photos of themselves in front of the snowbanks. They were all blacks and one of them remarked, "We sho enough going' to show up against this here background!. They had been sent to work on enlarging the Whitehorse airfield and to start work on the new Can - Alaska highway. The U.S. was nervous about a possible submarine threat to their coastal shipping between Seattle and Alaska and wanted an inland truck route built as soon as possible.

By early June we had the last of the furs baled and shipped. After a few days of cleaning up and saying good-bye we were ready to leave. Once again in only a short time I had made a number of good friends. I was even offered a job in town as they thought I no longer would be employed after we closed the store.

On Saturday the 14th it was pay day for a couple of hundred G.I.'s now working in the area so it was a noisy time around town that night. However, it was a quiet town at 5:30 the next morning when Andy and I left Whitehorse on board a new twin engined Lockheed Lodestar aircraft headed for Edmonton. In less than three years the bush plane route. had become a modern airline route. Instead of three days' flying in a two or

The White Pass shipyard at Whitehorse, Spring, 1941.

"Cat train" leaving Whitehorse with Christmas freight for Dawson City. Note "caboose" on third sleigh. The Bank of Commerce, where Robert Service wrote "Dan McGrew" and "Sam McGee" is in the background. The Toronto-Dominion Bank now sits there. This photo was taken from the front steps of the Whitehorse Inn, torn down in 1977.

Yukon Southern Transport, Lockheed "Lodestar," fastest commercial aircraft in the world. 4.00 A.M., June 15, 1941, at the Whitehorse airfield, leaving for Edmonton. Last Yukon photo by Jim Kirk.

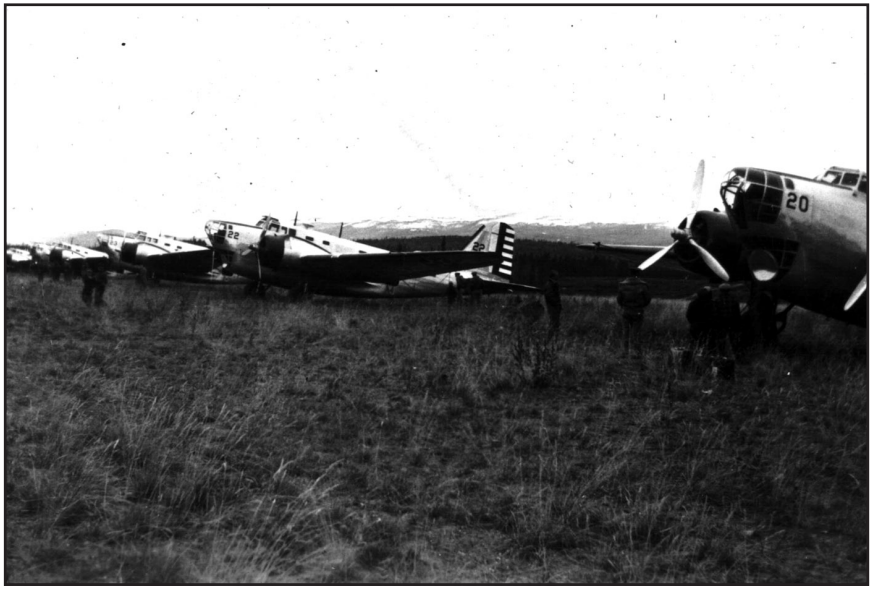
A few of us at Christ Church picnic at Ear Lake, Whitehorse, June, 1941. Left to right: Laura Fagan, Mrs. Carmichael, Mrs. McPherson, Mrs. MacBride, Jim Kirk. (last day in the Yukon for the H.B. Co. Jim)

"Copper Joe" at Fort Selkirk, 1939.

three passenger plane it was a 12 passenger airliner with a stewardess and only a one day flight back to Edmonton!

After checking in at District Office we both boarded a Greyhound bus for Winnipeg. I was excited at the thought of being back home again. Andy was going on to stay with relatives in Ontario. This concludes some of my Yukon experiences while in the fur trade.

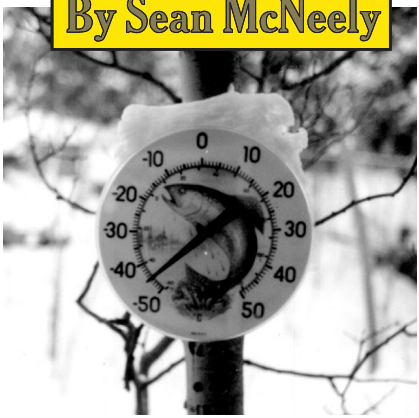
ADDENDA: While on furlough I enlisted with the RCAF as a pilot. After the war I returned to the North with the H.B.Co. and with a wife, serving at Company Posts in Ontario, Quebec and Saskatchewan. ♦



U.S. Douglas medium bombers at Whitehorse airfield, May, 1941.

Yukon Sean Adapts to Life Away Up North

By Sean McNeely



"Weather conditions for Whitehorse this morning: temperature -41 degrees," said the weather report as I crawled out of bed.

Talk about a test of willpower. Having moved from Toronto last fall to work as a journalist, that recent morning offered the perfect snapshot to a Yukon winter.

The pipes were frozen, so taking a shower was out.

The car wouldn't start despite being plugged in all night.

Closing the front door and grabbing the frozen metal knob with my bare hand, I received a second degree burn.

And while while I was walking to the bus stop, ice began building up around my eyes, forcing me to pry them open.

The Yukon Territory is home to just over 30,000 people, 22,000 of whom live in the capital, Whitehorse. Put in a visual context, the territory's entire population would fill just over half the SkyDome.

It's a world away from my old basement apartment back on Markham St., a stone's throw from Honest Ed's. My new northern life offers a Paul Bunyon-like existence that I am slowly adjusting to and, I should add, enjoying. There is still a romantic air of this being the last untamed frontier, and we as residents possess the same free spirit as those who rushed here in search of gold a century ago.

I have gone from the Gardiner Expressway to the Alaska Highway, from streetcars to dogsleds, from neon lights to Northern Lights.

Friends in Toronto are constantly asking me what life is like north of 60. So, for my friends and for any Torontonians thinking of venturing this far north, I have composed a small list to demonstrate the drastically different ways of life. Yukoners might be insulted by my comparisons. Then again,they might be terribly proud. In any case, here they are:

Car Status

Toronto: leather interior, 12-CD player with eight-speaker system.

Whitehorse: enormous front bumper (often homemade from logs or sec-

tion of fence) to keep the caribou and other large road kills from damaging the front end.

Comment: Up here you actually need SUVs.Yukoners originally from Ontario chuckle at the thought of using that Jeep Cherokee for shopping excursions to the St Lawrence Market or the even more treacherous weekend trip to Muskoka.

Housing Status

Toronto: digital climate control.

Whitehorse: running water.

Comment: Yes, plumbing is considered a bit of a luxury for some. And up here, it's not the size of one's property or driveway that counts, it's the size of the woodstove.

Bathroom Status

Toronto: jet stream bathtub, heat lamps.

Whitehorse: a polystyrene seat cover in the outhouse.

Comment: In case you city dwellers wanted to know, polystyrene doesn't freeze, protecting your bottom from becoming permanently attached to the wood seat.

Pet Status

Toronto: purebred toy breeds, such as poodles, spaniels, terriers.

Whitehorse: part-husky, part-wolf.

Comment: Scientists would be interested in the genetic breeding that goes on up here.

Fashion Status

Toronto: black leather jacket by the GAP, shoes by Kenneth Cole.

Whitehorse: parka that goes down to the knees, leaving your gender a mystery, and Sorel boots that are good to -100C.

