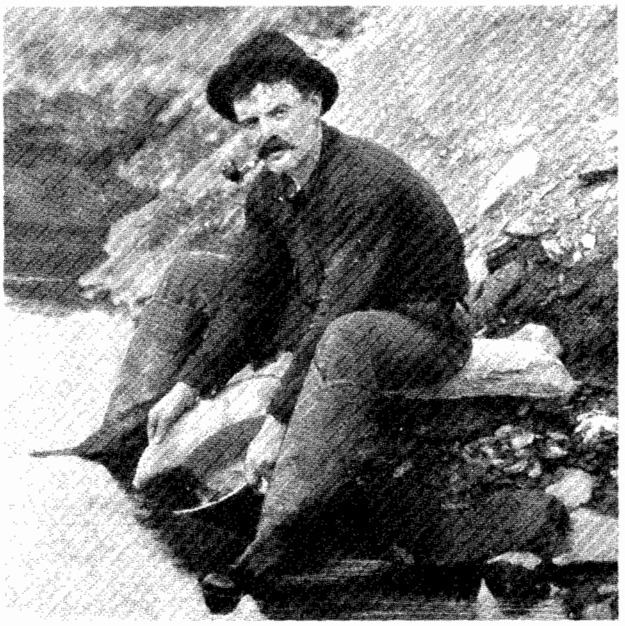
# GOLDEN PLACES

## THE HISTORY OF ALASKA-YUKON MINING

*With Particular Reference to Alaska's National Parks*



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File:
Alaska
Region

# ERRATUM

Page 319. Replace first paragraph with the following:

Many Alaska parks have had little or no significant mining activity, including Katmai National Park and Preserve, Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve, Sitka National Historical Park, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, and Noatak National Preserve. At Kenai Fjords National Park lode gold mining occurred in the Nuka Bay Mining District between 1920 and 1940, with some copper prospecting in the area as well. The estimated value of the total gold produced was $166,000. History that is properly part of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is treated in chapters of this study covering the Klondike Gold Rush, particularly chapters two through five.

# GOLDEN PLACES

## THE HISTORY OF ALASKA-YUKON MINING

*With Particular Reference to Alaska's National Parks*

Prepared as a special theme study to assist in the assessment of cultural resources associated with metal mining in Alaska's national parks.

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Edited by Judith Brogan, Word Service

Typography and design by Scott's Office Services

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# Abbreviations Used in the Chapter Notes

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|---|---|
| ASA: | Alaska State Archives, Juneau |
| ASL: | Alaska State Library, Juneau |
| FRC: | Federal Records Center, Seattle |
| GPO: | Government Printing Office |
| NA: | National Archives, Washington, D.C. |
| NPS: | National Park Service |
| RG: | Record Group of the National or Alaska State Archives |
| UAA: | University of Alaska Anchorage Archives |
| UAF: | University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives |
| UO: | University of Oregon |
| USGS: | United States Geological Survey |
| UW: | University of Washington Archives, Suzzallo Library |
| UWNW: | University of Washington, Suzzallo Library, Northwest Collection |

# Preface: An Overview

Mineral mining was of paramount importance in Alaska's history. The timing of discoveries and the shift in locations were not the result of orderly planning but neither were they entirely accidental or spontaneous. A flow of mining development courses through northern history. Although the primary focus of this study is on mining history within present park regions, it is best understood in the context of the northern scene as a whole. Each event from the 1880s influenced others in turn. The movements of individuals, the advances of technology, and the considerations of transportation and marketing should not be viewed in isolation.

High points in mining history are represented by sensational discoveries that precipitated stampedes. Following an initial small rush by the Stikine River in 1862-63, American miners were drawn north in large numbers for the first time in 1871 because of a gold strike in Cassiar, northern British Columbia. Nine years later, they established their first Alaska base at Sitka, then at Juneau when gold was discovered there. Next, in 1886, the prospectors who had been patiently searching the interior since the mid-1870s struck it rich at Fortymile. Ten years later in 1896, the lid blew off with one of the most sensational mineral discoveries of all time--the Klondike gold fields.

Sometimes the interest in the Klondike overshadows later events too much. For Alaska, the Klondike provided a major push towards the discovery and development of bonanzas within the American borders. In a certain sense, the Klondike was almost a beginning for Alaska. With a huge influx of prospectors in 1897-98 it was inevitable that any rich Alaska deposits would be revealed. So in 1899, Nome became the "American Klondike," and in 1902-1903 other prospectors found the gold of Fairbanks and the Tanana Valley.

From the founding of Fairbanks flowed discoveries at Kantishna, Yentna, Ruby, Iditarod, Marshall, Chisana, Livengood, and others. Over those same years, the copper prospects discovered by 1898 prospectors out of Valdez were developed. Production at the great Kennicott copper mines began in 1911 and ore was hauled to port over a railroad built for the purpose until the mine closed in 1938.

The ebb and flow of mining affected other territorial developments. Old mines were worked out and when new discoveries became rare, operators dredged over all diggings to create a long-lasting, prosperous industry in the interior. The placer mining industry gained considerable stability when the United States Refining and Mining Company consolidated claims and began extensive operations in 1925. Until 1965 the company's dredges were busy most seasons near Fairbanks, Nome, Hotntzen, and Chicken.

In time, World War II and postwar high costs slowed mining to a near standstill. But with the freeing of gold prices, interest has revived since the 1970s. Another recent development, environmental concern, now prohibits traditional placer mining methods and has severely affected mining's future in the parks and elsewhere.

Gold, copper, silver, mercury, tin, and platinum have been the most important metals. The gold placers of Fairbanks and Nome regions were the most productive in Alaska. Juneau and its environs produced 75 percent of Alaska's lode gold production of nine million ounces. Prince William Sound and the Copper River region produced 97 percent of Alaska's total copper production of 690,000 tons. Almost 86 percent of the copper came from the Kennecott ,mines which also accounted for nearly one-half of Alaska's total silver production of 20 million ounces. Mercury has come from the Kuskokwim River; tin from the Seward Peninsula; and platinum from Goodnews Bay.

The development of so-called strategic minerals: platinum, antimony, tungsten, tin, mercury, and chromium should also be noted. Mining of these metals was significant even though development has been intermittent and confined to periods of international shortages. Each development caused great interest on its occurrence, particularly the platinum discovery at Goodnews Bay. For a time Goodnews Bay was the nation's largest producer of platinum metals.

From the arrival of the first prospectors a particular lifestyle developed throughout many parts of Alaska. Prospectors appeared wherever there were mineral prospects, even in the most isolated portions of today's parklands. Many built log homes from which they trapped in the winter and prospected or mined in the summer. The big mining centers of Nome and Fairbanks became well-established, but the far flung prospecting and mining had significance for many localities where few people ventured. Early on Alaskans started using the term "Outside" to describe the states and other places. Inside and Outside are terms that still have meaning for Alaskans and have been used in this text.

# Acknowledgements

In the course of researching and writing this study, I enjoyed the full support of Ken Schoenberg, Robert Spude, Leslie S. Hart, Kate Lidfors, Gene Griffin, and others at the Alaska Regional Office in Anchorage. All of these individuals read parts or all of my manuscript and provided valuable comment. Other readers whom I wish to thank include Sande Faulkner, Rolfe Buzzell, William Hanable, Jim Halloran, Jo Antonson, and Terrence Cole. Tom Bundtzen, a geologist with the state's Department of Natural Resources, has been particularly helpful on Kantishna mining. Professor Ronald C. Brown of Southwest Texas State University served as an "outside" reviewer as distinguished from the Alaskans named above. Robert Spude, once the supervisor of the project, became an "outside" expert and reviewer after taking up his new duties in Denver.

Librarians made significant contributions, including the very capable staff of the Alaska Resources Library in Anchorage, archivist Dennis Walle at the University of Alaska Anchorage, and other individuals there. I want to thank these librarians and those who helped me on research trips to the Rasmuson Library at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the National Archives, the Library of Congress, the Alaska State Archives, the Alaska State Library, and other libraries (including that of the USGS at Menlo Park; Stanford University; University of Washington; Bancroft Library, University of California; Yukon Archives at Whitehorse). I worked with some folks I've known for many years and others new to me. My thanks to all these librarians.

Several typists helped prepare this manuscript, including Patty Ross, Lynn Fibranz, and Suzy Page. They are deserving of my deep appreciation, particularly Patty Ross, who did most of the work with speed, accuracy, and good humor.

# Highlights of Alaska-Yukon Mineral Mining History

| | |
|---|---|
| 1862 | Rush up Stikine River--first Cassiar discovery |
| 1870 | Gold discovered at Sumdum Bay, southeast Alaska. |
| 1871 | Stampede to Cassiar, British Columbia; Wrangell, Alaska becomes base for Stikine River route to the gold fields. |
| 1872 | Gold found at Sitka. |
| 1873 or 1874 | First prospectors go into Alaska interior. |
| 1880 | Major gold strike leads to founding of Juneau; gold found in beach sands of Yakutat. |
| 1886 | First major gold strike in interior made on Fortymile River. Several hundred stampeders cross the Chilkoot Pass. |
| 1892 | Birch Creek discovery which leads to founding of Circle City on the Yukon River. |
| 1893 | Other interior placer gold strikes on the Yukon River near Circle and Rampart and in the Koyukuk River region. |
| 1894 | First mining of beach sands at Lituya Bay. |
| 1896 | Klondike gold discovery. |
| 1897-98 | Klondike stampede. |
| 1898 | Placer gold discoveries on Porcupine Creek near Haines, Seward Peninsula, and Kobuk River. |
| 1899-1900 | Stampede to Nome. |
| 1899 | Nabesna gold strike. First gold dredge at Nome. |
| 1899-1902 | Extensive prospecting for copper in Copper River Valley. |
| 1901 | Nizina gold strike. First gold dredge at Dawson. |
| 1902 | Tanana Valley placer gold discovery near Fairbanks. Iliamna Lake (Lake Clark) gold discovery. |
| 1903 | Placer gold strikes at Kantishna and Valdez Creek. |
| 1905 | Gold discovery at Yentna; gold lode located on Chandalar. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1907 | Stampede to gold placers of Innoko; start of construction of Copper River and Northwestern Railway. |
| 1908 | Gold strikes on Kuskokwim. |
| 1910 | Stampede to Iditarod |
| 1910 | Placer gold finds in Koyukuk (Hughes) and Chisna. |
| 1911 | With completion of Copper River and Northwestern Railway the first shipment of Kennecott copper is shipped to Cordova, then by sea to Tacoma, Washington. |
| 1913 | Gold found at Marshall and Chisana. |
| 1914 | Gold discovered at Livengood and Tolovana. |
| 1916 | First gold dredges operate in interior. |
| 1937 | Kennecott shuts down. |
| 1940 | Peak year of gold production. |
| 1942-45 | Most mining shut down during World War II. |
| 1955 | Peak post-World War II year of Fairbanks region gold dredging operations. |
| 1959 | Alaska becomes state. |
| 1966 | Gold mining hits low; total productions under $1 million. |
| 1968 | Fixed gold price ended. |
| 1975 | Federal ban on private ownership of gold ended. |
| 1970s | Mineral mining and exploration revive. |
| 1970s-80s | Environmental concerns affect costs and future prospects of mineral mining industry. |

# Chapter 1
## The New Territory

Alaska's purchase price seemed "dog cheap" to an American newspaper editor in 1867. It seemed strange that Russia would give up a huge territory when Europeans customarily fought bloody wars over portions of land that could be tucked unnoticed in any corner of Alaska. And Alaska, according to the proponents of its acquisition, was a veritable treasure box of wealth in furs, fisheries, timber, and minerals. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts exalted in Congress of "forests of pine and fir waiting for the axe; then the mineral products, among which are coal and copper, if not iron, silver, lead, and gold."[1] To Secretary of State William Seward, Alaska seemed certain to be "the great fishery, forest, and mineral storehouse of the world."[2]

Neither Sumner nor Seward really knew the extent of Alaska's mineral and other resources at the time of the acquisition. Much of the territory had not yet been explored. Speculations on great wealth were not unreasonable, but constraints of climate and distance delayed development until actual mineral discoveries caused widespread excitement. Only gradually did the emphasis shift from furs to gold, but the traders did open the interior and support the early prospectors who patiently probed streambeds for signs of gold.

### The Land

Six distinct geographic regions are found in Alaska. The southeastern coastal region, or panhandle, includes the narrow coastal strip west of the mountain walls along which lies Canada's boundary, many coastal inlands and the Alexander Archipelago. Sitka and Juneau, sites of the first Alaska gold developments, are located in southeastern Alaska. Sitka was also the center of the Russian American Company's Alaska operations and the American governmental center before giving way to Juneau, a very productive gold mining town, early in this century. Sitka has some small sites (SNHP) under National Park Service administration. Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (GLBA), where there was a modest gold mining activity earlier, is in the northern part of the panhandle.

Moving north along the coast from Seattle and other Pacific coast ports, southeast is the first Alaska region voyagers encounter. The second region, for travelers following the coast, is southcentral, which includes Cook Inlet and Kodiak Island and has as its northern border, the huge Alaska Range. Considerable gold mining was done in the Cook Inlet region. The Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) is within southcentral, and it includes areas where most of Alaska's copper was mined. The third region is southwestern, which includes the Alaska Peninsula and its extension, the Aleutian Islands. Within southwestern park regions include Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve (ANIA), Katmai National Park and Preserve (KATM),

and Lake Clark National Park and Preserve (LACL). A little gold was mined near Lake Clark.

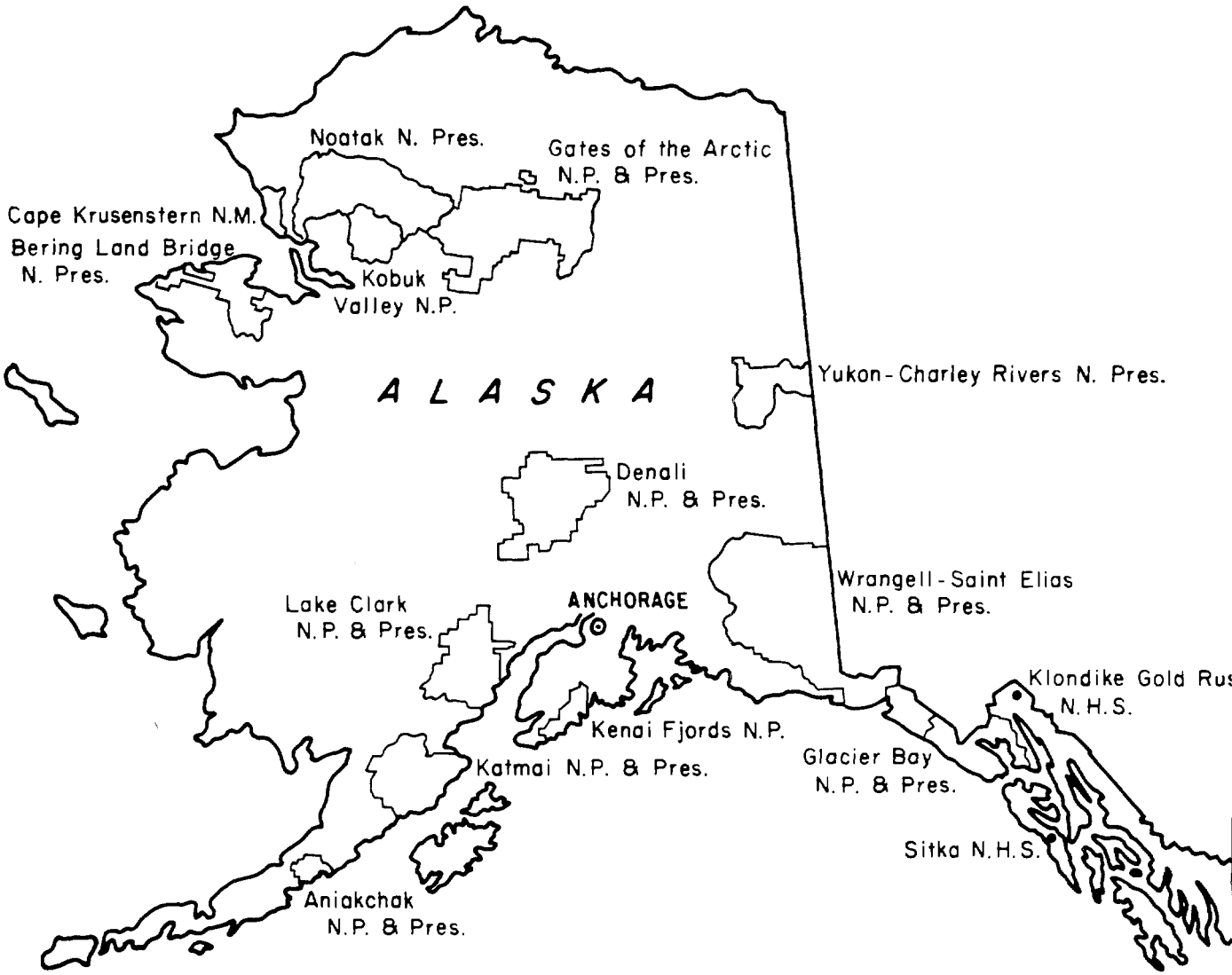
The fourth region is the interior or central plateau, which lies between the Brooks Range to the north and the Alaska range to the south. Denali National Park and Preserve (DENA) and Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve (YUCH) are within this section. Both park regions have a significant mining history. The original portions of Denali, then called Mount McKinley National Park, constituted Alaska's first national park when established by Congress in 1917. The fifth section in western Alaska stretches from the head of Bristol Bay to the Seward Peninsula and includes some islands of the Bering Sea. The Bering Land Bridge National Park and Preserve (BELA) is in western Alaska. Finally, the geographic regions include the arctic, extending from Kotzebue, north of Seward Peninsula, to Canada's northwestern border. Parks within this sixth region include Cape Krusenstern National Monument (CAKR), Kobuk Valley National Park (KOVA), Noatak National Preserve (NOAT), and Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR). Little mining activity occurred within CARR, KOVA, and NOAT convervation units, but gold mining was significant in parts of the GAAR and BELA.

The geographic focus for much of Alaska's mining activity is the Yukon River and its tributaries. This is because the Yukon region produced most of the gold mined in the interior, and Yukon transportation routes dominated that era. The traffic of people and goods was largely from Pacific coast ports to the Lynn Canal and the upper Yukon or to St. Michael and the lower Yukon. The importance of the Yukon routes extended beyond the closing of navigation in the fall because major winter trails followed the banks or used the frozen surface. Mining areas that were not serviced by the Yukon River include southeastern, the Copper River and Prince William Sound region, Cook Inlet, the Kuskokwim, and a few others. Even the Seward Peninsula was tied partially to Yukon transport, particularly for winter travel.

## Themes

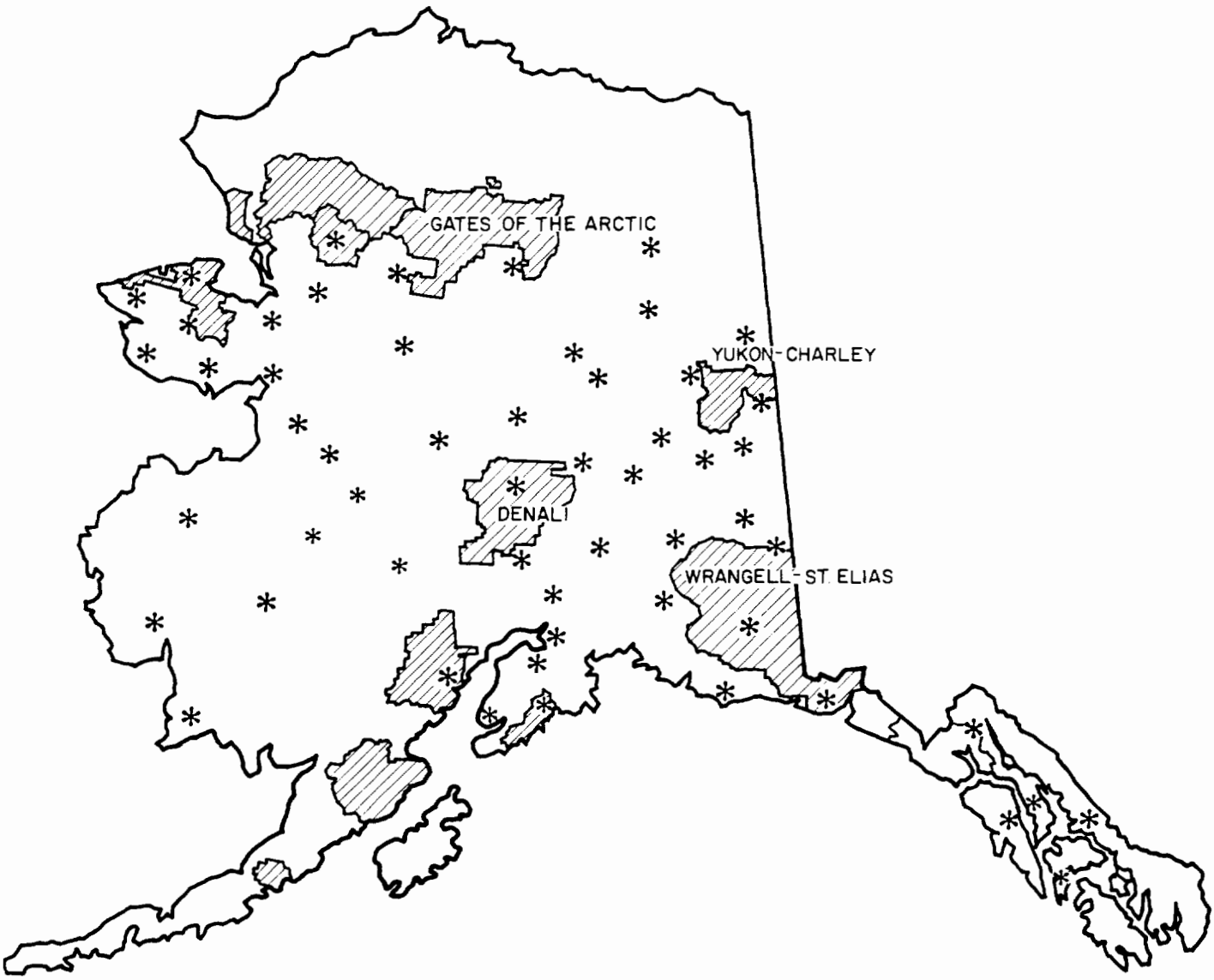
This is a study of mineral discovery and development in Alaska from the first decades of the nineteenth century to the present. While the study is designed to focus on mining within the national parks, its early chapters--embracing the earliest prospecting through the Klondike era--are necessarily more general. Gold-seekers ranged widely and major events affected activities everywhere in the same general ways. Later chapters of this study offer particular treatment of the several parks where mining occurred.

Particular themes of this study of placer and lode mineral mining in Alaska include consideration of the continuity of the mining frontier as it moved northward; the trade patterns in the Russian and early American eras; exploration; transportation to and within Alaska; law and litigation; social history; technological progress; community development; the role of government; mining investment and speculation; peaks and declines in productivity; and the literary-cultural facets of the mining frontier. For the most part, these and other themes are discussed within the chronological and regional




LOCATION MAP

# ALASKA'S NATIONAL PARKLANDS




## SIGNIFICANT GOLD MINING REGIONS OF ALASKA

* MINING REGIONS

▨ NATIONAL PARK / PRESERVE

sections of the texts rather than separately. Exceptions are such large, significant topics as the role of government and the literature of the mining frontier.

## Early Trade

Russian efforts to develop trade in the Yukon River region began with the establishment of posts at St. Michael in 1833 and Nulato in 1839. Cinnabar (mercury) was discovered near Kolmakof on the Kuskokwim River but not mined. The Nulato post remained the farthest inland and farthest north throughout the Russian period, but other posts were founded at the mouth of the Unalakleet River, and at Andreesvsk, Alexkseevsk, and Komarovsk within a few years, and Russian Mission (Kvikhpak) on the lower Yukon was established in 1845. Alaska's fur possibilities also stimulated England's Hudson's Bay Company to establish Fort Yukon in 1847 at the mouth of the Porcupine River.

This encroachment on Alaska territory lasted until Capt. Charles P. Raymond of the U.S. Army protested the boundary matter to the company in 1869. Raymond had been dispatched because of complaints from American traders and voyaged to Fort Yukon from St. Michael on a small trading steamer. After his survey confirmed Fort Yukon's American location, Raymond notified the Hudson's Bay Company men and raised the Stars and Stripes over their post. Raymond reported cautiously on the economic potential of the Yukon: "Profitable management requires fixed posts . . . there is no place for small enterprise." Whether the length of travel justified large investments "remains to be seen." As for gold--"no valuable mineral deposits in workable quantities have been found in the vicinity of the Yukon River up to the present time."[3] This was not quite accurate, as Frederick Whymper of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition had reported on signs of gold near Fort Yukon a few years earlier.

Raymond's flag raising was a necessary gesture, but his assertion of American authority was not fortified by other government action. Many years would pass before the United States' presence in the interior was firmly established. The government's indifference to the Yukon through the 1870s can hardly be wondered at since it was impotent even in parts of the west where serious Indian-white conflicts brewed. In 1879 Sitka's citizens, faced with Indian hostilities two years after an army detachment had been withdrawn, appealed to British authorities at Victoria for relief. After HMS *Osprey* arrived to calm aggressive spirits, the U.S. government dispatched Captain Brown with USS *Alaska*, who was relieved by Commander L.A. Beardslee and *Jamestown* after a few weeks. *Jamestown* and other ships replacing it remained on duty in Alaska waters from 1879.

With the acquisition of Alaska in 1867 the potential of the fur trade attracted several American companies, including the Pioneer Company, Parrott and Company, Taylor and Bendel, Faulkner and Bell, the Jansen Company, and the Hutchinson, Kohl Co. The latter became the Alaska Commercial Company and dominated Alaska trade for decades. A lease arrangement secured the Alaska Commercial Company a mono-

poly of the lucrative Pribilof Island fur seal harvest, but elsewhere in Alaska other traders were free to compete.

Among the pre-Klondike traders Francis Xavier Mercier, a founder of the Pioneer Company of San Francisco, stands out. He was born in Quebec Province in 1838, entering the fur trade in 1856 with the North West Company at Fort Benton, Montana, and Fort Union, N.D. His Alaska work started in 1868 when he voyaged to St. Michael, then ascended the Yukon to found Nuklukayet (later Fort Adams) 15 miles below the Tanana River mouth and lasted until 1885.

Within a year the Pioneer Company folded and Mercier joined Hutchinson, Kohl (soon to become Alaska Commercial). By 1872 he was the company's general agent for the entire interior based at a post he built at Tanana 12 miles upstream from Nuklukayet until he quit in 1875. From 1877 he represented the Western Fur and Trading Company, which the Alaska Commercial Company absorbed in 1883. Mercier remained with the Alaska Commercial Company until 1885 when he left Alaska. Francis Xavier's brother, Moise, was another pioneer trader who came north in 1868 and joined Parrott and Company the next year to run their Fort Yukon post until 1874.[4]

## Notable Pioneers

It was in 1874 that Leroy N. McQuesten and Alfred Mayo arrived in the interior and were sent by F.X. Mercier to build Fort Reliance some 30 miles within Canadian territory and 6 miles downstream of the mouth of the Klondike River. Mercier was not anticipating the Klondike gold discoveries in building a post in what was to be the great mining region; he wanted to spare upper Yukon and upper Tanana Indians a long haul to Fort Yukon or Nuklukayet and the temptation of trading with his rivals. On July 3 Mercier left St. Michael on the steamer *Yukon* to supply posts at Nulato, Nuklukayet, and Fort Yukon, then carry building materials upriver for Fort Reliance. *Yukon* had been voyaging the river since 1868, first for Parrot and Co., then for Alaska Commercial, but had never before gone above Fort Yukon. Another post Mercier built on the upper Yukon was Belle Isle, a name given to the general vicinity around the present site of Eagle, some 80 miles downstream from Reliance. He established this post in 1880 for the Western Fur and Trading Company and re-established it in 1882 after Western Fur and Trading abandoned it. Leroy Napoleon McQuesten--always known as "Jack"--was born in New Hampshire in 1836 and is the trader most closely identified with mining development of this period. He and his sometimes partners, Arthur Harper and Alfred Mayo, sensed the transition from fur to mining dominance and did much to stimulate it. Arthur Harper, born in Ireland in 1853, ranged throughout the interior prospecting on his own, and was among the discoverer of the Stewart River, Fortymile, Sixtymile, and Tanana gold fields. Other independent traders active in the 1880s and the powerful Alaska Commercial Company were slow to shift from their traditional trade.

In a sense the Hudson's Bay Company subsidized the initial Yukon entry of McQuesten and his companies. He and other men had been trapping around the Nelson River when Chief Factor McDougal offered a guide, boat-building material, and provisions if the party would move to the Yukon. One Hudson's Bay man, who had been at Fort Yukon in 1869, when Captain Raymond voyaged upriver, contributed another inducement: "Mr. Sibistone told us that one of the officers that came up on the steamer washed out a yard of dirt near Fort Yukon and he had about a teaspoon of something yellow in the pan and the officer threw it away remarking that it would not do to let the men see it as they would all leave the steamer."[5]

Another early report of Yukon gold was publicized by members of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition who surveyed for a telegraph line from 1865-67 in Alaska and Siberia. Expedition men heard that gold in small quantities was found on the islands of the Yukon near Fort Yukon. In 1867 two expedition men found evidence of gold in the upper Yukon and another, Daniel Libby, made similar modest discoveries on the Seward Peninsula.

When his party reached Fort Yukon in August 1873, Alaskans were as pleased to see McQuesten as the Canadians were to see him go: "We were treated like kings." Mercier, happy to have fully equipped trappers in the country who would increase his trade, even let them have 50 pounds of flour, although his own supply was very low. In the spring McQuesten ran into Harper and his party of prospectors at Fort Yukon: "They wintered at White River, they killed plenty of moose and lived like kings all winter. They had done considerable prospecting but they found nothing that would pay." The prospectors were not discouraged, however, as they saw evidence that paying quantities of gold existed: "Mr. Koh Bear," McQuesten noted, "had about thirty dollars in coarse gold that an Indian by the name of Larieson gave him. The Indian said he had found it, a piece of rock that he picked up about thirty miles below the station. The place is now called Gold Mountain."[6]

The region Mercier and McQuesten opened up from Fort Reliance in 1874 showed little promise of prosperity to traders. For all its vastness it was, as Mercier noted, "so sad, so rigorous, and so unproductive, populated by three or four small uncivilized villages, separated from each other by hundreds of miles, living off the products of their hunting and fishing." Clearly a region so rude and remote was not one he imagined would one day "turn the head of all the civilized world." At the time there were only 32 whites in the vast region of the Yukon, Kuskokwim, and Tanana. All these men, except for Lucien Turner, a U.S. Signal Service officer at St. Michael and prospectors Arthur Harper, George Finch, and a man called James, were involved in the fur trade. But by the early 1880s, the fur trading posts would be the congregation points for an ever-increasing number of prospectors who made the first substantial gold strikes on Yukon tributaries.[7]

Sources are not clear on the first prospector to investigate the Yukon from the Lynn Canal entry. George Holt, who was killed by an Indian at Knik in 1885, may have crossed the Chilkoot in the 1870s. But priority perhaps belongs to the better-documented party of Arthur Harper, Fred Hart, George Finch, and Kinseller who

reached Fort Yukon from Canada by way of the Mackenzie, Peel, and Porcupine rivers. Mercier hired Kinseller to assist Napoleon Robert at Nuklukayet, while the others prospected in the White River region in 1873-74, returning to Fort Yukon with McQuesten, Mayo, and George Nichelson, who had also used the Canadian interior route to reach Fort Yukon in '73. Mercier hired Mayo and Hart to assist at Nuklukayet and Nulato, and McQuesten, already known for his honesty and trade skills, to build Fort Reliance, with George Banfield to help him. Harper joined the Alaska Commercial Company in 1875, thus the illustrious trio of McQuesten, Mayo, and Harper settled in prospecting or encouraging prospecting as well as trading over the succeeding decade.

Soon after this, probably fall 1877, McQuesten followed up on a gold prospect Harper had discovered on Sixtymile River. His account of this and the Indians' concern for his well-being indicates the general rule of racial amity on the Yukon:

> I went over to Sixty Mile that fall prospecting. I found Gold on all the bars in small quantities--I found some places where a man could make $6.00 to $8.00 per day but not extensive enough to put on a string of sluices. There was nothing happened during the winter of any note. We always had plenty of meat in store, and done very well in the fur line. In March I fell out of the loft of my store--I struck on a nest of Camp Kettles on my back. I broke one of my short ribs. It was two weeks before I could move and I was in great pain unless I was in a certain position. There were three bands of Indians within days travel, Davids, Charley and the Tronduk--they would send in a messenger every day to hear how I was getting along and the Shoman were making medicines for me to get well and still they were twenty miles away. They thought if I should die that they might be blamed for killing me as there was no other white man in this part of the country.[8]

Violence between natives and whites, common on other western mining frontiers, was rare in Alaska, but there were a few incidents. Briefly, in 1871-1872, the wife of Fred Riedelle, Alaska Commercial Company manager at St. Michael, graced the area with her residence, then in 1875, Mrs. James Bean joined her husband at the Alaska Commercial's Nulato post, later giving birth to the first white child in the interior. Bean left Alaska Commercial in 1878 to establish his own post 30 miles up the Tanana where Mrs. Bean was killed by an Indian. What motivated the Indians is not clear, but the tragic slaying illustrates the lawless situation in the interior. No American officials were available to apprehend the Indian, and the few scattered traders and prospectors did not gather themselves for action.

In 1877 McQuesten had some reason for anxiety about the Indians' mood. Several Indians broke into his storehouse at Fort Reliance and ate a mixture of arsenic and grease that they thought was flour. Three of them died of poisoning, and McQuesten returned to Fort Reliance very cautiously:

> When we arrived in sight of the station they began firing off guns to salute us. They kept shooting until we were very near the landing. Being received so friendly relieved the feelings of my interpreter and the Indians I had with me as they were opposed to coming, thinking they would all be killed. In regards to the poison, they had to break the lock to get into the Store--I said then that the poison was put in the store to destroy mice and it was out of the way of children and the old people ought to know better and the people that died it was their own fault for breaking into the store and taking things that did not belong to them. There was one blind girl about sixteen years old that got poisoned--her father said she was a great deal of help to her mother and he had taken one of our dogs to replace the girl, but if I wauld pay for the girl he would return the dog. I told him I would think the matter over and let them know later on. Finally I told them the girl's Mother could keep the dog, so that settled the matter and that was the last I ever heard about the poison.[9]

## Schwatka's Voyage

Pivotal events in Alaska's mining history were the discovery of gold at Juneau in 1880 and the exploration efforts of the U.S. Army that helped foster the obvious interior route from the Lynn Canal. Lt. Frederick Schwatka led an expedition in 1883 to chart the Yukon River from its source to its mouth. Though the Yukon was hardly unknown, it seemed important to fix its course precisely. Everywhere in the West the waterways had been a primary part of the transportation network, and the Yukon's 2,300 mile length made it appear the obvious geographic key. Exploitation of the river from its mouth at Norton Sound had been the initial penetration route but entry from its source, much closer to Juneau and Pacific Coast ports, made sense.

When Schwatka landed near the mouth of the Chilkat River he negotiated with the Chilkats for packers. After Schwatka got over the pass he built a raft on Lake Lindeman for his Yukon voyage. On the upper Yukon he met two prospectors, the "most woe-begone objects I ever seen," drop-outs from a prospecting party of that season who were returning to the coast. Along the way Schwatka met other prospectors who were faring somewhat better, including Joe Ladue, later to be a founding father of Dawson. Ladue and Schwatka met among the watery maze of the Yukon Flats where the soldiers suffered three weeks of tedious confusion working their raft downriver. At Nuklukayet, near the Tanana, Schwatka abandoned his raft in favor of Arthur Harper's steamer, and voyaged down to St. Michael in more comfort. Schwatka finished his task and published a narrative of his journey in 1885 that stimulated readers to the possibilities of Alaska.[10]

## Population Gains

Alaska's population in 1880, the date of the first United States census, was estimated at 33,426. Excluding the military, this figure only showed 430 whites. Native peoples included coastal Indians (Tlingits, Haidas, and Tsimshians) of southeastern; Eskimos of the arctic (the Innuits), and of the Bering Sea and Pacific Coast (the Yupiks) the Aleuts of the Aleutian chain and other coastal areas; and Athapaskans of the interior. Included also were some 1,756 Creoles (mixed Russian and native).

By 1884 the date of publication for the first census, mineral discoveries had already caused a large increase in the white population. Governor Alfred P. Swineford estimated that there were 1,900 whites--a figure that was probably exaggerated.

The pace of prospecting quickened in the early 1880s, although there were no dramatic gold discoveries. McQuesten observed changes in 1882 that improved the quality of his life considerably:

> The fall of 1882 was noted for the number of men that came into the country to prospect for gold. There was a party of men that wintered with men at Reliance and Sheffelling [Schiefflin] came in by the way St. Michael and wintered at Tanana Station. The first party that arrived by the way of Juneau was Wm. Mer, J. Ladue, J. Rogers and John. They arrived on the 5th September, they had a large supply of provisions enough flour for two years. On the 8th September I took them over to the Sixty Mile--we found very encouraging prospects about 15 miles below Miller Creek. Jo Ladue panned out several pieces that weighed .10 ct. The ground was frozen and we had to thaw out the ground by fires. It took us three days to sink one hole ten feet deep and the water came in so we had to abandon it before we got to bedrock. We got short of provisions and it was getting very cold so we returned home, and the party was well satisfied and intended to go back in the Spring. Shortly after we returned home seven more men arrived. They all built cabins and went into winter quarters. They were not so well supplied with provisions as the first parties. I had plenty of flour on hand and they all passed the winter and had plenty for the following summer. It was the first time with the exception of one year, that anyone was living near that I could converse with. Most of the men would meet at the Station in the evening and we would play cards, tell stories and the winter evenings passes away very pleasantly.[11]

With the venture of Ed Schiefflin and his brother in 1882, mentioned by McQuesten, it appeared that professional mining interest was stirring in the States. Schiefflin, famed as the discoverer of Tombstone, Arizona, opened a new era of well-financed prospecting by bringing a small steamer, the *New Racket*, to St. Michael for river voyaging. He wintered over in 1882-83 above the mouth of the Tanana, ascending that river a short distance when navigation opened for prospecting. Like other early

prospectors Schiefflin found plenty of gold signs but not enough to excite him to further time and effort. After a single season's prospecting he gave up and returned outside.

The appearance of such a well-organized party of well-known prospectors encouraged others even if the Schiefflins did give up rather quickly. They reported the discovery of "a mineral belt" around Nuklukayet that included bars paying $10 a day per man: "There were many good indications of gold, especially in the region where a range of hills known as the Lower Ramparts are aligned with the river's course." Since the Schiefflins supported the theory that a great mineral belt encircled the world from Cape Horn through Asia and the New World, they believed that their modest gold discoveries confirmed the theory. What was more significant than such theorizing was the party's discovery of gold within Alaska. All earlier discoveries of gold along the Yukon occurring from the time of Alaska's purchase had been on British Territory.[12]

## Northward Course

The faith that sustained the endeavors of the northern prospectors in the mineral resources of Alaska rested in the previous history of western mining. Gold discoveries in California in 1848 caused a stampede of thousands to the Pacific Coast. Subsequently prospectors found gold in Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Montana, the Dakotas, and elsewhere. Inevitably men turned northwards to search for wealth and found rewards on the Fraser River in 1858 and the Caribou a year later.

In the early 1870s the Cassiar district of British Columbia and Sitka, where the Stewart mine was discovered in 1872, created the excitement, then in 1880 major strikes were made at Juneau. As Juneau developed as a thriving community, it became the natural jumping off place to Alaska's interior for most of the prospectors who ventured forth in the 1880s.

Sitka, the former center of Russian America, was the scene of the first gold mining of the American era with the development of the Stewart mine from 1872 while Juneau was founded in 1881. Juneau proved to be a very important mining center and eventually replaced Sitka as territorial capital. Richard T. Harris and Joseph Juneau made placer and quartz discoveries in 1880 with backing from George E. Pilz, who was building a stamp mill at the Stewart mine, and other Sitka men. Placer deposits of the Silver Bow basin in the hills encircling Juneau were developed and continued to produce for decades. A quartz claim on Douglas Island very near Juneau was developed by John Treadwell, a California contractor and mining engineer. Eventually Treadwell's "Glory Hole," covering 13 acres and penetrating 2,000 feet into the earth, became world famous. From 1882 to 1916, the mines produced $60 million in gold from the ore processed. Flooding in 1916 forced the closure of operations.

Juneau's prosperity was assured by mining and its location on Lynn Canal, just 100 miles south of the trail leading to the Chilkoot Pass, made it a natural jumping-off place to the interior.

With justice the Cassiar district has been called "the training school for Yukon miners," and to the experience gained there the latter owed to a great extent their

ability to cope with the natural disadvantages, for the conditions are similar in each region. Harold Goodrich, author of the history section in an early USGS summary of northern mining, detailed the Cassiar-Alaska relationship:

> The early miners were obliged to enter the Cassiar field over a steep mountain trail more than 150 miles long, bringing all their provisions with them, and when they arrived had to contend against severe winters and short working seasons, in a country far from the base of supplies. Cassiar traditions, then, had great weight among the first miners of the Yukon, and Cassiar methods were followed.[13]

When the placer deposits of the Cassiar became exhausted by 1884 most of the miners left the district. Potentially rich auriferous quartz veins could not then be mined because of the high costs of importing machinery. Thus Cassiar miners looked northward. Why not try the Yukon country? Schiefflin's experience was known as were those of Schwatka and prospectors who had used the Chilkoot Pass entry into the interior. Ordinary miners lacked the capital for steamer transport on the Yukon but pushing downriver from headwater seemed easy enough.