Comment: Here, survival is in fashion. Suede and silk have been replaced by Gore-tex and fleece.

You know you're a Yukoner when your idea of sexy lingerie is tube socks and a flannel nightgown with only eight buttons.

Financial Status

Toronto: mutual funds, a diversified portfolio.

Whitehorse: plane ticket out of the Yukon.

Comment: A ticket from Toronto to Whitehorse in winter is about $1,400, round trip. It's cheaper to fly to London, Los Angeles or Istanbul. Because of the expensive travel, leaving the territory is referred to as "getting Outside."

Winter Status

Toronto: The wind chill factor.

Whitehorse: -40C, wind chill not included.

Comment: One of the most frequently asked questions is "How cold does it get?" A good winter's day is between -30C and -40C. Most drivers carry two ice scrapers - one for the outside and one for the inside.

Technology Status

Toronto: palm computers, voice-activated software.

Whitehorse: a telephone.

Comment: There are still about 800 Yukon families without basic phone service. Some have radio phones that require an operator, making a call seem like a flashback to an episode of M*A*S*H with Radar O'Reilly trying to get through to HQ. Most Yukoners were not the slightest bit worried about the the Y2K bug.

Unwanted Houseguests

Toronto: salesmen, religious groups.

Whitehorse: bears.

Fine Shopping

Toronto: Hazelton Lanes.

Whitehorse: Canadian Tire when there's no sale.

Comment: The city is expanding with the recent additions of Boston Pizza and Rogers Video.

Rare Foods

Toronto: ostrich, escargot.

Whitehorse: fruit.

Comment: I'm being a little harsh here, but by the time those oranges arrive from Florida, or those bananas from the Caribbean, shoppers often play a game of "Guess how deep that bruise is."

Needless to say, I miss Toronto. But I am enjoying my time here. With its friendly people, unspoiled beauty and slower pace, it's easy to see why Yukoners don't mind six months of winter. And I'm not totally isolated from home. Toronto newspapers and magazines are available at the local bookstore, though days later, which sends me to their online versions.

I also watch CITYtv, which - to my delight - is part of the local cable package. Watching those brief spots between shows with Mark Dailey declaring, "City Pulse . . . Everywhere" often sends me into a daydream. Each season conjures up images of a different neighbourhood: summer along the harbourfront, changing leaves in High Park, snow-covered university buildings on Harbord St., spring blossoms along Palmerston Ave. in the Annex.

So if you think it's rather chilly in that subway car as you head down to King St. or up to Eglinton Ave., consider yourself lucky. At least you don't have to pry your eyes open to read. u

* This article was reprinted from the *Toronto Sun*, January 20, 2000. Sean McNeely is a reporter for the *Yukon News*.

I Married the North

By Elizabeth Reid

More Tales of the Arctic 1945-53

"Hon, what would you say if I told you that Jamie's going to have a brother or sister?

My husband practically snapped to attention although he was sitting down. "Go on, are you serious? Well, I think that's just great, there'll only be two years separating them and they can grow up together. That's a wonderful surprise, calls for a celebration."

We immediately began figuring out future plans and came to the conclusion that I should fly home to Nova Scotia on the October mail plane. Actually, I would only go as far as Edmonton on that plane then transfer to TCA and fly East where my parents would meet me. My young son Jamie would accompany me to see his grandparents for the first time. They could spoil him and give me a break. You can see I was beginning to assume plans already, and when the July mail plane arrived we made arrangements for me to fly out on the October mail return plane.

The summer passed and fall set in; soon the date for the October mail was looming, I had mixed feelings about going outside because I'd have to leave Jim alone for months, but there were no facilities at the Fort to deliver a youngster and Jim was getting jumpy already.

RCMP Norseman aircraft.

On the 12th of October I was ready, even packed my son's little blue potty in case of an emergency.

Right on schedule the mail arrived around 3 p.m. Jim went down to the plane and helped unload the mail sacks; then he came to the house with the pilot whom we had invited for supper. They were so solemn and quiet, I thought "Hey, there's something wrong here" but right away the pilot broke the news himself. He said "I know you were counting on going with me on the October mail run but we discovered something that will alter your plans. When we landed we discovered a broken engine mount and legally we can't take passengers or outgoing mail." That was quite a shock. Jim persuaded the mechanic to take a note and deliver it to an old friend, the RCMP pilot - Johnny Nesbitt. He told him of our predicament but knew he couldn't write us back, so we had to find our own solution and hope for the best.

On our Anniversary, October 17th, we packed our bags, threw in an eiderdown and loaded our big freighter canoe. Jim took an extra motor, a 16 h.p. kicker just in case.

We started out early in the morning and before long the weather turned colder. Clouds hung low over the mountains and they threatened snow. As we came around a bend in the river we saw a scow with two trappers and their supplies and they were beaded for Fort Nelson also, nearly 200 miles distant. They asked us if we would like to tie alongside and travel together - you bet we would.

They arranged a tarp to keep out the wind and we got underway. The Liard River has a 15 m.p.h. current and as we were traveling against it I felt we were hardly moving. The drone of the motors lulled Jamie to sleep so all we could do in the developing cold weather was watch for anything unusual on the banks.

Suddenly, about 3:30 in the afternoon we heard the roar of a plane flying low overhead. It dropped out of the clouds and landed alongside. It was Johnny Nesbitt and his mechanic. Quickly my luggage was thrown up into the Norseman, Jamie was handed to the mechanic and I was very unceremoniously hauled aboard. Last thing Jim tossed up was Jamie's little blue potty. Apparently Johnny had taken the Norseman, flew directly from Edmonton to the Detachment, on finding no one there, he gassed up and took off, scanning the river to see if we were on it, and finally located us creeping along at a snail's pace.

Waving goodby to Jim we took off. The weather was closing in and John was anxious to get to Peace River before dark. There was a forest fire in the area and he had to go further north to get around it, so he steam boated that plane so low we crowded two large white birds into the spruce. I heard the two men discussing landing conditions at the Peace River and since darkness had settled in they hoped there would be at least a car light shining on the river. There wasn't anything in sight as we approached the town. John said to hold Jamie down tightly as it might be a rough landing. It was so smooth a landing by the experienced bush pilot that I didn't know we had landed until Johnny cut the motor.

We found our way to the Hotel where we were to spend the night. I told Jamie who was twenty months old, "Son, you're a big boy now, no more diapers and no wet bed" and from that moment on he was housebroken. Next day we flew to Cooking Lake, Edmonton and I continued on to Nova Scotia by TCA. Johnny reported in and quit the Force.

I couldn't help wondering how the two men on the scow made out and later heard they had been frozen in just above Nelson Forks and had to walk the remaining 140 miles to Fort Nelson. I often wondered how we would have managed.

When Jamie and I flew to Toronto via TCA we were dressed in the same clothes in which we started our canoe trip up river. Moose hide jacket (smoked), mukluks and mitts. We were a fragrant pair especially where it was warm. The weather was rough and lots of turbulence on the TCA flight and we had to detour and landed in Milwaukee, where we reported to customs. A lot of the male passengers went to the bar and enjoyed some "good old Milwaukee beer."

People stopped and stared at us in our outlandish outfits and I heard one lady say to her daughter: "Look, dear, those people are from Canada."

Back on the plane and off to Toronto, once there we were taken to the Royal York Hotel by limousine. My brother-in-law had been notified that we were coming and he was at the door of the hotel when we drew up. The driver unloaded our luggage and Jamie and the last article unloaded itself-Jamie's little blue potty fell out the door and rolled across the sidewalk, coming to rest at the bottom step of the Royal York Hotel.

I think my bank manager brother-in-law was paralyzed with embarrassment but the door man laughingly retrieved the little pot and that broke the ice. So much for a return visit to civilization

In due time our new son arrived in February. He was a lovely nine pound plus baby and the nurses—one of whom would become my sister-in-law - loved to work with him. They said he was like a pre-stuffed Thanksgiving turkey, round and easy to handle.

Alternately I stayed with my parents then with Jim's folks until March when our new son Davie, who was now five weeks old, and I took off for our Northern home. We flew to Edmonton then to Fort Nelson by RCAF where we took a Piper Cub run into Liard. There we were met by an exuberant team of six dogs, a very happy husband who was delighted to say 'so long' to his batching days, and welcome us home.

In case you're wondering about Johnny Nesbitt, what happened to him since he quit the Aviation section, well he got a job with Eldorado and was lucky. He discovered a rich ore deposit and became a millionaire. Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy.

The Bath Tub

When you turn on your water tap and you're rewarded with running water do you ever stop to think how convenient it is? Believe me, I still appreciate it, even to this day.

"Just think" I say to myself: "No melting snow, nor carrying pails of water from water barrels". Worse still or I should say better still, no walking down a steep bank with a yoke on your shoulders and two pails hanging from it so they can be filled from the fast flowing river. Just turn on the tap.

Did you know there's an art to melting a quantity of snow? Maybe its not an art but believe me, its a method. Anyway, the first time I decided to get the wash water ready, I put the oblong wash tub on the stove. Maybe if I warmed it up the snow would melt quicker. Quickly I emptied large pails of fresh snow into the tub and hurried to fill it to the top. All at once the nice clean fragrance of the snow seemed to change to a burnt odor. Just then Jim came in from outside and he said "what's burning, what a smell?'

I told him I wasn't cooking anything, just melting snow. "Ye gods, woman, you're not melting it you're burning it". Don't be daft, I countered, I'm not burning it, its in the tub"

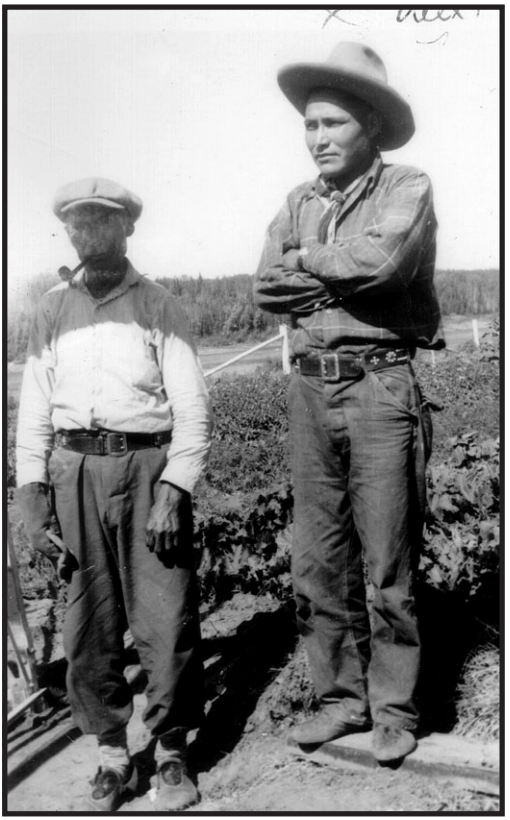
"Look, when you melt snow you start with a small amount and gradually add to it. It helps if you tap the side of the tub to ease the snow down into the water. No wonder the kitchen smells like the blacksmiths".

"Well, I said, don't get your knickers in a knot, I didn't know about that. From now on I'll let you be the snow melter."

My snow master probably realized he had come on too strong because he tempered his criticism by giving me a little squeeze and said "don't feel bad hon, I burnt the snow in the tea kettle the first time I made tea on the trail with my Eskimo guide at Aklavik. And they didn't let me forget it".

I looked at him and thought, "He's afraid I won't get on the other end of that buck saw and it takes two to get those logs done. I'll just let him stew for awhile". I smiled to myself after he went back to his office. I could be pretty scarce sometimes too.

Nearly every night was bath night. Our youngsters loved splashing in the tub as much as the next one, and when Jim came off patrol a bath was his greatest reward.



Alexi (right)

He was very wary he might bring home something crawly because of visiting natives in crowded quarters. After feeding his dogs he'd have a hot bath before sitting down to his own supper.

Usually I knew what day he'd be back and I would have it all ready, with hot water from the tank next to the firebox of the big camp stove. I put a black bear skin on the floor and then the bathtub could sit on something soft.

Now this bathtub consisted of a folding rectangular frame to which a heavy rubber enclosure was attached. When the frame was opened up the tub took shape. It sounds good on paper but it was an awkward thing when it came time to empty it. You could dip out most of the water but the remainder had to be poured out the end and no matter how gently you tipped up the frame, the remaining water would rush up to the front and lots of times would run all over the floor - turning the air very blue. It didn't hurt the floor covered with battleship linoleum but it was a lot of work cleaning up the mess.

Of course it wasn't exactly a picnic for the man of the house either as he had to carry the pails of water outside. Especially when it was -40 degrees. Now we just pull the plug.

It was late in the morning when Jim came over from his office and handed me an article which closely resembled a catcher's mitt.

"What in the world is that? I asked, "Where did you get that awful thing?" "OH" said Jim "Alex) brought it, said it was a gift for my missus" "Well, it's nothing to look at, just what is it?" I asked. Jim handed it to me and said "It's a moose's nose, a great delicacy they say".

I took my gift, examined it closely, then went out the back door. The last that Jim saw of my exotic gift was it winging its way over the wood pile.

The Bear Story

After freeze up in the early fall, a large native family arrived at the settlement with their pack dogs. They walked forty miles from Trout Lake to arrange for jaw bone'-- a local term for credit -- with either the Hudson Bay store or the Independent Trader and there they stocked up on supplies for their winter on the trap line. They obtained a quantity of flour, tea, matches and salt. Maybe even a toy for the younger ones was hidden away in the stores.

The women of the group hung back while the men did the bargaining. Once the necessary goods were decided upon, it was their turn to make their special purchases. They picked out the brightest duffle cloth to make mukluk and moccasin liners and finer cloth for articles of clothing. Brightly coloured thread was a great luxury as the women usually sewed with babishe that they made themselves. They did a lot of the heavy work -- such as first scraping the caribou and moose hides and then stretching them over wooden frames. To make the babishe they stripped the sinew

from the back of the moose -- that ran from the neck along the back to the rump -- and stretched it between two trees until it dried. Then it was possible to cut it in very fine strips almost like thread but much stronger. This unique material was used to sew their footwear and the coarser strips were made into snowshoe lacing and webbing.

There was much discussion over the new colours and lots of giggling and laughing among themselves.

With all of their purchases recorded and piled in the centre of the store, the men congregated to talk and smoke their pipes with the rest of the group. The women and children stood by patiently waiting until directed to pack the dogs and get ready to leave; these packs averaged around forty pounds per dog. Finally, with everyone organized, the families set off for their camp. Likely they stopped half way and made camp for the night, to rest the dogs and the little children as well. Some of the toddlers travelled on their mothers' backs but one never saw a man wear a back pack. Sometimes they playfully lifted the youngsters onto their shoulders but never onto their backs. That was strictly women's work. The men's packs contained food or traps or such items but never babies.