Some 200 prospectors crossed the Chilkoot in 1883. Pleasant reports reached Juneau in 1883-84 of successes, although they were probably exaggerated. One messenger spoke of placers yielding $150 a day; another of gravel bars mined for $25 a day. Though most of the prospectors reached the Yukon's tributaries a few tried other regions, including the Copper River. In fall of 1883 a miner electrified Juneau by appearing with $1,000 in coarse Yukon gold, thus stimulating the movement of 300 men into the interior men in spring of 1884.

The interior miners brought with them experience in regulating mining districts and keeping order through miners meetings. Their ability to provide the rudiments of governance was on a par with their ability to extract gold--very crude and inefficient but effective for the transitional period. It was probably in 1882 that the first formal miners meeting convened on the Yukon occurred at Fort Reliance. Regulations concerning mining and the necessity of record keeping were of chief concern: "There was a meeting called to make laws governing the size of placer claims and water rights," Jack McQuesten explained, "so that everyone knew that he was entitled to in case anything was struck and then was bounded off and I was elected recorder." Thus it was that the way was smoothed for subsequent social developments in the great interior.[14]

## Notes
## Chapter 1

1. Ernest Gruening, *An Alaskan Reader, 1887-1974* (New York: Meredith Press, 1967), 38-39; Richard E. Welch, Jr., "American Public Opinion and the Purchase of Russian America," in *Alaska and Its History*, edited by Morgan B. Sherwood (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), 277.

2. Oliver Risley Seward, *William Seward's Travels Around the World* (New York: Appleton, 1873) 36.

3. *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, (Senate Reps., 56th Cong., 1st sess., No. 1023. Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1973) 40-41.

4. Francois Mercier, *Recollection of the Yukon* (Anchorage: Alaska Historical Society, 1986), ix-xii.

5. Leroy N. McQuesten, *Recollections of Life in the Yukon, 1871-1885* (Dawson: Yukon Order of Pioneers, 1952), 2.

6. Ibid., 4.

7. Ibid., 13.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Ibid.

10. Frederick Schwatka, *Along Alaska's Great River* (New York: Cassell, 1885), 143.

11. McQuesten, *Recollections of Life in the Yukon*, 11.

12. Josiah E. Spurr, "Geology of the Yukon Gold District, Alaska," *Eighteenth Annual Report of The USGS, 1896-97*, pt. 3, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1898) 108.

13. Ibid., 212.

14. McQuesten, *Recollections of Life in the Yukon*, 11.

# Chapter 2
## Interior Riches

### Strike in Fortymile Region

In the mid-1880s prospectors of the interior made their first major gold discovery. The Fortymile River's headwaters lie within Canada, but the river's southerly course crosses the Alaska border before arcing northwards again to flow back to Canada. Such a wayward passage resulted in some confusion after the gold discovery as most of the diggings at Bonanza Bar, Franklin, Chicken, Jack Wade, and Steel Creek lay within Alaska while the community (usually spelled "Forty Mile" unlike the river's designation as "Fortymile," but for our purposes here, both will be referred to as Fortymile) was within the Yukon region of Canada.

Howard Franklin is given credit for the initial Fortymile discovery, but several other pioneers were on hand to share in the bounty. And, when the news reached the Outside, other hopeful men like Frank Buteau were eager to try their luck. Buteau, a Quebec-born rover who lived in Maine and Wisconsin before moving to the Northwest in 1882, reached Juneau with a party of prospectors in January 1886. After working for the Treadwell Mine to make a stake, he joined a Yukon prospecting party. The men crossed the Chilkoot Pass in August, bypassed the Klondike region, and settled on a little island a mile above the mouth of the Fortymile. That September, some 30 miles farther upriver, Howard Franklin and others struck gold on sand bars. The lucky miners on the upper river bars had staked claims extending 1500 feet--as the law allowed, but Buteau's party on "Sixteen Liars' Island" decided to limit their claims to 300 feet "in order to make room for others."[1]

The great news of the gold strike reached the coast in dramatic fashion. Anticipating an influx of miners, trader Arthur Harper prepared to move the pioneer store of McQuesten, Harper and Mayo from Fort Nelson on the Stewart River to the Fortymile mouth. In a tragic "message-to-Garcia"-like episode, Harper sent word to McQuesten, then in San Francisco buying trade goods, to prepare for a big spring rush. Tommy Williams and an Indian half-breed called Bob left Stewart River for the coast after Christmas. At Chilkoot Pass, a snowstorm held them up for three days. By then their only provisions consisted of a little flour. After the storm the chilled men went on and finally staggered into the Healy and Wilson store at Dyea. Tommy Williams died shortly from the effects of exposure. Healy took the Indian lad to Juneau for treatment of his frozen feet. On his return he found the letters Williams had cached on the trail and sent them on.

Back on the Fortymile, Frank Buteau made $3,000 in the summer of '87, more than any other Fortymile miner. Later Buteau bought Franklin's original discovery claim, working it in 1888 without substantial gain. Over the 1888-89 winter, Pete McDonald, George Madlock, John Campbell, and Buteau slaved over the construction of a half mile of flume built from whipsawed lumber. The flume, which conveyed water

from Franklin Gulch to their bar at Troublesome Point, made possible the first hydraulic mining ever done in the interior. Buteau and his partners mined there until September 1892, then journeyed Outside, taking 37 days to reach Juneau. They were not yet millionaires but they were confident about the future and planned to return to the interior in the spring.

## Lynch Law

The only instance of violence by Indians against whites of the 1880s occurred in 1888 when prospector John Bremner was murdered on the Koyukuk River. The response of miners was in sharp contrast to that on earlier occasions of violence. The slaying of trader James Beans' wife in 1878 had gone unpunished. Just four years earlier Alaska Commercial Company trader George Holt of Knik had been killed by Copper River Indians, but white men did not dare venture into the little-known Copper River country for revenge. But with the death of Bremner, the pioneer prospector who had encountered Lt. Henry Allen's expedition in 1885, the Yukon whites determined that their security demanded retribution. Their numbers at Fortymile were great enough to insure success, although they had to go a good 400 miles and the lower Koyukuk. Henry Davis related his experience:

> July 10, 1888--We called for volunteers to go and have nineteen white men and two Indians, John Manook and Pitka, both fine, good natives. They did not want to go much as they were afraid the Koyukuk Indians would come back next winter and kill the Tanana natives. However, we talked them over.
> July 14, 1888--We stopped to see if there were any signs of Indians. Yes, there was a cache full of white fish drying and Manook said the Indians had gone up the creek for sure. We looked in the cache and found Bremner's tools which had his name on them. We were sure we were on the right street. We saw smoke two bends upstream and all hands on the front deck got ready to jump when the boat hit the bank. Others jumped and spread out around the Indian camp. Their dogs were barking and jumping, and the Indians ran into the tents, scared stiff. Only one Indian moved for his gun and Folger hit him over the head with the barrel of his Buffalo Gun. We all got together in a bunch, and Manook asked the Chief for the Indian who killed the white man prospector. Then the Indian who Folger had hit stood out bold and said 'I killed the white man.' We took him on the boat as well as their medicine man and his wife and two bad-looking squaws. Then we smashed their guns over the woodpile and threw them in the river. We had to back down the stream about half a mile to turn around and we put the two squaws off at an old Indian camp. They took to the woods like rabbits. We then tried the medicine man but could not connect him up with the crime in any way, nor his wife, so we got ready for the hanging. There was

> a big tree being over the river. We made a noose, tried it and it worked too slow, that is, it didn't slip so well, so Hank sent me for axle grease or lard to grease the rope and it worked fine. We again put it on the Indian and everybody pulled on the rope and tied him up and started for home. Everybody was satisfied and in good spirits.[2]

## Indian Packers

The other confrontations between whites and Indians in this period concerned travel over the Chilkoot Pass. Traveling into the interior the Chilkats has long maintained a monopoly over the pass. They had resented the Hudson's Bay Company's establishment of Fort Yukon in 1841 and Fort Selkirk in 1848 because the flow of trade goods from Canada ended the dependence of interior Indians on those the Chilkats brought in. As time passed, the Chilkats' animosity declined, but they did burn and pillage Fort Selkirk in 1852.

By September 1886, the trickle of prospectors venturing into the interior was swelling. A confrontation occurred when Henry Davis, one of the pioneers on the Fortymile, went out to Juneau for supplies, then tried to hire Indian packers on his return journey. With the increasing traffic of miners into the interior the Hoonah Indians were competing with the Chilkats in offering packing services to prospectors--and the Chilkats were angry. When Davis landed near Dyea with his winter supplies, Chilkat and Hoonah Indians milled on the beach. Negotiations for packers were impossible so Davis sent for John J. Healy, proprietor of the Dyea trading post. Since the potential for a Indian war had made Healy anxious earlier, he had already notified government officials in Sitka before Davis appealed for help. The U.S. Navy's armed tug warship *Pinta* with a show of force as the Indian rivals declaimed and threatened. Naval officers met with the Indian chiefs and Healy in a two-hour conference. After the chiefs agreed to keep the peace Davis, and others were to hire 10 packers willing to carry 100 pounds each to the Chilkoot summit. The $12.50 rate for each man was lower than it had been previously because of the Indian competition.

Disputes among the Indians at Dyea and between Indians and whites occurred on other occasions. In June 1888 the whites dispatched an urgent message to Juneau's U.S. Marshal:

> We the undersigned write to you to have sent here a posse of armed men on the *Dispatcher* or some other steamer <u>at once</u>, should the *Pinta* not be within easy calling distance of Juneau. We last night dispatched an Indian by canoe with a letter to the Man-of-War but being in doubt as to his fidelity, or fearing that he may be intercepted, we send to you direct, as the situation is becoming hourly more alarming. Sam Matthews the bearer of this, will give you full particulars, regarding the shooting of one of our packers by Kla--not, and the death of the Sub-chief. We are not a lot of women to be easily frightened, but can take care of ourselves as long as

> ammunition holds out but something must be done for the safety of the white residents.[3]

As it turned out, the Indians calmed down quickly, but the incident shows that, on occasion, frontiersman in Alaska knew the fear that had haunted pioneers elsewhere in the west.

## Healy and the North American Transportation and Trading Company

John J. Healy deserves credit for foreseeing the Yukon-Alaska boom and convincing men of wealth to invest in his vision. He kept a keen eye on developments over the late 1880s and was convinced that the interior's future was bright. In 1891 he wintered Outside and convinced an old Montana business associate, Portus B. Weare of Chicago, that a major trading company could successfully compete with the long-established Alaska Commercial Company. In the spring of 1892, the newly formed North American Transportation and Trading Company (NAT&T) entered the Yukon field with its first river steamboat and bases at St. Michael and Fortymile. Healy, as general manager, supervised the operation at Fortymile--or Fort Cudahy as he named his post. The well-known Chicago meat-packing Cudahy family had been induced by Weare to share investment in the North American Transportation and Trading Company.[4]

The North American Transportation and Trading Company's opportunity lay in a natural resentment among miners of the trading monopoly and the occasional sharp practices of Alaska Commercial Company agents. Occasionally, as Bill Leak and other Fortymile pioneers got to Juneau in November 1895, miners' complaints were reported in the newspaper. Leak had taken the steamer *Weare* down to St. Michael where the Alaska Commercial Company charged $2 daily for board and included the "poorest fare. Rotten ham was dished up to them for so many successive meals that the miners made a unanimous and just kick, knowing that a supply of wholesome ham was on hand." Miners cried out against grub that had been damaged through leakage in shipment and store prices at the Yukon's mouth that equalled those in Fortymile. According to Juneau's *Mining Record*,

> this company had held a monopolistic sway over that section of Alaska for the past three or four decades but they now realize their days of indisputable regency are numbered, that other transportation and mercantile companies will soon be in the field that will crush them out of existence, and therefore they are bleeding it at every opportunity and for all they are worth during the short time they yet have to hold sway.[5]

Of course, the views of Juneau folks were not entirely objective. Businessmen wanted interior miners to use their town as a supply and recreation point, and did not mind criticism of the interior-based trading company. But Juneau businessmen had trouble convincing miners that a Juneau base made sense. Transportation charges and

limited steamer service inhibited miners from wintering over at Juneau. Yukon River passage cost $50 and sea passage to Juneau from St. Michael via Unalaska and Sitka was $120. Board costs ran the bill to more than $200 for miners who might want to winter in Juneau. Thus, the newspapers commented, Juneau had lost the "fall and spring harvest" from miners "loaded with from $1,000 to $20,000 in dust."[6]

Healy, unlike McQuesten--one of the Alaska Commercial Company's greatest assets, was not popular with miners. Healy was far less congenial that he had been in Montana and cared little for social contact. He was also blamed for the company's unpopular no-credit policy, although the policy made good commercial sense under the circumstances. Healy did, however, grubstake miners whom he trusted as a company investment.

The Alaska Commercial Company had maintained a virtual monopoly on interior trade from 1870 until the challenged its dominance in 1892. With the little steamboats *Yukon*, *St. Michael*, and *New Racket* the company serviced its several trading posts efficiently. After the Fortymile development, the company prepared for increased trade by launching the *Arctic*, a larger vessel, in 1889. The *Arctic's* 140-ton cargo capacity was eclipsed by the North American Transportation and Trading Company's *Portus B. Weare*, modeled on Missouri River steamboats and capable of handling 200-tons. The Alaska Commercial Company responded in 1895 with *Alice*, also capable of carrying 200-tons, and the North American Transportation and Trading Company built the *John J. Healy*, 241-tons, in 1896, and two larger vessels in 1897. In 1898, the Alaska Commercial Company put three huge, 700-ton capacity vessels into service, the *Susie*, *Sarah*, and *Hannah*.[7]

By moving his base to St. Michael in 1892, then Fortymile in 1893, Healy left opportunities for other entrepreneurs on the coast. Jack Dalton, conspicuous among the other independent traders and commercial venturers for daring and initiative, cast his lot with the Lynn Canal entry route into the interior in 1893-94 when he established Dalton Post in Yukon Territory and commenced work on his Chilkat Pass Trail to the coast.

Healy's move to the interior provided a wider opportunity for William Moore, the veteran mariner and prospector who had called the White Pass route to Canadian surveyor William Ogilvie's attention in 1887. By 1895 Moore was certain that a gold rush would occur over the White Pass. He and his son, Bernard, filed on a homestead at what became Skagway, and began building on wharf there.

## Signs of Civilization

When miners found diversions from the practicalities of transport and work it showed the advance of civilization. It can be said that civilization arrived on the Yukon in 1894. There were two clear signs in that year, the establishment of a Canadian Police post at Fortymile and the publication of the interior's first newspaper, the *Yukon Press,* at Fort Adams (Tanana).

Advertisements in the *Yukon Press* showed an acceleration of commerce because of the recent gold strikes near Circle. The North American Transportation and Trading Company moved fast to build a post there, but the North American Transportation and Trading Company and the venerable Alaska Commercial Company were not the only traders in the interior. There were also several independent traders as well as the veterans, Jack McQuesten at Fortymile, Al Mayo at Tanana, and Arthur Harper at the Pelly River--all associated with the Alaska Commercial Company with its base at St. Michael and a branch at Andrieffaki. Of these, H. Kokerine at Nowakakat, D. Belkoff at Anvik, T.H. Beaumont at Fort Yukon and Porcupine, and A. Romkoff at Kotultk were primarily fur traders, but the new wave of mining interest was well represented by Gordon Bettles at Arctic City and Nulato; George Carmack at Salmon River; and Joe Ladue at Sixtymile. The last named traders either prospected themselves or eagerly backed other prospectors. Two years later Carmack would make the strike that precipitated the Klondike gold rush; Ladue would lay out the townsite of Dawson while Bettles would give his name to a Koyukuk mining town near what would become the Gates of the Arctic National Park.

*The Yukon Press*, published by the Rev. Jules L. Prevost with the help of trader Gordon Bettles, had as its object "to promote man's religious, moral and mental facilities, and to develop the great resources of the Valley." News of mining was of most importance in all issues. Bettles wrote a lead article on Koyukuk mining in the first issue, describing the difficulties of the country, and warning any interested parties outside: "I deem it necessary to advise . . . owing to the difficulty of opening deep diggings, as it will at least, take the greater portion of the first season before much, if any returns are realized, to come prepared if possible to meet those obligations." That winter there were 22 miners on the Koyukuk with another six wintering at Tanana who intended to move up the Koyukuk in the spring.[8]

"Local News," a popular column, included reports on Franklin Gulch mining and Stuart and Miller creeks. The compiler, probably Bettles, commented on several prospectors who came in the previous spring and left in the fall. They were "satisfied in their own minds that this is no country for them, [and] we are of the same opinion. Those who expect to meet with success in this country by mining, must expect to meet with many disappointments and failures, do a good deal of hard work, and suffer many hardships."

"Local News" also reported on the Birch Creek discovery, which led to the founding of the town of Circle City on the Yukon River. Bettles who encountered two Indians at Tanana who had $400 in dust, joined three Koyukuk prospectors who decided to try the upper Yukon in preference to the Koyukuk. They took passage on the little steamer, *Arctic*, upriver, landed 90 miles above Fort Yukon, hired Indian packers for a two-days portage "over a wet and disagreeable country" to reach Birch Creek 150 miles above its mouth. They prospected up Birch Creek for another 150 miles but with no success. Despite his vested interest in the Koyukuk, Bettles did not knock Birch Creek. He blamed the high water for his party's inability to prospect effectively: "We did not do the country justice."

Newspaper readers of Juneau and Seattle in April 1895 could have no doubt that things were picking up in the interior. An estimated 425 people, including children, were strung out on the trail from Dyea to the Yukon headwaters. Indian packers were in demand for the last stage of the trip to the summit, getting $1.50 per 100 pounds from "the foot of the last pitch to the summit." Technological advances included Peterson's tramway, which carried goods from base to summit for 50 cents per 100 pounds, "the miners doing their own work operating it." The tramway did not always perform well. Other aids to passage included a trail cut by Edgar Wilson, John Healy's partner at Dyea, around the canyon between Dyea and Sheep Camp.

## Circle's Progress

Gold was discovered on Birch Creek, a Yukon tributary within Alaska, in 1892. As good gold prospects drew other men to join the discoverers mining on Pitka's Bar, the community of Circle City developed at the site of Manny Hill's store on the Yukon about 30 miles from the diggings. Other discoveries in 1893 on Birch, Mastodon, Deadwood, and Mammoth creeks attracted more stampeders. Although some of the prospects were as much as 80 miles from Circle, the new settlement served as the base for a burgeoning population. The new Alaska gold field soon proved itself. Although the yield in 1893-94 was only $9,000 from Mastodon, Deadwood, and Mammoth creeks, the production from the entire Birch Creek district by the end of 1895 was $150,000.

Circle's growth was encouraged by Jack McQuesten, who established a store and extended credit to at least 80 Fortymile miners. The population reached 700 in 1896, a sizeable community for Alaska and one that was destined to last. Circle's growing prominence drew John J. Healy and a North American Transportation and Trading Company store in 1894 and other amenities, including saloons and dancehalls, the Yukon Order of Pioneers (originally founded at Fortymile in 1894 and reorganized at Circle in 1895), and another significant society--the Miners Association, which determined mining regulations and, on the cultural side, developed the library book collection McQuesten had bought from Fortymile. By 1896 a school opened with 30 students, mostly native, and an Episcopal Church was constructed. Circle City also became the new location for the *Yukon Press*, which moved from Tanana.[10]

Sometimes there was some relief from the hard work of prospecting, mining, and household chores. As the prosperity and population of the Yukon Valley swelled in 1896, entertainers from San Francisco showed up at Fortymile. A variety troop managed by Jack Smith entertained grateful miners with songs and dance before moving on to Circle as it became the larger camp. Circle's miners paid $2.50 for seats in the Tivoli Music Hall, a two-story log building. After seven months the program became somewhat stale, but the 11-member company made good money, particularly as its six women were the only white women in the interior save for the wives of a few missionaries and traders.

George T. Snow added to entertainment possibilities when he opened the Grand Opera House in summer 1896. Theatregoers weary of the Tivoli fare could see the

veteran thespian Snow, his wife, and son in such classics as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Old Kentucky*, *The Newboy*, and *Camille*. Additionally, the Miners Association sponsored minstrel shows and other entertainment presented by James Dougherty and Casey Moran.

Harry Ash was another Yukon theatrical man who became famous. Juneau was the first Alaska town in which Ash entertained citizens before moving on to Circle and Dawson. Among his cast were the Drummond sisters, whose connections with Swiftwater Bill Gates and other romantic episodes in Dawson, would result in temporary fame for the women. By September 1897, Ash would be dubbed the "gambler millionaire" of the Klondike. When he turned up in Seattle with his wife, a previous wife he had forgotten was at the dock with police to arrest him for bigamy. A Juneau newspaper reflected that "things were not going as well in the land of sunshine and flowers as in the land of gold."[11]

Circle lacked a theater critic, but Ash's variety program drew favorable reviews in Juneau before he moved into the interior: "There are no waits, the entire mammoth show is run through with lightning-like rapidity and the entire show is a kaleidoscope of shining sensationalites. There is not a weak feature in it, everything is new, bright and up to date." May Hamilton and Georgie Roubein sang popular airs; Fred Breen and Fred Winans presented comic skits; Rose Davenport captured the mood of one of San Francisco's celebrated murder cases with her tragic narrative song, "The Durrant Case" and the Drummond sisters danced and did a contortion act. Other acts included a topical two-act drama, "The Miner's Oath," with James Townsend as the villain. All this cost only 25 cents.[12]

Circle's decline followed hard on its peak in 1896 but was not caused, as is usual in placer mining districts, by the exhaustion of local mines. What caused the exodus from Circle in 1896-97 was the stirring news of George Carmack's gold discovery on the Klondike--a development that marked a watershed in northern history.

## Carmack's Discovery

George Carmack's prospecting with Skookum Jim and Tagish Charlie along the Klondike, a tributary of the Yukon, followed the suggestion made to him by Robert Henderson. Henderson, for reasons he had good cause to regret, did not stake any claims himself, and left the region before his friends struck gold on August 17, 1896. Some weeks later, Carmack showed some of his nuggets at Fortymile, and miners dashed to the new bonanza. It took longer for the word to reach Circle, but when it did, most of the population rushed to the Klondike.

The new town of Dawson boomed over the winter of 1896-97, where Joe Ladue had plotted a site near his store and sawmill. The progress of the community was orderly despite its rapid growth because Canadian officials at Fortymile moved quickly to establish order. William Ogilvie, who had been waiting at Fort Cudahy during summer 1897 for directions on boundary survey work, sent the first word to Ottawa:

> I am very much pleased to be able to inform you [he wrote] that a most important discovery of gold has been made on a creek called Bonanza Creek, an affluent of the river known here as the Klondyke. It is marked on the maps extant as Deer River, and joins the river a few miles above the site of Fort Reliance. The discovery was made by G. W. Cormack [sic], who worked with me in 1887 on the coast range. The indications are that it is very rich, indeed the richest yet found, and as far as work has been carried on it realizes expectations. It is only two weeks since it was known, and already about 200 claims have been staked on it, and the creek is not yet exhausted; it, and its branches are considered good for 300 or 400 claims. Besides, there are two other creeks above it, which it is confidently expected will yield good pay; and if they do so, we shall have 800 to 1000 claims on this river, which will require over 200 men for their proper working."[13]

Ogilvie moved upriver to Dawson to provide an official survey of the townsite and of claims on Bonanza Creek and elsewhere. Mounties stationed at Fortymile also moved to Dawson to assume jurisdiction of police and court matters. Ottawa immediately dispatched a larger force of Mounties from the south to support the detachment in the North. It was the availability of a well-organized, fully empowered national police force that distinguished the Klondike from other western American and Alaska mining frontiers. The law-and-order lid went on at once--and stayed on; life and property were secure throughout the Canadian North.

By June 1897 Dawson had grown to a community of 4,000 people housed in some 500 buildings. For some months it was the most famous town in the world, a place that fascinated millions and attracted many thousands who hoped to join those on the ground before all the gold was gone.

The first full report on the Klondike development appeared in Juneau's *Alaska Mining Record* of February 10, 1897. Miners A.D. Nash and W.M. Cowley arrived in Juneau by canoe from Dyea with two Indians, including Schwatka, the native who had guided Lt. Frederick Schwatka's army exploring party in 1883 and taken the commander's name. Nash and Cowley had left Dawson on December 4, traveling over the Chilkoot with Capt. William Moore, hearty enough at age 72 to take the Canadian governments first mail contract. Everyone in Juneau read the Nash-Cowley report avidly:

> The Clondyke river is a stream about forty yards in width at the point of its confluence with the Yukon about fifty-five miles above Forty Mile, and is about such a stream as Forty Mile creek. Its principal tributaries are Bonanza and Hunker creeks, each about twenty miles in length. Bear and Too-Much-Gold being smaller streams emptying into it all from the south, the mouth of Bonanza being about two miles above the point where the Clondyke empties into the Yukon. These streams and their branches are

very rapid--much more so than the other prospected streams of the district. The discovery claim on Bonanza creek lies about twelve miles above its mouth, or some fourteen miles from the Yukon. The gold of this district is invariably found in the beds of the streams there being no bench diggings. The pay streak runs from three to six feet deep and lies under from twelve to twenty feet of gravel, and the district is distinctly and entirely a winter diggings, sinking and drifting being only practicable when the gravel is frozen.

One hundred and ninety-two claims are staked out along Bonanza creek, extending a distance of twelve miles, 102 below and ninety above the discovery claim. Boulder creek empties into Bonanza at No. 42 below and has twenty claims staked along it. Adams creek enters at No. 7 below and on it are located thirty claims. At No. 7 above, Boulder creek enters and has forty-five staked claims upon it. Victoria creek, Carmack gulch and two other small creeks--pups'--are also tributary to Bonanza and have an aggregate of forty-one locations, but are not yet surveyed. A total of 332 claims located on Bonanza and its tributaries. Baker creek is included in this district, having its source near the head of Adams creek, though flowing west and emptying into the Yukon some nine miles above the mouth of Clondyke. Baker creek has sixty claims located upon it.[14]

## Glowing Reports

The northern miners were the ultimate source of all information, and some of the original Klondike reports caught the excitement among the men in the field. Gold-struck prospectors told of wonderful things in private letters in terms of awe that could not be capped by outside journalists--even those who might be permitted flourishes of fevered imagination. And such letters were made available through publication. "Don't pay any attention to what anyone says but come in at your earliest opportunity," wrote Casey Moran from Dawson to his friend George Rice in March 1897: "My God! it is appalling to hear the truth but nevertheless the world has never produced its equal before." And Burt Shuler, writing to a friend in early June assured him that "I have seen gold dust until it looks almost as cheap as sawdust." He tempered his exuberance a bit by giving his friend practical advice: "Take someone who understands boating and take no chances." Shuler, despite his gold-common-as-sawdust reference calculated to inspire the most sluggish man, hesitated to advise his friend to come: "The journey is not entirely one continued round of pleasure." But how could his friend resist when he learned that work at $15 daily was assured to stampeders who did not care to risk prospecting their own claims? A $15 wage in '97 was a princely stipend almost beyond the ken of an American worker--and certainly beyond his grasp in ordinary circumstances.[15]

Exaggerations?--no, not really, when examined in the spirit of the times. And Juneau's newspaper editor saw no reason to warn his readers to avoid being carried

away. How could Burt Shuler's friend hesitate, especially as another letter arrived in the same mail confirming that Shuler held a claim on Bonanza Creek and adding that Billy Leake's purchased claim on El Dorado "is supposed to be worth a million; there are 34 claims on the same creek which seem to be as good?" If a sober miner reported prospects of $34,000,000 on one creek and was believed by other Alaskans, is it any wonder that Klondike fever swept the world?[16]

The editor of the *San Francisco Chronicle* saw no reason to resist printing a letter from Dawson dispatched "by a prominent and wealthy young businessman of San Francisco to his brother" that glittered with rich details: "The excitement on the river is indescribable, and the output . . . almost beyond belief." Stories of huge gains "are substantiated by ocular demonstration . . . some of the stories are so fabulous that I am afraid to report them, for fear of being suspected of the infection." And the Klondike man was even able to confirm the reports of others on prevailing wages--cause enough for an exodus from poverty-ridden cities: "Labor is $15 a day and board, with 100 days' work guaranteed . . . men who worked for bits last year are now talking and showing thousands, and the air is full of millions."[17]

Since this letter appeared in the same *Chronicle* issue that reported the arrival of *Excelsior*, the first ship to reach the outside with Dawson miners and their well-filled pokes, it could be supported by local "ocular demonstration." And folks gawked at the dock as the 15 fortunate miners disembarked with their gold sacks, hurrying after them to hear their wonderful stories. When a reporter saw the scores of sacks valued at a reported $500,000 to $750,000 and heard the stories he could safely pass along the cheering news that "millions upon millions of virgin gold, according to the story, await the fortunate miner who has the hardihood and courage to penetrate into the unknown depths of the Yukon district."[18]

Key words and phrases seized on quite naturally by hurried writers contributed to developing myths and legends: "hardihood and courage . . . unknown depths." Something important is added here by the writers who endowed gold seekers with manly virtues. Thus it was that the public perceived that gold-seekers are not grasping profiteers, lazy men casting for the fast buck; nor were they anxious, unemployed family men willing to gamble for steady, high-paid work. Instead they were daring, brave adventurers willing to plunge into the unknown. Writers did no harm in perpetuating such images in Klondike stories. Reaching the Yukon would prove taxing enough for many hardy folks and sustaining existence over a harsh winter would be even more of a challenge for many.

The *Chronicle* followed its first *Excelsior* story with one repeating the advice received from returning miners: "Do not go unless you have good outfit, plenty of provisions and money enough to last a year." Travel presents difficulties "which stagger the average man." No one following events could miss the point that "dangers and hardships" faced any stampeders, nor that the rich ground was already occupied: wealth was available for those with "the money to buy claims and hire miners."[19]

But even a widespread acceptance of such warnings could not discourage hopefuls who figured that the vast northern region probably contained other Klondikes--as

indeed it did--and that they could find them. It was this anticipation of Klondike conditions existing elsewhere that turned considerable numbers of stampeders to the Copper River, Koyukuk, Cook Inlet, Kotzebue Sound, although the Klondike still remained the goal of most argonauts.

By July 17, only two days after the *Excelsior* news, San Franciscans were already on the move: "Working men quit their jobs and joined the procession for the long and tedious journey northward," proclaimed the *Chronicle*. As might be expected, Californians could not forbear comparisons with the great stampede that had lured so many thousands to its shores: "Not since the days of '49 . . . has there been such excitement in mining circles." The excitement in Seattle, when *Portland* arrived a day after the *Excelsior* with its complement of successful miners, was even more intense, turning the Puget Sound town "upside down" with a "delirium" of gold fever: "Policemen are resigning from the force, every street car man that can raise a stake has given notice to the company . . . men neglect their businesses and congregate in groups on the street in excited discussion."[20]

When careful men like Inspector Strickland of the Northwest Mounted Police, a *Portland* arrival at Seattle, offered hope to those thinking of trying their chances, many felt optimistic. Once again the matter of high wages was stressed: "The claims now staked out will afford employment to about 5,000 men . . . If a man is strong, healthy, and wants work, he can find employment at good wages." Strickland accurately reported that wages in mines had been $15 daily and in sawmills $10 over the 1896-97 winter, and that Dawson's population totalled 2,000 to 3,000 residents. This meant that at least a couple of thousand more could earn tremendous wages in 1897-1898, but a flood of 20,000 stampeders would certainly cause extensive unemployment.[21]

## Starvation Reports

Joe Ladue, justly acclaimed as "the founder of Dawson," was a trader and sawmill man with much to gain by the swelling of the town's population. He quickly perceived that enthusiasm was getting out of hand. "I am appalled at the prospect," he told newsmen. "Everybody seems to be gold mad, and if one-third of those who have talked about going to the Clondyke reach there death in its most horrible form will soon follow." Don't go at this season, he warned, winter was not far away when "privation and suffering is always the rule and not the exception."[22]

Ladue's cries triggered a debate that raged for months on the prospects of famine conditions over the 1897-98 winter, a controversy that did not finally end until Yukon River traffic reopened in spring '98. Concern over food supplies resulted in a number of projects and plans for the alleviation of forecasted distress. Some were sensible, like the Mounties' insistence that Chilkoot Pass travelers carry in plenty of grub. Others, like the Rev. Sheldon Jackson's promotion of a reindeer drive to Dawson were farcical and ill-conceived. But the starvation debate did underscore the greatest differences between the North and other regions of the West. There were no easy ways to service a district where climate impeded transportation so severely over a long season.

Exaggerated and false stories on Klondike conditions had proliferated in the nation's press by summer of '97. Editors pressed for colorful Klondike items did not discriminate. Thus when someone falsely reported the shooting of two thieves on the Chilkoot Trail to a Vancouver paper, other papers presented the story without reservation.[23] Reports that provisions would be short over the 1897-98 winter had substance because the trading companies knew what quantities were coming, yet the distinction between short supplies and certain famine was blurred by panicky reports. Trading companies had an interest in encouraging the traffic flow to the Yukon, yet would bear part of the burden if disaster struck. Healy in Dawson handled the matter much better than J.E Hansen, his Alaska Commercial Company rival who dashed frantically through Dawson's Front Street crying: "Go! Go! Flee for your lives!" Government officials joined in Hansen's alarm, but their unease was more understandable: an exodus from Dawson, even if unwarranted, was preferable to what might have occurred if starvation conditions came.[24]

If traders and government officials on the spot could not predict the future, the distant newspapers could not be more accurate. In September the *San Francisco Chronicle* assumed that the worst had already occurred and began taking credit for earlier editorial warnings: "The *Chronicle* wants no better attestation than its files that it told them not to go." In part, the paper was responding to general denunciations of the press for misleading readers to trigger a stampede into "the blackness of the long arctic night and the freeze of the long arctic winters" without food.[25]

A day later the *Chronicle* featured a story sent by correspondent William A. Ryan from *Charles H. Hamilton* enroute to Dawson. Passing the steamer *John J. Healy* coursing downriver with returning Klondikers sobered the passengers on *Hamilton*. "What're ye going to eat when yet get there?" called *Healy* passengers. Ryan and others had heard about the preponderance of whiskey landed at Dawson by *Weare* and condemned the North American Transportation and Trading Company. "But the criticism applies with equal force to each company. Avarice is the marked characteristic of both companies at St. Michael . . . it is nothing less than a crime for these transportation companies to scatter advertisements broadcast and bring so many people into the county."[26]

By January 1898 folks interested in the Klondike had access to much information from those who rushed in '97 and had then returned Outside. Sam Archer, for example, was a Seattle man who made no bones about the severity of the climate or the hard work packing into the country. His party took six weeks crossing the White Pass before building a boat on Lake Bennett and navigating the treacherous rapids on the upper Yukon. Archer and party carried their cargo around White Horse rapids because several lives had been lost already that season and many boats had been smashed.

Archer found conditions in Dawson tolerable, but deeply resented the reports of starvation fostered by sensational journalists because they created unnecessary anxiety among families of stampeders. Wildcat speculation on mining properties and the perjuries of locators who recorded claims that had not actually been prospected, created

much hysteria in Dawson. Too many folks pretended that their discoveries were of bonanza proportions; they lied in hope of selling out at an inflated price. "The Klondike is the worst country for lies and liars I ever saw." Lying about a claim's prospects was understandable, but Archer marveled at lies about smaller matters and events occurring Outside. It was said that Jack Dalton died on the trail; that Swiftwater Bill Gates got his feet frozen; and that the U.S. and Japan were at war.[27]

Many rumors originated outside as well. The departure of the U.S. revenue cutter *Bear* from San Francisco for the relief of whalers stranded at Point Barrow triggered a story of "another object in view besides the one of humanity." Pundits argued that "somewhere in the frozen north, somewhere in that charmed arctic circle whose floes have always attracted so many daring explorers, there exists a region which abounds in little else than gold." Another rumor was that highly placed government officials had instructed *Bear's* commander to locate claims for them. The *Seattle Times* believed such stories must be taken with a grain of salt, yet pondered the alacrity of the government in fitting out *Bear*:

> It will be remembered that a great deal more haste was employed . . . than in sending the relief outfit to alleged sufferers at Dawson City. It will also be remembered that some officers made exceedingly quick journeys across the country to go on the expedition . . . perhaps because of a vision of golden Eldorado.[28]

It soon became obvious that the Klondike discovery, however much it might be misrepresented, was momentous. Rather quickly the event began building a force capable of sweeping thousands of individuals around the world into its vortex. Few events cause the kind of impact that triggers a mass movement, but the Klondike stirred the kind of frenzy that induced thousands of people to uproot themselves.

## Notes
## Chapter 2

1. Herbert L. Heller, Ed., *Sourdough Sagas* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1967), 93.

2. Ibid., 49-51.

3. J.C. Moore et. al. to U.S. Marshall, June 6, 1888. NA. RG 60. Letters Received.

4. Healy -- Adney correspondence, *passim*. Dartmouth College. Stefansson Collection; Healy to Porter, March 24, 1891; Crow et. al. to Porter, March 28, 1891. Alaska State Archives. RG 505. Box 4397. Letterbook.

5. *Mining Record*, November 13, 1895.

6. Ibid.

7. James Ducker, "Navigability Study for the Upper Yukon Region Alaska," (Anchorage: Bureau of Land Management, 1983), 234-36.

8. *Yukon Press*, January 11, 1894.

9. *Seattle Post-Intelligence*, April 18, 1895, quoted in the *Juneau Record*, April 8, 1895.

10. Melody Webb, *The Last Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 89-91.

11. *Alaska Mining Record*, September 15, 1897.

12. Ibid, April 8, 1896.

13. Allen Wright, *Prelude to Bonanza* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing Co., 1976), 299-300.

14. *Alaska Mining Record*, February 10, 1897.

15. *Alaska Mining Record*, July 7, 1897.

16. Ibid.

17. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 15, 1897.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., July 16, 1897.

20. Ibid., July 17, 1897.

21. Ibid., July 18, 1897.

22. Ibid.

23. *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1897.

24. Pierre Berton, *Klondike Fever: The Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 178.

25. *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 10, 1897.

26. Ibid., September 11, 1897.

27. *Seattle Times*, January 13, 1898.

28. *Seattle Times*, January 18, 1898.

# Chapter 3
## The Stampeders

The world hungered for news from the glittering towns near the great gold fields. What people wanted to hear most were confirmations of the region's mineral wealth--particularly reports of new gold discoveries and favorable accounts of the community's well-being. Further confirmation of the existence of bountiful gold answered a deep need. Easily accessible sources of wealth promoted optimism among would-be stampeders and investors and even among nonparticipants aware of the Klondike's benefit to the economy. Dawson's well-being was also very significant to those who worried about family members or friends in the north. Thus, news from Dawson was eagerly sought--any news, trivial or significant would do, and the public's heart opened equally to either stories of high jinks or those of stern purpose among the argonauts.

### Returning Miners Report

Stories of all kinds abounded. No one doubted that high-minded, steadfast prospectors would fare better in the pursuit of gold than careless plungers, but reports on either class were fascinating. Who could resist the thrills of hearing about Swiftwater Bill Gates and his ilk--those prodigal spenders who defied copybook maxims yet gained great fortunes? Men and women who struggled every day of their lives for a modest living were excited by characters like Gates, whose triumph fulfilled a romantic need.

But what was to be believed of Dawson with so many conflicting stories? Did one who planned to go, or to invest, or who was involved only in cheering for another, have any reasons for optimism? On any day, in any city, a couple of pennies for a newspaper provided much food for thought. Edgar Mizner, one of a famous San Francisco family, and a Dawson employee of the Alaska Commercial Company, told of unlimited wealth. He calculated that the gold field extended 300 miles and expected $5,000,000 to be taken out in 1897. Some estimated $10,000,000, "but I have noticed a local inclination to brag," wrote Mizner for a San Francisco newspaper, "and I want to be entirely within the facts in any information I send out from this camp of marvels." Dawson reminded him of Tombstone and the California camps Bret Harte celebrated in stories, but this one showed better qualities. There were boisterousness, gambling, and dance halls by the score, but fair mining laws and the presence of Mounties prevented much of the fighting over claims that erupted in earlier camps.[1]

Gestures spoke louder than words as the excitement over one returning Klondiker in New York indicated. James D. Clements knew how to stir up folks. As the "El Dorado King" he checked into the Continental Hotel with his wife and two children and chatted easily with newsmen who were awed by his wife's bracelet of large gold nuggets. Clements told how he had devised the first tramway over the Chilkoot, showed three caribou skin sacks stuffed with $30,000 in gold, and expressed full faith in the

Klondike's long-term prosperity. Clements, Clarence Berry, Frank Phiscator, and Anton Standen were the El Dorado discoverers and among the region's first monied men. But he said that he would not go through the suffering he experienced again unless certain of a big find.[2]

Clements moved to the Lafayette Hotel in New York before Christmas and displayed there a glittering Christmas tree decorated with nuggets, $20 gold pieces, and presents valued at $50,000. Visitors were given nuggets from the tree for souvenirs because Clements, who estimated his fortune at $2,000,000, was not a miserly fellow. The Christmas tree had been conceived in a dream experienced by Clements a year earlier after eating a cold hunk of caribou with his fingers while celebrating the nativity. He vowed then that he would treat himself and family to just such a tree if he survived with his wealth. Proudly, Clements told everyone how he had quit his job as a brakeman on the Southern Pacific in March 1896, then "discovered" the Chilkoot Pass after disembarking at Dyea.[3]

Some returning gold kings uttered sober, practical warnings. Clarence Berry's success had attracted much attention, particularly because his wife had been with him at Fortymile when the Klondike strike news reached the camp. The Berrys had happened to be at the right place at the right time, but Clarence, the employer of many less fortunate miners, questioned the plans being formulated by stampeders. Bachelors could take their chances in '98, but "I would not advise any married man to go to the Klondike in anticipation of being able to earn money to send back to his family." This was sensible advice. Most stampeders were able to find work when they did not find gold, but few earned enough to support households Outside. Berry was dismayed to hear of families selling their homes to raise money for the trip: "They will make a big mistake in doing this. There is a chance that a man may remain there several years without striking anything, and on top of that comes the danger of starvation. In a way, I think that the people are excited without cause." Berry's distaste for the excitement extended to a weariness with being one of the most celebrated men in San Francisco. As he looked at a stack of letters and telegrams arriving at the rate of 100 daily, and learned that 1,500 people called at the Grand Hotel hoping for a chat, he grew irritated and tried to keep out of sight. "The thing is something terrible," he complained. "It is practically impossible for me to go to my meals without being interrupted." On the street he was accosted at every step "by people who pretend to know me, and who invariably give me the glad hand."[4]

Charles E. Meyers of Illinois, a veteran southwestern prospector before trying Alaska, considered Clarence Berry too optimistic. Meyers had found gold, too, but he insisted that newcomers had no chance at all. Old-timers found the gold because of their knowledge. "People are very foolish to go there now. They will be sure to suffer very much. Many of them will die. There is really no way for them to live."[5]

Even men who had not been North could advise as if they were experts. "Don't hurry," said U.S. Senator George Shoup of Idaho, an experienced mining man. History shows that "big money is to be made by people who follow the miners and speculate in claims . . . what the pioneers bring back is insignificant compared with the fortunes

made by later arrivals." Of course, Shoup was addressing himself to monied men so his wisdom had little impact on the masses who *knew* they had to be early on the ground; their hopes rested in finding--not speculating.[6]

## Journalism and the Klondike

The acclaim successful miners experienced in 1897 illustrated the public's fixation with the distant North. As the drama of the Klondike discoveries unfolded it is possible to trace the spread of the excitement across the nation. Charges were made at the time--and have been repeated since--against newpapers' role in exaggerating reports of wealth, making light of difficulties facing stampeders, and in other ways encouraging a mass migration. Among the flood of information published in newspapers, magazines, and guidebooks were some inaccuracies and exaggerations, but fewer than might be expected. A review of newspapers published in Chicago, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle does not show irresponsible coverage of northern events.