It wasn't long after the excitement of the natives' visit subsided when another group from yet a larger camp arrived. Francis Arrowhead, chief of this camp, told Willie a story about his most recent moose hunt,

While making camp he pitched his tent in a nice, sheltered spot. During the night he awoke to a steady, low noise that seemed to be coming from just outside the back of his tent. He decided his investigation could wait until the morning and he went back to sleep. Imagine his surprise when he discovered he had slept on top of an occupied bear den. The group listening to this story thought it was a great joke--a snoring bear!

Jim and Willie returned home discussing what they would have done had they discovered the sleeping bear. Right then and there they decided to go and check out the camping spot. Harnessing two dogteams Jim and Willie took off to locate the area Francis spoke of. It wasn't long before they discovered the sheltered spruce stand. They tied the teams and approached the hillside ahead of them.

"Here's the den," Jim said, pointing at a small column of vapour escaping from a frost-encircled opening. Kneeling, they

Willie, Special Constable

listened for any sounds from within when they heard a soft, rumbling noise and knew they had indeed found the bear.

"Let's wake him," Willie said.

He cut a long pole and sharpened one end. Inching the stick down through the 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 the den below. He poked and twisted several more times, each time retrieving another small clump of dense, black hair. Finally the bear awoke 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 painstakingly dragged the bear out. Between them, they loaded the bear on the toboggan and brought him home. The skinned carcass was divided equally but I got the best windfall-- suet for the Thanksgiving pudding and the dense hide for a pair of gleaming black bearskin mitts.

Eggs

Did you ever have an egg explode? Well, lots of them do when they get 'ripe.' If you were making a cake or something that required eggs, a cook would always break the egg into a saucer first, before adding it to the measured ingredients -- no point in ruining everything.

We received two cases of eggs each summer with our annual rations and they were supposed to last for a whole year. Jim turned them over each week hoping that the yolks wouldn't settle and go bad. But of course, we ran out of the precious commodity around Christmas and resorted to using powdered eggs.

Can you imagine our delight when we received word that the RCAF were coming our way and would we like a case of eggs? As my neighbour would say, "Is the Pope Catholic?"

Down the plane flew from Fort Nelson. The pilots said they had to fly so many hours each month anyway and they thought we'd enjoy something fresh. Landing on the frozen river in front of the Detachment, Jim met them with the dog team and the crew was quick to accept his invitation to come up to the house for a hot drink.

Halting the team at our front door, Jim started to remove the precious case of eggs from the toboggan. But at that instant the pilot -- squadron leader Paul Gibbs -- said, "Just a minute, Jim, you hold the dogs, I'll lift the eggs off," and lifted the case out of the sleigh. And wouldn't you know it—the whole bottom fell out! The broken eggs ran down the front of the pilot's uniform, pooling below on the snow. What to do? Nothing.

Jim just turned the team around and the appreciative dogs cleaned up the eggs—shells and all.

A hot rum and honey warmed the embarrassed silence until we finally waved the plane good-bye -- looking forward to the next welcome visit. ◆

A DOG-PUNCHER ON THE YUKON

1896-1902

By Arthur Treadwell Walden

Part Two

Continued from the last issue. An introduction to Walden and this story appeared there.

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.

CHAPTER II
DOWN THE YUKON TO CIRCLE CITY

FINALLY we got off in our boat, and crossed Mud Lake, which is nineteen miles long and very shallow. Halfway over a terrific thundershower came up, and after it was over the sun came out hot and I trolled astern with a spoon. The first fish I caught was a large salmon trout, which our little bear immediately grabbed as soon as I swung it aboard. His one idea seemed to be to tear the fish to pieces, and, Shirley joining in, the only way we had of breaking up the row was to throw both the bear and the fish overboard.

At the foot of Mud Lake, Fifty-Mile River begins, and halfway down we had to pass through Miles Canyon, and Squaw and White Horse Rapids, in all about three miles of as rough water as any type of boat could undertake to negotiate. About a mile above Miles Canyon, on the right bank, some kind person had hung out a warning in the shape of a white rag. We were on the lookout for something of this kind, and, landing, walked down to look things over. We found many boats collected here, making ready to go through or around the rapids, according to a man's ability and a boat's capacity.

The water above the canyon is about a quarter of a mile wide with a six-mile current; this narrows to a hundred feet or less, between sheer blank walls of rock that tower far up into the air, the water sucking down into this natural sluice-box at about eighteen miles an hour. The current is ridged up in the middle five or six feet high, and on top are tremendous rollers, so that a boat is always standing on one end or the other.

Halfway down, the canyon bends sharply to the left, and there is a large whirlpool on the inner side. It is about two hundred feet across, and in it the water goes around at a terrific pace. The rim is high and the center many feet lower; there is, however, no suction toward the center, and if a boat is not dashed to pieces on the walls there is not much danger, as there are no rollers.

The trick of going through the canyon was to keep the boat straight, and cross the whirlpool as far on the right as possible without hitting the wall; if this was not done, you were likely to get into the merry-go-round and had to trust to luck to get out. I remember two Swedes who had this experience and were carried round and round for over two hours, in spite of all their efforts to get out. At last they gave themselves up as lost and lay down in the bottom of the boat, but after a time they were suddenly swept out and down the rest of the way without mishap. There is a saying in the Yukon, 'As lucky as a Swede.'

Most of the boats were unloaded before entering the canyon and the outfits carried over the hills to a point below rough water, while the empty boats were run through by a few experts. Some did not do this and were sorry. Eighteen men were drowned in these rapids one spring.

Below these are Squaw Rapids, which are open and the danger is from rocks alone. Most of the boats were let down along the shore by long ropes, with two men in each boat to guide it through and around the rocks.

The rough water ends in the White Horse, where the river narrows to twenty or twenty-five feet, and is a mass of spray, but the shores are long ledges and the boats could be pulled out and run along shore to smooth water. This was slow and hard work, and took some time to accomplish, but it was safe. The other way was to rig your bateau or scow with fore and-aft sweeps, lashed onto outriggers, then to cut loose from the shore a couple of hundred yards above the rapids—and you were through everything, provided you were lucky.

We had had wonderful luck, and acted as pilots, charging from ten to fifty dollars per boat or scow. There is a saying that there is always a last time, and this I saw proved by one of the very best men. Later the Canadian Government blew out the worst rocks in White Horse Rapids, making it very much safer, and since the opening of the railroad, which goes over White Horse Pass, the route is not used.

I have always had great admiration for the presence of mind of men who are good in an emergency, and I remember one instance of three men who attempted to go through the canyon in an overloaded bateau. The boat was swamped, and the men, who could not swim, were only saved by the steersman, who abandoned his sweep, jumped onto the gunwale of the boat and tipped it over, thereby ridding it of its load, and the three men went through clinging to its upturned bottom.

Another thing that has always interested me is to see how men can avoid hard work by using their brains. One instance of this kind was connected with this canyon. Two boats with two men apiece traveled together toward the rapids. The first boat to get there was worked through with half a load, as the men knew something of the river conditions. When they got back, expecting to pack the balance of their load over the hills; they found that the other boat had arrived, and they told these Cheechakos such tales of the terrors of the rapids that the newcomers were completely unnerved, and begged to have their boat taken through for them.

This was agreed to on condition that everything should be taken out of it. When this was done and the Cheechakos had been sent away on some wildgoose chase, the men loaded into it the balance of their own cargo, took it through the rapids, and left the entire load of the second boat to be packed over the' mountains. Needless to say, the two groups were hardly on speaking terms for the rest of the trip.

A great many men who were inexperienced in navigating rapids unloaded their boats and turned them loose to take their chance, while they packed their load around over the hills. The luck of the rapids was very strange. I remember an Englishman traveling alone, a morose man who always kept to himself and who strangely enough had never heard of the rapids. For some unknown reason he came through the whole length without mishap, and as he casually tied up his boat at the foot he wanted to know if there were 'any more of these bloody blooming jump-offs in the river.'