Public interest in the Klondike was very high for good reasons. Gold stories appealed to readers because they suggested that quick fortunes could be won by ordinary folks--which was true enough. Equally appealing was the lure of the exotic. For the first time since the acquisition of Alaska by the United States a wave of interest in the North erupted. Quite suddenly, everyone wanted to know about the Yukon region and the most commonplace facts regarding climate, distances, and events fascinated them. On the whole writers sought the best information on hand in reference books or through interviews with northern travelers and passed it along to their readers. As with any major new event the press helped sustain interest through lively coverage, but the stampede could hardly be called a newspaper-inspired event any more than any other newsworthy national or international episode.

One of the appealing aspects of the journalistic coverage of events was determined by geography and climate. Reporters flocking North shared the rigors of the trail with stampeders and readily fell in with the spirit of their quest. They were not detached observers of the mass movement but participants, and most sent pretty lively copy back to their editors.

## Shipping

Klondike bustle on the Seattle waterfront was obvious in 1897-98 as ships readied to sail north. On any day residents could view "the now familiar every-day scene of a big boat loaded indiscriminately almost with a teaming assortment of freight and passengers for the gold fields," a newspaper observed. It was expected that the pace would quicken from February '98 as parties from the east reached the Puget Sound port. Seattle transportation companies could handle 15,000 passengers each month. Ships available on the sound and an estimated 40 other ocean and river vessels under construction would be augmented by vessels expected around the Horn from eastern ports. Estimates of 100,000 gold seekers departing from Seattle created an optimistic

mood among skippers, although some guessed that the tide of stampeders might hit 300,000. Each passenger would have about a ton and a half of supplies which meant that an immense fleet of Yukon boats and barges would be required. Riverboats would average two round trips, carrying 200 tons of cargo; some would push up to three barges carrying 200 tons each ahead. Statisticians were kept busy figuring the traffic; one steamboat man concluded that 375 vessels would be needed to insure every Klondiker three squares a day for a year and a half.[7]

New ocean ships were readied for the '98 Klondike traffic. At a shipyard in Philadelphia, *Ohio*, *Indiana*, *Illinois*, and *Pennsylvania*, once the mainstays of passenger service between Liverpool and Philadelphia, were altered for stampeders and northern cargoes. Smaller vessels were readied as well, and steam yachts from the Atlantic Coast were shipped by flatcar to the Pacific Coast.

After shipwrecks on the northern run called attention to the unseaworthiness of some vessels, the collector of customs began restricting passenger loads on ships from Puget Sound. In San Francisco, newspapers called for similar regulation. Perhaps nothing could be done about heavy freight loads, editors argued, but passengers should be protected from their indifference to good sense. Ships were wallowing out of the bay that should not carry passengers. "Their cargoes alone had sunk them to the line of their port holes," and, though listing, their decks swarmed with men, women, and boys. "There were three times as many as the lifeboats could carry," wrote a report of one ship. If the government could not regulate shipowners then, a writer said, insurance companies should refuse policies unless safety precautions were taken.[8]

Some of the northbound ships had long and unusual histories. *Eliza Anderson*, known as the oldest vessel on Puget Sound, was a side-wheeler built in 1830. After serving for many decades, the vessel rested in a boneyard at Olympia for 16 years, as her timbers bleached and movables were removed by vandals. Returned to service again she sank in Seattle's harbor and lay at the bottom for a year before being raised and readied for northern service. It is not remarkable that the northern voyage of the *Eliza Anderson* proved to be long and unpleasant for its passengers.

The *Polly* or *Politkofskey*, had been a Russian gunboat at Sitka and was acquired by the U.S. government at the time of the Alaska purchase. Later the Port Blakely Mill Company used her as a tug on Puget Sound. With the Klondike rush, owners dismantled and remodelled the old boat, removing boilers, machinery, and superstructure, for service as a barge on the Yukon.

The famed goldship *Portland*, formerly *Haitian Republic*, had been in the West Indian trade before moving to Puget Sound for coastal trade service. Smuggling activities brought her to the attention of the government. Seizure, condemnation, and sale followed. The North American Transportation and Trading Company renamed the ship to obscure her lawless past and fitted her for northern service.[9]

Shipowners, desperate for vessels, scoured the boneyards for possibilities. Fifty-year-old hulls presented some dangers on the runs to St. Michael and Kotzebue Sound, but there were great profits to be made. Some wary passengers insisted on inspecting the hold of old ships, assuming that if no signs of leaking were visible that all was well.

One shipper covered the hold with tar paper, installed half-inch flooring, and scattered dirt and stone as "ballast" to avoid close scrutiny.

Seattle newspapers warned against such old hulks. Most "floating coffins" preparing to leave Puget Sound had been brought up from San Francisco or Portland, according to the *Seattle Times*, "and Seattle is not very far behind either one of them." The newspaper dispatched its own team of "inspectors" to the waterfront and warned against the *Guardian* of Seattle: "while laying in port, calmly and steadily at her dock, she is kept dry by her sheathing . . . this will not avail her when she gets to rocking at sea."[10]

By July 1897 many businessmen were considering better means of transport to the Yukon. Capt. Charles M. Goodall had shipped livestock to Juneau for conveyance by Jack Dalton over the Dalton Trail and believed that this route from Pyramid Harbor to Fort Selkirk would become the major entry. He did not believe that the proposed Chilkoot tramways with connections to steamer services from Lake Lindeman would be successful because handling and portage costs would be too high. He also was dubious about the various railroad schemes because approvals and construction would take too long.[11]

Whatever the uncertainties of transport, the stampeders of '98 headed North. Those who read widely about the Klondike might have avoided some pitfalls and frustrations by preparing well and anticipating conditions, but their care did not necessarily eliminate all risks and woes. Success in the Klondike turned on good luck, sturdy character, sufficient resources, wise choices of transport, and particular conditions encountered en route. Stampeders whose preparations, resources, and abilities were inadequate were, naturally, more likely to be misdirected by erroneous information or the lack of information, and to be defrauded by transport companies and others. It is no wonder that many stampeders gave up before reaching the Klondike and returned home, and others, abandoning their Klondike dreams, scattered throughout the North in hope of striking riches elsewhere.

## Who were the Stampeders?

Among those lured North were the obscure; the well-known; the impoverished; the wealthy; those who were well-prepared and those woefully ill-prepared; men fleeing from the law or their families; men keen to uphold the law and provide support for their families; and men whose wives and children accompanied them. Of the cast of thousands participating in the great exodus we know the individual stories of a remarkable number because many kept diaries, wrote letters that have been preserved, or published accounts of their experiences; and because a small army of journalists joined the stampede. Dispatches from newsmen and celebrities on contract proliferated in the newspapers of the United States, Canada, and Europe, but space was always made for newsy letters sent by ordinary folks.

Stampeders had many experiences in common. Problems of outfitting, marine transportation, and trail travel were similar for all stampeders, and their vicissitudes

after reaching the gold fields (if they did) fell into one of several major patterns. Of course, stampeders were still unique as individuals, even if they were components in a mass movement.

To understand the appeal of the Klondike and Alaska to most stampeders, it is only necessary to recall the economic conditions of the 1890s. In 1893 a sharp recession slowed the economy and caused a high level of unemployment, a situation that had not been mended by 1897-98. If economic reality was grim for many people, their expectation of fulfilling the old American dream of improving their lot dramatically still bloomed freshly. Thus, psychologically, they were ready to uproot themselves and make other sacrifices to grasp at fortune.

Marshall Bond, a wealthy, young college-educated man whose father made a fortune in mining, was in Seattle when *Portland* docked after its historic voyage. Bond craved adventure as much as the notion of seeking gold, which was part of the family tradition. With no need to wait, because money for necessities was no problem, Bond and his party boarded the *Queen* in San Francisco just a week after he had watched the *Portland's* passengers arrive.[12]

Joseph Gibson started off in '97 too, leaving his wife and two sons behind. Before long they joined him at Dawson. The Gibson family later moved to Fairbanks and remained despite that they did not succeed in mining or even in marriage.[13]

Like Marshall Bond, Kirk E. Johnson of Wisconsin was a bachelor. His poleman's job for the telephone exchange bored him, and he hoped to do better in the North. Before setting out he wrote about his expectations to his mother: "I don't think gold is easy to pick up. I expect to work and earn a living for us both. There is no more danger than now in falling off a pole."[14]

An Illinois man, Ed Kingsley, tried the Valdez Glacier route to the Copper River country in '98. Kingsley gave up after one season of hardship and disappointment, as did Alfred McMichael after a short stay in Dawson and a start of mining near Nation City. McMichael was one of the witnesses of the tragic avalanche on Chilkoot Pass that ended the dreams of more than 60 stampeders.

Among the thousands of stampeders were many old-time miners. C.H. Gale of Sonoma was one of these. At age 60 "Old Hank" still yearned for the gold he had been chasing and "since he was able to distinguish colors." He was a Forty-niner, then stampeded to Kimberly in South Africa for diamonds and elsewhere for gold. He sold some of his California interests to finance his trip even though his Jackson Hill mine had given him $60,000 over the previous eight years. "Why go?" friends asked. "Because there is plenty of gold there," he answered, "and it does not cost 60 per cent to get it out, as it does here in California." Old Hank said nothing about "adventure" or "irresistible lures," yet seemed clearly to relish the novelty and expected hardship: "I expect to rough it, of course. A part of the time I will live on rabbit tracks, and that's thin diet, you bet, but I know how to draw my belt tight about me when grub is scarce."[15]

Most stampeders dipped into savings or borrowed money to make their trips, but others tried, with varying degrees of success, to work their way to the gold fields. Men

took jobs as sailors or salesmen or offered services to newspapers and others to get their initial grubstakes. Singing for one's supper had a Klondike variation when Col. Fred Wilson, a 60-year-old minstrel man, earned travel money over the winter of 1897-98 by performing. First he wrote a song, had it published, and set out from New York City for upstate New York. At Elk and Masonic lodges and elsewhere he entertained with music, stories, and comedy and sold copies of his Klondike song.[16]

Klondike madness triggered some desperate acts. James Cullen, office boy for the National Security Company in New York, took $2,000 of his boss' money to the bank for deposit, deposited $1,000, and disappeared. He had often been heard to say that no one should start for the Klondike unless he had at least $1,000. "The boy had the Klondike fever in an exaggerated form," observed his employer.[17]

Another form of desperation resulted from disagreements among marital and business partners. Some partnerships broke apart. There were even some fatal results, as when farmer George Schofield of San Jose quarreled with his wife because he wanted to sell their homestead. She refused; he choked her, then went for his shotgun. Hired man Daniel Dutcher intervened with his rifle and shot Schofield dead.[18]

If you were lucky someone else might pay your fare. Two men benefitted from a Klondike contest sponsored by the *New York Telegram*. Two hundred candidates competed for two prizes consisting of a year's outfit and all transportation expenses. Newspaper readers voted for their favorites, and the winners, F.A. Louis and R.C. Dodge, represented organizations that put a major effort into their election. Louis, a fireman, got 299,088 votes while Dodge, a railroad conductor, polled 267,792.[19]

Some groups included individuals who were caught up in the general Klondike hysteria. A party of 48 German mechanics from New York set off for Seattle after a joyous parade through the city on three beer wagons displaying banners inscribed "Auf noch Clondyke." The men, who wore fur coats and carried revolvers, presented an agreeable spectacle to bystanders. They were a jolly lot, singing folksongs of their Fatherland as they toasted their gold future in pilsner, then, after stuffing themselves with liverwurst and kartoffel salad at Fritz Klein's saloon, continued by beer wagon to the rail station. Organizers had only collected $200 from each man, a low cost for getting to Circle with nine months of provisions. Before very long the German argonauts lost their joyous thrust. A fire in one of their railroad cars erupted at Glencoe, Ontario, destroying $12,000 in fur garments, mukluks, picks, shovels, dynamite, pickled herring, gaesseburst, limburger cheese, 14 barrels of sauerkraut, and other arctic supplies. Railroad officials uncoupled the supply car but would not permit the men to rescue any provisions because custom seals had been placed on the car. Before legal formalities could be overcome and water applied the car was demolished, leaving a "smoking, steaming mountain of truck that smelled like a second avenue restaurant behind a saloon during lunch hours."[20]

The Germans went on to Chicago where their treasurer advised them that the expedition's coffers were empty. August Dinger sent a telegram to New York, "Klondike is musgespieit and the railroad is verdammt. Send me $50 to come home." While party members believed that a custom officer's cigar had ignited their supplies

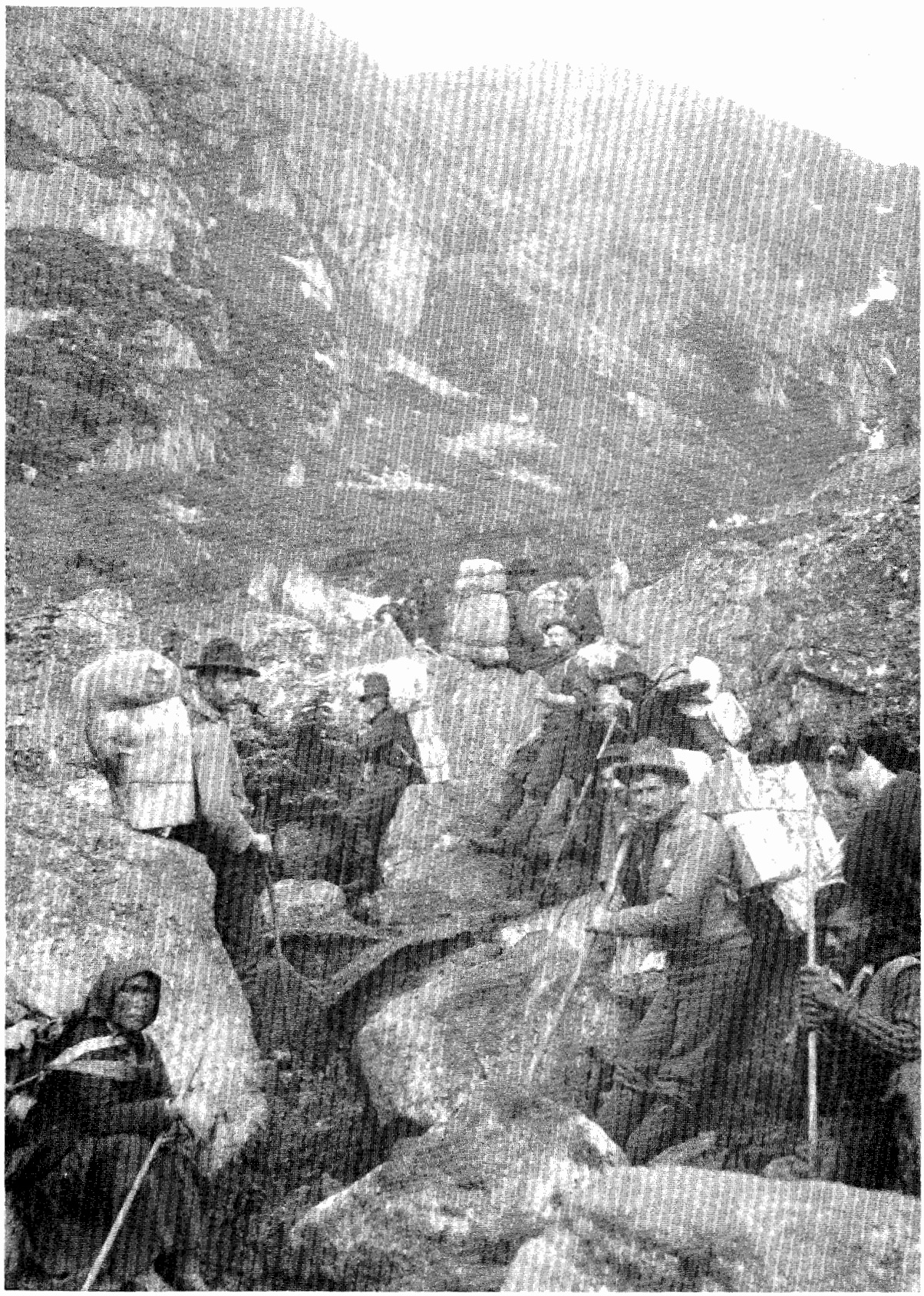
and hoped for compensation from the railroad, they could not afford a wait in Chicago. Forty-three other messages similar to that of Dinger's were sent to New York. With such a general collapse of expectations, sorrow and frustration reigned among the Germans' families. Mrs. Walter Haferborn, however, was happy. She had married Haferborn the day before his departure and resented her short honeymoon. Also pleased was Lena Haferborn, Walter's sister, the betrothed of stampeder Theodore Schepp. Lena wanted to marry before the expedition started again--in the unlikely event that a fresh start could be made. Earlier Theodore had argued that there was no time to marry, now fate had given them a second chance. "There is plenty of ice there," Lena advised him, "and the Klondike will not spoil."[21]

Stampeders included those eager to provide recreation for miners. Half the gambling fraternity of Tacoma started north to join those from San Francisco and elsewhere who were concerned about the lack of recreation opportunities in Dawson. "If the successful miners do not part with a good share of their wealth over the gaming table," a newsman commented, "it will not be the fault of the knights of the green cloth now speeding northwards." Gamblers were not narrow in their interests. "King" John Malone had the backing of a New York syndicate authorizing him to invest in mines as well as games of chance. Malone was a veteran stampeder who "has been in every boom or mining excitement since the first sailboat was built west of the Mississippi River."[22]

Tom Eckhart of Seattle's Union Club led the parade of gamblers from that city because police had recently closed him down after a player whined about a $5,000 faro loss. Police had confiscated much of Eckhart's equipment, but he bought more. Since Eckhart "is an old Leadville gambler and has the reputation of being the straightest man that ever sat behind a table in Seattle," he expected to do well. He would call his Dawson place "the Union Club, which will certainly make the Klondike more homelike for many of the prominent business, political and professional men who have gone to Alaska from Seattle." Bill Langdon and other gamblers left too on *Portland's* return voyage: "About the only gamblers left in the city are the Chinese, and they would not prosper should they go to the Klondike."[23]

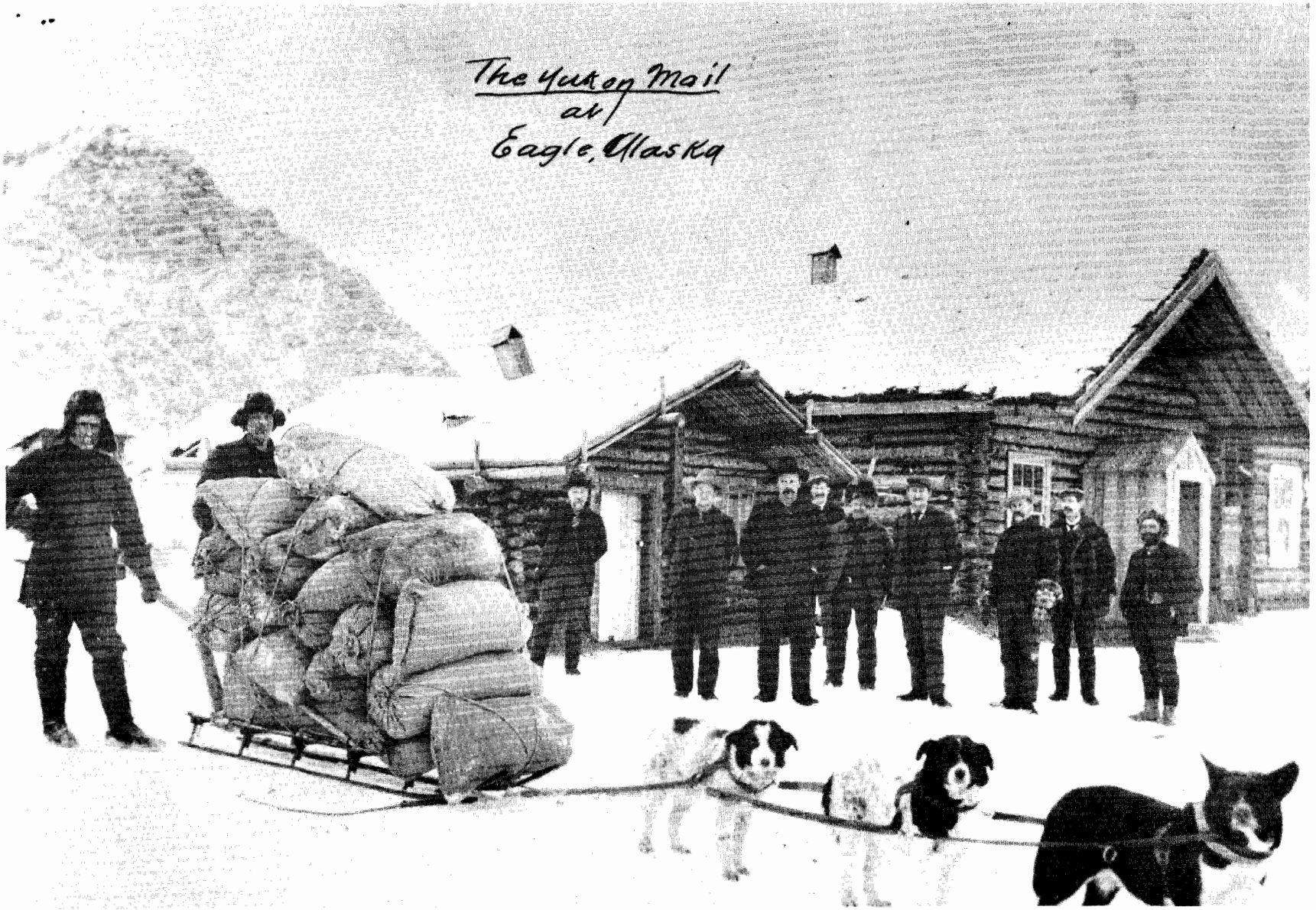
Con men in Seattle and elsewhere caught the spirit of the stampede. "Rebel George" Knowlton, a well-known gold brick vendor and all-around confidence man introduced himself to Jacob Haver, who was outfitting for the Klondike. Knowlton described his scheme for dredging on the Yukon and flourished some gold nuggets from the Stewart River. Wisely, Haver got a second opinion from a veteran prospector who doubted Knowlton's scheme and questioned the authenticity of his nuggets. Police were notified and arrested the con man.[24]

Most stampeders left for the North with the minimum of provisions and equipment, but some expeditions were heavily financed. A party of former military and naval officers took along a dredging steamer built by one of its members, 60 tons of mining machinery, 40 horses and 40 bob sleighs, and eighteen month's provisions. The prospectors planned to ascend the Stikine and work on the Stewart, Pelly, and other rivers. Another large enterprise, the Alaska Klondike Cooperative Mining expedition,



Packers on Dyea Trail

Alaska State Library

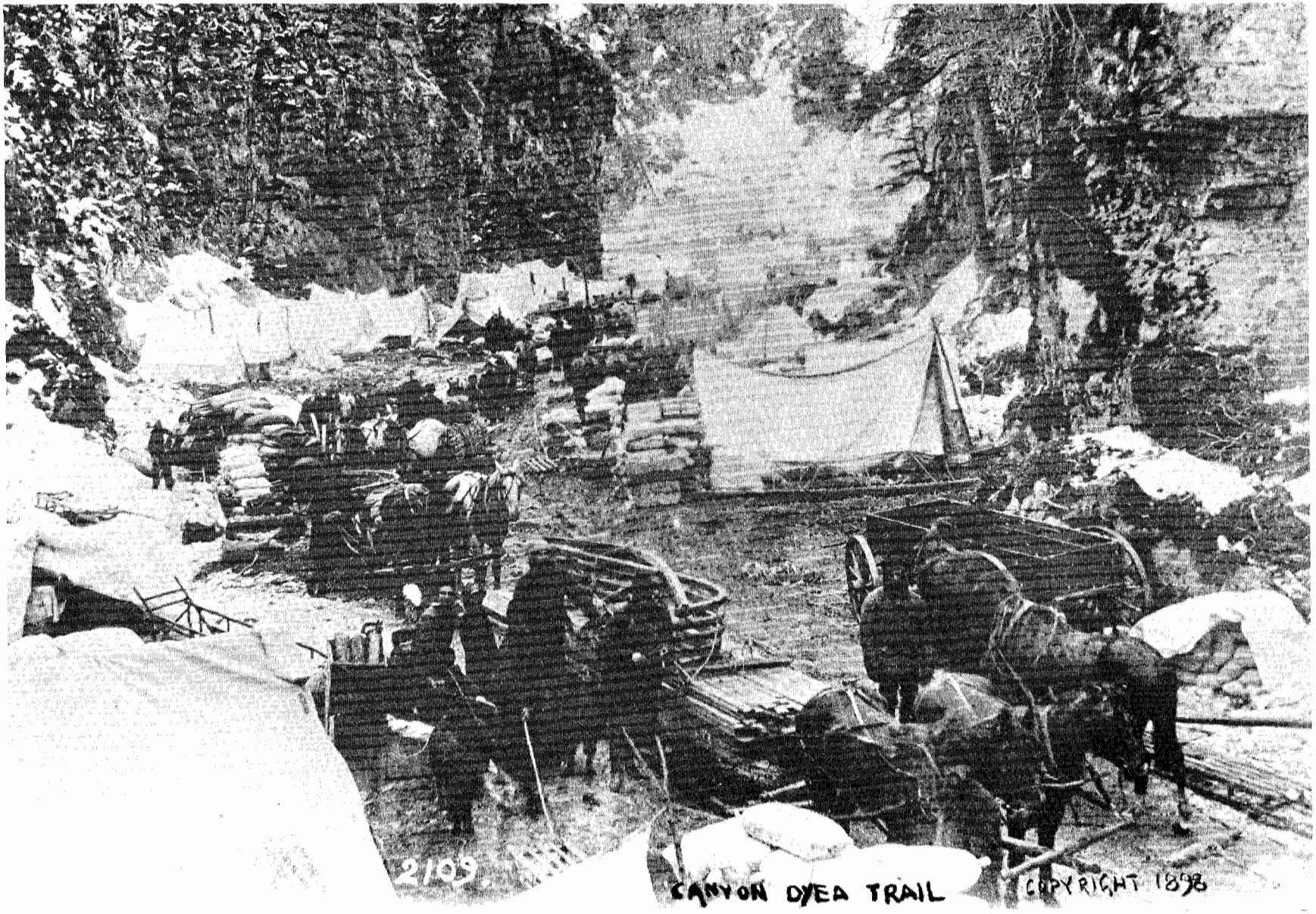



Yukon mail at Eagle

University of Alaska

Drift mining

University of Alaska

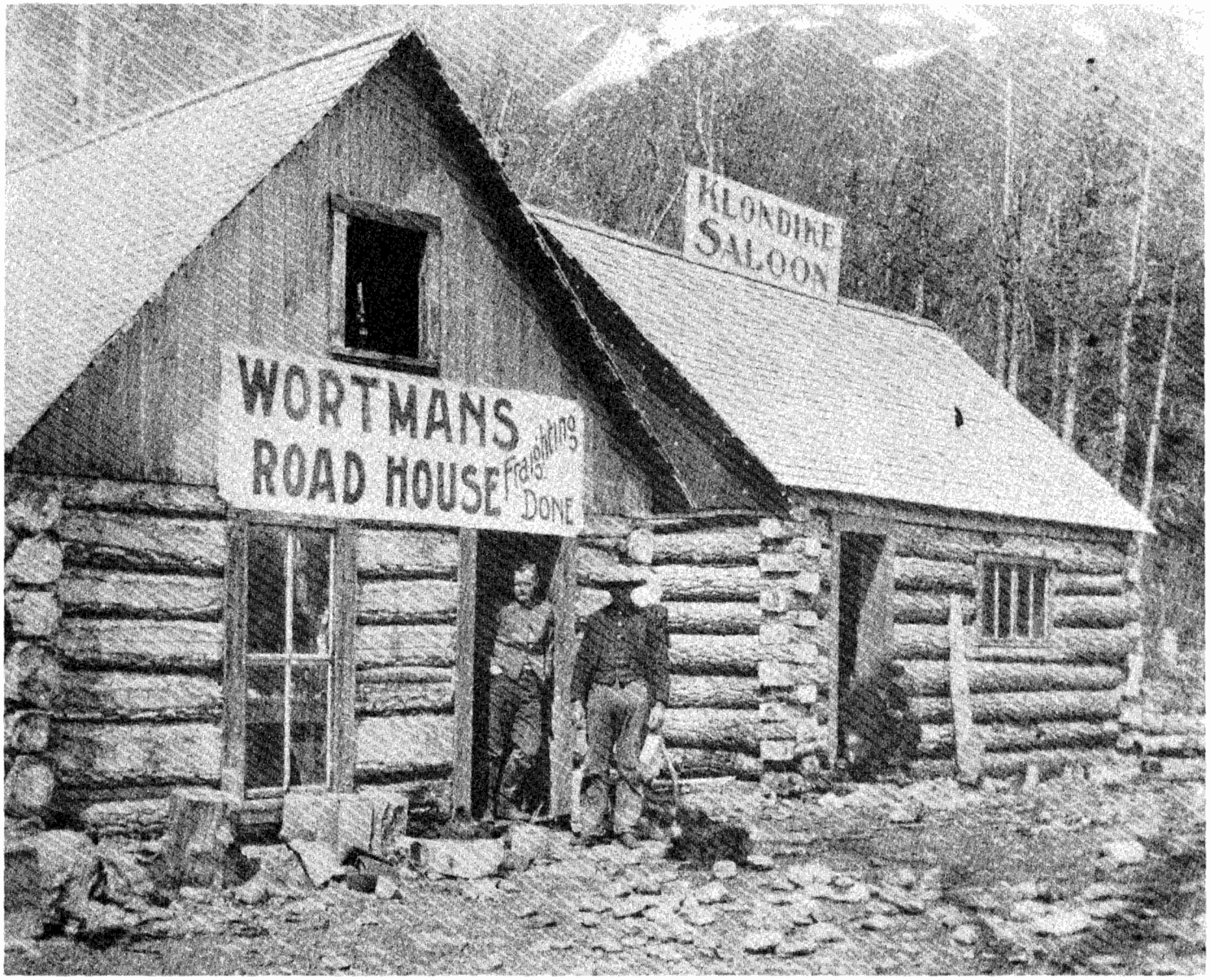



Dyea Trail, 1898

University of Alaska

Natives at roadhouse at the junction of Copper and Tonsina rivers, 1903

National Archives




Wortman's Roadhouse

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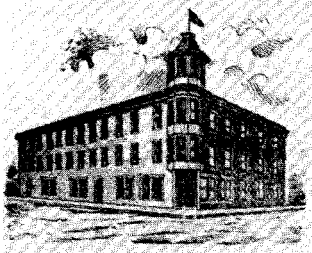


# Fifth Avenue Hotel

AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN

—J. WESLEY YOUNG, PROPRIETOR—

Skagway, Alaska, June 29 1901

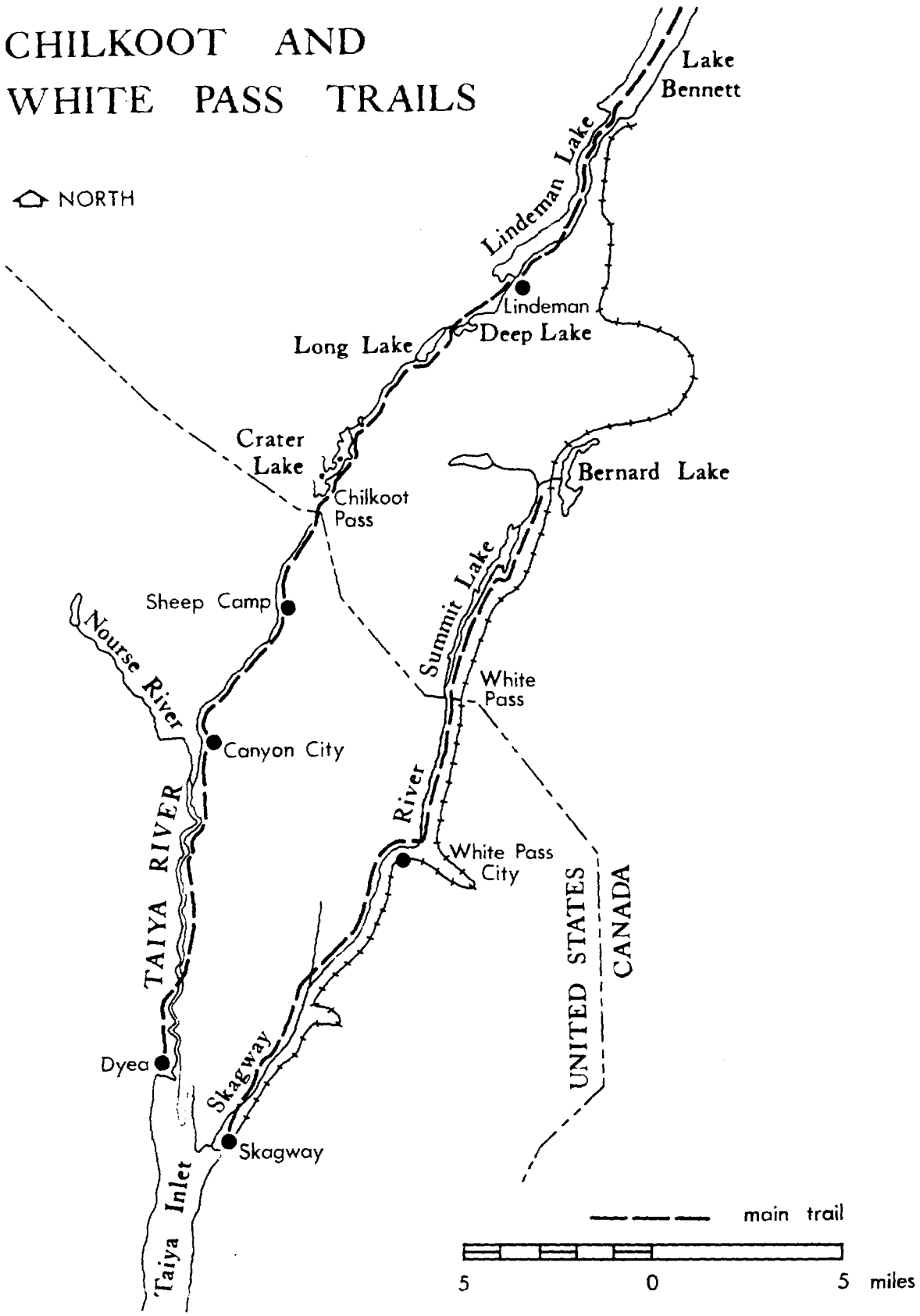
My Dear Mother,

I wrote you on the boat last night and it is on the way back now. We arrived here just 30 minutes too late to catch the train so have to lose a day here. The Prop of this hotel is an old Rampart man and an old friend of mine. Have played in Luck all the way through, got a 2/3 rate to Dawson and it paid me $25.00. We had a fine trip up, no rough weather and a good crowd on board. This place is almost deserted & simply a transfer point for Dawson and the Yukon River points. Get a good view from here of the Bay & can see five steamers from where I am sitting now.

Most all of the people have gone to Fairbanks. A party of fifteen Rampart people passed through two days ago bound inland. Some I missed them. Have learned a good deal of news however. Bill Faulkner sold his interest in What Cheer Bar for $10,000. that it was

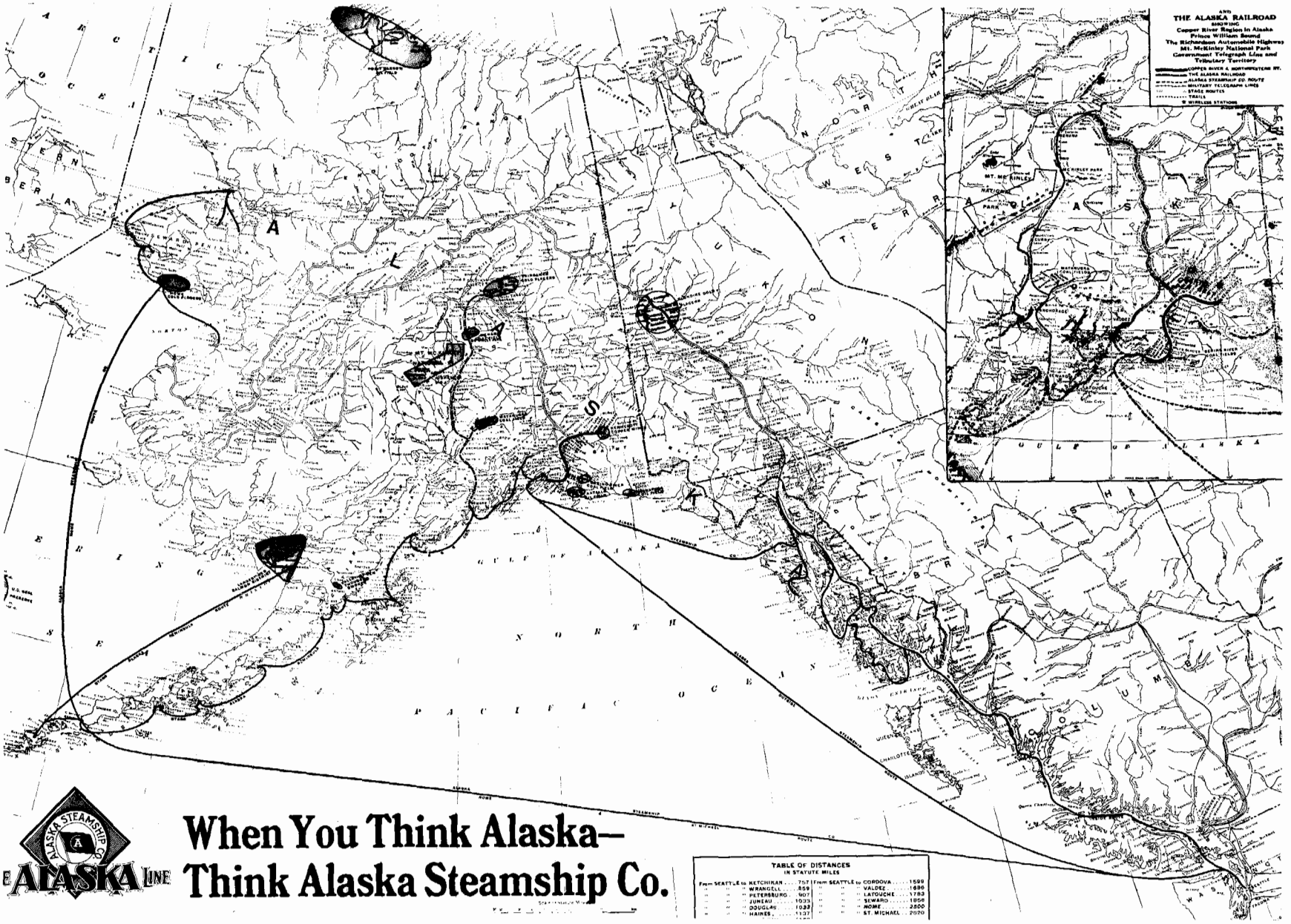
Letter to mother from prospector at Skagway

University of Alaska




Chilkoot and White Pass trails

National Park Service




Alaska Steamship Company map of Alaska mineral areas

Alaska State Library

Soapy Smith's gang, shortly after the leader's death in July 1898

Alaska State Library

was formed by 60 individuals who put up $500 each. They purchased two bucket dredges, a sawmill, a large metallic gold pan, and two boilers and engines for a steamer to be constructed on the Stikine River. While some members moved towards the Klondike from the Stikine, others prospected in the Stikine region.[25]

Some travelers planned exploration as well as prospecting. Two old-timers, Felix Seghezza and D.R. de Simone, left New York in midwinter to survey the Ashcroft, British Columbia route. Their mapping would open up unexplored country, establish the superiority of winter over summer travel, using dogs and sleds, and result in new gold discoveries. "We intend to combine practical exploring with a scientific study of the geological, the floral and general conditions of the country," Seghezza told newsman, "we shall not neglect to prospect." The men entrained for Vancouver and Ashcraft, then Quesnelle by wagon road and by trail along the Fraser River. Whether the wealthy scientific adventurers achieved any of their goals is not known.[26]

Inventive minds set to work on easing the way and making profits on the unique mass movement. A Chicago company projected an electric sleigh service from the Yukon headwaters to Dawson and was willing to accept money from investors. Sleighs furnished with upholstered berths and electricity for heating and lighting would carry contented passengers at 60 miles per hour along the frozen river. The first such trip was expected to be comparatively difficult, so the sleigh would carry "a number of men who will smooth over the rough places, and after the pilot becomes reacquainted with the road a fast trip will be possible." Individuals who preferred to travel independently could purchase small sleighs propelled by a motor, capable of taking a prospector "anywhere he may desire on the ice." Each such vehicle would be fitted with a motor-driven diamond drill which "can be driven fifty feet through the ice, and in this way bars and placer ground only accessible in the summer and at lower water can even be prospected in midwinter. If the diamond drill indicates gold in quantities, the prospector can stake off his claims." For both transport and prospecting the company's product would certainly have benefitted miners, but, unfortunately, production planned by winter 1897-98 was not realized.[27]

The electric sleigh-diamond drill machine was too ambitious a scheme for the day's technology, but its promoter was trying to answer obvious needs. Miners called on inventors to eliminate one of their most vexing tasks by providing a means of melting ice and frozen gravel by a more expeditious method than that of wood fires. A clever inventor was certain to make his fortune and the fortunes of thousands of others by some simple and cheap melting process. Finding gold was no problem, miners assured newsmen, but thawing ground at the bottom of shafts delayed their dreams. Inventors responded with a great variety of equipment although no effective machine was developed in the early Klondike development. C.J. Berry did start using steam points for thawing at Dawson in 1898 but the process was expensive and not widely employed. When dredge operations became extensive the need for a low-cost thawing system led to further experiments. In 1917 an engineer demonstrated that cold water points could be used at less cost and higher efficiency than steam points.

## Departures to the North

From 1897 through 1900, and in later seasons when the latest gold excitement sparked an exodus, the waterfronts of Seattle, San Francisco, and other Pacific coast cities presented lively scenes. On July 28, 1897, the famed *Excelsior* departed for its return voyage north after bringing down the first of the "Klondike millionaires" and the news that had swept the world. Needless to say, the ship was packed and the Mission Street pier was thronged. Some 20,000 folks turned out in the sunshine to either say good-by to relatives and friends or simply to experience more fully the joyful fever that held the city and the nation in its grip.

The Golden Gate flew open wide
As from her dock the boat did glide--
'Mid shouts and tears, old shoes and rice--
And from her peak flew this device:
"Excelsior."

The first party of argonauts was leaving for the Yukon, taking with them the affection and envy of those who remained. Cheers echoed after every man and woman who boarded the ship, as cargo handlers weighed luggage, then hoisted it aboard. Some pieces of luggage were tied with rope, others were strapped, and some were done up in canvas sacks, in which the owners proposed to sleep when they reached their destination. Mackintoshes and heavy coats were more commonly carried by passengers than fur coats, and everyone seemed to be packing firearms and ammunition. It is likely, a newsman wrote, "that the game in the country will be at least scared to death if not killed outright."

Photographers snapped the scenes continuously. Loud cheers erupted whenever an argonaut was presented with farewell gifts. Bouquets of flowers and flags vied with gilded horseshoes as the most popular presentations.

Little bits of descension did not dampen the enthusiasm of the good-natured throng. In fact, they rather enjoyed the flurry of excitement when one passenger, the first to have boarded, showed pensiveness, then extreme agitation as he commanded the recovery of his baggage, by then stored deeply in the hold. When flustered cargo handlers found his possessions the man stormed down the gangplank, refusing to answer the question hurled from all quarters: "Why?" "Why?" "Why?" Well, he had his reasons, but never mind, let the joyous show go on.

The arrival of revenue officers who treaded up the gangway and down into the ship's depths with a mysterious air caused a stir. Soon the officers emerged packing 15 kegs containing 60 gallons of whiskey. It seems that *Excelsior's* firemen, alert to trade prospects in contraband booze, had smuggled the kegs aboard. Someone must have informed on them. The crowd cheered the whiskey, the intrepid officers, and the resourceful firemen.

Two men arrived late, glowing with whiskey imbibed in waterfront saloons, slipping and falling in desperate struggles to remain upright. One fell in a hatchway and hurt his head. Doctor John Hartley hurried aboard, cheered by the watchers who thought he was the captain, probed the stricken seaman and pronounced him sound but for drunkenness. Capt. Tom Higgins appeared, fired the seamen, and watched while police helped them ashore.

Sad scenes were observed as tearful couples said their last farewells. Finally, the little ship of the Alaska Commercial Company was ready. "Cast off the stern rope," shouted Higgins loudly. As the engines shuddered into explosive life and the whistle pierced the air, pandemonium burst from the dock: "Such a yell went up as had never been heard in San Francisco." Thousands of white handkerchiefs fluttered at the 100 argonauts "while those not possess of this article flung wildly over their heads hats, umbrellas and parasols." Argonauts, "heroic figures" all, waved in response. Other boats in the harbor sounded whistles as *Excelsior* headed for the Golden Gate, steaming "for the country of riches, hardships and privations."[28]

It was quite a send-off. Many others, somewhat less attended, followed as the flow continued. No one attending any of these departures questioned the momentousness of the great northern migration.

Sailing from Seattle did not attract such huge crowds, but early ones were well attended and, as novelties, were described by the press. When *City of Kingston* departed July 27, 1897, with 200 passengers, some 7,000 interested folks visited the Yesler Wharf in the course of the day. "There were some tears spilled on the rough boards that floor the warehouse," a newsman noted, "but the wives and sweethearts as a rule bore up bravely and said nothing to make the grind in leaving home harder than it naturally was." Two young men, smartly dressed in gray cadet suits, attracted attention. One was George Allen, a "brilliant" University of Michigan student whose father, the former U.S. Senator from Washington, and other family members were seeing off. The cadets expected to win a fortune before returning to academic life and would perhaps be the youngest miners in the Klondike. Allen got into minor trouble in Skagway and concluded his Alaska adventure a few years later at Nome after being convicted of armed robbery. Another young man had been preparing for hardship ever since the gold-heavy *Portland* had arrived with nightly hikes up Queen Anne Hill wearing rough miners' clothes, hob-nail boots, and carrying a pack. Others told of sleeping outside at night to "harden themselves." Generally, the passengers seemed serious; only a few were drunk. "It seems to be too serious a matter to start on in a drunken condition," a reporter said.[29]

Another observer at Seattle's dock as *Mexico* departed in July '97 with 300 passengers likened the separation of families to that common during the Civil War. But differences lay behind the good-byes; a "different spirit" flowed on dockside and on deck than if the men were going off to war. "His heart was light with the prospect of success which he might win, and the other had only to fear the natural hardships which would necessarily attend him whom she loved and waved adieu."[30]

## Dangers Ahead

Cautionary notes which appeared in the newspapers amply suggested that the path to the Klondike was not strewn with roses. J.B. Kerfoot of New York reported that he did not even land from *Queen* when it reached Skagway in August, but he knew all about the travails fellow passengers faced. He was amazed that so many parties brought along riverboats for the Yukon passage and only learned on landing that the boats could not be transported to the headwaters. "Hundreds of those boats are on sale or are being burned . . . Many have given up, and outfits costing $300 and $400 are being bought for a song, $33 in one case. Scores will die on the pass or in the bitter cold beyond." On the beach the hastily dumped stampeders and their baggage presented a pitiful sight: "Think of being thrown out at 5 p.m. on a ledge of rocks, with an impossible precipice behind you and an oncoming 29-foot tide in front, your things somewhere in a heap of stuff fifty feet deep covering half an acre, and a nice, fine rain falling the while." Yet the hopeful men gave three cheers as *Queen* departed "and every mother's son thinks he is going to find a fortune. Half of them will be lucky if they get buried."[31]

An editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* carefully explained that much of Alaska and the Yukon should be considered *terra incognita*, and that would-be travelers must beware of "trails" marked on maps. Most such trails had been scarcely used and were not necessarily passable: "When a trail is spoken of as existing between any one given point and another, it has no further meaning than that a man, and possibly a beast of burden, may travel that way over the natural surface of the ground. It may consist of nothing more than a blazed path through the almost impenetrable wilderness" of dense forest. Such occasional editorials tempered exuberant news stories with calm assessments and warnings. In "The Frozen Facts" the *San Francisco Chronicle* gave "the sober truth . . . that 10 times as much gold has been talked of there and on the road from there to civilization as anyone has ever seen." Also sobering was the fact that no authentic reports of rich discoveries had been reported of anywhere else but the Klondike. What such facts suggested to reasonable folks is that stampeders should not join the fall '97 dash then under way but wait until spring '98 to see if other rich ground existed in the North.[32]

The proliferation of schemes for transport to the gold fields was understandable. Promoters were eager to attract inventors by announcing plans for roads, railroads, and novel means of reaching the Klondike. Newspaper readers needed wariness to distinguish promises from reality. Chimerical projects, including a bicycle road over the Chilkoot and a road by the Stikine River way from Fort Wrangell to Lake Teslin were reported by the press but remained visionary. Also soberly reported but never built was a railway from Montreal to the Klondike via the Peace, Liard, Finlayson, and Pelly rivers to the Yukon. The road would extend 1,600 miles, and the company proposing it promised that the first 1,100 miles to the Pelly would be completed within 20 months. Other fantastic schemes were proposed by daring individuals like C.W. Vosmer, a man "with dreamy blue eyes and a high forehead" who exhibited a small balloon in San

Francisco and planned an air voyage to Dawson. His airship, the largest ever constructed, would start from Cincinnati. "If we get the proper kind of encouragement we can go to the Klondike easily," Vosmer said. Perhaps Vosmer did not get the "encouragement" or money he needed as nothing more was heard of the balloon flight.[33]

## Women Stampeders

Helen Dare of the *New York Journal* voyaged to St. Michael in August 1897 with "gold crazed" stampeders whose obsession seems appalling: "It's 'the Klondyke, Klondyke, Klondyke, gold, gold, gold' from early morning until drawing eve." No one seemed to care for the beauty of nature or anything else: "Gold possesses every mind, all other interest and incidents are like broken twigs on a swollen stream." This sickened her: "Gold is pretty and good to have, but one grows to hate its yellow sheen when one sees how it draws men on and plays pranks with them like a mocking devil." At St. Michael two shiploads of stampeders heard all about the starvation threatening in Dawson, yet the travelers refused to turn back.'" I'd rather die than turn back now' is the grim determination of everyone, and some of them are very clear headed." Many expressed the belief, however, that others should give up.[34]

Dare's negative comments suggest the possibility that women generally resisted the Klondike lure or, at least, remained level-headed amidst the hysteria. On examination, however, it appears that Dare's disdain for gold-hunting was relatively rare. Women, in considerable numbers, headed north individually, with husbands, as members of mixed groups, and as members of all-women ventures. The law did not restrict the right of women to hold any gold they found, and those who succeeded were widely respected in the north. Naturally, prevailing attitudes towards women influenced the men who considered their roles.

Jack McQuesten, the Yukon pioneer, eagerly interviewed when he visited New York in November '97, made light of hardships women stampeders would face. Earlier it had been different. On his first ventures in the 1860s he went for months without speaking to a soul. A man then had few "companions in misery, and if he fell by the wayside, he stayed there, with no helping hand to give him aid." Now the country was fuller and friendlier. Any capable women could do well at dressmaking, laundering, mining, or other work. And, if she wished to marry, "there are whole armies of nice fellows with fine claims who are looking for wives, and unless a women is unspeakable she seldom leaves Alaska unmarried." McQuesten apparently did not like "new women," those who were assertive about their rights and questioned traditional fashions and everything else. He advised them to stay away as there was no demand, particularly those who wore short dresses which police banned in Dawson.[35]

A much-publicized women's expedition headed by Mrs. Hannah S. Gould of New York was treated with due respect in the newspapers, although one Seattle reporter pretended that it threatened the plans of a former minister in Seattle for auctioning women in Dawson. Gould did not see the humor of the story. She was a serious businesswoman with experience in railroad construction who was commissioned by New

York capitalists to report on Klondike possibilities. Some 25 other women were eager to go with her to establish various enterprises including a hospital. Gould set age limits of 25 to 56 and she also reserved the right to send back any women who misbehaved.

Each woman was required to bring a complete outfit of supplies. Only one long dress could be taken by each, but plenty of warm clothing and a kind of bicycle suit was mandated. This corduroy suit consisted of a belted jacket, knickerbockers, a short skirt, Klondike hat and high, stout shoes. For summer work a tweed jumper and skirt with a long gingham apron and old-fashioned sunbonnet was recommended.[36] "Our object," Gould stated, "is to make money, but we are not going to be any more uncomfortable while trying to do this than is absolutely necessary."

Gould expected to reach Dawson by April, although she was somewhat optimistic in expecting the Yukon River from St. Michael to open early enough for her schedule. The party, which left New York on *City of Columbia*, consisted of widows, for the most part, who were not looking for husbands. Gould did confess, or so newsmen alleged, that she would consider a gold millionaire's offer, if made, and her disciples echoed the same view. Most were women of means, women who liked to read and converse on cultural topics.[37]

Mrs. T. Webb Taylor, a beautiful, Harlem society woman, headed for the Copper River "because she was dared to do so." Her husband accompanied her, and she had his tailor make two suits of Eskimo style clothing. The couple's outfit also included the entire furnishings for a cabin, including carpets. Newsman were skeptical of the woman's chances: "She has no more idea of the misery she will be called upon to endure than a July butterfly has of the signs of December." Mr. Taylor only agreed to go because she insisted against his most persistent warnings and, presumably, because he believed she might soon lose her zest. "He does not relish a three years' residence in the wilds of Alaska and he has no yearning whatever to explore the Copper River or any other river."[38]

Another women, "Mrs. Flemming," a.k.a. Mary Alice Almont Livingston, previously acquitted of charges of murdering her mother in a much publicized trial, made it to Dawson but sent back urgent appeals for help: "All the money I took with me has been swallowed up. Send me help. I am in peril."[39]

Miss Mary W. Board of New Jersey organized another women's expedition whose ambition was to found a city in the Copper River region. She was considered a formidable woman because, several months earlier, she had achieved some notoriety after capturing three would-be burglars in her home. It was her understanding that the climate resembled that of New York: "There are vegetables and game in plenty," she believed, "the Copper River Indians plant their gardens late in April, and live comfortably in their huts in winter." Each expedition member would receive provisions for one year and two lots for those wishing them. Board planned to bring a portable house, portable sawmill, and portable hospital, plenty of garden seed, a camera, a chaplain, and "last but not least," the American Flag. "The city would be a woman's town in every sense of the word," although some men would be permitted there for the heavier work, Miss Board explained. Men definitely would not participate in com-

munity management. In other respects, too, the Board City would look to the future. A much-publicized inventor named Nicholas Tesla had developed an electrical plant using the power of the sun's rays, and Board City would utilize such a plant for its needs. Mary Board's plans understandably attracted a lot of interest: "Here at least," wrote one newsman, "is a woman who has gone more deeply into the question of escaping the indolence of man than any other known in history."[40]

What should women wear? Mrs. R.E. Craft, the Chicago wife of an experienced Montana miner, chose brown corduroy bloomers, an outfit that shocked the more conservative while attracting the attention of more open-minded gawkers. "The matter of a proper costume for this trip gave me considerable trouble," said Mrs. Craft, who had given her husband trouble when he tried to leave her in Chicago when he went north. "When I determined on bloomers as the only fit thing to wear, I modelled my entire outfit on the same plan." With warm flannel underclothing, stout shoes, etc., she was ready for climatic rigors, "especially as I have never been sick a day in my life."[41]

Plenty of women went to the Klondike on their own. A Middletown, New York, woman told the press that she was dissatisfied with her husband's income as a tailor and would seek a better fortune. He would take care of the three kids and expressed every confidence that his wife would succeed.

Martha Louise Purdy wanted to go along with her husband, Will, and her brother on their venture to the Klondike in 1898. She was enchanted by the prospects and jaded with society life in Chicago. In Seattle Will Purdy left Martha for a few days to attend to business in San Francisco. Soon he wrote her that he had changed his mind. Terrible tales of hardships on the Klondike Trail had set him on another course. "How about Hawaii," he asked? We could make a fortune there under better conditions. Or she could go back to Chicago and wait for him. Martha Louise rejected Hawaii and Chicago--and Will Purdy as well. By failing to share her northern vision he had proved himself "undependable," and she wanted no more of him and found her own way north.[42] Forty years later she would become the first woman governor of the Yukon Territory.

The first professional baker on the Yukon was Mrs. J.T. Wills who also ran a laundry at Circle in 1895. Her oven could only handle two loaves at a time, but the demand kept the fire hot all day. She baked 14 loaves daily and sold them at $1 a loaf. Wills also provided the first shirt-starching service in the North and did mending for miners. She had pioneered in New Mexico, Colorado, and Washington before going north. She joined the Klondike stampede, bought a valuable claim, fought claim jumpers in the courts, and found time to cook for the Alaska Commercial Company at $15 daily.[43]

Women went as showgirls, housewives, nurses, cooks, prospectors, whores, missionaries, and schoolteachers. Mrs. L.C. Howland of San Francisco was not content to be idle while her husband worked for a northern trading company. She intended to open a school in Dawson for the "forty children unfortunate enough to be there." Children need to learn "something besides the way to cook beans with a quantity of fat pork or to pan gravel." She would also offer advance courses to adult miners who had

leisure for study during the winter, using a variety of texts and works by Hawthorne, Scott, and Lamb. "I will charge just as much for tuition as I can get," said the pretty brunette. Mrs. Howland also arranged to write some Klondike articles for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.[44]

Mrs. W. Place of San Francisco planned to work on a lay with her husband and others. "I want to get rich and will do so if I can," she said, showing reporters a lightweight pick and shovel set. Although her first concern in clothing was comfort rather than style she had chosen "becoming" colors for her bloomers, short skirts, and other items. At St. Michael she figured that she would buy fur garments. In case work with pick and shovel provided irksome and the miners' demand for sewing warranted it, she brought along a sewing machine.[45]

Miss Blanche King of New York planned mining speculation but did not favor primitive living conditions. She took along three sealskin costumes, several trunks of clothing, provisions for two years, a cook, a horse, two St. Bernard dogs, one spaniel, four canaries, a piano, and $10,000 in cash. "I always travel this way," said the young woman. Prospecting was difficult for women, "but with a little capital I think I can do better than the average prospectors" by buying part interests in active claims. The press thought it worthwhile to report that Miss King's piano was not to be boxed up on the voyage from San Francisco to St. Michael so that guests visiting her splendidly furnished suite on the steamer *North Fork* would enjoy music to relieve the tedium of the voyage. Unquestionably, Miss King enjoyed the publicity that her luxurious quest sparked, then, unaccountably, she changed her mind. "Women miner funks," noted a newspaper, "Miss King has failed to appear" at the scheduled sailing of *North Fork*.[46]

Some women were only assertive in traditional, romantic ways. The postmaster of Dawson received poetic declarations of romantic longings from six "California girls," Monterey residents, who asked that their individual messages be given to different Klondike miners. Each missive was tied with a lover's knot of different colored ribbons and contained a pointed offering. Verses were of uneven quality but nice sentiments:

"Whoever gets this bow of white
Will find in me a supreme delight."
Another said:
"Green for thee
To thy destiny.
A sweetheart true
Is seeking you."
Still another promised:
"The fates have said
This bow of red
Foretells a happy life.
A loving wife,
A sky that's bright,
And 'bread' that's light."

Miss Ellen Mayburn was named as the addressee for any miner wishing to respond.[47]

## Outfitting

Pacific coast cities competed strenuously as centers for outfitting. Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, San Francisco, Juneau, Vancouver, and Victoria were among those proclaiming their advantages as jumping off points for the Yukon. San Francisco's advantages as the largest city on the coast and longtime headquarters of the Alaska Commercial Company were neutralized by the shorter distance from Seattle and aggressiveness of its merchants in seizing on business opportunities. J.J. Healy's choice of Seattle as the North American Transportation and Trading Company's regional headquarters in 1892 helped the Puget Sound town's cause too, but the flood of advertising sent out from the newly formed Alaska Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce in Seattle under energetic Erastus Brainerd provided an enormous stimulus. Other Seattle-based operations before the Klondike boom included the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, which moved from Portland in 1892, and the Alaska Steamship Company, organized in 1895.[48]

Outfitting and transporting the miners was a matter of serious commercial interest among responsible businessmen but, inevitably, there were elements of misrepresentation and fraud. The average miner started north with 1,000 pounds of food, soap, candles, groceries, cooking equipment, mining gear, clothes, and a sleeping bag. Flour, bacon, beans, and sugar headed the food list but a variety of other foods were also available. Because the food processing and packing industry had developed earlier in the century, shoppers could choose among canned, evaporated, concentrated, desiccated, compressed, liquified, crystallized, and granulated products.[49]

Opportunists and quacks responded vigorously to Yukon market possibilities. "ARE YOU GOING TO KLONDIKE?" asked the Sander Electric Co. in newspaper ads for Dr. Sander's electric belt. "It requires two kind of capital to make this venture. The man who goes through must have strength and nerve as well as money. Weak men will lose out, but belt wearers will prevail. This is an electric life-giver. It saturates the nerves and muscles with animal magnetism, which is the force that builds up weak constitutions. Many who have already started on this trip have been made strong by this famous belt." Whether many stampeders actually succumbed to this con is not known. Perhaps a few electric belts fell among the trail litter but modest strong men or would-be strong men did not boast if they wore this kind of equipment.[50]

Newspaper advertisements were as full of Klondike items as were the news columns. Some men asked for grubstakes and others called for miners to represent them. Mining stock was offered from 25 cents to $1,000 a share. Participation in joint stock companies was available from $200 to $1,000; you could either go along or stay home to gain benefits. If one wished to make money without taking part in any Klondike venture there were countless opportunities to buy businesses from men eager to set off--or their homes. There were lots of books for those longing for facts on the

Klondike, priced from 25 cents to $1.50. If you preferred selling to buying books, positions as book agents were open. Machines could be purchased as well, "sure thing" machines guaranteed to rob mining of hard work, misery, and risk. For $50 daily one could lease a portable device for penetrating frozen soil. Transportation companies made light of logistics and promised to put men in the gold fields with all their supplies at any season of the year.

Mining enterprises of Arizona, Colorado, Arkansas, Kootenai, Sarinam, South America, and Mexico used "the Klondike" in their advertisements as an invidious comparison. "Why go to Alaska?" they asked, "Come to our mild climate and participate in truly rich mines." But most advertisers wanted readers to believe in the Klondike and be ready for opportunities. Among compelling ads were the following from a San Francisco newspaper:

> DON'T BE A TENDERFOOT. Practice shooting in Murphy's Klondike shooting gallery before starting for the gold fields and your claims won't be jumped.
>
> WANTED--VICTIM OF THE CIGARETTE HABIT would like some philanthropist to grub stake him in the Klondike. Has had considerable experience in digging wells and other work suiting him for mining.
>
> WANTED--MAN BOUND FOR THE KLONDIKE to handle line of ear muffs on the side. Great chance for the right party.
>
> WANTED--LADY OF GOOD SOCIAL STANDING temporarily in reduced circumstances wants to meet honorable gentleman bound Klondikeward. Object, business and ultimate matrimonial partnership.
>
> WANTED--EXPERIENCED DISHWASHER wants to buy interest in gold placer mine cheap in the Klondike. Will guarantee good work with the pan.
>
> WANTED--BUSINESSMEN ARE REQUESTED to investigate Glacier Gully Mining Company. Capital stock, $50,000. When 60 percent is paid in the promoters will start for the Klondike and stake out good paying claims, the process of which will be divided proportionately among the stockholders. Shares $5.[51]

Some outfitting items were not advertised, as, for example, stolen dogs. "If you have a dog you care anything for keep your eye peeled," warned the *San Francisco Chronicle* in August '97. A "gigantic dog trust," aware of the superiority of dog transport in the interior, were rounding up strays for sale as dog prices soared. Trust members were the poundkeepers of San Francisco, Stockton, San Jose, and Oakland. The Stockton keeper admitted the secret scheme when confronted by a reporter but

the Oakland keeper denied its existence, although conceding "it is a pretty good scheme." All he saw wrong with the plan was the poor quality of dogs available. He knew northern travel conditions and calculated that only two of 200 local strays "would be any good."[52]

Farsighted men thought of everything. One prospector hauled a huge bundle of old magazines. He was a veteran of earlier gold camps and knew the value of reading material where package mail service had not been established. If he was correct each magazine would fetch up to $10 before he reached Dawson.

Another man shipped a stack of bicycles. He had used one earlier conveying baggage over the Chilkoot. Bikes could not surmount the steepest portion of the trail but would be wheeled along carrying 100 pounds for much of the route with more ease than backpacking would entail.

The competing qualities of pack animals were heavily debated. Horse and mules were shipped in quantity, but some innovators insisted that goats would do better. Dogs' success on the trail had long been established, and prices of larger breeds like Newfoundlands and St. Bernards soared to a $75-$150 range.

Modern forms of transit received attention too. A California man organized a company to provide balloon service between Juneau and Dawson. The flight would require only 24 hours. There would be no danger, backers assured the public, because northern air currents are "solid and steady." Ballooning would be much faster than "a stage or even a railroad." The first flight would be made on a balloon then under construction as soon as investors paid in $2,000. As there is no record of the flight it must be assumed that the scheme did not arouse sufficient interest.[53]

Why dig for gold, reasoned some crafty men? Let's ship a cargo of onions north: It's "a sure thing." Such wisdom motivated many individuals and business managers who reflected upon their place in the Klondike excitement. Favoring provisioning over digging came naturally to those established already as merchants but countless others innocent of any connection with trade reached similar conclusions. Thus a glut of entrepreneurs, carrying a wide variety of goods, joined the good surging north. Those who guessed well on miners' needs and did not suffer unforeseen losses did well, but many others found their timing bad, ran into a market glut, or otherwise encountered troubles that often beset those keen on piling up fast profits.

Outfitting in Seattle for some included carousing in the tenderloin district. By August '97 celebrants en route to the Yukon overflowed the hotels. Police interviewed those who had had too gay a time: "They were robbed, beaten, cheated, and fought," said the *Seattle Times*, "and they seem in many cases to be proud of the scars they have this morning, and not to mind the loss of a few hundred dollars more or less, although it was taken without their consent." The first flow through Seattle had been western folks, then the eastern arrivals predominated and were free and easy in spending. Some hinted of greater celebration to come when they returned with Klondike gold.[54]

With this motley tide of adventurers heading north in 1897-98, it is no surprise that the military eventually had to help the destitute. But help did not come until after widespread reports of hardship and deprivation motivated the government to undertake relief measures.

## Notes
## Chapter 3

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2. *New York Journal*, December 14, 1897.
3. Ibid., December 25, 1897.
4. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 1897.
5. *Chicago Tribune*, August 20, 1897.
6. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 2, 1897.
7. *Seattle Times*, January 15, January 18, 1898.
8. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 12, 1897.
9. *Seattle Times*, August 15, 1897.
10. Ibid., April 15, 1898.
11. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 1897.
12. Marshall Bond, Jr., *Gold Hunter: The Adventures of Marshall Bond* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), 21-22.
13. Gibson family correspondence, 1884-1908, UAF.
14. Johnson to mother, November 17, 1897. Kirk E. Johnson Collection, UO.
15. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 20, 1899.
16. *Seattle Times*, November 6, 1897.
17. *New York Journal*, August 18, 1897.
18. Ibid., August 16, 1897.
19. *Seattle Times*, February 23, 1898.
20. *Chicago Tribune*, February 4, 1898.

21. *New York Journal*, February 16, 1898.

22. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1897.

23. *Seattle Times*, September 1, 1897.

24. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 16, 1897.

25. *New York Journal*, February 11, 1898; *Oakland Enquirer*, March 16, 1898.

26. *Oakland Enquirer*, March 16, 1898.

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29. *Seattle Times*, July 28, 1897; for Allen's career see William R. Hunt, *Distant Justice* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 147-53.

30. *Seattle Times*, July 27, 1897.

31. *Chicago Tribune*, August 28, 1897.

32. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 29, September 1, 1897.

33. *New York Journal*, August 16, 1897.

34. *New York Journal*, August 29, 1897.

35. Ibid., December 1, 1898.

36. *Seattle Times*, December 1, 1897.

37. *New York Journal*, December 17, 1897; *Seattle P-I*, December 5, 1897.

38. *New York Journal*, December 19, 1897.

39. Ibid., December 22, 1897.

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41. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1897.

42. Mrs. George Black, *My Ninety Years* (Toronto: Nelson Co.), 21.

43. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 15, 1897.

44. *Seattle P-I*, August 18, 1897.

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47. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1898.

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53. *New York Journal*, August 16, 1897.

54. *Seattle Times*, August 7, 1897.

# Chapter 4

## Chronology: Dyea, Skagway, and the Passes

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1874: | Spring | Prospector George Holt is guided across the Chilkoot by Indians. |
| 1880: | May 27 | Indians agree to allow prospectors over Chilkoot Pass. |
| 1882: | May 28 | Arthur Krause, German scientist studying Tlingits, crosses pass. |
| 1883: | June | Lt. Frederick Schwatka reconnoiters route, publishes map. |
| 1884: | | Edgar Wilson opens trading post at Dyea. |
| 1886: | | John J. Healy becomes new trading partner at Dyea Indian village, operates Lynn Canal steamer *Yukon*. |
| | Spring | 200 prospectors cross Chilkoot. |
| | | Major gold discoveries on Fortymile River, a branch of the Yukon. |
| 1887: | Spring | 500 stampeders cross Chilkoot, head for the Fortymile. |
| | June | William Ogilvie, Canadian surveyor, runs traverse across Chilkoot. |
| | | Dyea population: 138 Natives. |
| 1888: | June | Indian packer's war, Chilkoot chief killed. |
| | | Gold discoveries near Circle City on the Yukon. |
| 1894: | April | Peterson builds hoist on Chilkoot pass. |
| 1895: | Spring | 1,000 stampeders cross Chilkoot, head for Circle City. |
| 1896: | August 14 | Klondike discovery by Californian George Washington Carmack and Natives Tagish Charlie and Skookum Jim. |
| 1895-97: | | William and Bernard Moore homestead Skagway, build wharf and sawmill and improve White Pass Trail. |
| 1897: | March 25 | SS *City of Mexico* leaves Seattle with 600 stampeders. |
| | July 17 | SS *Portland* arrives at Seattle with over "a ton of gold on board." Klondike stampede begins. |
| | August | Skagway platted. |
| | October | Dyea platted. |
| 1898: | January 12 | First issue of *Dyea Trail* newspaper. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | February | Mounties man the pass. |
| | | Dyea wharf completed. |
| | March | Dyea population estimate: 10,000 people. |
| | April 3 | Avalanche above Stonehouse on Chilkoot Pass, 52 die. |
| | April 21 | War declared against Spain. |
| | May | Chilkoot Railroad and Transport Company tramway completed. |
| | | Construction begins on White Pass and Railway. |
| | | Ice breaks on Lake Lindeman. |
| 1899: | February 20 | First train reaches summit. |
| 1899: | Spring | Chilkoot tramways removed. |
| | July 6 | White Pass and Yukon Railway reaches Lake Bennett. |
| 1900: | June | Dyea population: 122 people. |
| | | Skagway population: 3,117 people. |
| | July 2 | White Pass and Yukon Railway reaches Whitehorse. |
| 1901: | September | Telegraph service opens to Outside. |

# Chapter 4
## Getting There

Reaching the gold fields represented the most taxing part of the adventure for many stampeders. To men and women planning their journey in Seattle, Chicago, or Montreal the routes were well-defined. Newspaper stories and guidebooks provided details, giving the costs, distances, and travel times involved. Stampeders made their choices on the basis of this information after considering the state of their finances, the extent of their baggage, and their judgment of the region most likely to fulfill their golden dreams. Most were headed towards the Klondike in '97, but by '98 a considerable number resolved to try the Kobuk, Koyukuk, or Copper rivers or elsewhere.

The shortest route to Dawson appeared to be the Chilkoot Pass out of Dyea, or the White Pass out of Skagway. Another possibility existed with Jack Dalton's trail from Pyramid Harbor, a route suitable for pack animals although tolls were levied on passage. Voyaging to St. Michael, thence up the Yukon by river steamboat, appeared to many as the safest and least arduous of the available routes. Other routes held patriotic appeal, as with the "All-Canadian" overland routes which were promoted by the Canadian government.

Tales of hardship and starvation might have given pause to some of those thinking about heading north in '98 but for reports of a new strike in mid-September '97. Skookum Gulch, about 18 miles from Dawson, drew a rush of prospectors from Dawson. "Upon a barren hillside where no prospector would ever think of looking for gold the nuggets have been found scattered on top of the ground neath moss and boulders," said a Juneau newspaper. Some 400 bench claims were located within 24 hours despite a raging snowstorm. The very implausibility of the location added to the Klondike legend; it was one that showed none of the favorable signs that prospectors looked for. Alexander McDonald, a successful Dawson miner, considered that "if science went for anything, there would not be an ounce of gold in the mountain. No, I am free to confess that I know nothing about placer mining. These recent discoveries have been too much for me." It was predicted that the new find would cause a stampede of 100,000 in the spring. Jack Dalton and J.F. Maloney bought two claims from McDonald and Hugh Ferguson for $82,500.[1]

How could men be cautious when fortune beckoned? Many were impelled to go despite their lack of experience or preparation. And those least suitable were most likely to succumb to fakery.

Professor George Davidson of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey warned against a prospectus advertising a Copper River route. Promoters offered to convey passengers from Valdez into the interior's mining country for only $75. The region's climate was described as mild because of the influence of the Japanese Current, and its game and fish were said to be abundant. It was also claimed that trade stations and Russian missions existed in the region and that travel was possible at all seasons. "These statements," said Davidson, "are the most infamous falsehood ever published."

Davidson urged travelers to consider Lieutenant Allen's Copper River ascent in 1883, which established that the river was not navigable and its valley did not give access to trail routes. Allen had also failed to find game.[2]

It was difficult for anyone to police the flow of false information or find means of warning the unwary. Time was short. Everyone was in a hurry. Misinformation could cause great harm.

## Chilkoot Trail

The most debated question concerned the best route. All stampeders learned the virtues and drawbacks of the Chilkoot Pass from newspapers and other sources. The White Pass and the Yukon River route via St. Michael were also well known. But most stampeders preferred the Chilkoot. As a place and event the passage of the Chilkoot Trail dominated contemporary reporting on the rush and, when stampeders took up their pens later, they gave particular attention to this phase of their experience. As historian Robert Spude noted, the Chilkoot "became the symbol of the Klondike gold rush." Early on it attained the place of legend--and held it. Whether a traveler made money in the north or failed, whether enriched or embittered by the experiences, the Chilkoot remained an important focus. Other gates to the interior lacked the drama of the Chilkoot, a mass that was so obviously nature's barrier, a rocky challenge to human stamina. In essence the Chilkoot could encapsule all the real hardships miners had to endure and, in part at least, could lend sense and meaning to the undertaking.[3]

The summit of the Chilkoot at 3,100 feet was 20 miles from tidewater. By '97 a rough trail from tidewater to the base of a steep 500 foot rise to the summit had long since been established. After packers reached the summit the hard part was over. The trail descended gradually seven miles to the lake which was 1,000 lower in elevation.

Events from the acquisition of Alaska by the United States in 1867 show the gradually emerging importance of the Chilkoot Trail from the time of prospector George Holt's crossing with Indian guides in 1874. In 1880 Klotz-Kutch, leader of the Chilkoot Indians, who considered the pass a tribal monopoly giving them control over trade with interior Indians, was persuaded to allow access to white prospectors. Scientist Arthur Krause, a student of Tlingit culture, crossed in 1882 and a year later Lt. Frederick Schwatka crossed to map the Yukon River.

By the mid-1880s more and more prospectors were trekking into the interior. Supporting commerce dates from 1884 when Edgar Wilson opened a trading post, although the Indian fur trade, rather than outfitting prospectors, was his chief concern. John J. Healy became Wilson's partner in 1886, and that spring 200 prospectors crossed the Chilkoot. Gold was discovered on the Fortymile, and in spring '86 and in '87 some 500 stampeders used the trail as William Ogilvie, Canadian surveyor, mapped the route. Another boom occurred in 1895 after the discovery of gold near Circle City, and the Klondike discovery followed a year later.

The 1897 Klondike stampeders landed at either Dyea or Skagway to begin their trek to the gold fields. Lack of a wharf (before May 1898) and deep-water moorage at

Dyea made landing freight and passengers tedious because small-boat lighterage was necessary. But the traffic kept coming, creating a boom town near the Indian village and the Healy and Wilson store. Competition for Dyea and Skagway town lots was as furious as was the pace of carpenters raising stores and homes for new arrivals. F.W. Hart raised a three-story hotel of 40 guest rooms, dining room, and bar in three days, then, without pausing to rest, built a block of five stores in five days. The bustle and frenzy of the boom town attracted some and repelled others--depending on their sensibilities. By October 1897 the Dyea-Klondike Transportation Company of Oregon located land 3 miles from Dyea for a wharf and warehouse, then built a toll bridge to town. By February 1898 stampeders could use the newly completed wharf. Dyea became the largest town in Alaska.[4]

Through 1897-98 some 30,000 to 40,000 stampeders landed at the head of Lynn Canal after completing their ocean voyages. No brief summary could do justice to the wide diversity of their experiences from the time of landing to their arrival at Dawson or elsewhere. But the records reveal the emotions of the event--anxieties, expectations, frustrations, angers, fears, just as well as they detail the physical hardships involved.

The first stage of the trail, from Dyea to Canyon City, was a comparatively easy 8.5 miles along the Taiya River. Stampeders who were prosperous enough had options available for freight handling. Healy and Wilson ran a 12-horse packtrain daily between Dyea and Sheep Camp, which was 7 miles beyond Canyon City. Travelers unwilling or unable to hire a packing service could use their own handcarts on this stretch or tow their loads to the head of navigation at the canyon. Winter passage was easier on the Taiya, and many men pulled their outfits on sleds.

In 1898 Canyon City was a lively service center. It was a convenient halting place on the trail and the station of two freight companies operating tramlines from the Scales to the summit. One of those, the Dyea-Klondike Transportation Company, built a power plant that generated electricity for its tramway and for the needs of Canyon City.

From Canyon City to Sheep Camp the distance was only 7 miles, but, particularly in the summer, this portion was hard going through a narrow canyon. Some enterprising fellows improved the trail and charged tolls for passage. "That six miles of canyon," Said Robert Medill, "cost us nearly everything but our shirts." Travelers paid for the work done in bridging ravines and corduroying wet portions of the trail with logs, but even with these improvements Medill's party worked four tough days to reach Sheep Camp from Canyon City.[5]

Sheep Camp, the base camp for the jump to the summit, became a big town over the 1897-98 winter whenever storms stopped progress of the stampeders. Here, as at Canyon City, entrepreneurs were on hand to provide food, lodging, and other services. According to Dyea's newspaper in April '98, Sheep Camp's business houses included two drug stores, two laundries, bathhouses, stores, a hospital, 15 hotels and restaurants, and other "restaurants, coffee-stands and lodging houses too numerous to mention." Tents housed most of these enterprises. This was the end of the trail for

packtrain services and the point where the severe climb of 3,000 feet to the summit commenced.[6]

The summit was 4 miles from Sheep Camp. The trail rose sharply from this point, and there were only two places along the way where travelers could rest. One was an open area beneath a huge overhanging boulder, called the Stone House, the other a much larger area equivalent to several square city blocks called the Scales. The Scales got its name because the open area lay at the base of the steepest part of the ascent where packers reweighted loads and raised rates for the last, hard stretch. This short, strenuous part of the trail is well represented in the famous photographs of a continuous line of pack-burdened travelers moving antlike up the trail. On this, as on other stretches, most travelers traversed again and again until all of their goods were planted on the summit. From the Scales travelers legged up the final stages of ascent on the so-called Golden Stairs. It only took an hour for this climb but, as the slope was 35 degrees, it was taxing. Horses were useless above the Scales. Packers were willing to help for eight cents a pound from the Scales to the lakes. Edwin Adney calculated that a packer, carrying 100 pounds, could make three trips daily and earn $24.[7]

Travelers had good reason to feel triumphant in achieving the summit without succumbing to fatigue, discouragement, accident, or avalanche. They had moved as part of a disorganized mass, subject to anxiety-producing rumors and fear of the unknown. Emotions weighed as heavily as backpacks in the highly charged atmosphere of the trail. Jack London, one of the mass, later described the physical hardships of the trail in a novel:

> Time had rolled back, and locomotion and transportation were once again in the most primitive stages. Men who had never carried more than pencils in all their lives had now become bearers of burdens. They no longer walked up-right under the sun but stooped the body forward and bowed the head to the earth. Every back had become a pack-saddle, and the strap galls were beginning to form. They staggered beneath the unwanted effort, and legs became drunken with weariness and titubated in diverse directions till the sunlight darkened and bearer and burden fell by the way.[8]

But the grim physical labor and emotional drain of the trail should not be overstressed. There were lighter moments at day's end. A man could readily find a drink or two and might even gamble away part of the fortune he intended to make. And there were stories to tell and to hear; friendly arguments on the best places to mine; serious discussions on the grand times they would have disposing of their wealth; and considerations of the day's events--and tomorrow. Stories of righteous anger and swift justice were repeated often for ripe local scandal, like the tale of two men who had robbed caches at Sheep Camp. When a miners meeting convicted them, one of the miscreants dashed away in panic, then shot himself as vigilantes closed in. The other

received 50 strokes with a knotted rope and was paraded down to Dyea wearing a large sign inscribed "Thief."