There was another case of a Norwegian who had lived many years in the country, and who was coming back alone with a large outfit in a big

bateau. For some reason of his own he brought a music-box along and played it going through the rapids, until a wave of the White Horse swamped it and stopped the noise: but the man's intentions were good.

The strangest load I ever saw taken through was in the rush of '98, when a scow-load of cats was brought in, and sold at the then thriving town of Dawson for an ounce of gold apiece. They went off like hot cakes, as mice were very prevalent in the town, but their number was quickly reduced, as the place was swarming with dogs. No one at the customs house knew the duty on cats, so they charged the importer a dollar each on the fur.

Twenty-five miles below the rapids the stream widens out into Lake La Barge, the largest and last of the string. The lake is thirty-seven miles long and very stormy, and every one was glad to get safely across it. The wind constantly blew either up the lake or down the lake, and, as no one had real sailboats and all were overloaded, men would wait until they got a favorable wind before starting out.

Halfway down Lake La Barge we stopped on a rocky island where gulls were circling around, and hunted for eggs. We found only one, which we divided equally, not having yet lost our taste for delicacies. After leaving the island, while we were sailing along with a gentle breeze, the sail jammed and we were unable to lower it. This almost crowded the boat under water till we were able to cut the ropes loose.

The rest of the way down the lake everything went smoothly. Below we found a very swift piece of water called 'Thirty-Mile River,' which flows into the Hootalinqua River. These upper reaches of the Yukon are known as the ' Lewis River,' and the peculiarity of this part of the river is that the water is low in spring, and high in fall, because it drains the lake basin which is supplied by snows and glaciers. The reverse is the case with the rivers coming from the interior. So we had low water on the Lewis River until we joined the Hootalinqua, which at that time was in flood, and just the other way round in the autumn.

As we were floating down the river late one night in the twilight, Billy, who was steering, dropped his paddle and picked up his rifle, telling me to hold the boat steady as he wanted to shoot at something swimming in the river. He took a shot, and the thing reared up on end. Seeing that it couldn't get away, I rowed the boat over to it, when with a great deal of scratching and clawing a large lynx made its appearance over the bow of the boat and sat on the extreme end.

It looked more like the Devil than anything I have ever seen. Shirley rose in his wrath, and with every bristle on end disputed the animal's further progress down the boat. Billy had to knock it back into the water, where we killed it. I was very much surprised to find a Iynx in the middle of the river, but heard afterwards that they are good swimmers.

When we got down to Circle City my partner told a crowd of men about it, who joked with him about finding a wild-cat in the river. I was sitting some distance off and overheard the conversation. One of the men came over to me and asked me if we had actually found a Iynx in the river. I abso-

lutely denied it, whereupon they promptly dubbed Billy 'Wild-Cat Bill,' which name stuck to him for good.

Below the Hootalinqua there were two more stretches of bad water, Five Fingers and Rink Rapids; these, however, were not bad if taken on the right-hand side of the stream. The rest of the way to Circle City, at that time the banner town of the interior, the river was smooth and safe except for what were called 'sweepers,' or trees whose roots had been undermined by the river and were leaning out across the stream, together with caving banks, where in some places as much as eight or ten acres would fall into the river at once. All these dangers, however, could be avoided by keeping in the middle of the stream, which at this point is from half to three quarters of a mile wide.

One of the most unpleasant nights of my life was spent several years later on the lower river, when a strong wind and current swept us almost under one of these overhanging banks, where the water had melted the silt and the stream was rushing under the banks for goodness knows how far. To avoid going under we threw out a home-made anchor which, luckily for ourselves, held us a few yards from this swirling water-made cavern. But having very little faith in either the anchor or the strength of the rope, we lay all night speculating as to whether we were getting any nearer to those caves or not. When the wind dropped in the morning, we cut the rope and by hard rowing were just able to get by.

The destination of the prospector in those days was either Forty-mile on the British side, or Circle City, two hundred and forty miles farther down the river on the American side. You will have some realization of the slowness and roughness of travel in those days when I say that I left the coast on the 1st of April, and got to Circle City, nine hundred and ninety miles distant, on the 4th of July.

Circle City itself was started in '94. The Birch Creek Mines, of which it was the base, lay from sixty-five to eighty miles back from the river to the south. The trail across was over a swampy plateau, covered with shallow ponds and muskeg, and a few stunted spruces. In summer there was absolutely no game of any kind on these flats, on account of the mosquitoes, which are simply impossible to describe. Not a particle of the body could be exposed, and the sun was actually obliterated. Pack-horses were generally covered with a canvas sheet, and their nostrils had to be perpetually cleaned out or they would choke. Men have been known to go raving mad: the mosquitoes never let you alone day or night, though at that time of year it was all daylight. Mosquitoes were the worst hardship we had to bear when traveling in Alaska, and I have known men who had readily braved all previous hardships, but who gave up when it came to facing that pest.

Practically all the miners carried their packs on their backs and did not use pack-animals. They generally relayed their stuff from the river to the mines, working their way across in three trips. Birch Creek, which is really a large river running parallel with the Yukon for several hundred miles, had to be crossed. If you were lucky enough to find a boat you could load your

outfit on it and pole it and tow it to within twenty miles of the mines. We were fortunate enough to find one which some men had just abandoned; so we loaded in our outfits and, although the mileage was longer, we were able to make better time.

Part of the way we followed a branch of Birch Creek called 'Crooked Creek,' which was the most beautiful piece of water I have ever seen. It ran between spruce timber that was high for this country and on rather high banks. The stream itself was practically without current, and was about three feet deep from bank to bank. It was swarming with different kinds of fish, and moose and bear were plentiful. I have never seen such high-bush blueberries; and strawberries, cranberries, and mossberries were very plentiful. But owing to the irony of fate we couldn't spare the sugar to eat on them.

The mines themselves were named after Birch Creek, which made a big sweep of a hundred miles around them, and were in the hills where there was little or no timber. The mosquitoes were not so bad here, as there was more or less of a breeze. The mines were what are called shallow diggings, and had to be worked in an open cut, since there was not overlay enough to be worked in deep diggings, as was the case later in the Klondike. So all work had to be done in summer, which has a duration of only sixty to eighty days up there. Practically everybody lived in tents very near his work. Wages were ten dollars a day, paid in gold dust at seventeen dollars an ounce.

Life here was crude in every way, but it was still more primitive beyond for the prospector who poked back a hundred miles or more into the wilderness, possibly alone. On his way from his 'prospect' to the 'outside' this man saw his fellow men for the first time at the mines. The next step toward civilization was Circle City, where there were a limited number of women and children who had braved the wilds with their husbands, and where people lived in log cabins. From there he went up the river and down to the coast to the then thriving town of Juneau, where he found churches, schools, and all the advantages and disadvantages of civilization. The last stage was down to Seattle, where civilization in its most modern expression was reached. A man taking this route depended entirely on his own food and skill for transportation as far as Juneau; beyond that it was the almighty dollar that did the work.

There was another route that was taken in summer; down the Yukon by steamer to St. Michael's Island at the mouth of the river in Behring Sea. There if you were lucky enough to catch a coast steamer you could go back to civilization by the Aleutian Islands. This is the way the women usually traveled.

In the early days before the rush, the crude necessities of life were brought up by this route. They reached St. Michael's from Seattle the first summer, and if they missed the last boat up the river they lay there all winter, and were brought upstream by the river steamers the following summer. When I first went out in '96 there were only three river steamers. They all burned wood cut on the river, and the upstream trip of fifteen hundred miles was so slow that they could not make more than two trips each year.

As the cold weather came on, and the miners began to flock back into Circle City, my partner and I built a cabin and made our headquarters here for the winter. This was the winter of '96 - '97 and was just before the beginning of the rush to the Klondike.

This was my first experience of the freeze-up of the Yukon, a remarkable sight. Early in October very thin sheets of transparent ice about three or four feet in diameter are noticed coming downstream; these are almost as thin as window glass, and as they grow thicker and more plentiful they rub together, and turn up at the edges like Japanese water-lilies, and gradually turn white. This usually continues for a day or so when, as far as I know, the river clears of all ice.

In a week or ten days the same thing begins again, the ice gradually filling the whole river. The cakes freeze together till the middle of the river is a solid mass of slowly moving ice. This white ribbon breaks at some of the sharper bends and opens, leaving a huge V-shaped crack of water to be closed later. The ice gets thicker and denser and travels slower and slower until the final freeze-up, when it closes for good.

The final closing of the river is almost as spectacular as the break-up in the spring. Jamming on some island or between narrow cliffs a huge mass of ice is piled higher and higher, and as more is perpetually being pushed down, in some places it stands more than fifty feet high, in great pinnacles, from bank to bank. The crushing and grinding noise it makes cannot be described, and is quite different from the roaring sound of the break-up.

As more ice comes down and crushes itself on this barrier, it freezes back solid, to a distance of twenty or thirty miles, gradually getting smoother until it meets a new barrier that has been formed above, and the whole process begins all over again.

This succession of huge barriers alternating with smoother sheets formed the surface on which we had to travel. It was terrifically rough, and very dangerous just after the freeze-up. The rushing current has a way of cutting the ice out, forming new lanes, until permanent channels for the winter are worn, and, as these changing lanes of water are not noticeable from the surface, we were in perpetual danger of falling in.

In some places in spite of the intense cold a channel will remain open all winter, and these open places are for some unknown reason not over the shallows, or where a jam has been formed, but where the ice is frozen smooth and the water is swift. Over rapids the spray will gradually freeze up solid across the stream, as at White Horse and the Canyon.

The ice this autumn played a curious trick in freezing up, just outside Circle City. In front of the town the water had been frozen solid, where the back-water from a slough affected the current. A quantity of ice-cakes had been jammed together, making a circle about sixty feet in diameter, which was being revolved by contact with the running river ice on the outer edge. This wheel of ice went round and round, grinding itself into an absolutely perfect circle, until the river was completely frozen up. This strange phenomenon was called by us 'The Wheel of Fortune,' but, as it never rested until it stopped completely, there was no way of laying any bets on it.

CHAPTER III
FREIGHTING WITH DOGS

EARLY this winter, when I was living in Circle City, I made up my mind I would become a freighter, or what was called locally a 'dog-puncher.' And so it came about.

While everybody in this section had driven dogs more or less, there were only five of us who made this our entire business. Freight was left at Circle City by the river steamboats, and from there it was taken out to the Birch Creek Mines on sleds. In summer only the absolute necessities to keep the mines going were carried out, and the price was forty cents a pound.

There were two 'way-houses' on this line, afterwards called 'road-houses,' where we were furnished wood, water, and shelter, but nothing else; we carried our own provisions, did our own cooking, and provided our own bedding. These houses were long, low, log buildings covered with dirt roofs. The cracks were stopped up with the long moss of the country. A large ventilator, always open, kept the air fresh. There was a dirt floor, and the entire wall space, except the window, door, and a place for the stove, was occupied by tiers of single bunks made of poles, with a deacon-seat around the bottom. The bunks were filled with hay in the fall, but, as every one that came used the hay to put into his moccasins, it didn't last long and we slept on the bare poles.

The way-houses were much more comfortable than they sound, and generally had little bars connected with them. Outside there was a large corral made of long poles stuck upright in the ground, with a gate at each end. The loaded sleds were driven in here and the dogs turned outside. The corrals were designed to prevent the dogs from stealing from the loaded sleds. Also we cooled the dogs' food in them after cooking it.

On the way from Circle City to the mines we stopped at both of these way-houses, thus making the trip in three days. On our way back, empty, we jumped one way-house, making the return trip in two days. We had one day in town to collect a load, and thus made a round trip every six days.

Food was scarce in Circle City that winter, and we were put on an allowance. The boat intended for Circle City had stuck in the ice eighty miles below, at Fort Yukon. The necessities of life were freighted up on sleds from Fort Yukon and then out to the mines. This was done in the fall, as soon as it was possible to use sleds. It was a disagreeable trip, as the river was open in a great many places, and several teams broke through the ice and the loads were lost.

A dog-team with equipment for heavy freighting is totally different from that used for any other kind of dog-driving. It consists of from six to seven large, heavy dogs of the native breed. We always liked to have two dogs who could lead if possible, so that when breaking trail one could relieve the other.

These dogs were locally called 'Malamutes,' from a tribe of Eskimos living at the mouth of the Yukon, from whom we got most of our dogs. The Eskimo dog, the Husky, and the Malamute are all the same breed. Variation

in size is accounted for by the food they had had for generations in their particular localities.

There was another breed of dogs called the 'Porcupine River' or 'Mackenzie' Husky. These originated a great many years ago from a cross of the Eskimo with some large domesticated dog, and were the best freight dogs I have ever seen, being far superior to the Eskimo and much larger and stronger. One team of these dogs, the finest I have ever seen, weighed from a hundred and forty-five to a hundred and sixty-five pounds each, in working flesh.

A freight team was harnessed single file in what is now called the 'tandem hitch,' each dog wearing a leather collar something like a horse collar. The traces were hitched directly to this, without harness, and held in place by a back-band and belly-band.

The traces of the lead-dog ran far back to those of the dog behind him and were hitched about four inches to the rear of his hips. This method was repeated until you got to the dog in front of the sleddog. His traces ran back past the sled-dog and were not hitched to him, but to a little whiffle-tree, to which the sled-dog was also hitched by a short pair of traces working between the long ones. This gave the sled-dog a chance to jump out and pull at right angles, to help the driver get the sleds around corners.

From the little whiffle-tree a tug-rope about five feet long came back to the sled. The dog-driver walked astraddle of this tug-rope, which passed between his legs at the ankle. When the sleds were loaded and the dogs going at a walk, they were coupled up very closely. But there was another set of rings hitched at the junction of the back-band with the traces, into which the traces were snapped when the dogs were coming back light and at a trot. This lengthened the space between the dogs by about eighteen inches, giving them more freedom for fast traveling. When loaded we made only about three miles an hour; when light from six to seven.

The sleds were of the so-called 'Yukon type,' seven feet long, sixteen inches wide on the runners, so as to be able to follow the narrow trails, and clearing the ground by about four inches. The top overhung two inches along each side, making it twenty inches wide. On the sides were lash-ropes, like inverted V's, extending about eighteen inches above the sides. Two long lash ropes were fastened to the front end.

The method of loading was this: A light canvas sheet measuring about eight by ten feet was first spread on the sled and the freight loaded on, the heaviest part about a third from the front end. Then the canvas was drawn up and wrapped around it, as you would wrap a bundle. The two long lashropes from the end were woven back and forth in the side-ropes, enveloping the whole in what looked like a fish-net. There was another rope V at the back and one in front. The lash-ropes were woven in and out of these two at the last, tightening up the whole thing. On long trips a little water was spattered over these joints, freezing and binding them together.