Earlier, an imaginary lynching at Lake Bennett, reported by Hal Hoffman to the *Chicago Tribune*, was described as the "fated result" of traveling with insufficient provisions. This highly charged incident occurred as stampeders faced hunger: "Flapjacks, hot or cold, have been worth more than platters of gold of the same size and beans [were] more precious than nuggets." A sack of flour cost more than a claim on Bonanza Creek, according to the imaginative Hoffman. Thus the men at Bennett, stomachs growling, grew suspicious of William G. Martin, who sold his outfit at Skagway then crossed the pass with a 60 pound pack. On investigation it was found that Martin's pack held a side of ham "brushed with the private mark" of another Bennett man. "The gold hunters jumped on Martin with the ferocity and grim determination that a Southern man drags a guilty negro to the place of execution . . . No more mercy was meted out to him than the midnight garroter shows his victim in a dark alley." The vigilantes acted openly and swiftly after Martin refused the opportunity to leave a last message or even pray. His last words were a promise to carry in the goods he left at Skagway. He wrote a letter to his wife: "Hoping that with the money I might make in the Klondike, sacrifice would go out the door and love return through the window, I left you. Kiss Ted, but never tell him." Martin asked his executioners to give his note to the newspapers.[9] A newsman invented the lynching story because its occurrence was easy to imagine under the circumstances. There was some thieving on the trail, but the stampede was too fast-paced to allow time for much crime and vengeance.

But tragic mishaps did occur along the trail. Dwight Fowler's death in August 1897 came just a mile out of Skagway. Other argonauts were not indifferent to such terrible accidents. A group of men convened informally at Skagway to express their sorrow at the death of young Fowler, whose fatal accident occurred crossing the Skagway River, a narrow, normally shallow, calm stream which had suddenly turned violent with a rush of snow melted waters. Their proclamation read:

> Whereas, His life was suddenly cut off by the will of Providence at this early stage in his career, to the realization of the ambitions of which he was looking with great hope; be it therefore resolved, that we, the miners do hereby extend our heartfelt sympathy to his sorrowing relatives and friends.[10]

Lives were lost in numerous individual incidents like Fowlers and there were two terrible unleashings of nature's forces. Fierce winds tore a glacier edge in September 1897 to release a lake of water. Three men were drowned, and much damage to tents and goods followed. A greater disaster occurred in April 1898 with a thundering avalanche. Men ascending the Scales on the last stage to the summit tried to run down trail from the danger but the massive snow burden, extending 30 acres and heaping as high as 30 feet, caught many of them. Hard-working rescuers saved 100 men; 40 to 60 others died under the snow.

## The Great Avalanche

Charles Watts, who was managing a Lake Bennett Hotel but doubled as a stringer for the *Oregonian*, spent two days on the scene. Writing to his wife he reported seeing 41 bodies and interviewing many of the survivors. He and other would-be rescuers felt miserable, knowing that there were others buried too deep beneath the snow to dig out. Watts achieved a scoop for the *Oregonian* by giving his dispatches to a traveler headed Outside who made a good steamer connection at Skagway and wired Portland from Vancouver Island on his arrival.

Alfred McMichael, who was resting from his packing efforts at Sheep Camp, recorded "we heard a great rumbling roar . . . This morning there were two or three more." As the men speculated on the strange noise first reports reached them:

> The cause of the one in the night is supposed to be from an avalanche a mile or two over the mountain, caused by the snow and ice coming down from a big glacier. The smaller ones were from the snow coming down from the hills here. About 9 a.m. I saw one going down the face of the mountain about half a mile away. It made a great noise as it tumbled down. Some places it looked like a beautiful waterfall tumbling over the cliffs in leaps of 50 or 100 feet. But these were only fun. The serious ones, or news of them, came a little later.
>
> About 10:00 word came that 10 men had been buried, tents and all, a little way up the trail. They were dug out uninjured. An hour later came the news that 50 had been overwhelmed by a snow slide while coming down from the Scales, a place four miles above here. In a few moments hundreds of men were on the way with shovels and sleds. It was such a bad day that not many men were out so it took some time to get on the way. I was moving some baggage and started as soon as I was through, the weather at the time being fine.
>
> After going about 2 1/2 miles, we met men returning with sleds and each one bore a lifeless or unconscious form. They were all put into the power house of the tramway up there in the mountains. When we arrived, men were digging for dear life in snow which was from 5 to 25 feet deep. Twelve men and one woman were taken out dead. Another woman is not expected to live. Others are injured, but I do not know how seriously. About 50, it seems, were at the Scales and though it was storming, they formed a life line and started up the mountain. That is, all took hold of a rope to prevent being dropped out on the way. When they were down near Stone House, the snow slide caught them and all but about a dozen were buried. Some dug themselves out and others were rescued in a short time, alive. No doubt some are there yet.[11]

The terrible tragedy sobered all the stampeders. Folks Outside who doubted that the risks and discomforts of gold hunting made any sense were confirmed in their pessimism by the avalanche. The cemetery holding the victims of the greatest single disaster of the Klondike Gold Rush is part of Klondike Gold Rush Park (KLGO) and offers a sobering reminder that the great adventure was perilous.

The Mounties established a customs station at Tagish Lake and another post at the Summit to collect fees and turn back travelers lacking 1,000 pounds of food. The food requirement was taken very seriously because of the general belief in Dawson from fall '97 that a famine could occur over the winter. Stampeders saw merit in the Mounties' strictness, and those who had worried about the security of lives and property in Skagway and Dyea found their presence reassuring.

Reaching the summit was harder for travelers who were short of money. Lester Monnet, Bill Shanks, and Chappie Campbell of Washington state disembarked from *Alki* at Dyea on July 24. The unceremonious dumping of 200 men and their provisions on the beach at low tide led to a frenzied scramble to move everything up the beach before the tide swamped the stores. Monnet and company passed this first hurdle, then unwisely invested in a pony for packing. Once loaded the pony bucked, scattered the load, and dashed for freedom. Soon the partners realized that pack animals were useless except on the first portion of the trail, but they were still out the missing pony's cost and damages to equipment.

Monnett contracted at 10 cents a pound with Indian packers, then another ship disembarked with stampeders willing to offer 50 cents. Monnett's packers demanded 40 cents more when the party had moved 7 miles down the trail. The party could not pay these demands and demanded their money back. Since the packers concluded they had already worked enough for the money they fought to keep it. Three men were no match for 20 packers, and the stampeders ended the melee by fleeing the field.

After pushing on to Stone House, Monnett's partners spoke longingly of Seattle. Monnett made a bad bargain to dissuade them from turning back: After their first trip to Lake Bennett he would do all the rest of the hauling while they commenced boat building. Over many days Monnett toiled with some 3,000 pounds "on the most grueling trek man ever undertook." Finally, on September 10 he threw his last pack on the ground at the lake.[12]

After the summit, the next great general activity was boat building at Lake Lindeman for Chilkoot stampeders or at Lake Bennett for White Pass travelers. There was plenty of time for boat building for winter or spring arrivals because they had to wait for the thaw of the Yukon's headwaters before pushing on. The Yukon River passage cost a number of lives. Many stampeders were inexperienced boatsmen, and a number of rapids, including the terrible White Horse, had to be traversed or by-passed by portage. Finally, the Mounties began supervision of navigation, requiring women and children to walk around the White Horse and prohibiting the passage of boats built without adequate freeboard. These restrictions probably saved some lives.

How long did it take to reach the Klondike? The journey's duration varied widely depending upon the season. Travelers who reached the lakes while navigation was possible could ready boats within a week or two and be under way. In a week or so they could pass the dangerous part of the river--if they had no accidents--reach Lake Laberge and a safe, easy drift of 400 miles to Dawson, which took approximately a week to 10 days.

## Tramways

Tramways were a means of reducing freight costs. As early as 1895 the first tramway from Stone House to summit was constructed, but it did not operate successfully. In 1897 a horse-powered windlass went into operation and by April '98 stampeders had a choice of four different tramways available at a rate of 10 cents a pound from Dyea to Lake Lindeman. Of these the best was built by the Chilkoot Railroad & Transportation Co. of Tacoma. It consisted of two sections--one over the 4 miles from Canyon City to Sheep Camp and another from Sheep Camp over the summit a quarter mile beyond--a span of 4¼ miles. Freight boxes measuring 40 x 20 x 24 inches could handle 400-pound boxes. This system allowed stampeders to transport their freight over the Dyea-Canyon City wagon road at drayage costs from one-fourth to one-half cent a pound, then transfer loads to tramway buckets for transhipment. Overall freight costs were reduced from one-fifth to one-tenth of the cost in '97.

Other tramways went into operation before the Chilkoot Railroad & Transportation Co. finished their system in April '98, but the others were less efficient. The Burns' Hoist opened in December '97 to pull sleds hitched to a cable 1,500 feet long. A gas engine turned a pulley drum to haul loads from the base to the top of the summit for two cents a pound. The bucket tramway of the Alaska Railway & Transportation Co. operated from 2 miles above Sheep Camp from spring '98 until July when its operation was consolidated with the CR&C Tramway. Another was that run by Dyea-Klondike Transportation Co. using a steam engine, two buckets of 500 lbs capacity, and a cable running from the base to the crest of the summit. The Dyea-Klondike Transportation Co. later consolidated with the Chilkoot Railroad & Transportation Co. Although the tramways did not always run as well as planned, they effectively put Indian packers out of business on the American side of the Chilkoot. The tramways also forced a reduction in tolls on the Brackett Road over White Pass.[13]

As with everything else connected to the gold rush, there were exaggerations about the capacity of the tramways. It was good that the estimates of some promoters like steamship manager J.P. Light on the numbers of '98 stampeders were far-fetched. Light expected 200,000 rushers, "that is conservative. I would not be surprised to see the figures doubled."[14] Light correctly observed that the tramways were incapable of handling that kind of traffic. But the tramways impressed some newsmen as a marvelous technological breakthrough, and the crossing by a woman, Martha Kelsey, in January '98 was heralded in newspapers. "A Yankee woman," the *New York Journal* noted breathlessly, "has crossed in an hour and a half the mountain defile which has

hitherto tried men's souls and bodies in a struggle of days and weeks. Never before was such a pioneer enterprise displayed in establishing a means of transportation over almost impassable heights."[15]

## White Pass

Stampeders using the Lynn Canal entry could, if they wished, defer judgment on a choice of Dyea-Chilkoot or Skagway-White until leaving their ship. Which pass was best? Reports varied. The White Pass summit at 2,800 feet was only 20 miles from tidewater. Over the first 10 miles the trail ran through heavy timber growth and a narrow, steep-walled canyon. At the base of the pass, 18 miles from tidewater, travelers and their pack animals faced a steep climb as they gained 800 feet in elevation. Once at the summit the trail was easy. Lake Bennett was only 10 miles away.

Some praised the less-used White Pass in '97. Harry Fitzgerald had taken it in June before the improvements then under way had been completed, "and I do not understand why so many go by the way of the Chilkoot, particularly at this time of the year." Fitzgerald's description certainly suggested ease of transit: American contractors built a trail on their side "and the Canadian government had twenty-five men working for four months . . . so that there is now a fine broad trail, over which horses and mules can travel easily."[16]

Such reports, coming at a time when "a great blockage of gold seekers" on the Chilkoot was being reported, affected some travelers' decisions, but many who used the White Pass were sorry. The only certainty about the routes was that most regretted that they did not choose the other route.[17]

Stampeders with pack animals could not use the Chilkoot so were drawn to the lower, less steep grade of White Pass. Ease of transit, however, required more trail improvements than had been made by 1897. Footing was uncertain on the narrow, twisting trail which disintegrated rapidly with the heavy traffic. The progress of pack trains was delayed continually as obstructions had to be cleared. Heavily loaded animals fell in their tracks or slipped and plunged to the valley below. Soon the stench of rotting carcasses on what became known as the "Dead Horse Trail" became another discomfort, a sickening momento of the stampeders' frenzy and callousness.

Once under way, it was difficult to turn back. Frank Thomas started over White Pass in summer '97 with three horses and a mule. After many delays and the loss of a horse and the mule, he abandoned hope of reaching Dawson before winter but determined to reach Lake Bennett to establish a winter camp. "I am not the only crazy fool--there are many others," he reported.[18]

One of the other "crazy fools," Charles W. Watts of Oregon, gave one of the best descriptions of the pass after crossing in January 1898:

> Of course there are times when it is windy and very cold there but so far as the climb is concerned it [is] not one-half or one-third as much of a climb as I make every year when I go to Upper Soda deer hunting. If I was feeling

> good and [had] no pack I could walk from the bottom of the Pass to the top in 10 minutes and never stop. Then it is a mile across. At no time can you see over 20 or 30 feet in any direction on account of fine snow drifting through the air. You simply look down at your feet to follow the trail and plod along. Everything looks the same for all the time you are walking between walls of rock from 10 to 50 feet high and all covered with snow. Suddenly you walk out a great opening. That is Summit Lake--6 1/2 miles long. Straight across it you walk, all the time following one little narrow trail about 16 to 18 inches wide. To step out of the trail meant to sink into snow up to your waist. The prettiest sight I ever saw in all my life was to stand at the foot of that lake and looking in the right direction see the long string of people, some drawing sleds, some packing, and some with dogs and many with horses. We saw one string 1/4 mile long.[19]

## Skagway and Dyea

Sometimes one gains the impression that stampeders jumped from their ships at the head of the Lynn Canal and immediately stormed the passes. In fact, the traffic did not flow so readily from sea to mountains and two coastal towns, Skagway and Dyea, developed as service centers to travelers.

William Moore was the father of Skagway. He and his son, Bernard, did some work on the White Pass Trail in 1895 and 1897, while also building a small sawmill and a wharf on their homestead at Skagway. The Moores were betting that travelers would choose to travel over the White Pass via Skagway rather than the Chilkoot via Dyea. Many of the '97 argonauts landed at Skagway, but they paid no attention to the Moores' priority there. In fact, the stampeders took over the Moore homestead and its environs and laid out a townsite without consulting the pioneers. Worse yet, they forced William Moore to move his cabin since it encumbered a newly plotted street. William Moore had been ignored and humiliated, but he did not give up. He got busy and extended his wharf to better serve arriving ships. The wharf made money and aided the growth of the town, even though most of the traffic continued to move towards Dyea and the Chilkoot Pass. While Skagway was a place of transit for most people, merchants like Capt. James Carroll established enterprises and government officers, like C.L. Andrews, the customs collector, were residents. Andrews, who later transferred to Eagle and wrote several books on Alaska's history, had his hands full trying to curb whiskey smuggling.

Smuggling, however, did not bother residents and transits of Skagway. They had a genuine, versatile crook to contend with. Jefferson "Soapy" Smith became the most durable of gold rush legends, although his operations only extended over a few months. Soapy was a small-time con man from Colorado with visions of grandeur and enough organizational ability to establish a gang of thieves and extortionists to prey on stampeders. By corrupting the deputy marshal, Skagway's only police officer, and posing as a civic-minded citizen, Smith was able to pluck the unwary with impunity. In time

aroused citizens formed a vigilante committee to restore law and order, and in July 1898 Smith died under the gun of Frank Reid. Of course, his legend remains green because of his singular and dramatic career.

It would not do to detract from the legendary genius of Soapy Smith. He did show remarkable initiative in seeing the opportunity for a gang of con men and thieves at Skagway and acted swiftly to seize the advantage. He was also successful in corrupting the U.S. deputy marshal and, until vigilantes organized in summer '98, in confusing many of the residents about his activities. His base was a saloon-gambling den and he placed men along the trail to steer the unwary into his place. So Soapy showed some ability as an opportunist, organizer, corrupter, and dissembler, but exhibited a fatal clumsiness in issuing a drunken challenge to the vigilantes after first agreeing to return money taken from a returning miner. Of the many possible options available to him--some of which might have prolonged his career--he chose gunplay with Frank Reid and was shot dead. Reid, Skagway's surveyor, died too and earned his place as an Alaska hero.

Historian C.L. Andrews observed that if all the men who claimed to have seen Smith shot were laid end to end, the line would extend from Skagway to the Equator and back. This is probably an exaggeration but it does reflect the great truth that legend-making requires a little lying by others. It took some exaggeration of Smith's cunning, larcenous successes, and violence to give him lasting infamy and lots of gold rush participants were willing to help. Col. Sam Steele, an intrepid officer of the Mounties, contributed eagerly to the legend by telling of a night in Skagway when he and another officer were awakened by gunfire, shouts, and curses. The Mounties did not interfere with American law-keeping: "Bullets came through the thin boards [of our room], but the circumstance was such a common event that we did not even rise from our beds." Steele exaggerated mightily in alleging that Smith's gang had more than 100 members, that they made Skagway "about the toughest place in the world . . . they ran the town and did what they pleased; almost the only persons safe from them were the members of our force . . . neither law nor order prevailed, honest persons had no protection from the gangs of rascals who plied their nefarious trade. Might was right."[20]

Aside from the colorful, bizarre exploits of Soapy Smith, the development of Skagway and Dyea followed the frontier pattern of neighboring communities competing for the advantages of a similar location. Each town boasted of its commercial and civic amenities, its churches, schools, newspaper, and government--and, while extolling its own future prospects, derided the other's pretensions. But, in the end, Dyea died and Skagway lived.

Skagway held a natural advantage over Dyea because it had a deep-water harbor. William Moore had noted this advantage in originally choosing a homestead there and, of course, believed that the White Pass's superiority over the Chilkoot was as obvious as the harbor advantage. He was wrong about the passes' relative appeal to '97-'98 stampeders but correct in his longer term appraisal. Construction started on the White Pass and Yukon Railway in 1898 and its completion in 1900 finished Dyea as a commercial rival to Skagway.[21]

The Smith gang did not interfere with the establishment of schools, churches, and respectable business houses, nor with the evolution of a polite society. Thus could Governor John Brady, after watching the Fourth of July festivities, exult over the fine qualities of the town, "the stampeders reflect the goodness of our institutions." Brady predicted that Alaska would become the "most noble state in the Union . . . if the coming multitudes compare with the people at Skagway and Dyea now."[22]

People came and people left, but some, like Harriet Pullen, put down roots in Skagway. She had been trying to wring a living from a marginal Washington state farm for herself and her four children when the Klondike was struck. In '97 she joined the Gold Rush, arriving at Skagway with only $7. Soon her apple pies, baked in a tent, were delighting the men building Billy Moore's wharf, and she was able to move to a log cabin. For a time she operated a packtrain over the White Pass with horses brought up from her Washington farm. After her children joined her and she had a short fling in the Atlin gold rush, Harriet settled down to become Skagway's most famous hostess. She rented a large house from Moore and made the Pullen House the best hotel in town. Pullen greeted shipboard visitors at the dock for many years, inviting them for good eats and regaling them with an account of the shooting of Soapy Smith.

Among the town's businesses were a number of photographers who specialized in souvenir pictures of local scenes and events. Some became famous like E.A. Hegg, Winter and Pond, W.H. Case, and H.C. Barley, and their photographs are standard features of Alaska books.

Newsmen of early Skagway included J.F.A. Strong, a member of the vigilante committee opposed to Smith and Elmer (Stroller) White. Strong moved on to Nome, Katalla, Iditarod, and, eventually, the governor's chair at Juneau, while White moved to Dawson and Juneau.

Among Skagway's more colorful citizens was Frank Keelar of New York and California, who elevated himself from jeweler to "the Money King of Alaska" in a shop on Holly Street. Keelar boasted of great wealth, including mines, sawmills, steamboats, townsites, and timberlands that yielded him barrels of money he wished to invest. From his arrival in March 1898, Keelar proved himself as a hustling entrepreneur and was rewarded with election to the city council.

It was the money king's claim that he could deal with anyone who really wanted to trade and he offered $5,000 to any would-be trader who was disappointed. He also advertised in the states, offering information on Skagway and advice: "If you have no money and your skin is full of hard luck stories, don't come to Alaska as we don't have time to bury you. But if you are a man that believes in pluck and not in luck, here is the best of all places on earth to invest, but you must have something to invest."[23]

Dyea was a lively place by fall '97, and its growth continued over the winter as arriving argonauts settled in to wait for spring before continuing on. The town had 1,200 people by mid-December. Many lived in tents but streets had been laid out for a townsite and carpenters were busy building structures. In January the *Dyea Trail* began publication, boasting that "the world can now be assured the finest system of Wharves

and Warehouses in all Alaska will be constructed here at the mouth of the Chilkoot Pass, the only route to the greatest gold fields known to history."[24]

By May the Dyea Wharf was completed. The *Dyea Trail* editor rejoiced as the docking facility helped Dyea compete with Skagway. Skagway's facilities were superior, but lighters built at Dyea kept busy shuttling stampeders from Skagway to Dyea. Some of the town's new buildings were large ones, including the Olympic Hotel, a three-story, 75-by-100-foot structure that was billed as "the largest in Alaska."

People in Dyea, particularly the merchants who had a heavy stake in the town's permanence took pleasure in Skagway's woes. News about the formation of vigilantes, the Committee of 101, to challenge Soapy Smith's operations, caused Dyeans to reflect on their better condition. When Frank Reid of the vigilantes and Soapy Smith shot it out, Dyeans were scandalized. The *Dyea Trail* had not even been able to forebear a little gloating when an outbreak of spinal meningitus occurred in Skagway. Clearly, the Dyeans reasoned, their town was superior to Skagway in every way.

When the terrible avalanche swept down on the Chilkoot Trail in April 1898 with tragic results the *Dyea Trail* accused their rivals of taking advantage: "But Skauans have no shame. Their ambition seems to be to heap misery on others, they glory in publishing false statements; they are ghoulish enough to wish that there had been 500 buried if it only happened on the Chilkoot trail."

The rivalry between Dyea and Skagway was real enough, but its determination did not rest on newspaper editorial bombast. After the '98 rush only one town was needed to service traffic to the interior. The choice of a permanent route would eliminate one town or another. And, of course, the railroad chose the White Pass and Dyea faded out.

## All-Canadian Routes

The Canadian routes caused considerable grief to argonauts. The Edmonton Trail was highly touted in Edmonton by those who believed that this Canadian route would protect travelers from exorbitant transportation charges and "get-rich-quick" merchants in Seattle, Skagway, or along the Yukon. It was easy enough to trace a line on the map showing a pleasant water route via the Peace River, Athabasca River, Lane River, Great Slave Lake, Mackenzie and Porcupine rivers to reach Fort Yukon on the Yukon River. Of course, the distance of 2,600 miles was a notable impediment. An overland route was also offered from Edmonton. This involved a trek of 1,446 miles for travelers across Peace River, to Fort St. John, along the Finley and Kechika rivers to Watson Lake, thence along the Pelly River to Fort Selkirk.

Boasters of the Edmonton routes noted that the pioneer Yukon prospectors, Jack McQuesten and Alfred Mayo, used the Mackenzie-Porcupine route. They did not note that the pioneers' choice was determined by their location in Canada, that the transportation of the 1890s had improved over that of the '80s, and that the pioneers traveled light, living off the land. In the end--or well before the end--the Edmonton route travelers had reason to regret their decision, and ample time for dismal reflections on

their bad choice. Some travelers spent two years on the trail, hampered by the bulk of their baggage and the lack of reprovisioning stations along the way. One woman, who finally reached Dawson, was proud to report that her baby had been born on the trail, but less pleased that conception had occurred en route as well. It is estimated that about one-half of the 1,500 who started out from Edmonton gave up and turned back and that 70 people died on the way.

Another disastrous choice was the Stikine River route which drew about 5,000 stampeders. These travelers voyaged to Wrangell from Canadian or American Pacific Coast ports, then moved up the Stikine to Telegraph Creek and over the trail of 160 miles to Teslin Lake. The route appealed to Canadians because once the sleazy lures of booming Wrangell were bypassed, its passage was over Canadian Territory. For the same reason Canadian government officials lauded the route.

Stampeders who marched over the Stikine ice during the '97-'98 winter had a miserable time. Except for the Edmonton Trail, its 1,200 mile length made it the longest overland route to the Klondike and perhaps only half of its travelers made it up the Stikine while far fewer reached Dawson. Even a well-equipped man like trapper Straford Tollmache had rough going in '98. He used sled dogs, but the spring thaw turned the Stikine ice cover to slush. In desperation he abandoned most of his provisions to ease his dogs' burden. Even so he had to kill 10 of his weakest dogs for food before finally getting upriver and he still had a long way to go over a route that required a great deal of portaging. Tollemache arrived at Dawson in late summer with very hard words for the falsely ballyhooed Stikine route.[25]

Still another painful divergence from the main routes was the Ashcroft Trail from Ashcroft, British Columbia, 125 miles northeast of Vancouver. Travelers took the Caribou Road, built in the 1860s during the Caribou gold rush, crossed Sheena River, and after 1,000 miles reached the Stikine at Telegraph Creek. The route seemed to offer certain benefits in avoiding high transportation costs and utilizing established trails along portions of the way--the Caribou Road and the Western Union Telegraph Expeditions trail constructed in the mid-1800s, but the advantages were illusory since the trails were hardly more than a trace. Of the approximately 1,500 men who attempted the route because of its "easy" access with pack animals, the greater number turned back after their animals died. It was said that none of the few successful travelers who reached Dawson had pack animals on arrival.[26]

## Valdez Glacier

There were no other single disasters on other trails to compare with the Chilkoot avalanche, but there were many instances of danger, discomfort, and frustration. Klondike stampeders who chose the Copper River route to the gold fields in '98 considered themselves judicious. They were encouraged by the Pacific Steam Whaling Co., in particular, to believe that they would avoid the congestion at Dyea and Skagway, the travails of the Chilkoot, boatbuilding on the lakes and ascend the Copper River with ease to get within striking distance of their goal. Their numbers, some 3,000 to 4,000,

were swelled by many who decided that their best prospects lay in the Copper River country itself. Persistent rumors of gold and copper deposits and of the existence of an old Russian trail from the head of Prince William Sound to the Copper River valley were other lures and accounted for the early mineral exploration of the WRST parklands. It was also meaningful to stampeders that the U.S. Army had dispatched Capt. W.R. Abercrombie to blaze a trail into the interior from Valdez. Abercrombie did his assigned duties but also found time to make Copper River mineral claims.

The influx of stampeders began in February 1898 and lasted into June, although by May more stampeders were leaving the country than entering it. Reports on the hardships suffered by those who had crossed the Valdez Glacier to reach the Copper River country were made by Abercrombie and by F.C. Schrader of the USGS, both of whom landed at Valdez in April. Some new arrivals were not charmed by 5-foot snow depths still on the ground at Valdez in April. "Several of the wavering and less stout-hearted . . . [decided]," as Schrader noted, "that their line of duty lay in an immediate return to home and friends."[27]

Schrader and an army officer made a reconnaissance of the glacier trail for arriving prospectors. A heavy snowstorm lasting five days left up to 12 feet of fresh snow on the glacier, but the officers got far enough to judge the glacier's extent and see the head of the Klutena River form at its summit. Stampeders who did not care to tackle the glacier and others who were inclined to commerce remained where they were and organized the town of Valdez. Previously the area's only community, Orca, had consisted of a cannery of the Pacific Steam Whaling Company.

Most of the Valdez stampeders pushed on over the glacier with considerable hardship. Many of these returned to Valdez from the interior before winter closed the prospecting season; others settled in for the winter--some 300 at Copper Center. In late April 1899 Abercrombie landed at Valdez once more, this time to begin construction of a Valdez-Eagle military trail. With dismay he described conditions:

> The scene that followed the arrival of our vessel at Valdez was one that I shall not soon forget. Crowding aboard the steamer came the argonauts of last season's rush into the Copper River Valley and who now considered themselves full-fledged miners, although many of them had never handled either a pick or a shovel since their entry into the country. A more motley-looking crowd it would be hard to imagine. Mackinaw suits of all varieties and colors faded and worn by exposure to the elements and their long journey over the Valdez Glacier from the Copper River Valley. They seemed to be sadly demoralized, and from a hurried conversation I had with six or seven I had known the year before I was led to believe that hundreds were dying of starvation and scurvy beyond the Coast range in the Copper River Valley. Most of those then in the settlement of Valdez had little or no money, but notwithstanding this fact a wholesale orgy was inaugurated that lasted until midnight, the cabin and the decks of the steamer giving unmistakable evidence of the potent influence of the liquor on those who

> had indulged so freely and who were now lying around in various attitudes sleeping off the effects . . . That they had passed a terrible winter was beyond all question of doubt; that many of them had died from scurvy and being frozen to death was in evidence at the little graveyard that had sprung up since my departure the year before.[28]

Valdez became an important place despite its limitations as a point of passage to the Klondike. With the construction of the government trail to Eagle (and Fairbanks) the town's permanence was assured even if the hopes of its boosters for a railroad to the interior were not realized.

## The Yukon Route

For stampeders who considered an all-water route to Klondike preferable to packing over the Chilkoot or White passes, the Yukon entry was well advertised by shipping companies. It was the more expensive route but was certainly safer and less arduous. From Seattle to St. Michael the ocean voyage was 2,750 miles. The voyage could be comfortable or miserable depending upon the time it took, weather, quality of the ship, or--most important--the vessel's crowdedness. Some shipping companies took gross advantage of the desperation of the Klondike-bound passengers to cram them aboard without regard for comfort. Postponement of sailing dates was an aggregation, as were other delays caused by engine malfunction, storms, or Bering Sea ice conditions. Most ships called at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians for refueling or other purposes.

Overall, however, the ocean leg of the long voyage was more reliably achieved and more comfortable than the Yukon River passage. At St. Michael, usually described in dismal terms by argonauts, passengers transferred to one of the steamboats serving the Yukon. Over '97-'98 the Yukon fleet had grown mightily as trading companies, shipping companies, and individuals anticipated a bonanza in freight and passenger fares. But it was some 1,700 miles upriver to Dawson, and few of the '97 stampeders were quick enough off the mark to reach St. Michael before freeze-up. Some of these returned to the states, others languished at St. Michael, and a few pushed overland.

The great influx of stampeders hit St. Michael in spring '98. Nothing had occurred over the year to make the natural setting more agreeable, but accommodations were improving fast as lodging and eating places were thrown up and carpenters were busy building boats. Passengers who had made arrangements earlier for a quick transfer to waiting steamboats avoided discomfort but many had to wait some time at St. Michael. For some months the old Russian station held a huge tent city housing travelers who preferred camping to commercial lodging. Old tents came down and new ones went up as the season progressed, but the human flow was continuous.

One good thing about St. Michael was the opportunity it provided to send the last letters home before starting upriver where the vagaries of the mail service and climate might delay further communications for months. These letters could not tell much

about the writers' prospects at that point but they certainly revealed states of mind. Often the writer was already discouraged about his chance of making a fortune. He had seen too many people and heard too many stories about hardship and failure since leaving home. For some St. Michael seemed a good place to quit--to cut one's losses. Other letters burned with hope and ambition although it is likely that the flame burned less fiercely than it had in Seattle or another port of embarkation. It was certainly sobering--if not devastating--to one's spirits to encounter at St. Michael throngs of people returning from the Klondike crying out against the promises that had lured them north. Of course, there were plenty of pleased-looking fellows too, men who kept wary eyes on their baggage, which included gold.

For the Yukon voyage, passenger accommodations were either on the steamboat itself or a barge that larger boats pushed ahead. A barge could carry up to 175 people in crude fashion with rows of berths lining its sides separated by a long dining table running the length of the vessel. There was no protection from mosquitoes nor from the tedium of the lower river landscape, and anxieties mounted when the vessels grounded on sandbars.

Sometimes passengers endured major delays that were particularly aggravating in late season. In the fall everyone aboard scanned the skies apprehensively for weather signs and viewed the first ice with sinking hearts. Usually progress was steady, if slow; the boats pushed against a 4-to-5-mile current and made about 6 miles an hour. Halts to take on wood took about two hours daily in the commercial boats, but much longer for independents who did their own wood-cutting. Whatever the range of comfort provided, steamboat fare was expensive because of high costs. One important cost factor was the price of wood--varying from $7 a cord downriver to $14 nearer Dawson. A large steamboat driving a barge needed 30 cords a day. Stops at real towns provided some diversion. At places like Rampart, Fortymile, Fort Yukon, and Circle some passengers met acquaintances from Outside and could enjoy some gossip and opinions on the country that might be more trustworthy than those gathered from strangers. Some passengers ended their voyage at ports like Rampart, either voluntarily because mining prospects seemed better than those at Dawson or, involuntarily, when ice stopped navigation.[29]

## Food Shortage

While stampeders fretted about travel routes and trail conditions they, along with the working Klondike miners, were forced to worry about possible famine conditions as well. Newspapers were quick to report the first alarms about a possible food shortage in Dawson. There was a whimsical appeal in imagining men with pockets full of gold threatened by starvation. As the '97-'98 winter neared there was an increasing awareness of Dawson's remoteness and the limitations of food stores as people continued to enter the country. "How About Grub?" one editor asked: "Miners Cannot Eat Gold." Reporting from St. Michael to the *Chicago Tribune*, August 17, 1897, Sarah Beazley predicted certain starvation. She praised the efforts of the North American Transporta-

tion and Trading Company to get goods upriver and noted the concern of company officers that no blame fall on them: "they having reportedly warned people to wait until next spring before going in." Beazley heard much praise on "the generalship and management of Captain J.J. Healy" and expected that " he will not desert these poor miners."[30]

Criticism of Healy and the North American Transportation and Trading Company from August '97 was more common than praise. Rumor had it that the company's policy of hiring cheap labor for boat crews resulted in the sandbar grounding of *Weare*, thus reducing prospective food supplies in Dawson. Both companies were condemned for bringing in whiskey rather than food. "Avarice," argued one returning miner, "is the marked characteristic of both companies at St. Michael." And avarice caused the companies to encourage stampeders to come into the country despite the food shortage. Other charges against the North American Transportation and Trading Company came from stampeders at St. Michael who were advised by company agents in Chicago to buy their food and supplies when they got to the Yukon.[31]

What probably incensed the established miners more than anything else against Healy and the North American Transportation and Trading Company was his refusal to fill 1897-98 orders placed and paid for long before navigation closed in September. Arthur Celene had deposited $900 for grub and received one sack of flour "and a few other things, in proportion," and his remaining deposit back. Celene and about 500 miners treated similarly could not accept Healy's dismissal of their priority. They did not blame the Circle miners when they held up the steamboats in September '97 and were reassured when both *Weare* and *Bella* unloaded quickly and headed for Fort Yukon to collect cargoes left by other boats. Meanwhile, prices had risen. "Everything eatable was selling at figures from $1 up per pound. Flour was $1.50 to $2.00 per pound. Fresh meat was about the same price."[32]

Meals cost $2.50 at Dawson in '97-98 at a time when a hungry man could fill up for 50 cents in the states. A very hungry man in Dawson might spend up to $10. In restaurants and homes the flapjack was a popular standby. "It is the glory of the Klondike and appears in the most remote and impoverished diggings," noted a visitor. "Always palatable, it is, in the language of the miner, 'tough, but filling.'" Of course, rich men wanting a treat ordered fresh fish in season, savoring the disparity in taste, texture, and novelty between fish and flapjacks and other standbys, beans and salt pork.[33]

Reports differ on price gouging by the major trading companies. Thomas Magee, who left Dawson shortly after the stores ran out of food, reported that prices had not increased as the situation became threatening, but the store price had been $2 per pound for flour. Other reports placed the highest price of flour at $1.[34]

By October 15, 1897, Healy was openly "distressed" by the outlook. He had not anticipated that several boats would fail to reach Dawson and that so many rushers would reach there in late fall--and there were 700 unfilled orders on North American Transportation and Trading Company books. The North American Transportation and

Trading Company stock was gone, yet it appeared that one-quarter of the Klondike residents needed winter supplies.[35]

Urgent calls for government aid against famine induced Congress to appropriate $20,000 for Sheldon Jackson's scheme of a reindeer relief expedition. The U.S. Army took charge of the Laplanders, Finns, and Norwegians and the 539 reindeer purchased in Norway for shipment through New York, to Seattle, and Dyea. The expedition was not a success. Because of the lack of proper food, most reindeer either died en route or reached the interior in an emaciated condition. As it turned out the fiasco's failure did not cause any hardship. The long predicted specter of starvation at Dawson abated. There were some shortages of food over the '97-'98 winter, but supplies were enough to prevent disaster.

By late September 1897 some miners running from the threat of starvation came close to disaster. Thomas McGee, a San Francisco capitalist, chartered a little river steamer to carry his party upriver from Dawson to Fort Selkirk, where they would take the Dalton Trail to the coast. After the steamer broke down, the 15 men hired Indians to carry them by canoes. Large ice blocks hampered progress, but they managed to reach Fort Selkirk. They could not find the Dalton Trail as they headed for the coast until, 75 miles out of Fort Selkirk, they fortunately met Dalton who advised on the route and the location of hidden food caches. But for this chance meeting they might have died of hunger and exposure as it was late October by this time. Finally, after 40 days en route, they reached Haines Mission.[36]

By January 1898 there were about 6,000 people in the Canadian Yukon, including 5,000 at Dawson and nearby camps. Of these, 75 percent were Americans. Another 1,000 whites were in the Alaska Yukon, most of them stranded when en route to Dawson. During winter and early spring of 1897-98 about 28,000 argonauts crossed the Chilkoot and White passes, while 5,000 to 6,000 started upriver from St. Michael. Alfred H. Brooks estimated that two-thirds of those who started from St. Michael failed to reach their goal for various reasons, and overall only 34,000 of 60,000 stampeders reached the Klondike. By the close of navigation in 1898, 30,000 persons were left on the Yukon. Of these, 13,000 were in the Klondike and 4,206 at Dawson. An estimated 35,000 persons disembarked at Skagway and Dyea in 1897-98; 5,000 at Wrangell for the Stikine River route; 3,000 at Valdez for the glacier route; 1,000 on Cook Inlet; 2,000 tried all-Canadian overland or river routes. In all, probably 60,000 folks started for the gold fields, and if each had only two backers or family members--a conservative estimate--this meant that more than 200,000 people "had a more or less direct financial interest in the gold rush."[37]

## Hardship

There were numerous tragic conclusions of winter treks, particularly among men with too little appreciation of conditions and their lack of experience. J. Maidhof, formerly U.S. Consul in Germany, was among those aboard the steamer *Merwin* when she became frozen in near the Yukon's mouth. Wasting the 1897-98 winter on *Merwin*

was intolerable to Maidhof, so he acquired a dog team and sled and headed to Rampart. On Christmas Eve he arrived at St. Michael. H.M. Morgan, an Associated Press correspondent, restive at the prospect of sitting out the winter at St. Michael, agreed to join him. On January 7 they started over the ice for Unalakleet, intending to reach the Yukon at Kaltag, then move upriver. With two sleds and 13 dogs they reached Unalakleet in six days, rested several days at the Swedish Mission, then pushed on 20 miles to a native settlement where they hired a guide to get them to Kaltag. Snowstorms delayed their departure from the village until January 25. After two days run, one sled was damaged. While repairing the sled, beset by a heavy snowstorm, the guide left them.

At this point the travelers would have been well advised to turn back. The trail had been obscured by the snow, and they could only depend upon uncertain compass readings to find Kaltag. Yet they started off, wading through deep snow, making only 5 miles a day at best--and sometimes only half that. Extreme cold and a dwindling of provisions foreshadowed their fate. Maidhof froze his hands, and by February 3 it was apparent that they had lost the trail. Their only hope lay in continuing on through snow depths of 10 feet in a generally northeastern direction to hit the Yukon.

Eventually they cleared everything but sleeping bags and blankets from their sleds to lighten loads for the starving dogs. On February 6, they killed their first dog to provide food for themselves and surviving dogs. Soon Maidhof froze his feet and Morgan his hands. On the 11th they only made a mile, and Maidhof refused to go on. As they started back towards Unalakleet Maidhof collapsed. Morgan killed another dog and tried to force soup on the stricken man, but he died after some hours. Morgan buried him in the snow marked the grave with snowshoes and continued on, killing more dogs for food as needed. By March 3, Morgan, incapacitated by snow blindness, bundled up in his sled to await the end. After four days natives found him and carried him to safety.[38]

## Miners Help Themselves

Miners were not willing to face the hardships of food scarcity when food was within reach. Miners at Circle forcibly took stores from steamers of the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Transportation and Trading Company in September '97. Capt. P.H. Ray of the U.S. Army feared that Fort Yukon miners would show the same disregard for property. On November 1, he communicated his anxiety to Washington, reiterating recommendations he had made earlier for a military takeover of the Yukon:

> Sir: I have the honor to report that since my return matters here have assumed a very serious aspect. The crew of the Weare and others caught in the gorge at the same time as myself are in camp here at the site of the old

> fort; 4 miles above the Alaska Commercial Company have a cache of about 200 tons of stores, landed there last fall when their steamers failed to pass the bar.
>
> The North American Trading and Transportation Company have a cache here. On the afternoon of the 29th ultimo I received a note from Mr. Davis, agent of the Alaska Commercial Company, saying that he was informed that there was a movement on foot to seize the cache, and a meeting was being held for that purpose.
>
> I went up at once with Mr. Richardson, and soon after arriving there was waited upon by a committee from a miners' meeting, who stated their demands: That there were 75 of them, and they demanded they be furnished on credit with an 'outfit of provisions and clothing for nine months.' This, Mr. Davis, the agent, declined to do.
>
> I am still of the opinion that it should be a military government, with power to hunt to the death the lawless element.[38]

Conditions on the Yukon appeared critical to John J. Healy of the North American Transportation and Trading Company who shared Ray's fears that food thefts and disorders would continue. In December '97 he hired E.H. Wells to carry his letter to the adjutant general in Washington:

> We have advanced for the Government $1,000 to pay Mr. Well's expenses, he to look to the Department for compensation for his services to Washington and return. In behalf of the American miners on the American side of the Yukon Valley we appeal to the Government to send us the strong arm of the military for protection from Fort Get There, St. Michael Island, to the boundary line between Yukon, Alaska, and Yukon, Northwest Territory. Our Government should act at once, as there are many valuable mines on the Koyukuk, Tanana, Manook, Birch Creek, Seventy-Mile, American Creek, and all of that portion of Forty-Mile mines lying within the American possessions.
>
> The mining industries of the American portion of the Yukon Valley will be seriously crippled, if not entirely paralyzed, by reason of it not being safe to run steamers and land supplies at any of the mining camps along the river.
>
> The great rush of the people to the Yukon makes it probable that armed raiders will hold up the steamers and loot the stores of their supplies, consequently the merchants and transportation companies will be obliged to

> confine their business to the Canadian side of the Yukon Valley, as the Northwest mounted police offer protection to life and property.[40]

Other alarming reports were also reaching Washington and stimulated both the several relief efforts and, more significantly, the eventual establishment of a judicial district for the interior.

## Commercial Expansion

Valdez, Skagway, and Dyea were Alaska's chief gold-rush boom towns but Yukon River traffic also accelerated business at St. Michael. Activity there justified the efforts of the North American Transportation and Trading Company in building a commodious hotel in summer '98. Prior to 1897 there had never been more than three or four ships calling at the old Russian trading post during the season. Thirty-six ocean going ships and 15 riverboats entered the port in 1897; in 1898 there were 118--24 from foreign ports--and 113 riverboats. Construction activity flourished because many of the river steamers were shipped in knocked-down condition and assembled there--as was the hotel.

Such brisk acceleration of commerce strained the frail governmental system. The highest judicial office, aside from the district judge based at Sitka, was that of U.S. Commissioner. Commissioner L.B. Shepard of St. Michael lacked authority to deal with the most common civil cases--disputes concerning sailors; wages, libels against vessels, and other admiralty law matters beyond the jurisdiction of a justice of peace court. On several occasions, as when stampeder Homer Bird murdered another man on the Yukon, Shepard had to advance personal funds to secure a timely arrest. The commissioner wished Washington to know that his ability to meet financial demands in advance of repayment of governments vouchers, which could take a year, was limited. Shepard, who was also the North American Transportation and Trading Company's agent, distributed all company mail received at St. Michael and reported to Chicago on all news from the gold fields. He was in full agreement with his Dawson-based manager, John J. Healy, on the great starvation scare of '97, sending dispatches on *Portland* leaving St. Michael on August 16, "that all danger of starvation among the miners is over." Reporting this, a Chicago newspaper described the freight sent upriver as "principally goods," although other sources indicated that whiskey and hardware made up the bulk of riverboat cargos. Charles A. Weare in Chicago insisted that the company's food priority had been communicated to all riverboat captains. If this was true, the order must have been ignored.[41]

It was on Shepard's advice that the North American Transportation and Trading Company determined to build a hotel in anticipation of there being numerous miners whose downriver passages would be ended by freeze-up, inducing them to trudge down to St. Michael for its amenities, "most . . . will be well supplied with dust and eager to spend it," warned the agent. News of the company's investment at Fort Get There, their name for their St. Michael station (later changed to "Healy") was very stimulating

to Outside investors. It suggested that Alaska itself--not just the Canadian Klondike--was being developed and would probably prove rich in gold when prospectors gave it more attention.[42]

Shepard's performance was criticized by miners, particularly those who distrusted the North American Transportation and Trading Company and Alaska Commercial Company, because he was also St. Michael's North American's agent. There was no illegality in working for the North American Transportation and Trading Company, yet it attracted condemnation. An anonymous letter of 1899 scorns Shepard as "an illiterate man of no honor, no knowledge of law or justice," accused him of cheating other Yukon companies to force them out of competition with the North American Transportation and Trading Company, and with the Alaska Commercial Company agent, "gobble up most of the Cape Nome mining claims through fictitious powers of attorney." The disgruntled writer believed Shepard "used Laplanders and other foreigners and accepted filings of citizenship to get these claims." Since the complainant's linking of Shepard's supposed corruption with the much disputed claims of Nome's discoverers is nonsense, perhaps charges that he "accepts bribes in trials" was equally slanderous, although such charges were made by others.[43]

In addition to the hotel North American Transportation and Trading Company officers were proud to announce the augmentation of its Yukon fleet by the launching of *Hamilton* on August 8, 1898. A storm the next day came close to ending the steamboat's career, as fierce winds swept across the Bering Sea inland to damage some buildings. *Hamilton* survived but was not fitted out and under way early enough to complete its maiden voyage before being caught by the ice.

Neither Shepard nor any other adviser to companies and potential investors could be counted on entirely when they forecasted future events, but their reports had more credibility than those contributed by the hoards of newsmen. Shepard was amazed at the numbers of journalists gathered at St. Michael: "Every newspaper of note in the world seems to be represented, and the strife for news is so great that all kinds of stories are being sent out." This message was itself a warning to his Chicago headquarters--a hint that stories of competitive journalist might hold elements of fantasy.[44]

Cunning businessmen did not give all their attention to building, buying, and selling. They knew the value of lobbying in Washington or Ottawa for special advantages. Usually their requests were routine ones, but North American officers looking ahead to means of securing a stronger position in the territory proposed a bold scheme. Citing "a deplorable deficiency in the exercise of judicial authority," they proposed carving out the Yukon section as a separate territory. Lincoln Territory was the suggested name, with its capital at Weare (Tanana) about halfway between St. Michael and Dawson on the Yukon. Since Secretary of the Treasury Lyman Gage's son, Eli, worked for the North American Transportation and Trading Company, the secretary might favor a proposal that included Eli's appointment as governor. Boundaries would be: Mount St. Elias on the Southeast from which the eastern line would run to the Arctic Ocean; the western boundary would run downcoast from St. Michael to the top of the divide between the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers; the southern boundary would follow the

62nd parallel east to the Copper River, thence to Mount St. Elias. The Alaska territory would then encompass the Aleutians, Alaska Peninsula, Cook Inlet, Kodiak, Prince William Sound, Copper River, and southeast Alaska. Though Charles Barber, the Fort Get There hotel manager, who announced the scheme while en route to St. Michael, indicated a bill to be introduced by Senator Thomas Carter of Montana had already been written, nothing came of the scheme.[45]

The abortive territorial division effort had no importance in itself but, like the North American Transportation and Trading Company's expansion and the establishment of other shipping and trading companies on the Yukon, it reinforced a view of optimistic prospects. People thinking about the North were impressed by the splurge of capital flowing that direction.

## Conclusion

There were horrors on the Valdez Trail, terrible disasters on the Chilkoot, carnage of pack animals on the White Pass, anxieties about food shortage, and aggravating delays in the Yukon River passage. Many stampeders quit their quest along the way or reached Dawson to find their money depleted by unanticipated expenses in transport or packing or travel delays. Some gave up at this point or altered their plans for investment or maintenance.

"Getting There" was, in a special sense, what the gold rush was all about. Travel timing and hardships often dictated the longevity of one's enthusiasm, acting as a kind of "survival of the fittest" check on the masses who sought their fortune. Evidence of the importance of the travel ventures shows clearly in the many narratives of the stampeders. Their stories focus sharply on their experience while en route to the gold fields. Though such an emphasis is understandable among those who lost too much in money, time, and zeal to pursue their original goals, it is also pronounced among those who stayed in the North for long periods. Overall, the gold rush stampede venture held several distinct chapters or stages, but the post-travel stages did not dominate memories to the extent that "getting there" did.

## Notes
## Chapter 4

1. *Alaska Mining Record*, November 6, 1897; *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, 1897.

2. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 20, 1897.

3. Robert L. Spude, *Chilkoot Trail: From Dyea to Summit with the '98 Stampeders* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Cooperative Park Studies Unit, 1980) ix.

4. Ibid., 33, 13.

5. Ibid., 102-103.

6. Ibid., 127.

7. Ibid., 147.

8. Franklin Walker, *Jack London and the Klondike* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1966) 58.

9. *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1897.

10. *Seattle Times*, August 19, 1897.

11. Juliette C. Reinicker, *Klondike Letters* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1984) 23-24.

12. "Autobiography of Lester L. Monnett," 2, unpublished manuscript, NPS file copy.

13. *Seattle Times*, January 5, 1898.

14. *New York Journal*, February 13, 1898.

15. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 2, 1897.

16. Ibid., August 2 and August 4, 1897.

17. *Chicago Tribune*, September 12, 1897.

18. Jane Apostol, "Charles W. Watts: An Oregonian in the Klondike," (*Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 87, No. 1, Spring, 1986) 8-9.

19. Colonel S.B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (London: Jenkins, 1915), 295-297.

20. Spude, *Chilkoot Trail, passim*; *Roy Minter, The White Pass: Gateway to the Klondike* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1987) passim.

21. J.G. MacGregor, *Klondike Rush Through Edmonton* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970) 1-3.

22. Brady to Secretary of Interior, December 21, 1897; July 7, 1898, Interior Papers, FRC.

23. Howard Clifford, *Skagway Story* (Edmonds, WA: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co., 1975) 85.

24. *Dyea Trail*, January 19 and April 9, 1898, quoted in Edwin C. Bearss, *Proposed Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park Resource Study*, (Washington, D.C.: NPS, 1970), 105, 121, for this and following quote.

25. Stratford Tollemache, *Reminiscences of the Yukon* (Toronto: Briggs, 1912) 27.

26. William R. Hunt, *North of 53º* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1974) 75-77; *Hamlin Garland, Trail of the Gold-Seekers* (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1899) *passim*.

27. F.C. Schrader, "A Reconnaissance of the Port of Prince William Sound and the Copper River District, Alaska, in 1898," *Compilation of Narratives of Exploration in Alaska*. Senate Repts., 56th Cong. 1st sess., No. 1023 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1900) 368-9.

28. William R. Abercrombie, "Copper River Exploring Expedition, *1899*," *Compilation of Narratives of Exploration in Alaska*. Senate Repts., 56th Cong., 1st sess., No. 1023, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1900) 14-15.

29. Numbers of published narratives describe the Yukon route, including Jeremiah Lynch, *Three Years in the Klondike* (London: Arnold & Co., 1904). Other references to the Yukon route may be noted throughout this text.

30. *Chicago Tribune*, September 11, 1897; *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 11, October 21, 1897.

31. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 21, 1897.

32. *Alaska Mining Record*, November 24, 1897.

33. *Oakland Engineer*, March 16, 1898.

34. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, 1897; *Seattle Times*, December 1, 1897.

35. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 29, 1897.

36. Edwin C. Bearss, *Klondike Gold Rush* 100, citing Ella Lung Martinsen, *Black Sand & Gold* (Portland, OR.: Metropolitan Publishing Co., 1967) 216-18.

37. Alfred H. Brooks, *Blazing Alaska's Trails* (College: University of Alaska Press, 1953) 350.

38. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 11, 1898.

39. P.H. Ray and W.P. Richardson, "Suffering and Destitute miners in Alaska," *Compilation of Narratives of Exploration in Alaska*, 542-43.

40. Ibid., 540-41.

41. L.B. Shepard to C.N. Bliss, June 1, 1899, District Court Papers, ASA, RG 305, Letters sent; *Chicago Tribune*, September 5, 1897; Virginia Burlingame, "John J. Healy's Alaskan Adventure" (*Alaska Journal*, Autumn 1978), 316; and Pierre Berton, *Klondike Fever* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974) 178 used other sources indicating Healy's anger that so little food was sent.

42. Ibid.

43. Anonymous letter enclosed with Attorney General to Judge Charles S. Johnson, November 16, 1899, ASA, RG 505, Letters Received.

44. *Chicago Tribune*, September 5, 1897.

45. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 14, 1897.

# Chapter 5
## Mining Towns and Characters

### Glorious Dawson

During the fall of 1896 miners mushed or walked to the Klondike. Most came from the Fortymile region, the closest community of miners. The stampede from Circle City, then the largest population center in the interior, did not get under way until January 1897.

Fortymiler Joe Ladue is generally considered Dawson's founder because he shipped in his sawmill and laid out the townsite. William Ogilvie, the Canadian boundary surveyer, soon arrived to make an official survey of Ladue's site and of the valuable creeks, Bonanza and Eldorado, where gold discoveries had been made. With these preliminaries handled, the place boomed as hot-eyed arrivals kept coming.

Men kept busy over the winter and spring of 1896-97. The town lacked amenities, but all the stampeders brought in their own provisions, so there was food enough. Nonetheless, the arrival of the first steamboat from downriver in July was a great event. Food had been getting scarce, and the liquor had long since run out.

As the summer advanced, more stampeders came in from various Yukon camps and, increasingly, argonauts from the Outside hit town. By the close of navigation, Dawson claimed 5,000 souls and was well provided with saloons, dance halls, and gambling places.

A year later the town had 30,000 people and was one of the most celebrated places in the world. And, thanks to the Mounties, having been moved in soon after initial discoveries from their base at Fortymile, Dawson was a secure, orderly community. A man could drink and gamble all he wanted and hire a prostitute, but he could not display a weapon or indulge in rowdiness without police interference. In this respect Dawson differed markedly from the early camps on the American side of the boundary.

Dawson was a town full of Americans forced to observe the laws of Canada. Miners complained about Canada's laws and government officials. They hated the tax of 10 percent on their gross gold production (the first $5,000 was excluded from tax), but they paid it.

Dawson was a very special place from 1897 to 1899, in particular. The Nome rush and declining opportunities reduced the population considerably in 1899, and numbers fell sharply for the next several years. Even as the bloom faded, Dawson remained the important mining, supply, and cultural center of the upper Yukon, but the early years were the days of legend. Total production from all six Yukon Districts (1885-1988) was 11,720,026 ounces (troy) about 85 percent of which was derived from the Klondike. Hence, the Klondike has produced about 9.96 million ounces worth about 200 million (U.S.) at time of sale.

As the stampede to Nome was renewed in 1900 and then, within three years, excitement shifted to Fairbanks, much less was heard about Dawson and the Klondike. Production fell sharply from 1902 as local placer ground, that had been worked primarily by drift mining methods, seemed exhausted. But there was plenty of gold left for the investors who brought in advanced technology. With the advent of hydraulic and dredge mining on properties consolidated by Arthur Treadgold the industry boomed from 1901 to 1914. In fact, of the $250 million in gold produced in the Klondike, 75 percent was mined after 1900.

Jack London, whose literary popularity soared with publication of his Klondike stories, also dabbled in mining economics. In a magazine article of January 1900, the writer reviewed the great Klondike stampede in economic terms, comparing the costs and benefits of gold recovery. He calculated that 25,000 argonauts headed north in '97 with most failing to get beyond the head of Lynn Canal, while 100,000 started out in 1898. If the average stampeder spent $600, the total outlay was $75,000,000, half spent along the trail and the other half in transport and outfitting from Puget Sound or elsewhere. Few stampeders found paying claims, yet the stampeders lost a year's work which might have paid them an average daily wage of $4, had they stayed home. Thus, London calculated a loss of $150,000,000 in wages which, added to the $75,000,000 travel express, amounted to a total cost of $225,000,000. Against this outlay, the Klondike gold production was only $8,000,000 in '98 and, perhaps, $14,000,000 in '99: "The figure stand for themselves," London argued, $220,000,000 have been spent in extracting $22,000,000 from the ground.[1]

London went on to assess the long-range prospects of mining in the Yukon valley more favorably:

> While there are very few 'paying' creeks, it must be understood that nothing below a return of $10 a day per man under the old expensive conditions has been considered 'pay.' But when a sack of flour may be bought for a dollar instead of fifty, and all other things in proportion, it is apparent how great a fall the scale of pay can sustain. In California gravel containing 5 cents of gold to the cubic yard is washed at a profit; but hitherto in the Klondike gravel yielding less than $10 to the cubic yard has been ignored as unprofitable. That is to say, the old conditions in the Klondike made it impossible to wash dirt which was not at least two hundred times richer than that washed in California. But this will not be true henceforth. There are immense quantities of these cheaper gravels in the Yukon Valley, and it is inevitable that they yield to the enterprise of brains and capital.
>
> In short, though many of its individuals have lost, the world will have lost nothing by the Klondike. The new Klondike, the Klondike of the future, will present remarkable contrasts with the Klondike of the past. Natural obstacles will be cleared away or surmounted, primitive methods abandoned, and hardship of toil and travel reduced to the smallest possible minimum. Exploration and transportation will be systemized. There will be no waste

> energy, no harum-scarum carrying on of industry. The frontiersman will yield to the laborer, the prospector to the mining engineer, the dog-driver to the engine-driver, the trader and speculator to the steady-going modern man of business; for these are the men in whose hands the destiny of the Klondike will be intrusted.[2]

## Dawson Characters

Among the best known Klondike characters of the heydays of Dawson were a handful of show business promoters who entertained at the Opera House, Monte Carlo, Palace Grand, and other houses.

Dawson's first theatre, the Opera House, was built of logs with a bar and gambling room in the front and the theatre at the rear. Benches accommodated those who bought tickets at fifty cents while more expensive boxes ringed the area. Drinks cost double the bar price in the boxes but these murky places assured some privacy and sense of grandeur. Tallow lights served for boxlights in the first theatre but the splurge of building by summer '98 brought new, more fitting structures featuring gas lights, chair seats, nice dressing rooms, and other furnishings appropriate to the boom town's status.

Swiftwater Bill Gates' entry into the theatre world owed something to his friendship with Jack Smith. Both men had made big money on claims and Smith induced Gates' backing of his Monte Carlo theatre. Gates went down to San Francisco to hire dancehall girls, summoned reporters to his Palace Hotel suite, and told them colorful stories. Becoming a "character" in Dawson was not all that easy. Among the rivals there were skilled showmen and vastly experienced self-promoters like Capt. Jack Crawford, the "poet-scout," a veteran frontiersman who sold goods and lively stories from his store, the Wigwam, and offered fine prospects to men foolish enough to invest in the Captain Jack Crawford Alaska Prospect and Mining Corporation. Another frontiersman-showman was Arizona Charlie Meadows, a legitimate theatre man who built the Palace Grand.[4]

The dancehall gals competed with theatre owners to create their own legends, particularly those who managed to marry or otherwise exploit the newly rich men who thrived on dangerous love. Performers' salaries seldom exceeded $150 weekly, but girls could earn nugget tips and other remunerations. But salaries and other costs were far above those faced by managers Outside, and there were no profits unless oceans of booze were dispensed and gamblers flocked to the gaming tables.

In 1899 Arizona Charlie Meadows opened the Palace Grand, a magnificent house by any standards seating 2,200. Folks were impressed and showed their approval by howling like dogs at the July opening. Since miners had traditionally expressed their boredom and disgust at the theater by doglike howling, other signs had to be observed to ascertain their mood. One feature of the opening season was a play based on Meadows' own adventures as a scout with Al Sieber in the Geronimo campaign. On stage he rescued a fair damsel tied to a stake for burning by Apaches and escaped in a theatrical *tour de force*, plunging with his horse from a 14-foot elevation into 8 feet of

water. Before going north, Meadows had been associated with Soapy Smith of Skagway fame in Cripple Creek, Colorado. Meadows promoted a bull fight while Smith, then known as the "Denver Bronco Kid," ran a gambling concession stand.[5]

One of the most interesting aspects of Dawson's theatres was in its dramatic treatment of local characters and events. Swiftwater Bill Gates' edge in the race to legendom was fostered by lively skits highlighting his adventures. *Still Water Willie's Wedding*, produced at the Palace Grand, was one of several dramatic efforts to make fun of Gates by playwright-actor John Mulligan. *Still Water* later had a revival at the Tivoli Theatre where it was greeted with "yells of delight and amusement."[6]

Kate Rockwell, later "Klondike Kate," was a late-comer (1900) to the Dawson stage, and her paramour, Alexander Pantages, was a poor waiter at Dawson until he established the Orpheum Theatre. Later, Pantages left to foster a grand scheme for a circuit of vaudeville houses and made millions with the Orpheum network. Kate made her modest theatre reputation as "Klondike Kate" after leaving Dawson with Pantages and got big headlines when she sued Pantages for breach of promise in 1905.[7]

## Romance

The Klondike interest extended beyond the experiences of trail hardships and golden fortunes to other titillating aspects of the new frontier. Tales of romantic liaisons between men and women had considerable appeal. In a situation where desireable women were extremely scarce and suddenly rich men wished to crown their achievements by winning the favors of a lovely woman, the stuff of legend existed. Fortunately, Swiftwater Bill Gates was on hand to seize the opportunity for fame certain to outlast gold. Gates dazzled everyone by presenting Gussie LaMore $50,000 on the day of her arrival in Dawson from Juneau. Swiftly this deal was consummated by a wedding. LaMore's traveling companion, Violet Raymond, made a similar arrangement with Antone Standen for a present reported to be $10,000 in gold, but Standen's status as a romantic hero could not compare with that held by Gates. Before long the public tittered over the fleecing of Standen and others by their beautiful fortune hunters, but Gates, who did not fare much better with Gussie, went on to greater exploits. Gates was that *rara avis*, the man who defied all the copybook maxims with outrageous conduct yet landed on his feet--or even took giant bounds forward in the realms of gold and sex.

Stories of Dawson's matrimonial market reached the world press in summer '97. Exaggeration of such widely appealing romances is understandable. Miners arriving in San Francisco told their best stories, and newsmen placed them in proper perspective. "As a matrimonial market," newspapers insisted, "Dawson City has no equal on earth. Women are as scarce as gold dust is burdensome in the metropolis of the new Eldorado. All the men vow that any woman can become a bride with a wedding present of thousands of dollars worth of gold dust within thirty minutes after arriving in Dawson City if she will but whisper her consent." After relating the triumphs of Gates and Standen the writer invented a story about the only unmarried woman left in

Dawson: "She has refused every single man in Dawson, and they have knelt before her with uplifted hands full of gold. Being refused they have told her that she does not know a good thing when she sees it. She wears short skirts, carries an umbrella and wants to vote."[8]

## Joaquin Miller

Newspapers dispatched numbers of reporters to the Klondike. Among them was one of America's leading poets and incomparable poseur, Joaquin Miller. Miller, celebrated as the "Poet of the Sierras" and author of "Columbus," a poem that became a fixture in school books and anthologies for generations, was a genuine frontiersman, even if many of the adventures he recorded were fabricated. He grossly misrepresented his youthful Indian fighting exploits in California and falsely claimed membership in William Walker's filibustering invasion of Nicaragua (eventually he worked out a fine response to charges of lying about Nicaragua: "Was Milton ever in hell?"), but he was a Pony Express rider between Florence and Lewiston, Idaho in 1861-62.

Miller's Yukon adventure was a fiasco that nearly cost him his life and the literary reputation he had been reasonably successful in rebuilding for the last decade. The *New York Journal* and *San Francisco Chronicle* jointly commissioned Miller to lend his peculiar genius to the great stampede. The *Journal* knew what it wanted from Miller's pen: "Joaquin Miller will tell the romance of the new '49' among the ice fields." But by "romance" the *Journal* meant colorful, exciting reports rather than fictional ones that evoked controversy and the scandal of mendacious journalism. Other reporters keen to score a beat against the *Journal* or *Examiner* and envious of Miller's fame, read Miller's dispatches closely and critically, longing for the kind of misrepresentation that might tempt an aging poet-romancer of shaky moral integrity and unbridled enthusiasm.[9]

The *San Francisco Chronicle* led the pack of snarlers against Miller: "No one ever believes Joaquin except when he says he is thirsty." The truth was always too commonplace for a man of Miller's temperament, "and he is the last man to entrust with Klondike reporting to men whose wealth, savings, and lives might depend upon the truth and justice of his statements." Miller's "Pullman car" stories of the Chilkoot and White passes had already caused misery to "stranded men at Dyea and Skagway" as have his misstatements on travel cost to Dawson.[10]

Miller's literary style had curious, fetching aspects. He described Dyea's location in a "long, low marsh, lying between snow-covered walls of granite, graced by scattered trees no larger than an arm and a leg, and almost half of them are dead and dying." The dismal scene might have depressed less ebullient travelers but Miller found it "grand, grand, sublimely grand, and the air is sweet, healthful, and invigorating as wine. The heaven's breath smells wooingly here. You never saw snow so white anywhere as here." What he specifically admired was the absence of the dust of California or Colorado and a snow cover free of the litter left by large trees. "One constantly thinks of the transfiguration all along this land of whiteness and blue; white clouds, white snow, blue seas, and blue skies. Heavens! Had I but years to live here and lay my

hand upon this color, this fearful and wonderful garment of the most high God!" Readers of Miller's effusion could not fail to gain favorable impressions of marshy Dyea and the writer's Christian reverence.[11]

It is not true, as newspaper rivals accused, that Miller made light of crossing the Chilkoot Pass. He admitted climbing without the burden of a pack and finding the pass less formidable than it looked and even less difficult than other had represented it, "but, mark you, it is a man's and a big strong man's honest work and takes strength of body and nerve of soul." In other respects his supercharged prose paints true, impressionable pictures as with a depiction of the crowded, burdened unending line that is as expressive as the famed E. A. Hegg Photographs of the scene:

> The brave men climbing and climbing with their packs, pike in hands holding on with one hand . . . [carrying] sixty pounds, seventy-five, one hundred, and in one case a giant French courier with two hundred pounds . . . All the pictures that have been painted . . . of Napoleon and his men climbing the Alps are but childish playthings in comparison. We raised a shout and up the line it ran, the long, steep, and tortuous lines that reached from a bluff about us on and over and up till it lost itself in the clouds."

When Miller reached Dawson and reported that the diggings would produce 200 tons of gold--an incredible forecast--he was only quoting Pat Galvin, a former Helena, Montana, newsman who had struck it rich. Galvin, a genuine high-roller, expressed his fervent belief in the Klondike's future by establishing a trading transportation company to compete with the Alaska Commercial Company and North American Transportation and Trading Company. Before long his extravagance and ineptitude cleaned him out. In quoting Galvin and believing him Miller did no wrong, and who could blame a poet for concluding his story by calling on the Queen of Sheba and deriding the harbingers of doom: "No, there will be no starvation. The men who doubt that supplies will get here, where gold is waiting by the ton, miscalculated American energy. As for the gold here, I can only say as the Queen of Sheba said to Solomon, 'Behold, the half was not told me.'"

Miller's report on travel time and cost, however, was justifiably attacked by his critics. His first dispatch from Dawson reported his arrival after only 23 days from San Francisco (20 from Seattle), as if such a speedy transit were normal. Talking with other travelers en route must have made him aware that his pace had been unusual. Worse yet he argued that "the trip can be made for less that $100, and can be made alone." Perhaps someone might somehow contrive to travel for $100 but the costs were generally very much higher--and stampeders did need 1,000-2,000 pounds of provisions and gear that was expensive to buy and transport. In short, Miller projected his own experience in light travel without encumbrances as a standard for others lacking the support that had been provided him. It is hardly likely, however, that his misleading report "caused misery" to other rushers as newspaper critics charged. Any reader of reason-

able intelligence could distinguish between his own needs and situation and those of the journalist.

In October, Miller moved downriver to Circle and staked a few claims. He and E.O. Livernash, another *Examiner* journalist, shared a cabin. Years later, as a congressman from California, Livernash recalled the most memorable incident of a dull winter. It seems that Livernash had punched hole in a tin cup to make a coffee strainer. Miller, without noticing the mutilation, used the cup for a hoarded last drink of whiskey, saluting a female visitor with a poetic toast and lecherous intent while holding the cup aloft in tribute. When, weary of poetry, he tried to drink, his awful disappointment turned the cabin blue with curses. Livernash, in telling the story to an appreciative President Teddy Roosevelt, presented Miller as a buffoon, as did most of Miller's acquaintances. It was the price Miller paid for his chronic disregard for truth and modesty. Remarkably, Miller never retaliated in kind. He always spoke well of everyone, perhaps figuring this a fair return for the ego loss and discomfort that might attend his companionship.

But another more heroic side to Miller's behavior surfaced at Circle when word reached him that men caught by a blizzard on the Dawson-Circle trail were starving. Resolving to rescue them and provide a thrilling story for his editors, the 60-year-old adventurer and H.E. Canavan, an even older man, started off with some grub packed on a hand sled. Old-timers could not convince Miller an expedition of more than 200 miles in extreme winter conditions would be a folly even for experienced northern travelers. The men made 80 miles before holing up in a blizzard at the Charley River. Eventually they were rescued and taken to Dawson, suffering badly from frostbite after 35 days on the trail. Weeks of hospitalization and the loss of two toes followed for Miller. His foolhardy mission had not given him any good news stories, although it provided good copy for his detractors, particularly Edwin Tappan Adney's savage derision in *Harper's Weekly*.

Miller had left Dawson in June '98 and was at his palatial spread on the Heights near Oakland when reporters thoughtfully presented him with Adney's story in the July 9, 1898, *Harper's Weekly* and invited comment. Since Adney had carelessly averred that Miller, destitute in Dawson, had depended on miners' charity, the poet asked reporters to weigh his $6,000 commission plus expenses from the *Journal* and *Examiner* and the value of his 70-acre estate against Adney's canards. Avoiding mention of his disastrous Circle-Dawson journey, Miller threatened a $100,000 libel suit against *Harper's*. In December he started a vaudeville tour in Chicago, splendidly attired in his Klondike outfit of buckskin coat with gold nugget buttons, furry pants, and sealskin boots. His "five-a-day" lectures on the Klondike were hard work and not too successful, but it gave him a chance to deny having lured people north with inaccurate reporting. After some weeks, fearing that vaudeville would cheapen his reputation as a poet, Miller quit the circuit without any protest from the Keith Vaudeville Company management.

The "Poet of the Sierras" never became established as the poet of the Yukon, although some lines have survived, notably his commemorization of the Chilkoot:

Have you, too, banged at Chilkoot,
That rock-lined gate to the golden door.

Miller, a celebrity himself, drew attention to his own exploits and impressions. But he was only one colorful individual among an army of newsmen and miners who contributed to the heavy newspaper coverage. Most of the other were more serious-minded and less flamboyant than Miller.

## John J. Healy

In highlighting a few Dawson "characters" it does not do to focus exclusively on the high-livers. Some more serious businessmen were just as interesting. The place of John J. Healy in Alaska's mining history is significant. Healy, a tough little Irishman well into his middle years when he moved from Montana to Juneau in 1886, was already a frontier legend. After youthful U.S. Army service in the Utah campaign, he had been one of the discoverers of the Oro Fino gold fields in Idaho. Subsequently, he moved to Fort Benton and took up trading with Indians for buffalo robes. After American authorities curtailed the traders' whiskey traffic, Healy moved across the border into Alberta, then a lawless region rich in buffalo. Healy and a partner built Fort Whoop-Up, the most famous of the whiskey posts that spring up in the region. Healy flourished until the Canadian authorities asserted control by sending the Northwest Mounted Police to establish posts in the province.

Healy returned to Fort Benton in the late 1870s, where his exploits as an army scout during the major Indian campaigns brought him local fame but little money. After hotel management and newspaper work he served as sheriff for Fort Benton and the huge county for which it was the seat of government. As sheriff Healy continued to be famous for his fearlessness. He kept order among an unruly populace without gunplay over two terms of office. Back in private life Healy reviewed his rather glum economic prospects, heard reports of great potential in Alaska, and set out to try his luck.

After acquiring a schooner and conveying prospectors around the watery maze of southeast Alaska, including Glacier Bay, Healy became a trader at Dyea. For a time he also doubled as a deputy U.S. marshal. As a reformed whiskey trader, he was the nemesis of other whites who traded booze or molasses and other hootch ingredients to Indians. His reform seemed to have been genuine although those he charged with the nefarious trade charged him with the same thing.[12]

Of all the men who speculated on the future prosperity of Alaska, Healy was the most far-seeing and successful in attracting investments. His ability to convince Portus B. Weare and members of the Cudahy meat packing family of Chicago that Alaska would boom led to the formation of the North American Transportation and Trading Company. The new company's presence on the Yukon River was a great spur to Klondike developments.[13]

By moving the base to St. Michael in 1892, then Fortymile in 1893 Healy left opportunities for other entrepreneurs. Jack Dalton, conspicuous among the other independent traders and commercial venturers for daring and initiative, cast his lot with the Lynn Canal entry route into the interior in 1893-94 when he established Dalton Post in Yukon Territory and commenced work on his Chilkat Pass Trail to the coast.

Dalton, like Healy, was a formidable, determined man. A conflict between the two traders--had one occurred--would have matched characters of comparable strength, while a combination might have sparked some lively enterprises. Each, however, found backers elsewhere for their schemes--Healy in Chicago and Dalton in Juneau from John Maloney and others. The two tough individuals must have had some meetings, but no records exist showing any commercial or personal dealings.

Aside from trade interests the men had a shared experience as deputy marshals at Chilkat. Healy resigned the post in 1891 and Dalton was the officer in 1892-93. While Dalton was deputy he got into serious trouble. A brawl with a cannery storekeeper, who had been inciting Indians against Dalton's scheme of establishing an interior trading post, ended with Dalton's shooting the storekeeper. Dalton was acquitted of murder in Juneau, but angry citizens ordered him out of town and the prosecutor complained that defense attorney John Maloney had bribed jurors. Dalton recovered from this near-disaster to play major roles in many other important events in Alaska, including the gold rush and railroad surveys.[14]

## Circle City

The literature sometimes gives the impression that Circle City died after January 1897 when Arthur Walden mushed in to confirm rumors of a great gold strike on the Klondike. It was true that most of Circle's population left, but some remained and as miners' expectations for Klondike gold faded, the old Yukon camp eventually took on fresh life.

Letters of Nora Crane, the lively wife of John Crane, who was with the North American Transportation and Trading Company and served as U.S. commissioner, fill in part of the Circle story. The Cranes, who married in Chicago months before moving to Alaska, reached Circle in July 1897.

Circle did not impress Nora favorably. She was feeling sick and ardently wished she had not come north: "It means a good deal to get sick here with no doctor within 500 miles and no good when you find him." About 25 people lived in town yet she counted about "300 log houses put down every which way on the bank of the Yukon River without any regard to streets . . . Some of them are quite nice but so lonesome now. There is a layer of about a foot of tin cans over the whole place and then for diversement those measly dogs." Good things included huckleberries, fresh moose meat, fresh lettuce "and salmon--lovely big fish steaks, nicer fish than we ever got at home. Everything else is canned, and the very best at that." The Cranes lived in the North American Transportation and Trading Company house, an eight-room log structure rich with carpets, lace curtains, and good furnishings."[15]

In August the Cranes voyaged upriver to take a look at Dawson. "It is a wilderness of tents," Nora said, "bogs over your rubber tops and log houses, saloons and dance houses until you can't rest." Saloon gambling occupied many men but "this company's store is about as good as a gambling house. They average about $8,000 a day." On the whole Nora was not charmed by most of the men she met: "Some of these miners are perfect animals . . . I think men as a whole are as near P.B. Armor's chief product [hogs] as they get. If you don't believe it just live around a few hundred who have been away from civilization and women for awhile."[16]

She observed signs of gentility among the hustling crowd.

> This place is full of nice people; ex-ministers to Austria; would-be actors; ministers' sons; and disowned bankers' relations; to say nothing of the nobodies who are nice, working side by side, hustling logs, running saw mills, and digging in the mines. From the most disreputable, worst dressed one in the pot you can hear English that would sound well in Chaunchey Depew's mouth--such are the fortunes of a mining town.[17]

Back in Circle, Nora got settled in more comfortably in another house but could not establish social contacts: "this is an odd, gossipy place. You would think people here might be different but it is all the same--nothing of a social nature since I came. All the men go prospecting and even the one preacher is down on the Tanana trading and playing poker with the Indians, beating them out of their skins."[18]

Nora's comments on some women were not too kindly either. She deplored the boss' wife, Mrs. John Healy, as a drunken "bowery tough." And she was delighted when the steamboat carrying missionaries Sheldon Jackson and Mrs. S.L. Beiler got stuck on a sandbar below Circle for 26 days. "Their interest in deprived and ignorant Indians consisted so noticeably of souvenir collecting, gold nuggets, and a pleasant summer outing."19

By Christmas Nora was in a much better frame of mind. She no longer had to share a house with several hard drinking North American Transportation and Trading Company people, and her own polite local society had formed. Sam Dunham, the U.S. Department of Labor official and poet, came for dinner as did Capt. Patrick Ray of the U.S. Army, and a party for 40 children was a great success. Circle's cultured folks even opened up one of the abandoned "opera houses" for a musical evening, although disputes over program planning evoked animosity. Her health had improved and she was contented and charmed by the colorful effects of the winter sun: "It was the most glorious, gorgeous yellow I ever saw in my life, but not strong enough to cast a shadow." At night she saw "millions of stars . . . the performances of the sun, moon, and stars are a never ending source of delight and wonder."[20]

Nora still did not care much for the miners, particularly as a miners meeting had defied the legal majesty of U.S. Commissioner John Crane and released a man from jail. This incident further disrupted the sociable mood of the holiday season which had been showing signs of overheated jealousy and passion. Nora had innocently protested

the choice of a tall, thin man as Santa Claus for the Christmas party--and was "promptly blacklisted . . . and I am left to wonder why the Good Lord saw fit to make such length of leg and so little brain in some men." She resolved to lock her back door " and sit at the front with a Gatling Gun because the scenery is absolutely the ONLY subject upon which you may converse and not hurt someone's feelings." But the Christmas party was enjoyed by all. Then there was a dance that went on until 4 a.m., a pleasant affair, until "one man pulled a knife, then a gun came out," and Nora's husband had to settle down the combatants. "Oh! This is a lovely place."[21]

By July Nora was an old Alaska hand and cheered by John's promotion to manager of the Circle store. A visit from poet Joaquin Miller had amused her. "He stood and looked at me as if I were made of pure gold and of all the compliments and said he would send me a box of his own books. Invited me to come and stay a month at his ranch in California when I came out. Kissed my hand in parting and bowed before me as if I were a princess."[22]

Winter 1898-99 passed pleasantly enough at Circle. Keeping the peace was no longer a problem as U.S. deputy marshal Frank Canton was on duty. Unruly miners sensed that Canton, a veteran southwestern lawman, was too dangerous to trifle with. All was serene at the holiday parties and dances. A man was held up and shot on the trail, but the culprit was jailed by Canton.

Nora enjoyed reading the *Yukon Press* newspaper when the editorial office was moved to Circle in spring 1899--although she was none too complimentary: "It is a foolish little paper but affords considerable amusement on account of the amount of mistakes it makes. The people here have dubbed it the "Yukon Blunderer." For all the improved social decorum of the town it still remained too rough for Nora. "It is quite the fashion to wear a black eye for men and women." The big problem was all too obvious: too many people drank too much and most of the disturbances were connected with liquor abuse.[23]

Circle's best chronicler from 1897-99 left the scene in September 1899. Like many others the Cranes were swept along on the flood of the Nome stampede. John Healy moved John Crane to St. Michael and then, in 1900, to Nome where they remained for a couple of years.

## Life at Rampart

Other Yukon towns, most notably, Rampart, had residents whose surviving letters provide some illumination on life in the interior. Hunter Fitzhugh, a literate young fellow of 28 when he left Kentucky, tried his fortune downriver from Circle and Eagle at Rampart. The first snowfall in October delighted him: "It is a joy to be alone now." On mining prospects he benefited from advice given him by John Minook, the Indian who made Rampart's first gold strike. "Minook's word is as good as gold in this country," Fitzhugh told his father before setting off with two other men to locate claims on Big Manook Creek.[24]

The young man spent most of the winter in town and looked forward to the Yukon River's breakup: "At any moment it is likely to begin its 2,800 mile march to the sea, with its burden of dead dogs, which died of eating dried salmon whose bones punctured their tum-tums." Besides dogs the ice would carry down all sizes of tin cans and abandoned "labor-saving equipment" which did not measure up to manufacturers' claims, and "long lines of fearfully and wonderfully made clothing, gotten up by some one born and raised in Australia, who has read somebody's "Life in the Frozen North."[25]

Fitzhugh was an engineer so he made good wages for awhile ($15 daily) surveying a trail from Rampart to Eureka Creek, 27 miles away. He noted that former Washington state governor John McGraw was enjoying a prosperous cleanup from his claims and others as well. He did not think future prospects were very bright but resolved "to stay another year as much as I dread staying away from home so long."

Everyone on the Yukon from 1898-1900 debated at some point whether they should dash for Nome. Fitzhugh resisted. He was not sure in July 1899 that reports were accurate: "We begin to hear very discouraging reports from there already. It is the most desolate country in the world; not a stick of timber as big as a broom stick for miles . . . this [Rampart] is the best part of Alaska." But, he noted, two-thirds of Rampart's people had left for Nome or the outside. "I am glad," he said, "as that gives me a better chance next winter."[26]

Fitzhugh and his partner built a cabin on Hoosier Creek and mined during the 1899-1900 winter. Meanwhile, his fiancee back home married someone else. He was mad--but not too mad. "I find her 'not Guilty,'" he wrote his mother, "I didn't write as warmly as she thought I ought, and I was always telling her that I would probably have to stay in here several years. She should not have been so 'suddent,' and that's all."[27]

Work went on over the winter. Water flooded his shaft and he had to scramble out in a hurry. After the water froze the miners had to pick through it before digging towards bedrock. Occasionally, they had visitors. Fitzhugh, a devout Episcopalian, entertained the Rev. Jules Prevost and his lay reader, E.J. Knapp, on occasion and once had the fun of traveling to town for a minstrel show. John Minook also visited. He was half-Russian "and is very entertaining and tells splendid stories of the Russian days in Alaska, and of the first steamboat on the Yukon." But mostly Fitzhugh's days involved work and it was unpleasant when he was at odds with George Preston, his partner: "Preston and I don't get along as well as two little doves. He knows it all and so do I. And then the work on this claim seems to be a blank anyhow." What was actually frustrating to the partners were reports of success in nearby claims while they found nothing.[28]

That Christmas, Fitzhugh did not feel his usual ebullience. Cold winds discomforted him as he took his turn at ground level handling up buckets of gravel by windlass. Now he was 30 years old and "getting tired of this working for nothing, and will look out for something more profitable when I go to town." Days were all too short--"only five hours of so-called daylight now, and it is rather gloomy. The thermometer registered 50 below . . . Our holes were pretty well frozen up today so we couldn't do much in them . . . Christmas Eve, but it doesn't seem like it."[29]

The winter's work was for nothing. Water continued to seep into their shaft and, for all their labors, they could not penetrate to bedrock and had to abandon the mine.