The ordinary freight outfit consisted of three full-sized sleds, one behind the other, drawn up close and connected by cross-chains, making each

sled follow exactly in the same track as the sled ahead of it. The sleds had to be so strongly made and heavily braced with iron that each weighed from sixty to eighty pounds, the front one being the heaviest. They were loaded for the average team with six hundred, four hundred, and two hundred pounds apiece, thus making a total of twelve hundred pounds, or about two hundred pounds per dog.

On one side of the leading sled was what would correspond to a wagon-pole, called the 'gee-pole.' It was lashed to the side, was about six feet long and three inches thick at the butt end, and extended upward from the runners at an angle of forty-five degrees, almost to the height of a man's shoulder.

The driver walked in front of the first sled with the tug-rope between his feet, and the gee-pole in one hand. This gave him a leverage of about five feet, so that in steering a heavily loaded sled he could do it easily and accurately and stand upright. If the sled started to tip over in either direction, he could throw his weight on the pole and right the sled. He could also steady it on side-hills, and swing around corners making a wide turn, while the sled-dog, who was almost as well trained as the leader, helped him by jumping out of the traces and pulling at right angles. The gee-pole was used to break the sled loose when frozen in, by swinging it from side to side, and to hold back on when going down small hills.

On steep hills the dogs were unsnapped, and the driver rode the gee-pole, leaning far back on it with his legs stuck out in front, outrunning the dogs. This method was more or less dangerous but unavoidable. Several men were killed by running into trees; one man was killed by the gee-pole breaking and the stub running through his body.

A rough-lock brake was sometimes used on the back sled, but different grades on the same hill made this difficult. In some places where it was very steep, the sleds were sometimes tipped over and dragged down on their sides.

By using three sleds the load was distributed over twenty-one feet of bearing surface instead of twelve feet, as it would have been on one long sled. Being connected by cross-chains the sleds would go over rough ground like a chain over a log, and wind through narrow trails in the forest where only a seven-foot sled would be worked through. If the sleds tipped over, they could be righted one by one; and on long hills, where it was impossible to haul the whole load at once, they were unhitched and pulled separately.

I could go on indefinitely, describing the advantages of this method, which made it possible to handle heavier loads than have ever been hauled with dogs in any other parts of the north. This style of hitch has absolutely gone out, as have the jerk-rein teams of the Rocky Mountains, because times have changed, and long hard trips are no longer required.

I believe a dog-team can go farther on its own food than any other team in the world. Theoretically it can travel with one man, loaded with twelve hundred pounds of food and equipment, at an average rate, from start to finish, of twenty miles a day. This is a slow average, and barring accidents,

a team could travel fourteen hundred miles in seventy-three days. As the load grew lighter, the mileage would increase.

I know of an actual trip of over nine hundred miles where the dogs probably did not make over fifteen miles the first day, but wound up with a run of fifty-five miles the last day, hauling an empty sled and both men riding.

We usually reckoned on traveling about eight hours a day. Of course on a long, one-way trip of the kind I have been describing, each sled was discarded when empty. With one sled the pace became faster. The dogs were coupled closer to the sled and farther apart and either the gee-pole was used or improvised handle-bars were put on. When we were freighting and coming back empty, we piled one sled on top of another.

There were no passenger trips in those days. Everything was freight work, as 'Grub' was King. If you had a passenger he walked !

I read somewhere of the rush into the Black Hills of South Dakota years ago, where the superintendent of the stage line asked his manager how he was handling the traffic. He answered: 'Fine! First-class passengers, we carry them and their baggage. Second-class passengers, we carry their baggage. Third-class passengers, they walk and carry their own baggage.'

The nights at the way-houses were extremely interesting. The men came from almost every country in the world. Some were old prospectors from the rush of '49, and some had mined in California, South America, Australia, and South Africa. The old-time prospector was a breed by himself, with his own code of right and wrong strongly developed, which fitted in very well with this northern country, where written law was unknown.

Horse-play and tricks were of course always going on at these gatherings. I remember reaching the Grand Central Way-House long after dark one night, and, as I was taking off my load of dog-food to carry it into the house, I met a man in the corral who was cooling his. The air outside the corral seemed to be swarming with hungry dogs, drawn by the smell of food. Inquiring about one very obstreperous dog, I was told he was Chris Sohnikson's leader, and that if I wanted to play a joke on Chris I could do so if I followed instructions.

Now Chris was extremely fond of this dog and proud because he would do a certain trick if he was given a piece of salmon. We prepared by filling the dog chock full of salmon. After we had done so I let him into the road-house, shut the door, and inquired in a loud voice whose dog it was. Chris claimed the dog, and, as he came over to let him out, I started a discussion on the merits of the beast, and Chris, as we thought he would, boasted about this trick.

I offered to bet him drinks for the house that the dog would not do it. At this, men who had already gone to bed began to swing out and march to the bar, knowing that it was a drink either way for them. The dog, being full of salmon, turned his head away in disgust, and Chris 'set up' the house. Afterwards, when we told him the joke, he was so pleased because the dog hadn't actually gone back on him that he set up the house again, and, as there were some twenty-five or thirty men and it cost fifty cents a drink, the trick proved to be something of a luxury.

It was at this way-house that I heard the story of the tactful way in which the Indians were handled by the white men up here. This incident happened years before, and had been hushed up. Two men were prospecting one summer on the headwaters of the Tanana River, and, while coming down a small stream in a boat, were set upon by Indians, one man being killed and the other wounded. The wounded man landed on the other side of the river and eventually got back to town.

A deputation went to the Indian village. Surrounding it they called for the murderer, who of course wasn't produced, as the Indians pretended to know nothing about it. At this the white men hauled out the chief and strung him up; but before he was dead, the Indians produced a cripple as the murderer. The exchange was quickly made, and the chief freed.

The white men knew perfectly well this was not the murderer, and the Indians knew that the white men knew; but it was life for life, and the Indians had made a good bargain, which pleased them. This may seem strange, but the psychology of the Indian made it seem only justice. In the old days in the West the Indians would have been massacred, making it a war and calling for retaliation.

Circle City at this time was an interesting place. It lay on the left bank of the Yukon at the beginning of the Yukon Flats, on a long concave bow of the Aver. It was built in the form of a large crescent, with its widest part in the middle, tapering off into straggling Indian shacks. The muskeg began where the buildings left off.

At a Miners' Meeting held by the men who chose the site, there was a discussion on what to call the town. 'Swatka' and ' Dawson' were being considered, when a man jumped up and said, 'Boys, we're going to have a round city. Why not call it Circle City? '—and the name took.

A more appropriate name still would have been the City of Silence. People have an idea of a 'roaring mining camp,' but in this town in the summer nothing but pack-trains plodded through the soft muck of the streets; there was no paving; no wagons, no factories, no church bells, not even the laughter of women and children. There was little or no wind in this part of the country. The screech of a steamboat's whistle in the summer, sometimes weeks apart, and the occasional howl of the dogs were only part of the great silence. In winter time the silence was still greater. Even the scrape of a fiddle playing for the squaw dances was bottled up, and everything was hushed by the snow.

A person approaching the town by water for the first time saw a steep bank with small boats of all descriptions moored along the edge. On top of the bank were piles of logs to be whip-sawed, and crude scaffoldings for this purpose, with their accompanying machinery of a man above and a man below. Then came a stretch of fifty feet or more which was the street, and on the other side were rows of log cabins, with a few larger buildings, also of logs. These cabins were moss-chinked and dirt-covered, with the exception of the warehouses, which were built of corrugated iron. In the mosquito season every cabin had its little smudge in front.