During summer 1900, Fitzhugh prospected, built a cabin, and dried salmon. He planned to spend the winter mining on his new claims on Slate Creek. Visiting Rampart he put on a white collar for the first time since leaving Seattle in '98 for a dance and whist party. All the men in town were excited about a pretty Miss Gonott, a new arrival. Fitzhugh liked her looks too. "I am a great society man, but we fellows on the gulches have to dig, and hoist, and pan, and chop, and cook, and sew, and toil, and moil, and sweat and swear all winter while the fellows in town rush the girls and wear soft shoes and don't get their noses frozen, so they look nice."[30]

Rampart had recently gained an amenity--a weekly newspaper. "The Editor," Fitzhugh heard, "has had two fight already for being too fearless (?) and too unsparing in the use of the mighty power of the press." Other new reading came his way including a new novel, *Son of Wolf*, by Jack London, which he considered an excellent description of Yukon life. These comments on journalism and literature were among Fitzhugh's last words to his family in Lexington, Kentucky. His end came suddenly when caught by avalanche. His death reminds us that, for all his denial of dangers in letters home, the miner's life was riskier than that of most of his contemporaries outside.

The boys at Rampart missed Fitzhugh, an amiable fellow always ready to help out others. But life went on, and the community reached an important decision at a miners meeting. Time of day was the issue. Winter was coming and it was useful to maintain a standard by which everyone could set his clocks. Businessmen agreed that Doc Danforth's watch "is a good regulator of time" and should be the standard. "If the boys say so," Doc told the newspaper editor, "I'll do the best I can." As Doc moved around town others could hail him for the correct time. Men who loafed in saloons during the winter probably did not care what their watches said--if they had them--but serious folks, especially churchgoers, wanted to know. "Now we can make church--all at one time," crowed the editor.[32]

## Eagle

Eagle was another of the important upper Yukon towns. The community's history differed from that of Circle and Rampart in that it developed after the Klondike stampede. Eagle owed its existence to the gold stampedes, even though it did not have a rush of its own. It was the town's proximity to the Canadian border that determined its foundation and survival.

Among the pioneers of Eagle was miner and lawyer, J.L. Waller. Waller crossed the Chilkoot in August 1897 and wintered over 1897-98 at Dawson, working for $1 an hour wages on number 33 Eldorado. It was not easy for him and he suffered from homesickness. "If home today, " he wrote his wife in February, "I'd be enjoying my bacon and beans with greater zest." Mail service was an uncertain matter. He had sent letters out in the fall with Jack Dalton, "a bang-up pioneer," but feared their loss

after Dalton's death was reported. Dalton had, in fact, been assaulted by an Indian but was not seriously injured. Waller sent his February letter out with another celebrated stampeder, W.D. Woods of Seattle, the mayor who resigned his office to form a transportation and mining company when the first Klondike gold arrived.[33]

Waller had some claims but sold them in March, "because I don't trust Canadian law," and because they did not appear too promising. Many American miners moved downriver to Fortymile, Eagle, or Circle when their expectations were not fulfilled in the Klondike. Waller settled in Eagle and opened a law practice. In October he won the first case ever brought before a miners meeting at Eagle. The North American Transportation and Trading Company was required to return building materials and other items to Waller's client. He also won election as president of the Eagle City Lyceum, a literary club.

Waller kept active in mining claims he held on American Creek and was on hand when the U.S. Army started building Fort Egbert. The army's presence stimulated the town's growth briefly as did the establishment of Judge James Wickersham's court in 1900. Lawyers flocked to Eagle as the interior's first federal district court opened. "There are 150 lawyers in town," Waller noted ruefully, "and business for 10."

Catholic and Presbyterian churches were founded in summer 1899 as Fr. Francis P. Monroe and the Rev. James W. Kirk moved to town. Population dropped to 100 over the winter and even lower as miners joined the exodus to Nome in the spring. Eagle revived when the court was established there in September 1900. And, thanks largely to Fort Egbert, the community survived after Judge Wickersham moved the court to Fairbanks in 1903, although its population remained small.

Capt. Charles Farnsworth moved upriver from Fort Gibbon (Tanana) to supervise telegraph construction in 1900. He encouraged cultural activities in town and sponsored twice-monthly dances on the post. Although he got along with Judge Wickersham and others in town, he did not admire miners--"a gambling, incompetent lot of men," even if he recognized their strong work ethic: "I have never seen men or animals work so hard as the men work up here for a bare living on bacon, beans and coffee . . . men are slaving their lives out all over this wilderness prospecting."[35]

Like most other government officials in Alaska the captain considered the gold craze exaggerated, wasteful, and unlikely to benefit those involved in it:

> This is a desolate country and I would advise a man to keep out of it. There are just as many chances to make money in Pennsylvania as there are here and there is not half the hardship or risk attending it. I have not yet seen a man who has gotten rich digging gold. There is gold in the country but it is only about one man in five thousand who finds it and it is not because the other 4,999 are lazy or fools either. The other day, in dipping a bucket of water out of the river in front of our house, we found a speck of gold in the bucket. It is any easy thing to find gold here, but it is another thing to find it in paying quantities.[36]

## Conclusion

Other aspects of Yukon town life are treated elsewhere in this study. A more comprehensive social history of the Yukon has been written by regional historian Melody Webb of the National Park Service's Southwest Regional Office. Any consideration of Yukon life during the mining boom should note that town life was neither static nor conventional. Populations shifted swiftly with news of new gold discoveries and even with the opening of the river to navigation each spring. Though mining towns on other western frontiers were also characteristically unstable, the movement on the Yukon each season exceeded the usual norm. The northern mining frontier could well be termed "the restless frontier."

## Notes
## Chapter 5

1. Jack London, "The Economics of the Klondike," Reprint of *American Monthly Review*, January, 1900, Seattle: Shorey Bookstore, 1968.70-72.

2. Ibid., 74.

3. Michael R. Booth, "Gold Rush Theatres of the Klondike," *Beaver*, (Outfit 292, Spring 1962), 33.

4. Chad Evans, *Frontier Theatre*, (Victoria: Sono Nis Press, 1983), 235.

5. *Dawson Daily News*, September 23, 1899; *Whitehorse Star*, July 18, 1980.

6. Gary L. Stevens, "Gold Rush Theatre in the Alaska-Yukon Frontier," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oregon, 1984), 84.

7. Kate Rockwell collection, Yukon Archives, *passim*.

8. *New York Journal*, August 28, 1897; M.M. Marbery, *Splendid Poseur* (New York: Crowell, 1953), 41-45.

9. Ibid., August 14, 1897.

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12. Healy--Adney correspondence, *passim*, Dartmouth College, Stefansson Collection; Healy to Porter, March 24, 1891; Crow et. al. to Porter, March 28, 1891. Alaska State Archives, RG 505. Box 4397. Letterbook.

13. Pierre Berton, *Klondike Fever* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 26.

14. William R. Hunt, *Distant Justice* (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987), 42-47.

15. Nora Crane to mother, July 24, 1897, Kepner-Crane Collection, UAF.

16. Ibid., August 10, 1897.

17. Ibid., August 24 and 25, 1897.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid., Christmas, 1897.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid., July 9, 1898.

23. Ibid., March 26 and January 4, 1899.

24. Fitzhugh to father, October 5, 1898, Fitzhugh Collection, UAF.

25. Ibid., May 18, 1899.

26. Fitzhugh to mother, July 12, 1899, Fitzhugh Collection, UAF.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., November 12 and December 17, 1899.

29. Fitzhugh letter diary, December 17-26, 1899, Fitzhugh Collection, UAF.

30. Fitzhugh to mother, October 29, 1900, Fitzhugh Collection, UAF.

31. Ibid.

32. *Rampart Miner*, October 22 and 29, 1901.

33. Waller to Clara, March 12, 1898, Waller Collection, UAF.

34. Farnsworth to Will, February 1, 1900, Farnsworth Collection, UAF.

35. Ibid., September 14, 1899.

# Chapter 6
## Frontier Legends

Gold-rush legends include several distinct categories. Of leading interest to gold-era participants were rumors and fakeries which became established as truth and which acted as lures to action.

### Lost Mine

As mysterious gold mine maps and lost mine stories had been common on every western mining frontier, an earlier appearance of an Alaska lost mine legend is not surprising.

The Lost Rocker mine of southeast Alaska met all the requirements described as characteristic by historian Robert DeArmond: "general overall vagueness as to both time and place; contradicting details in the many tellings of the story, both verbally and in print; and, above all, the complete unfindablity of the lost gold deposit."[1]

Where was it? Well, finding it was the problem posed to prospectors. It was bothersome except to those who insisted that the Lost Rocker was the very same deposit that Richard Harris and Joseph Juneau discovered in 1880 and which led to the development of Juneau. The earliest publication of the story, dating from 1888, gave the same general details offered in later published versions. In 1867, 1874, or some other time Fred Culver and another man or two were prospecting the mainland shore north of the Stikine River, using either a rowboat or a canoe for transport. They went ashore each time they noted a stream and panned for color. At one stream they ascended to its source and made the wonderful find of bunches of gold nuggets. Quickly they constructed a crude rocker and mined furiously for two weeks with great success. Unfortunately, Indians attacked, wounded Culver, and killed his partners. Culver grabbed the sack of gold, dashed for the coast, and escaped the pursuing Indians.

At sea the Hudson's Bay Company steamer *Otter* encountered Culver's drifting boat and carried the almost lifeless man to Victoria. Culver revived, showed the $1,500 in gold that he had mined, and told his adventurous story. Later Culver and others sailed north in the schooner *Louisa Downes* and searched the Taku Harbor vicinity for the gold stream. They failed because 1) Culver recognized no landmarks and soon died; 2) Culver held out on his party and, after revealing the location to Mike Powers, he died.

It is not clear how much of the story has a basis in fact, but details were pervasive enough to inspire a number of prospectors over the years. As late as 1903, Juneau promoters formed the Lost Rocker Prospecting and Mining Company to search for the gold stream. Occasionally it has been reported that prospectors located the elusive stream, but such accounts have been as vague in geographic detail as the original story.

## Legends as Interpretations

Another form of legend bears more on the post-gold rush interpretation of events. What did it mean to participants? Was the experience as later perceived different from what it had been in reality?

Some participants and historians have promulgated the delightful or heroic adventure legend. This notion is well expressed by historian Pierre Berton: "The Klondike experience taught all these men that they were capable of a kind of achievement they had never dreamed possible. It was this, perhaps, more than anything else, that set them apart from their fellows. In the years that followed, they tended to run their lives as if they had scaled a perpetual Chilkoot, secure in the knowledge that any obstacle, real or imagined, can be conquered by a determined man."[2]

Certainly some of the stampeders expressed just the sentiment Berton describes. Fred Walker, an Englishman who was lured to the North in quest of adventure and stopped only fleetingly in Alaska before moving on to other parts of the world, looked back on his journey there as one of "the high spots" of a varied career. Another favorable commentator, Johnny Walker, a veteran of the stampedes, had fond memories of his early experiences: "I'm an old man now, but in those days of my youth I lived, ate, and slept adventure. I made fortunes and spent them, lived like a prince, and like an Indian."[3]

Another man, Charles Angel, who after suffering severe hardship on the trail and climax of a near disaster at sea, watched from shipboard the land of so many golden dreams and shattered hopes recede, declared: "True, I had found no gold. But I was no poorer than when I arrived; I enjoyed the best of health; and surely no more soul-satisfying adventures could have befallen me. No, I had no regrets.[4]

For those who shared their views, the Alaskan adventure was well summed up in the verse of an anonymous poet:

A million dollar gold bond
Could never, never buy,
My memories of the Northland--
I'll keep them 'till I die.
I'll treasure them like a miser,
His hoard of gleaming gold--
My memories are my treasure,
And never may be sold.[5]

Berton took his positive adventure thesis a step further into unreality by arguing that "in all the written memoirs there is scarcely one note of regret, except the general report that it ended too soon." It would be more accurate to say that most published narratives expressed a positive tone, although several stampeders like Arthur Dietz and J.D. Winchester published gloomy conclusions. Dietz suffered plenty on a glacier crossing and came near dying. He blamed the greed of merchants for printing wild,

exaggerated stories of golden wealth waiting for stampeders and bitterly regretted that he had joined the rush. J.D. Winchester, who had known only frustration and illness in the Koyukuk country, left eagerly without any memories he wished to cherish.

Publishers preferred narratives that expressed pleasant sentiments. Disappointed individuals were less inclined to write and offer their memoirs for publication. Unpublished diaries and narratives often reveal evidence of frustration.

Despite Berton's exaggerations it is clear that the stampedes created an atmosphere that encouraged participants to be optimistic and to feel good about their quest. Psychologically, as Adney observed, the northern promise came as a "New Year's Eve celebration of purge and promise as the worn out 19th century indulged a last binge." The promise was a glittering one that enhanced prospects for the masses. For once the "Robber Barons" would have some competition in the money-making game; little folks would finally be able to gather wealth.[6]

## Quitters

But we must test the Berton thesis further by investigating the men who did not leave happy memoirs. It is easy to understand that there were troubled men wishing to gamble who still felt undecided as they boarded a ship bound for the North. One newspaper story (recounted in Chapter 3) described a dockside scene that was probably not singular. A.C. Bryan's baggage was aboard *Excelsior* when he changed his mind. Despite the festive mood and air of respect tinged with envy emanating from the vast throng at the dock Bryan's misgivings overwhelmed him. He had been the first passenger to board so the recovery of his baggage from the hold pained the cargo handlers, but he had them recovered and disembarked as the dockside crowd watched. He did not give eager newsmen any reason for his change of plans.[7]

No one knows how many stampeders quit after confronting the travails of the passes. Packing load after load was excruciating labor. J.A. Costello believed that '49ers and other earlier argonauts knew no such labor: "They fought Indians, suffered thirst and all that, but they never labored like the goldseekers are doing in this good year of 1897." He respected those who pressed on, as he did, but did not deride the quitters: "Many men are falling by the wayside. Many are turning back; many more will not make it. Men without horses are selling outfits at Seattle prices and less. They will drop back at home as if by night, and will have nothing to say more of the Klondike."[8]

In evaluating the legends of the gold rush, meaningful statistics should be examined. Thousands of the stampeders did not reach Dawson or any other gold camp before turning back. Most of those who did reach their destination did not succeed in finding gold. Many left before the 1898-99 winter. Many more left after one winter. Those who returned home with nothing to show for their expenditures and discomforts were not likely to be in the most cheery state of mind. Did those whose wives made sacrifices in support of a speculative mining venture boast of the wonderful adventure they had enjoyed? Did those who remained in the north a second year without finding good prospects write home claiming that the adventure was worthwhile despite its

costs? Not likely. Later, of course, men who had put their northern experiences well behind them and had since earned money in other ways could adopt a sentimental view. And this perhaps explains the legend of the happy adventure.

Many examples of disenchantment could be cited. Joe Houk's unpublished letters show plenty of reasons for discouragement. He made a tough passage of the White Pass, lost his provisions to thieves, ran out of money paying tolls and customs, and worked like a slave to reach Dawson June 30, 1898, three months and six days after reaching Skagway. At Dawson he found that "the woods, mountains, and streets are crowded. As to the gold there are a few claims which are good but out of the most of them they got just about enough gold to pay expenses. Most of the people who came are selling their outfits." Houk was ready to sell out and leave but stayed only because selling his outfit would not give him any more money than his fare back. Might as well stay to eat the provisions and buy a claim, he figured. So he bought a one-half interest in a claim on Mosquito Creek.

Prospects for a fortune were hard. Houk heard of long-time prospectors who dug to bedrock on a claim they had chosen "scientifically," finding nothing. When the veterans heard about green horns striking gold where no one with sense would even think of looking, they quit in disgust. By July 10, Houk had enough of the hard, fruitless work and sold his provisions. He had reached a solemn conclusion: "This is an awful country. Men sleep any where in the woods like so many wild beasts . . . It is a great country to make the young old and the old dead."[9]

## Character Building

Another related legend focused on the character building aspects of the gold rush. Many stampeders were willing to believe that the hard path to the Klondike necessarily developed strength of character. Stronger folks emerged from the testing process. One rusher, A.A. Hill, even resented the completion of the White Pass railroad in 1899 because travel by rail "gives neither education, experience, or character." Hill described the difference in modes of travel from one year to the next almost like the change from the age of romance to one of burlesque. "The struggle," he argued, "brought out the best in men as well as the worse. It tempered character as the forge tempers the finest steel, or shattered it as if it were glass."[10]

Hamlin Garland, who followed stampeders up the harsh Ashcroft Trail, differed strongly from Hill. As he watched the travails of travelers and was sickened by the sufferings of their pack animals he lost any kind feelings towards his companions. He concluded that they did not represent heroic pioneers in any sense. They were not even strong men but weaklings driven by an insane purpose--"mechanisms drawn by some great magnet," victims of greed and foolishness.[11]

Wilson Mizner, the famed *bon vivant* of Dawson and Nome, and a legend himself, took strenuous issue with Jack London's stories depicting the surpassing courage of prospectors in overcoming obstacles. "The truth is," Mizner argued, "that most of the fellows up there were the worst sissies on earth. I was in court when 200 of them were

robbed of their claims by a crooked judge and a set of thieving politicians. Did they string up the judge as the '49ers would have done? No. They just sat there crying in their beards. Then they slunk back to their cabins and had to be treated with smelling salts." Mizner, of course, was referring to the Spoiler's plot in Nome that almost succeeded in depriving rightful prospectors of their claims.[12]

## Legendary Individuals

Some consideration should be given the individuals who gained fame for their real or imaginary exploits, those who became legends. Soapy Smith and Swiftwater Bill Gates lead the field and were deserving of their notoriety. Others competed as best they could and there were some spurious entries, particularly as time passed, like "Klondike Kate" Rockwell and others.

Men and women who were raised to eminence as legends achieved it through their own efforts or those of someone else. It was harder to be a celebrity earlier than it has become in our age of advanced communication. It may seem unfortunate that some lesser characters became better known than such leading actors as Jack Dalton and John J. Healy, but some men did not relish notoriety.

The making of legends began in the North but intensified when the ship docked in Seattle or San Francisco. A noticeable expectancy attended such dockings. The press and the public shared in a legend-making conspiracy, greedy for good stories featuring lavish spending and personal eccentricities. The whole world cheered when a miner pursued a lovely girl with romantic intentions and the cheers grew louder if she proved to be an unfeeling gold-digger. Who could blame writers for embellishing such stories--or even inventing them?

## Spending Habits

Were miners big spenders? Many accept the truth of this popular legend. To give one example: Jimmie McNamee struck a Tacoma newsman as the stuff of legends and his exploits were also exploited by papers in Chicago and elsewhere. Jimmie, "a Klonkike millionaire," boarded a schooner at St. Michael for the voyage home and quickly turned the head of young Lillie Anderson, a nursemaid to the captain's wife and baby. As Jimmie showered the bedazzled girl with gold nuggets and declarations of love, second mate Gust Easterberg became furious. Gust loved Lillie too. After Jimmie announced his engagement to Lillie, Gust tried to run the schooner onto the rocks.

The dangerous voyage ended in Tacoma. Jimmie "engaged an army of dress-makers and milliners to robe the girl . . . then loaded her with gold." Jimmie commanded three fine suits from a tailor and a watch and gold nugget chain from a jeweler, then established himself in saloons where no one else was permitted to buy a drink. Continuing a spending pattern Jimmie started on the steamboat from Circle to

St. Michael when he spent $9,000 on booze, he spent $1,000 daily in the Tacoma saloon.[13]

After a flurry of newspaper notices, Jimmie disappeared from notice before attaining elevation to the status of a personal legend. Though he did contribute to the general legend of the free-spending miner, he was only a flash in the pan as a celebrated man.

During the gold rush many observers complained about the free spending. Jack Carr, the mail carrier, told newsmen that the Dawson miners fell to the temptations offered in the town's saloons and dance halls with distressing frequency. Sporty fellows paid one to five dollars for a dance and 75 cents a drink. "They have hardly enough to purchase a supply of grub for the winter, and as a result of their drinking and dancing live in a terrible condition," Carr said. "They are on a spree for about half the time, and on the other days in the week are too much played out to work."[14]

Another San Francisco report made the same month indicated that returning miners "are finding great difficulty in retaining what they have wrested from the frozen placers." A number of Yukoners got together for a carouse in the tenderloin district where whiskey seemed cheap at ten cents a glass. Prudent men who deposited their pokes in the saloon safe were later told that the contents had been robbed. The next day, nursing bad hangovers, they brawled over the question of guilt until police intervened. Some parties figured that the five dollars for a bottle wine imbibed freely at a convivial banquet clouded the miners' memory of where they had left their pokes.[15]

Contradictory statements came from other parties, including a San Francisco hotelier whose guests included 12 lucky Klondikers who lived most sedately. All they want is peace from the hoard of information-seekers, he reported, "and a chance to break-in their new clothes." Unlike the early California miners, his guests spend their time reading and writing letters. "Why, all these men together," claimed the hotel men, "do not spend the money that one of the old-time miners could scatter around town after a good clean-up." They may be "dazed" with their good fortune but "they are holding on to their dust, and will, in the majority of cases, settle down to lives of quiet ease."[16]

Charles E. Stillman, a Comstock veteran, returned from the Klondike in '97 with $18,000 and a very favorable opinion of norther miners. They are "another race of men" from those who splurged in the "gilded palaces of Virginia City and lived in the hot days of Bodie, Tombstone, Anaconda, and Creede." Stillman saw some drinking and gambling at Circle and Dawson but nothing like the earlier camps. "Klondike miners are not the typical, picturesque miners the world has been hearing about for half a century." What made them restrained were the "awful hardships" that kept hard cases out of the north and the hard work which induced them to hang on to their money.[17]

We do not have any comparative statistics on sprees but can conclude that, regardless of the majority of lifestyles, the legend of the wastrel, bonanza-drunk miner survived. It did not take too many newsworthy incidents of spending to keep a cherished stereotype alive.

## Living Up to Expectation

More successful miners resembled W.M. Stanley than high fliers like Swiftwater Bill Gates. Stanley, a Seattle bookseller burdened with gray hair, lameness, poverty, seven children, and a wife, gambled desperately to chance the Klondike in 1897. He struck it rich, more by accident of timing than through skill, although earlier he had been a successful Rocky Mountain prospector. Seattle folks expected a man who brought back $112,000 in gold, while retaining claim investments said to be worth millions, to show some style. Stanley responded responsibly. As a good family man of mature years he disdained saloons so discovered other means of securing approval as a "Klondike King." "The old miner has been making things interesting for his family and friends . . . spending money with a lavish hand," the *Seattle Times* noted with approval. Stanley hired a hack for several hours daily, loaded in his splendidly dressed family and drove up and down the streets. "They have attracted a good deal of attention in this way, and nearly everyone recognized Mr. and Mrs. Stanley." With this daily showing of the new silk dresses worn by wife and daughters and new furniture for the home, Stanley met the demands of his advanced social standing in a quiet way.[18]

But Stanley, perhaps because of his bookselling experiences, also revealed literary ambitions. His gratifying story must be told; misconceptions concerning the north and inaccurate maps must be corrected. Although Stanley lacked confidence in his ability as a writer, a way was found. J.M. Evans, a literary free-lancer would compose the epic under the miner's direction and arrange for publication. Among the interesting things to be revealed Stanley gave priority to the northern climate. "Strangely enough, the snow depths of up to two-and-a-half feet are formed in an unorthodox fashion: Its precipitation can hardly be noticed. Snow comes down as frost never in flakes. Sometimes it almost seems to be coming up from the ground, and not coming down from the sky." Health considerations were also important: "the coldest weather is the most healthy. There is no disease peculiar to the country . . . One seldom has a headache owing to the ordinary arrangement of the system."[19]

## A Little Bragging

Certain risks attend becoming a legend. All publicity seekers were likely to encounter ridicule. Modest, sober men preferred anonymity and, of course, most returning Klondikers found better use for their money than in boozing, gambling, and squandering on showgirls. Arguably lavish spenders had more fun than the serious fellows who invested in other mining properties, many of which swallowed up investor's wealth.

One Wyoming man, who may not have been telling the truth in a letter home, nonetheless expressed a universal longing: "I am worth $75,000 and . . . I will start back to buy the town. Some people will want to kiss me when I get back who wanted to kick me when I left." The record does not show that a Klondiker ever bought

Casper, Wyoming, and other evidence indicates that this man was trying too hard to be a legend: "You have heard of the golden calf," he wrote. "Well, I have something that beats that; I have a golden dog. A dog of mine died and I used his hide as a sack for my dust. I have him as full of gold as he was of meat. I sometimes lay my head on his body and dream of what I will do with my 'dough' when I get back to the States."[20]

Protests against lies disguised as legends surface sometimes. Writing in 1949 J.C. Kline damned Mike Mahoney, who had made a career lecturing and reciting Robert Service's poems, for insisting that he had seen Dan McGrew shot, carried a piano over the Chilkoot, and other exaggerations. "It is high time to defrost these self-styled Arctic heroes." Poor Mahoney, who really was a hardy man on the Klondike trail, was embarrassed after a public recitation when a journalist read a letter from Robert Service. Service affirmed that (the person of) Dan McGrew and incidents in the poem were entirely fictitious. Merrill Denison, Mike's biographer, explained how public pressure forced Mike to describe his presence at the famous shooting. After telling the story for years, he came to believe it, so it was painful when his debunker confronted him. But, strangely enough, members of the audience jumped up to confirm that they, too, had witnessed the shooting. Denison seemed to think that Mahoney's backers, besotted from too many recitation of "Dan McGrew" had themselves become true believers. But, more likely, they only wished to spare Mahoney and themselves further embarrassment.[21]

Most of the legendary figures did not qualify as heroes. But, collectively, the reputation of Canada's Northwest Mounted Police soared from the earliest days of the stampede. Canadians were proud of them and Americans, who formed the largest part of Klondikers, contrasted the perils of Skagway's rogues and Alaska's unpoliced trails to the stern orderliness maintained on the other side of the border.

There were, however, some dissenting voices. The Reverend Hall Young expressed respect "for that heroic body of men," yet insisted that the Yukon's officers "insolence and rank dishonesty, and disrespect for the rights of man" exceeded anything experienced in the United States Hall specifically included police officials in his accusations. He condemned the laggard mail distribution system contrived by the Mounties to exact bribes. For an ounce of gold, prompt attention was insured. When Hall offered an officer $5 he was rewarded with letters. He believed that the patience of American miners in avoiding a riot was a high tribute to their characters. Wilson Mizner would read indefensive, craven weakness where Hall found strong character. Mizner and Hall also differed on their interpretation of Nome's travails under the McKenzie-Noyes ring of Spoilers: "Their graft was promptly detected" and stolen gold was restored. In Dawson, Land Commissioner Wade was removed for corruption, then returned a short time later as crown attorney.[22]

Some American miners became more patriotic after departing Dawson for Circle. Fortymile, Rampart and elsewhere, cursing the severity and/or corruption of Mounties without documenting specific charges.

Clarence L. Andrews, deputy collector of customs at Skagway during the Klondike stampede, made sport of the paranoia of the Canadian police. In 1901 he noted a

"commotion among the NWMP. They think they have information that an armed force has been organized in this place to capture the Klondike. They challenge every one who approaches their posts." Some Americans were being restricted illegally, Andrews believed.

## Miners Meeting

Another leading legend of the pre-Klondike era emphasized the sterling qualities of the pioneers and the effectiveness of the miners meeting as a democratic method of keeping order. This sentiment among those who saw themselves as somewhat superior to the vulgar hoards of Klondike stampeders is understandable and contains some truth. Communities were small, Alaska did not then draw many drifters eager to prey on the hard working and affluent.

Yet some pioneers viewed their neighbors with little indulgence. In 1891 John Healy reported that a handful of Dyea white men called for the lynching of an Indian who wounded another Indian while drunk on whiskey. Yet the whiskey had been illicitly sold by the same whites who winked at a store robbery by one of their number. Healy was no puritanical greenhorn. In Montana he had been a legendary whiskey dealer, Indian fighter, sheriff, and entrepreneurial jack-of-all-trades--including mining, townsite promotion, and newspaper publishing--thus giving weight to his appraisal: "I have been many years in official harness, and have had some experience with criminals, but I must say that this part of Alaska can furnish more petty, trifling criminals, and shoddy men than any other portion of the U.S.--taking the population into consideration."[23]

With this background it is not surprising that Healy was instrumental in calling the Northwest Mounted Police to Fortymile and end the reign of the miners meeting. This famous incident angered the American miners, but Healy was sick of law by miners meeting.

Bishop William Bompass also petitioned Ottawa for the Mounties after concluding that the town of Fortymile was within Canada even if most of the Fortymile River diggings were on the Alaska side of the boundary.

Healy's reason for writing to Ottawa in 1893 was, apparently, his anger over a decision of the miners meeting against him. The case concerned a white girl who worked for Healy's wife and was of a convivial temperament. To punish her for keeping late hours, Healy locked her out one night. She appealed to the miners who, perhaps because they resented Healy and the no-credit policy of his North American Trading and Transportation Company, ordered him to pay the girl a year's wages and her passage to the states.

Regardless of the motivation of Healy, the coming of Canadian authority and, much later, American authority, was inevitable. Miner's meetings worked well enough at times, but unbridled praise of them by pioneers is a reflection of sentiment and nostalgia.

## Conclusion

Legends of the gold rush retain an interest and a value in expressing what people like best to remember of the events. Legends are also valuable because they come to form a part of the literature. They become a segment of the cultural richness of the past, one that sustains memories and supports and inspires other kinds of popular literature.

## Notes
## Chapter 6

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3. Johnny Walker, as told to Louis Whittaker "Bonanza Days," (*Alaska Sportsman*, November 1943), 12.

4. Charles W. Angel, "And Going Home We Lost the Rudder!," (*Alaska Sportsman*, September 1943), 29.

5. James Wickersham, *Old Yukon* (Washington: Washington Law Book Co., 1938), 24.

6. Edwin Tappan Adney, *Klondike Stampede of 1897-98* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1900), 68.

7. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 29, 1897.

8. *Seattle Times*, August 19, 1897.

9. Houk papers, UAF.

10. A.A. Hill, "The Klondike," *Munsey's Magazine*, (v.20, No. 5, February 1899), 704. Quoted in Richard J. Friesen, *Chilkoot: A Literary Review* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1977), 41-42.

11. Hamlin Garland, *Trail of the Gold-Seekers* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1899), 217, 237, 241.

12. Quoted in John Perry, *Jack London: An American Myth* (Chicago: Nelson & Hall, 1981), 62.

13. *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1897.

14. *Seattle Daily Times*, July 27, 1897.

15. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 30, 1897.

16. *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 21, 1897.

17. Unidentified clip (1897) in Alfred Brooks scrapbook, UAF.

18. *Seattle Times*, September 10, 1897.

19. Ibid.

20. *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 6, 1898.

21. J.C. Kline, "Debunking Gold Rush Heroes," (*Seattle Times*, January 9, 1949), 3.

22. Hall Young, *Hall Young of Alaska*, (New York: Revell, 1927), 364-67, 371.

23. Healy to Potter, March 24, 1891, ASA, RG 505, Letterbook.

# Chapter 7
## Other Stampedes

All the wealth and excitement generated from the Klondike has mitigated against an appreciation of more modestly rich districts developed in '98 or subsequently--and even some of comparable wealth. If significant mineral production had not occurred within Alaska, the territory's historical development would have been very different and certainly long delayed. Stampeders believed ardently that somewhere on the Yukon or elsewhere an "American Klondike" would be unveiled. After all, it had been successful mining on Alaska's Yukon River and its tributaries that had sustained the search that climaxed in Canada's Klondike, and the prospecting possibilities within Alaska had not been exhausted by 1897-98. As time proved, there were "American Klondikes" on the Seward Peninsula, the Copper River, and in the Tanana Valley, areas of valuable mineral resources that yielded enough to sustain large communities at Nome and Fairbanks and kept the economic focus on mining for generations.

If the historical emphasis on the Klondike has tended to obscure the significance of Nome, Fairbanks, and Kennicott, it is no wonder that Alaska districts with less spectacular production are not well remembered. The production of gold and other minerals in Southeast, Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, the lower Yukon, the Kuskokwim, Chistochina, Rampart, and Iditarod was significant enough to trigger stampeders, sustain communities, and open trade and transportation throughout the territory. Considering these advances, dispersed in time and place, gives a perspective on the Klondike and all other mineral developments that defines their relationships and continuity.

Continuity in mineral exploitation history can be reviewed on several levels. It can be seen in the appearance of the same individuals at Circle, Dawson, the Porcupine, Nome, Fairbanks, and Iditarod. Or it may be viewed through a consideration of particular aspects of industrial and social development and addressed by a number of queries: How did technology vary from place to place? What conditions determined diverse courses of community and political developments? Which Outside or Alaska social forces or events influenced the industry over many decades? To what extent did the mining industry's needs determine advances and collapses in the transportation network? How did mining financing vary? What role did the government perform at various times? These and other considerations set the incidents of industrial history within a larger context, giving a broader view of a movement that did not stop at Dawson or Nome.

While a full review of these questions must be reserved for sections of this study focusing on particular park regions the following brief summaries of other gold rushes illustrate the continuity of the development.

## Southeast

In 1870 gold strikes were made at Sumdum and Windham Bay. These were placer deposits that were later recognized as part of the Juneau Gold Belt that extended 100 miles along the coast from Windham Bay, 65 miles south of Juneau, to Berners Bay, 60 miles north of Juneau.

Ten years later Joe Juneau and Richard Harris found placer gold at the mouth of Gold Creek in Silver Bow Basin. The first Alaska gold stampede followed, and Juneau developed as the territory's important community with mining as the chief industrial activity until World War II.

The first mines developed were placers. Later the huge deposits of lode above Juneau were exploited by the Alaska-Juneau Mine, while the great Treadwell Mine was developed on Douglas Island. Treadwell reached its peak in 1915 when its mills crushed 5,000 tons of ore daily--ore that was valued at $2.50 per ton. One year later Treadwell's record was surpassed by the Alaska Gastineau (Perseverance) and Alaska-Juneau mines. The Gastineau mill worked 12,000 tons of ore daily. In 1928 the Alaska-Juneau mined 13,000 tons daily--and at a profit despite the low 80 cents per ton value. For some years Juneau was recognized as the lode mining leader of the world.

Juneau tumbled from the top of the mining heap in three stages. Treadwell was flooded after a cave-in of 1917. Only the Ready Bullion Mine continued work, but it closed in 1922. The Alaska Gastineau, famed for the largest dam, longest tunnel, and fastest tunneling in the world of mining, failed in 1921. The Alaska-Juneau shut down in 1944 and is still closed, although there are prospects of a reopening. In all the three mines produced $158 million in gold.[1]

## Cook Inlet

Cook Inlet and adjacent regions attracted early prospectors because Russian discoveries of gold there were known. In 1849 Peter Doroshin, a graduate of the Imperial Mining School at St. Petersburg, was dispatched to the colony to investigate Kenai River gold reported by a trader in 1834. Over a four-year period, Doroshin searched for minerals without finding appreciable gold. He followed the Kenai River to its sources and prospected the Russian River, where his crew mined for two seasons to gain a couple ounces of gold. Other kinds of mineral development appeared more promising.

Doroshin's report on coal at Coal Bay resulted in the opening of a coal mine there in 1855. Coal was mined for several years and interest in coal there and in Kachemak Bay brought American prospectors into the region in 1886. Other Americans in the 1880s and early '90s were more interested in gold. Joseph Cooper reported gold on Cooper Creek in 1884, although he did not establish any claims. Other men worked beach sands at Anchor Point and located at Resurrection Creek, Bear Creek, and elsewhere. Many locations were made in the Hope-Sunrise area in

1895, and in the next year several hundred prospectors stampeded to the region, stimulated by the fabulous yield at Mills Creek in 1895---$40,000 in gold.

As the nation's press carried reports of the strike many readers probably gave their first consideration to Alaska and its opportunities. It would be some months later that the news about the great Klondike strike would be circulated. The Cook Inlet discovery appeared significant. The *Review of Reviews* reported that "Cook Inlet is now the scene of a rush almost as great as that to the Yukon [a reference to the Circle strike], owing to the results of last year's work, which is said to have yielded in some cases as much as $150 a day. It is estimated that some two thousand miners will prospect there this year."[2]

In several respects the Cook Inlet stampede was a lively precursor of the Klondike rush of 1897-98. Its impact upon Seattle merchants and shipping firms was significant in priming businessmen there for the quick start they got in '97 in making their city the "Gateway to the Klondike." Seattle newspapers of April 1896 reported that "no less than fifteen vessels, big and little, with a passenger list of fully 1,000 men, and freight and supplies in proportion, will have sailed from this port for the golden fields in the north."[3]

The 1896 stampede to Turnagain Arm on the northern Kenai Peninsula was described by Fred Moffit of the USGS: "Several thousand men, some state the number as high as 3,000, are said to have landed at Tyonek en route for Turnagain Arm and Susitna River, while a considerable number crossed by way of Portage Glacier from Prince William Sound. This was the banner year on Canyon Creek, 327 men being engaged in mining its gravels during the summer."[4]

Moffit contrasted the experience of the earlier prospectors with the stampeders, noting the wasteful results: "A majority of the men who first entered the field [1894-95] . . . were experienced miners. Many of them had spent years in southeast Alaska or the Yukon country and nearly all had mined in the placer fields of the west. On the other hand, most of the late comers were inexperienced in any kind of mining and many were scarcely able to take care of themselves. Thousands of dollars worth of useless machinery and supplies are said to have been landed at Tyonok for transfer to the arm, only to be abandoned or given away. Several expeditions spent months in hauling cumbersome and unsuitable outfits through an unknown wilderness to localities which none of their members had ever visited and possibly never had heard of till they reached Alaska . . . It is doubtful if there is any other part of Alaska where time and money have been wasted in a more enthusiastically ignorant manner or concerning which stockholders in mining companies have been more utterly misled than some places on the Kenai Peninsula."[5]

The Klondike stampede overflow produced another stampede in 1898, enough men to keep the region lively and productive for some years. The Sunrise district yielded $780,000 in gold from 1895-1900 and another $543,000 from 1901-1906. Subsequently, production dwindled. Most miners rushed to Iditarod in 1910, and the region's only store folded. Several efforts were made to introduce dredge operations on the Kenai River and hydraulic operations were carried on in several locations. But the

returns in gold were not practical. Production on the Kenai Peninsula was only $37,500 in 1917 and dropped subsequently.[6]

## Rampart

Rampart did not look like a permanent community to W.A. Ryan of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who visited in August and September '97. It had improved from "a more staggering collection of tents, with a doorless, windowless company store" with 30 residents to reach a population of 500 within a month. Rapid growth was due to the freeze-up of the Yukon, which stopped eager stampeders bound for Dawson. But new gold strikes on Minook Creek, where the original strike had occurred in 1894, and on Hunter and Hoosier creeks, kept some of the stranded miners in place and brought more in '98 from the great Dawson overflow.[7]

The new town's progress was steady and orderly. A town council governed efficiency, thanks to the presence of such distinguished, respected men as former Governor John McGraw and former Adjutant-General E.M. Carr of Washington state. Ryan's dour conclusions on Rampart's future may have been influenced by seeing so many abandoned claims and because his few hours work at mining yielded no signs of a fortune. He also considered it suspicious that Dan Carolan, recorder of Hunter Creek, would leave the discovery claim he shared on Minook Creek idle while gathering $2.50 recording fees plus $10 for guiding interested prospectors. Though Carolan figured that the Minook gold would wait for him, Ryan assumed that his choice showed a lack of confidence in Minook. Ryan also believed that miners showing nuggets from Minook actually got them from the Klondike.

Despite Ryan's negativism and the gloom caused by the death of a man named Tucker on the trail, Rampart moved ahead. A.C. Butcher and Neal Sorenson opened a restaurant, and the discovery claim on Minook was sold for $5,000. O.J. Tobin, D.F. Baxter, and O.C. Johnson were wealthy San Francisco men who, among many others, were willing to invest in claims. The largest camp between St. Michael and Dawson thrived over the 1897-1898 winter and continued to prosper in the spring.

Rampart flourished for a number of years until the inevitable decline of the local placers. Before the decline, the community boasted a newspaper and other cultural amenities and numbered among its residents such distinguished men as writer Rex Beach, saloon man Wyatt Earp, and deputy U.S. Marshal Frank Canton.

## The Porcupine

The Porcupine district was developed as an incident to the Klondike stampede and was reached by the Dalton Trail. It was 32 miles from Pyramid Harbor, Chilkat Inlet, where the Dalton Trail commenced to the gold field on Porcupine Creek discovered by S.W. Mix and his partners in October 1898. Some 50 miners staked claims, but winter forced a delay until spring when about 1,000 stampeders headed for the

Porcupine. Reaching the new mining region was relatively easy, particularly as the Jack Dalton Transportation Company was available to freight in goods. Dalton charged four cents a pound on freight from the coast to the diggings.