This town in summer never slept. As it was daylight all the time, people ate and slept when they felt like it. It was odd to hear a man speak of going to breakfast at ten o'clock at night. This perpetual daylight, however, got very trying after a time. Flowers sprang up as if by magic in the spring, and berries were very plentiful later. What few birds we had sang day and night. The summer, though short, was very warm.

Winter changed all this. The mud was frozen up, and the brown, dirty river turned to a sheet of white. Frost and snow hung over everything, and the cold was intense. The snowfall was very light; in fact it was mostly frost, and this seemed to be perpetually falling. It was too cold for much snow, the temperature often hanging at sixty below zero for weeks, and dropping very much farther at times.

During these cold snaps there was absolutely no movement of the air, which prickled like fine needles. The air was easily inhaled, although it gave you a burning sensation in the lungs, but I never heard of a man's lungs being frozen. Frost-bites and freezings were prevalent, but they never bothered us unless they struck to the bone.

We had no thermometers in Circle City that would fit the case, until Jack McQuesten invented one of his own. This consisted of a set of vials fitted into a rack, one containing quicksilver, one the best whiskey in the country, one kerosene, and one Perry Davis's Pain-Killer. These congealed in the order mentioned, and a man starting on a journey started with a smile at frozen quicksilver, still went at whiskey, hesitated at the kerosene, and dived back into his cabin when the Pain-Killer lay down.

Coming in from the mines one bright moonlight night I was impressed by one of the weirdest effects I have ever seen. It was intensely cold, with not a breath of air stirring. Every stovepipe in the city was belching forth a column of fast-rising smoke which, when it cooled at a certain height, formed a sort of canopy over the entire city, with the smoke columns as posts to hold it up. From under this canopy the lights shone through the uncurtained windows, promising warmth, food, and rest.

Circle City was unique in some ways, and for more than one reason. Here was a town made up of men from all parts of the world, intelligent men all. I knew an Oxford man, a younger son, married to a squaw who had blonded her hair: he could quote Greek poetry by the hour when he was liquored up. Another man, who had been raised in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains, never drank and didn't have a squaw, and had taught himself to read and write. In Circle City the saying went, 'If you look for a fool you find only one.'

Here was a town of some three or four hundred inhabitants which had no taxes, courthouse, or jail; no post-office, church, schools, hotels, or dog pound; no rules, regulations, or written law; no sheriff, dentist, doctor, lawyer, or priest. Here there was no murder, stealing, or dishonesty, and right was right and wrong was wrong as each individual understood it. Here life, property, and honor were safe, justice was swift and sure, and punishments were made to fit the case.

In the winter-time water was cut out in chunks and piled at the door, and for over eight months of the year the town was shut off from the rest of the world by ice and snow, with no means of communication save by dog-team, open only to the hardiest. The first winter I was there, only two teams went to the outside and one came in.

Letters accumulated at Juneau until some man going into the Yukon brought them up at a dollar apiece. This came rather high sometimes. I once got seventeen letters in one mail, one letter being eighteen months old. Letters were carried out in the winter for the same price and the carrier put the stamps on at the other end. This method of correspondence was rather amusing, as by the time the answer came you had forgotten what you had written about!

Locks were unknown. I remember an instance of two men arriving at a cabin which was barred from the inside. Written on the door were instructions as to how to unlock it. One of the men, a newcomer, remarked what a fool thing it was to do, and the sourdough's laconic reply was, 'Only Indians can't read and are lousy.'

Gambling was the chief relaxation, and although it sometimes led to quarrels it was on the square. Only gold dust was used as barter at the stores: this had to be weighed out for every purchase, and it was considered a matter of courtesy to turn your back while the man was weighing it. If things cost less than a dollar, you simply took more of them, making up the amount.

The saloons all ran trust accounts, and the companies gave a man his allowance of food whether he had the money or not. For some unaccountable reason a large, mounted grindstone, weighing about three hundred pounds, had been brought up on a river boat, and when all food was gone it was hoisted onto the counter as the only remaining thing to be sold. This had been the custom since the town started.

The few women who had followed their husbands into the country were a fine lot, and men looked up to them, not as their equals, but as their superiors. No man was a hero, no matter what he did, and no man was a saint, no matter how good he was. You did whatever you pleased as long as you did not bother any one else.

As an illustration of this, a man having hit it pretty high had a bad attack of delirium tremens and got very despondent. In making an attempt to cut his throat he cut too high and laid his jaw-bone open on both sides. The men who saw it stopped him; but when he was sober they informed him that if he wanted to cut his throat now he was at liberty to do so, and that they would watch him. To cover up his scars he had to grow a beard, which was black and gave him a ferocious look. His nickname from then on was 'Cut-Throat Johnson.' The Cheechakos, not knowing the story, gave him a wide berth.

To be continued...

From the Publisher

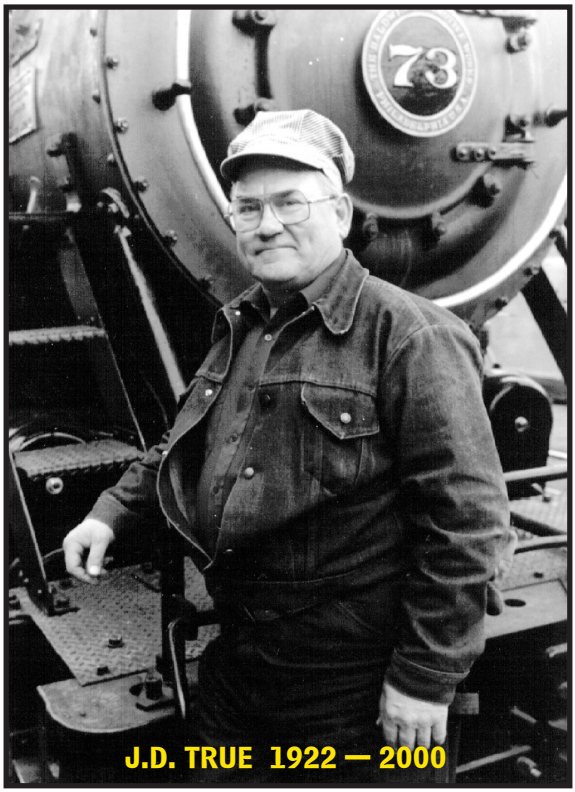
On a snowy day in September, 2000, J. D. True took his last ride on the railway that the Gold Rush built. To celebrate his life, the White Pass and Yukon Route railway ran a special funeral train over the White Pass where the former railway engineer's ashes were scattered.

For more than 40 years, J. D. rode the White Pass and Yukon Railway route from Skagway, Alaska to Whitehorse, Yukon. His career with the WP & YR began in 1941 when he went to work as a hostler, maintaining the steam locomotives. He soon graduated to the esteemed position of engineer, a job he held until 1983.

J. D. led a life of hard work and extreme adventure. His was the kind of life that people read about in books. J. D. knew that so, after his retirement from the railway, he began writing a book. Both Sam and I worked on *"It Happened on the White Pass,"* getting the text, photos and layout ready for printing.

J. D. was born in Anderson, Arkansas on August 20, 1922. The Depression was tough on the True family but it prepared J. D. for his life in the North. He came to Skagway aboard the *S. S. Yukon* in June 1940. A few years later, he met and married Anna Gable, a young Canadian waitress who was working at the Lake Bennett train station. They later celebrated their 50th anniversary on a special train to Lake Bennett.

In later years, J. D. made many a trip over the new highway from Skagway to visit his friends in the Yukon. He was a frequent visitor to our place here at Marsh Lake while we were working on his book and continued to drop by on occasion after the book was published. We're glad we got to know you, J. D. We'll miss you.



J.D. True in front of steam locomotive #73.