Dalton laid out the townsite of Porcupine and built a store. Other entrepreneurs established businesses, and the town's population over the 1899-1903 era was about 200. Things slowed down in 1903, and both the recorder and U.S. Commissioner offices were abolished. The easily mined gold had been taken by 1903--an estimated $460,000, and further development awaited investment in hydraulic mining. A flood in 1905 destroyed a large flume and closed mining for a couple of years until construction of a Haines--Pleasant Camp road and other improvements encouraged further investment. Mining continued until 1918 when another flood closed mines for several years. Revivals in the late 1920s and '30s were shortlived. Production from 1930-60 has been very modest, but the revival of steady small-scale production in the 1970s gave production of 3,500 ounces up to 1988.[8]

When "Porcupine" was discovered the U.S. and Canadian governments were still arguing over the location of the international boundary, and the confused miners staked claims by both Canadian and U.S. law to cover their status. Rich copper deposits were subsequently found at "Maid of Even" at the head of Tsirko River 20 miles to the northwest. A trade of sorts was worked out in 1905 in which the Canadians got the copper and the U.S. got the gold. This is the only instance in Alaska history of mineral resources determining the location of an international boundary.

## Nome

The discovery of gold on the Seward Peninsula in 1898 led to development of the first Alaska mining district comparable to the Klondike. In 1899 a stampede of miners who had been working and prospecting in the Klondike or elsewhere in Alaska hit Nome, followed by another wave in 1900 from the Outside. Nome's geography determined the two-season nature of the stampedes. Yukon miners were able to reach the new diggings by overland travel; stampeders from Outside, most of whom were not tempted to risk winter travel via Lynn Canal and the Yukon River, had to wait for the opening of the four-month navigational season of the Bering Sea. Thus, the 1899 rush drew hopeful prospectors from Rampart, Dawson, Fortymile, Circle, and other northern points, some 3,000 in all, while the 1900 seaborne stampede brought thousands more from the outside and within Alaska.

No other northern gold rush community except for Dawson drew so many people so fast. Unlike Dawson, where the Mounties were on hand to keep order, Nome's early days were characterized by a high crime incidence. The mining claim situation was also chaotic because of the uncertainty of the law, the prevalence of power-of-attorney filings, claim jumpings, and the subversion of the federal judiciary by Alexander McKenzie and others.

Another unique aspect of Nome's development was in the discovery of rich beach sands in 1899. While modest amounts of gold had been found at Yakutat and Lituya

Bay, the quantities in the Nome sands occupied hundreds of men who were able to take $2 million in beach gold over a single season. The mining process could not have been simpler. A miner only needed to set up a crude rocker and go to work. Neither were legal niceties like staking and recording necessary. One held his "claim" as long as he stood and worked it. After the 1899 season the beach sands were worked out, but more conventional placer discoveries at various points on the peninsula continued to be made.

The success of Nome as a permanent community was very significant for Alaska's future. Mining provided a stable, long-term economic base for the huge region of northwest Alaska, where otherwise a non-native community might never have developed. Once Nome shook off its bad start and corrupt officials, social development followed the pattern set in other mining communities. Progress in mining technology also followed the established pattern as primitive thawing and digging methods eventually gave way to hydraulic and dredging operations. Even today, however, interest remains in the promise of beach sands and the newest offshore mining technology has been employed with successfull results near Nome.

## Fairbanks

Trader E.T. Barnette, born in Ohio in 1863, had migrated to Montana in the 1880s, thence further west to Oregon where in 1886 he was convicted of theft by bailee and served time in prison. In '97 he stampeded to the Yukon, experienced some fleeting success as a profiteering merchant during Circle's post-Klondike prosperity, and earned the disdain of miners. Before setting up in Circle he managed the North American Transportation and Trading Company mines at Dawson under John J. Healy's supervision. Barnette remained in touch with Healy and acted on the older man's advice when he sought a new trading station. Go to Tanacross, urged Healy. Tanacross or Tanana Crossing was the point on the Tanana River where the Valdez-Eagle Trail reached the river. In 1900 there was not much doing in the area, but Healy was planning a railroad and a Tanacross station would be important. The railroad would end the remoteness of the Tanana region and spur gold prospecting and probable revelation of rich fields.

Barnette followed Healy's advice, announcing to Dawson newsmen his plan to found another Chicago serving 50,000 square miles of the Tanana Valley with fine agricultural and mineral prospects. In San Francisco he found a backer, bought $20,000 in trade goods, and in 1901 pushed up the Yukon and Tanana. The steamer *Lavelle Young* would not reach Tanana because of low water so Barnette turned up the Chena, a small tributary.[9]

It was Barnette's good fortune that Felix Pedro and Tom Gilmore showed up to patronize his store in 1901. Pedro, a veteran prospector who had outfitted in Circle for his trek into the Tanana Country, gladdened Barnette's heart by revealing his discovery of promising gold signs. Chena boomed as the news was spread of Pedro's discovery. Several other towns rose in the region, including Fairbanks, where Barnette induced

Judge James Wickersham to establish the district court in 1903, thus insuring the dominance of the town.

Felix Pedro, it should be noted, was no tyro in northern prospecting. He had worked at Caribou, British Columbia, in 1893, at Fortymile, and the Klondike before prospecting on the Tanana. The Tanana prospered after stampedes in 1902 and 1904. By 1904 Fairbanks boasted 387 log houses and 1,000 residents with another 1,000 living along various creeks in the region.

The Tanana Valley mineral development was the most significant one in Alaska's early history. The Tanana gold yield was sustained for decades and the location insured permanent communities in the vast heartland drained by the Yukon River. Tanana's wealth also supported the long-term existence of a trail-road network commencing from the coast at Valdez. Originally, the government trail from Valdez was run to Eagle on the Yukon, but the Fairbanks stampede resulted in a diversion to the Tanana. Over the 376-mile route, winter and summer trails were maintained and served by the stage coaches of the Ed S. Orr Stage Company. Passengers paid $150 to ride to Fairbanks, and a modest amount of freight was carried at 50 to 75 cents per pound. Depending upon the season, horse or dog relay teams were placed at roadhouses along the way so the journey could be made in nine days.

Yukon River transport remained important in serving Fairbanks. Passengers could reach the new town is season from St. Michael or the upper Yukon and the boats could handle large freight that was beyond the capacity of stage coaches.[10]

Fairbanks was Alaska's most important gold district and ranked with the Klondike (Fairbanks = 8.15 million ounces; Klondike = 9.96 million ounces). Gold development there was instrumental in the location of the original University of Alaska campus, the operation of the Alaska railroad, and additional prospecting and discoveries in other areas of the territory. Concerning relative richness of placers, Nome indeed had rich ground on the beaches and on Anvil Mountain, but nothing there was as rich as the paystreak on Cleary Creek north of Fairbanks. To illustrate this, during the first five years of drift mining on that creek alone, more than 1 million ounces of gold were recovered--all by hand methods. This is more than all the gold mined historically in the Circle area.

In 1906 Fairbanks District gold production of 435,000 ounces was 41 percent of all the gold mined in Alaska. By 1909, the district's production of 466,000 ounces was 47 percent of all the gold mined in Alaska. These trends continued. During the late 1940, '50s, and early 1960s, Fairbanks production was generally accounting for 50 to 60 percent of all gold mined in Alaska--mainly from FE dredges.

## Iditarod

In 1909-1910, there was a considerable stampede to a region that had not received much attention from prospectors. Iditarod, located on a tributary of the Innoko River which flows into the Yukon from the south, became a thriving boom town. Getting to Iditarod was not easy. During the navigation season stampeders traveled from Valdez

to Fairbanks over the trail, then by steamboat down the Tanana to the Yukon, thence via the Innoko River to Iditarod. The other route, used chiefly in winter, was over a trail that is perhaps more famous today than it was in 1910. The Iditarod Trail, scene of an annual dog sled race that is much publicized today, extends from Seward to Iditarod and on to Nome. The Seward-Iditarod stretch is 489 miles.

Flat, another community nine miles from Iditarod, was much closer to the mining district. A narrow-gauge tramway connected the two communities, powered by mules pulling wagons along the wooden rails. For a time the Iditarod area commanded lively interest, but it did not take long to work out its shallow placers and the town's swift demise followed. From a peak population of 2,500 in 1910, Iditarod's population dropped to 500 in 1914, with another 300 in nearby Flat. In 1917 many of Iditarod's buildings were moved to Flat. Mining continued for a few more years, but in the 1920s both Flat and Iditarod became ghost towns.

The Iditarod stampede has been described by historian Robert Spude as "the epitome of a steamboat stampede." There were other such stampedes in the north, but Iditarod's was the grandest. It was not just the steamboat race to the diggings after winter's inactivity that characterized the steamboat stampede. Active promotion of the new camp by transportation companies was another aspect, as was the company promoters' plotting of new towns to serve as entry points for the mines. The timing of the Iditarod discovery--Christmas Day, 1908--gave companies opportunities for planning. Since the news did not reach downriver until summer, there was time for only a small rush, mostly from Fairbanks, in 1909. With a larger rush anticipated for spring 1910, promoters had time to stimulate excitement, gather boats, and sell space for passengers and freight.[11]

## Ruby

Prospectors rushed to Ruby in 1911 and 1912. Gold had been discovered on Long Creek not far from its mouth on the Yukon. Ruby, the only sizeable gold camp ever developed on the lower Yukon, peaked with a population of 1,000. Like Iditarod, Ruby supported two newspapers for a time, along with the usual commercial ventures. Also, as with Iditarod, the gold placers were not comparable in yield to those supporting Fairbanks and Nome. By 1918 Ruby was fading fast and soon went the way of other short-lived mining towns.[12]

## Iditarod Trail

The Seward-Nome Trail, famed today as the Iditarod Trail because of annual dog-sled races from Anchorage to Nome, was never a major long-distance route. It consisted of a number of winter trails that had developed in the early prospecting days that were linked in 1910. When the upper Innoko strike attracted miners from Cook Inlet and elsewhere in 1906, a trail to tidewater appeared beneficial. In February 1908 the Alaska Road Commission began a survey of a new trail from Seward to Nome. After a

Christmas strike on Otter Creek by prospectors W.A. Dikeman and John Beaton, the boom town of Iditarod developed. Over the winter of 1910 the Alaska Road Commission marked and cleared 1,000 miles of trail from Kern Creek, on the Alaska Northern railroad 71 miles north of Seward, to Nome. Some portions of the trail were new and some had been used by prospectors or natives earlier. The Seward-Knik section became a mail and supply route until the railroad was extended, and the Knik-Kaltag section was much used from 1910-20. Other portions of the wide winter trail network were used as needed, then abandoned when conditions changed.[13]

## Prince William Sound

Mining on Prince William Sound was highlighted by the development of major copper deposits on Hinchinbrook and Latouche islands. Copper was discovered in 1897 on Landlocked Bay and on Virgin Bay on Hinchinbrook Island. The Virgin Bay deposit, known as the Ellamar Mine, was the second-greatest producer of the region to the Bonanza mine on Latouche Island--which was also discovered in 1897. The first copper ore was shipped to the Tacoma smelter in 1899-1900 with regular shipments starting in 1904. Copper productions reached $5,000,000 from the shores of Prince William Sound by 1910.

With the proximity of the Prince William Sound mines to ocean transport ore could be shipped to the smelter at far less cost than that mined in the interior. Mining continued until 1930 when the last mine on the sound closed. Fifteen companies had shipped 214,000,000 pounds of copper over the operational years with the Beatson-Kennecott Company at Latouche and the Ellamar Mining Company accounting for 96 percent of the total. The Ellamar Mine closed in 1919 and production of the low-grade ores (five percent copper) dwindled for some years as copper prices were low. By the time Beatson-Kennecott shut down its Latouche operation in 1930, the price was down to 13 cents a pound.[14]

## Livengood

Mike Hess reported gold in the Tolovana or Livengood area in 1892, but development was deferred until 1914. The Livengood discovery, often described as the last strike of the heroic era of mining (1880-1914), was made by Jay Livengood and N.R. Hudson on Livengood Creek. A modest stampede followed and successful claimants began work, relying primarily on drift techniques as bedrock deposits were up to 100 feet below the surface. Mines also developed on other creeks, including Olive, Ruth, Amy, Gertrude, and Wilbur.

With the development of the bulldozer in the 1930s mechanized mining with dozer and dragline replaced drift mining. Transportation costs were high as freight was brought up the Tanana River to the Tolovana until the Fox-Livengood portion of the Steese Highway was opened in 1936.

Dredging began in 1941 after efforts began in 1930 by Clifford Smith in consolidating claims led to the formation of Livengood Placers, a subsidiary of the Callahan Mining Company. Prosperity did not follow the post-war startup of operations. To recover its loan to Livengood Placers, the Reconstruction Finance Corporation sold the dredge to another company in 1955. The dredge was moved to Hog River. Some work was done in the 1960s and 70s with dozer and dragline. Management of the company mining has changed several times in recent years.[15]

## Kuskokwim

As early as 1881 prospectors were drawn to the Kuskokwim River by reports that Russian traders had found gold and cinnabar deposits earlier in the century. George C. King, who prospected near Kolmalkof in 1881, discovered only a small deposit of cinnabar which was later mined by Reinholt Speare, an Alaska Commercial Company agent. Speare's shipment of ore to a California smelter, assayed at $11 of mercury per ton--too little to warrant further efforts. Some prospecting was done in the 1880s and '90s by George Langtry, Frank Densmore and others, but nothing was found to compare with Fortymile, Circle, and Cook Inlet, which were exciting enough to draw stampeders in the pre-Klondike era.

With the overflow of stampeders to the Klondike, the Kuskokwim received more attention. A rush from Nome in 1900, based on rumors concerning the legendary Yellow River, laid the legend to rest but did result in wide-ranging prospecting efforts. Duncan McDonnell rediscovered the cinnabar deposit near Kolmakof and received high value assay reports from 1901-04, but development did not follow. Other cinnabar discoveries in 1905-06 near the mouth of the Holitna River also appeared favorable, but only modest quantities were mined in 1906. It took the high mercury prices offered during World War II to finally trigger large-scale mining.

There was a stampede to the headwaters of the Innoko River in 1907 following discoveries on Gaines Creek. Some 1,000 men hurried in from Nome and Fairbanks to stake along Ophir, Spruce, and other Innoko tributaries. A year later, Ophir Creek discoveries caused another stampede, one that caused the establishment of stores and transportation services along the Kuskokwim, Takotna, and Innoko rivers. With such services, prospectors had advantages in outfitting and transport that had never existed before and were able to prospect the region intensively.

Overall, all the gold production from the Kuskokwim did not place the region among Alaska's leaders. The McKinley district in the foothills of Mount McKinley near the North Fork, on the Arolik River in Kuskokwim Bay, ranked 14th by 1930 with $2,702,400, followed by Tuluksak-Aniak (number 27 with $680,000) and Goodnews Bay (number 35 with $243,200). The total yield of some $3,650,000 by 1930, compared to $80,000,000 for Fairbanks and $68,000,000 for Nome, indicates the Kuskokwim's position. By 1960 the total gold production was 650,000 ounces, only 3.2 percent of all placer gold produced in Alaska. Despite the Kuskokwim's relative low ranking among

Alaska's gold regions, the industry had great local significance, providing a useful economic base.

In the mining of mercury and platinum, the Kuskokwim holds a more commanding place. By the 1930s some 3,000 ounces of platinum were taken from Goodnews Bay region and with later dragline and dredge operations on the Salmon River, production reached a half million ounces by 1960.

Mercury mining boomed during World War II. By 1943 production totalled 783 flasks, most of it from the Red Devil mine near Sleetmute. High production continued through the 1960s, with a total production of 34,602 flasks by 1965, but most mines shut down in the early 1970s. During the 1950s and early 1960s the Red Devil mine supplied about 20 percent of U.S. mercury requirements. Total production of mercury in Alaska through 1986 has been 40,950 flasks (76 pounds).[16]

## Conclusions

A review of mining history in regions outside of the parks make it obvious that the mining frontier was a single entity. At different times, particular areas commanded attention. Some were regions of prolific and sustained gold production like the Seward Peninsula and the Tanana Valley. Others, including places not noted here like Marshall and Willow Creek, were far less significant. But all districts, large or small, contributed to sustain an economy that depended largely upon mining for many decades.

## Notes
## Chapter 7

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3. Ibid., 100.

4. Fred H. Moffit, *Mineral Resources of Kenai Peninsula, Alaska*, USGS Bulletin No. 277, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1906), 9.

5. Ibid.

6. Rolfe Buzzell. "Settlement Patterns," in Charles E. Holmes, "Supplementary Report: Sterling Highway Archeology, 1985-1986," (Fairbanks: Alaska Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys, 1986), ii, 8, 10.

7. *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 22 and 24, 1897.

8. Patricia Roppel, "Porcupine," (*Alaska Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Winter, 1975, 2-10), *passim*; Tom Budtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

9. Terrence Cole, *E.T. Barnette* (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publ. Co., 1981), 18. Barnette became a rich man without the benefit of Healy's railroad, although the crash of his bank in 1911 led to a criminal prosecution ending with acquittal on all but one minor charge.

10. William R. Hunt, *North of 53°* (New York: MacMillan Publ. Co., 1974), 129-75.

11. Robert L. Spude, "Steamboat Stampedes in Alaska & the Yukon," symposium paper, University of Victoria, 1987, *passim*; Hunt, *North of 53°*, 228-31.

12. Steve Sherman, "Ruby's Gold Rush Newspapers" (*Alaska Journal*, Autumn, 1971), 16-24.

13. Steven Peterson, "The Iditarod Trail," in *Mining in Alaska's Past*, (Anchorage: Alaska State Parks, 1980), 178-89.

14. John Kinney, "Copper and the Settlement of South Central Alaska," (*Journal of West*. Vol. X, No. 2, April 1971), 309.

15. Ernest Wolff and Bruce Thomas, *The Effects of Placer Mining on the Environment in Central Alaska* (Fairbanks: Mineral Industries Research Lab, 1982), 16-18.

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# Chapter 8
## Gold-rush Literature

According to mining historian Duane Smith, the mining frontier has not inspired authors of fiction as have cattlemen and fur traders. Given the miserly treatment of mining themes in fiction for the entire trans-Mississippi West, we cannot expect to discover many literary treatments of Alaska-Yukon mining. The great triumvirate of early 20th century writers, Jack London, Rex Beach, and Robert Service, of course did found their careers with books focusing on northern mining. A few other writers, like Sam Dunham, worked similar veins, but the flourishing period was short-lived.

### Jack London

"I brought nothing back from the Klondike but my scurvy," wrote Jack London of his great northern adventure. Of course, this was not true. He had gold, the glittering dust that had lured him from California, but he did not boast about it. It was not that he was above bragging on occasion. But his portion of the fabulous wealth of the Klondike amounted only to $4.50, so he was inclined to modesty.

Earlier Jack had reported more accurately on his gains. "I never realized a cent from any property I had interest in up there," he told a friend. "Still, I have been managing to pan a living since on the strength of the trip."[1]

Accounts differ on how Jack spent his time in the North. Some contemporaries claimed that he spent more time telling his stories and listening to others in Dawson's saloons than digging the frozen ground. Whatever the truth, the results of his observations were later to be expressed in wonderful ways. Tens of thousands of men and women shared London's goldrush experience--and millions since participated vicariously in their travails through his fiction.

Jack London landed at Dyea with thousands of other Klondike gold stampeders in August 1987. The vibrant-looking, husky 21-year-old was new to prospecting, but he had plenty of other adventures behind him as a seal poacher, hobo, oyster-bed raider, jute mill hand, and cannery worker.

Aboard ship he had formed a party with a few other young men eager to pool their resources and their labor for the work ahead. When the fellows hit the beach at Dyea they knew just what to do. No hired packers for them! They had strong backs and weak wallets.

As Jack and his companions packed along the Chilkoot Pass trail, he began to feel good about his physical prowess. Again and again he had to relay loads of provisions averaging 150 pounds and managed about 24 miles each day of the passage to the summit and beyond to Lake Lindeman. This tough work took a couple of memorable weeks.[2]

Along the way to the gold fields Jack rejoiced in participating in an event that offered so many opportunities to view the behavior of others under stress. He noted

illustrations of courage and fellowship and less admirable examples of cowardice and greed. It was all grist to his mill. Some of his observations showed his good humor. He could even praise the cunning of the fierce mosquitoes that were such a burden to all travelers. A journal entry recorded behavior unknown to natural science:

> Badly bitten under netting--couldn't vouch for it but John watched them and said they rushed the netting in a body, one gang holding up the edge while a second gang crawled under. Charley swore that he has seen several of the larger ones pull the mess apart and let a small one through. I have seen them with their proboscis bent and twisted after an assault on a sheet iron stove.[3]

One Yukon winter was enough for Jack. In summer 1898 he voyaged down the Yukon through interior Alaska for St. Michael and the trip south. He had not money enough for passage so worked as a fireman aboard ship.

Back in Oakland the young writer pondered his experiences. By 1899 the world no longer hungered for news from the Klondike. Journalists had filed millions of words with their editors to finally satiate the public's curiosity. The papers still carried Klondike and Alaska stories but not on the front page where other events dominated.

In fact, the Klondike was old news by the time London returned to California. But when the editors of the popular magazine, *Overland Monthly*, read the stories Jack submitted, they liked the robust prose the young man contributed. *Overland* took nine of his stories in 1899, and eastern journals snapped up 10 stories in 1900. Books followed year after year, and most sold well.

By his own admission London was poor at making up plots. He frequently purchased ideas from young unknown writers like Sinclair Lewis. Newspaper stories also provided some of his best material. One story told of the sad death of a Sausalito man at Rampart. John Snell, hoping to make a fortune in commerce, started upriver from St. Michael in 1898 with 1,500 dozen eggs. He had invested everything he owned in the eggs, a food item reported to command fabulous prices in Dawson. Unfortunately, low Yukon water halted his steamboat at Rampart, then winter closed river navigation. Snell was stuck with 1,500 dozen eggs. Rampart miners would have been glad to buy some of them but, alas, they were all spoiled.

Snell brooded for a time, then affixed a note to his cabin door saying "Gone Out." Several days later a friend forced open the cabin to see Snell "suspended by a wire rope from the rafter of the cabin cold in death." "One Thousand Dozen" was the story London told of this tragic incident.[4]

Published narratives on the gold rush provided the writer with factual background material and, occasionally, with the inspiration for a good tale. Jeremiah Lynch's "Three Years in the Klondike" included an account of a miner who froze to death on the trail. He had been traveling from his claim to Dawson and suffered from exposure after falling into a stream. Evidence of the doomed man's attempt to light a fire to

warm himself and dry his clothes struck London's imagination powerfully. The moving little story, "To Light a Fire," was the result.

Among the books London carried with him to the Klondike was Miner Bruce's *Through the Goldfields of Alaska to the Klondike.* Once he returned to Oakland he bought other books useful for fleshing out his stories, including Tappan Adney's *Klondike Stampede* and Harry DeWindt's *Through the Gold Field of Alaska.* Adney's book was helpful in his planning of *Daughter of the Snows.* Adney had paid particular attention to trader John J. Healy's role at Dawson and made a spirited defense of his policies when starvation threatened the town. London made Healy the father of his novel's heroine but did not show more than a superficial interest in the trader or his commercial world. He found Adney's description of Swiftwater Bill Gates useful in both *Daughter of the Snows* and *Burning Daylight.*[5] Another source for *Burning Daylight* was a miner named Elam Harnish, whom London met in the Klondike. Harnish was a hard worker and determined prospector, but hardly the heroic figure London described, a tireless musher who wore out three Indians and two dog teams carrying the mail from Circle to Dyea, then danced all night before starting back over the trail in the morning.[6]

Sometimes Jack waded through some heavy waters in pushing too earnestly his theories of Anglo-Saxon superiority and social Darwinism. But, generally, he maintained a lively pace and even managed to grace weak stories with good character depiction and superior natural description.

Perhaps no other journey to the Klondike and Alaska cast as long a shadow as that made by London in 1897-98. His stories of the North have been popular for nearly a century and have given countless readers their strongest impressions of the region. No other writer concerned with the North comes close to London's place as the premier adventure storyteller. Jack London achieved legendary status as America's first writer/hero--a personality whose life was as interesting to the public as his books.

Some critics were not pleased with London's work. The nation's ranking expert on Alaska, William Healy Dall, derided London's efforts. Dall, who had been a member of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition from 1865-67, reigned over Alaskan scientists from his post at the Smithsonian.

Dall had little good to say about London's first collection of stories, "The Son of the Wolf," when he reviewed it in the "New York Times." London defended himself to a friend. Dall was a scientist not an artist, London complained, and he did not understand art. "When I have drawn a picture in a few strokes, he would spoil it by putting in the multitude of details I have left out . . . His trouble is that he does not see with a pictorial eye. He merely looks upon a scene and sees every bit of it; but he does not see the true picture in that scene."[7]

Other Alaskan "experts" also poked fun at London. Wilson Mizner, probably the wittiest man who ever caroused in the saloons of Dawson and Nome, later wrote about the "London school" of Klondike fiction, with "its supermen and superdogs, its abysmal brutes and exquisite ingenues."[8]

Another critic cried that the writer's craft consisted of turning men into brutes and brutes into men. And still another man charged that the writer was guilty of "spreading a false gospel of the true Alaskan conditions."[9]

But how did the Alaska miners feel about London's stories? An unpublished letter in the University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives written by a Rampart miner in 1900 presents one view. Hunter Fitzhugh had only a little time to look at London's novel before another eager reader took it away. The book reached the Yukon River gold mining town in October 1900. Its owner was besieged by men keen to read about London's north. "The fellow who owns it says he will lend it to me when about two dozen others have read it," Fitzhugh wrote his mother.

> I can see that it is an A-1 sketch of our life up here. The dog tales, the descriptions of our costumes, and all the stage settings and business are just as I would have put them if I had been able to write. The Indian talk is a little off color, as he makes them use too much Chinook of which they are entirely ignorant.[10]

Tastes differ on writers and London's stories varied in quality. But he is well loved. Among national writers he holds a singular place as the most widely read American novelist in the world. His preeminence abroad has been maintained for decades against distinguished rivals like Mark Twain, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway. A Russian writer described his nation's infatuation with London in evocative terms: "This is the first cigar we smoke in our youth."[11]

Alaskans, of course, hold London in special regard. His is the only major writer who made Alaska and the Yukon the setting of a major part of his work. Though London wrote other books not concerned with the North, he launched his career and did some of his finest writing about this region.

London felt very strongly about his Klondike experience. Writing to Sam Dunham in 1913, he praised Dunham's *The Men Who Blaze the Trail* and *The Goldsmith of Nome*, two books of northern poetry. "I cannot express to you how I have enjoyed it, but I can say this: Your verse has struck the truest note of the Northerland." London did not think that Dunham's poems would be pleasing to those who did not know the north because the "truest note" would not be popular. His comment was shrewd if the relative popularity of Dunham and Robert Service may be compared. Service, rather like London, wrote very colorful poems about improbable events, and his work became as famous as London's. Dunham's realistic lyrics had few readers.[12]

London had only 40 years for his prodigious work and hectic play. Boozing wasted him, as did the habit of treating ailments with narcotics, heavy smoking, the strain of unfortunate investments, his grandiose ranch development and construction schemes, and all around helter-skelter lifestyle. But his marvelous exuberance lives on in his stories. Somehow it is so easy to picture him at work, tearing through his mandatory daily stint of completed pages. Some voice was always calling to him--"Run, Jack, run! And he ran, too hard and too fast.

When he laid his pen down for the last time, he had left us something monumental, including 50 published books of fiction and nonfiction--500 articles and essays, 200 short stories, and 19 novels. And he also left us a dazzling, never fading picture of a man of parts--adventurer, social commentator, novelist, Socialist, and more. He helped draw the picture to the extent that he directed his own self-publicity in years of fame--but it was not faked. He was truly a protean figure, a fellow of legendary proportions, a character well fit to play the lead in a novel by Jack London.

## Sam Dunham

Sam Dunham, a representative of the U.S. Department of Labor, arrived at Dawson on September 23, 1897. After investigating labor and related economic conditions, there he moved downriver to Circle on the steamboat *Bella*, arriving there on October 14 after a 13-day voyage. Dunham's work on his report was excellent, but in Circle he had time to write the poems about "The Men Who Blaze the Trail." Dunham wrote respectable verse:

> So while others sing of the chosen few
> Who o'er the Fates prevail,
> I will sing of the many, staunch and true,
> Whose brave hearts never quail,--
> Who with dauntless spirit of pioneers
> A state are building for the coming years,
> Their sole reward their loved one's tears,--
> The men who blaze the trail![13]

Dunham had a good time with a famous western poet, Joaquin Miller, in Circle. They were good enough friends to permit some playfulness over Miller's heroic verse on crossing the Chilkoot in the form of a Dunham parody of some verses.

Dunham returned outside in 1899, then returned north in 1900 to help with the census and report for the Labor Department on Nome. While in Nome he wrote poems on actual events like the conspiracy to take over wealthy mines by Alexander McKenzie and his cohorts and on the disenchantment of miners with the government's service. His "Alaska to Uncle Sam" was an emotional, good-humored plea for statehood. Other poems caught the disappointment of unsuccessful prospectors:

> We're too slow for the new breed of miners,
> Embracing all classes of men,
> Who locate by power of attorney
> And prospect their claims with a pen.[14]

## Robert Service

Dunham knew the gold-rush era far better than Robert Service but failed to tap the literary gold. He had emigrated from Scotland to North America as a young man and bummed his way out to California. There he was thrilled by the stories of Jack London. The Klondike excitement had not yet faded in 1902-03 when Service became aware of the North, although he did not imagine that, "while other men were seeking Eldorado, they were also making one for me."[15]

Quite by chance, in 1904, he was offered a bank clerk's job at the Whitehorse branch of a Canadian bank. Service lived sedately in Whitehorse but did enjoy reciting famous verses like "Casey at the Bat" and "The Face on the Bar-Room Floor" at social gatherings. After one such performance Stroller White, the well-known *Whitehorse Star* journalist, urged him to write original verse: "Give us something about our own little bit of earth . . . There's a rich paystreak waiting for someone to work. Why don't you go on in and stake it?"[16]

Service thought about White's suggestion for some time before inspiration came. He described the moment in his autobiography. It was Saturday night, and he was still working at the bank. Music and revelry from a neighboring saloon penetrated his reflections. Just then a pistol shot roared in his ear, fired by the bank watchman who thought Service's after-hours presence was that of a burglar. Explanations followed but instead of retiring for a drink or other repairs to his jingling nerves, Service sat tight and wrote about a shooting at the Malemute Saloon. His first scribbled words were: "A bunch of the boys were whooping it up in the Malemute Saloon." Hours later he finished what was to become the most declaimed of all verses of the North, a lurid, exciting ballad of unrequited love and vengeance entitled "The Shooting of Dan McGrew."

Good fortune followed immediately upon Service's first recitation. A miner told him "a story Jack London never got" that became "The Cremation of Sam McGee," a lively tale that climaxed with a happy scene:

> And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,
> in the heart of the furnace road;
> And he wore a smile you could see a mile,
> and he said: 'Please close that door.'
> It's fine in here, but I greatly fear
> you'll let in the cold and storm--
> Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee,
> it's the first time I've been warm.[17]

Service's *Songs of the Sourdough* appeared in 1909 and has not been out of print since.

## Rex Beach

Rex Beach made significant contributions to Alaska's mining literature. His stories and novels were not as popular as London's because he was not as good a writer, but they had wide readership. Beach's experience in the North certainly exceeded that of any other author.

As a college lad he had joined the gold stampeders and ended up at Rampart, where he spent two years mining. At the time he had no literary aspirations, yet was intrigued when a friend argued that the North would never generate a Mark Twain or Bret Harte--writers capable of chronicling the stampede as had been done for California. "There's no drama up here, no comedy, no warmth. Life is as pale and cold as the snow." Beach accepted this dictum at first, then, later on, realized what nonsense it was. Why should the Yukon country lack for drama and color when the actual conditions were appreciated? It should not be hard to imagine romance in a community like Rampart, an instant town full of anxious fortune seekers confronting a severe climate and wholly unfamiliar surroundings.[18]

Later, Beach got in on the Nome stampede before returning to Chicago. While working for a building materials firm he started writing stories about mining events and eventually achieved great success. *The Spoilers*, based on the McKenzie-Noyes conspiracy in Nome, was a best-selling novel and has had several reprintings over the years. Another novel, *The Barrier*, treats the world he knew as a Rampart miner. *The Iron Trail*, based on the construction of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway, did well in several editions. Beach had traveled to Cordova and the Copper River country after the railroad's completion to research the novel.

In his choice of historic events at Nome and the Copper River for novels Beach reached more readers than did Alaska's historians. But Beach also influenced events with a series of articles, "The Looting of Alaska," on the Spoilers of Nome published in 1906. The magazine articles created a sensation and angered U.S. Senators who were associated with Alexander McKenzie, but they gave the 1900-01 conspiracy the first general publicity they received.

London, Beach, and Service had many imitators, but no other writers who focused on the mining frontier have enjoyed large commercial or artistic successes. Though there is some risk in predicting the future of literature, it seems unlikely that many writers will be attracted by the northern gold-rush theme because neither the region nor the time command general interest. The odd romance or adventure popular novel will continue to surface from time to time but probably will not make much of a commercial stir. In other forms of popular culture, television productions and theater films notably, the gold-rush era has been treated at times but not very successfully from any point of view. It does not appear that the general consciousness of northern mining history is high enough to make its treatment popular in the future.

Referring back to historian Duane Smith's comments on the comparative paucity of mining frontier fiction, it is evident that his analysis does not apply to Alaska. The rivals of miners in other parts of the West--cattlemen and trappers--are not observable

in Alaska's past. There were trappers, if not cattlemen, in the North, but none who captured the popular fancy as did those wonderful pathfinders and Indian fighters of the Plains and the Rockies. Alaska had fishermen, but romance does not cling to that severe pursuit. Thus far, authors viewing the North, excepting those who focus on natives, see the mining frontier alone as a colorful setting for literature.

## Personal Narrative Literature

Considerations of mining frontier literature usually focus on the creative branches--fiction and poetry--to the neglect of personal narratives. Early published travel narratives were eagerly studied by stampeders, who used them as sources of information and, as has been seen, by writers like Jack London for inspiration and source material. But the personal narratives form a body of nonfiction literature worthy of respect for its artistry and wisdom. Many of the more interesting of the narratives have been reprinted in recent years because of their intrinsic reading value, including Edwin T. Adney, *Klondike Stampede*; Mrs. George Black, *My 70 Years*; Alfred H. Brooks, *Blazing Alaska's Trails*; Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*; L.H. French, *Seward's Land of Gold*; and others.

As an illustration of the richness of the travel-adventure accounts on the North, Addison M. Powell's *Trailing and Camping in Alaska* is a superlative example. Powell landed at Valdez in 1898 to investigate the Copper River country and published a book of his observations some 10 years after his return. As a witty and wise observer of other stampeders, Power was matchless. Even before leaving Seattle he caught the peculiarities of gold fever, telling a funny story about an angry man who "knew" an acquaintance was on to a good thing in the Klondike because he insisted that he had no intention of leaving Seattle. At Copper Center he observed that "in the wild rush to this country, there were about two prospectors to every hundred invaders, and two others who were willing to learn, while the other ninety-six were waiting for a "strike." While waiting they kept busy "in holding miners' meetings over dog-fights and other such trivial matters."[19]

Prospectors, Powell said, lived on hope and beans, and the hope was the more important driving force. He did admire the spirit of Ole Allson of Minnesota, whose claim location notice stated: "I take one mining claim and if it's good I take two."[20]

Powell understood quitters and paid them particular attention:

> Every outgoing steamer was loaded down with quitters who, as prospectors, were helpless incompetents. To avoid being ridiculed, they pretended to be returning for horses, larger outfits or more assistance from home. One young man, to have an excuse, said he was returning for cigarette papers. . . . When a man was seen whittling, it was generally conceded to be an indication that he was going out on the next boat.

Another quitter blamed his wife: "I am a married man, and this is no place for me. My wife thinks I'm a peach, a blossom, and a hero! She thinks I am a loo-loo bird and I feel through my whole system that I ought to be at home *doing* something! You can't imagine how my wife loves me, my person and my ways!" Some quitters were good-humored about it. One told Powell that "the reason I came to Alaska was that I had nothing to lose; and, I'll be hanged, gentlemen, if I didn't lose that."[21]

Powell reflected the miners' contemptuous view of mining promoters, making an addendum to Mark Twain's famous comment: "It has been said that the miner is a liar with a hole in the ground, but I say, generally speaking, the promoter hasn't even a hole."[22]

Powell's good-humored way of seeing things did not obscure his relations of travails of the trail. His description of trudging across the Valdez glacier facing the perils of crevasses catches the dangers and hardships well enough. Everywhere he heard of deaths in blizzards, falls, avalanches, drownings, or other dire circumstances. He crossed the summit by the Valdez Glacier at 5,000 feet in a blinding snowstorm; "I broke through the crust of snow that covered a crevasse, and with one leg swinging around in space beneath, declared I never again would attempt to cross that glacier."[23]

In Powell we gain a feel for the vast country of his travels, its beauties and its discomforts, including tearing winds and mosquitoes so harassing as to cause "us fully to realize the mistake that had been made when we were born."[24] Many readers find the personal narratives of Powell and other participants more meaningful than fictional representation of the same events. The narrative expresses a truth and immediacey that may not come across with even the most adroit novelist and thus bridges the gap between actor and reader, past and present, more effectively.

But whatever the literary merits and interest offered by personal narratives, they are less likely to attract readers of a later time than fiction. We are fortunate whenever a previously published narrative is reprinted and even more so when an old unpublished narrative gains a printing. We can expect few publications of personal narratives or, for that matter, of historical works treating the mining frontier because of the small Alaska-Yukon population and correspondingly small universities. Publishers, except for the few regional specialists, must look to books that will interest general readers of history in the states and Canada because high sales among northern residents cannot be expected.

There is no reason to be gloomy about the prospects of narrative and historical literature. Rich archives of historical material have been established in Alaska, the Yukon, and elsewhere in the states and Canada where personal papers of gold-era participants have been preserved. Whenever the novel writers, poets, or historians need to search for documentation the research material is at hand.

## Popular Culture

The northern gold rushes have been featured in a number of movies. Hollywood has produced at least three versions of *The Spoilers*, including one with Clark Gable. Of all the gold-rush films none has compared in popularity to Charley Chaplain's *Gold Rush*, the stirring silent classic that finds new fans in each generation. On television the gold rush appears only infrequently.

Other gold-rush stories have been radio shows, including a serial of the 1940s, "Refrew of the Mounties," children's books, and comic adventure books. But the event's lasting impact on popular culture has not been great. There is no popular, perennial stock representation in any cultural form comparable to the western cowboy or gunslinger themes.

Reasons for the relatively light impression of the mining frontier on popular culture are not hard to find. The event was sensational and dramatic enough for a time, but it was soon crowded off stage by other events. It could not continue to grip public attention except through the genius and persistence of artists and performances. The great literary triumvirate, Jack London, Robert Service, and Rex Beach, could inspire film, radio, and other media productions for a limited time only. What was lacking was the emergence of artists strong enough to establish the gold-rush theme for a long run. If someone like Will Rogers, for example, had been a Klondiker and continued to bring forward his experiences to his varied huge audiences, the impact would have been considerable.

Revivals of interest in the popular arts will surface periodically, and some future revival might become hugely popular. Meanwhile, we maintain our stimulants. Visitors to the wonderfully restored towns of Dawson and Skagway and other preserved northern mining sites will continue to be impressed by the "dear, dead days" of '98.

## Notes
## Chapter 8

1. Franklin Walker, Jack London and the Klondike (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1966), 213.

2. Ibid., 58.

3. Ibid., 174-75.

4. David M. Hamilton, "*The Tools of My Trade*" *The Annotated Books in Jack London's Library* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 189.

5. Ibid., 8-15.

6. Terrence Cole, "Go Up, O Elam," (*Alaska Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 4, Autumn 1976), 235-41.

7. Walker, *Jack London and the Klondike*, 219-20.

8. Richard O'Conner, *Jack London* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1964), 84.

9. Melvin Ricks *Alaska in Literature* (Juneau: Alaska Historical Library, 1960), 289.

10. Fitzhugh to mother, October 29, 1900, Fitzhugh papers, UAF.

11. O'Conner, *Jack London*, 6.

12. Hamilton, "*The Tools of My Trade*," 198.

13. Frank Busbe, "Sam Dunham: Forgotten Goldrush Poet," (*Alaska Journal*, 1981 Annual Collection), 130.

14. Ibid., 132.

15. Robert W. Service, *Ploughman of the Moon* (London: Benn, 1946), 257.

16. Ibid., 274.

17. Robert W. Service, *Collected Poems* (New York: Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1945), 36.

18. Rex Beach, *Personal Exposures* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1940), 20.

19. Addison M. Powell, *Trailing and Camping in Alaska* (New York: Wessels & Bissel, 1910), 51-52.

20. Ibid., 58.

21. Ibid., 24; 53; 90.

22. Ibid., 107.

23. Ibid., 39.

24. Ibid., 56.

# Chapter 9
## The Progress of Mining

### Early Mining Methods

The early miners in Alaska relied upon simple techniques in seeking and gathering gold. A prospector searched for smaller streams and former streambeds that seemed promising, according to his individual experience and theories regarding favorable mineral signs. At such spots that suggested possible wealth, he gathered sand or gravel into his pan, shook vigorously to settle the heavier mass. If his keenly alert eye spotted gold flecks or--God be praised!--nuggets, he got to work seriously. Good prospects encouraged the prospector to advance his technology from elemental panning to the use of a rocker.

Building a rocker did not tax the carpentry skills of most gold-seekers who could follow specific directions given in mining manuals and guides to gold fields. A typical rocker was a box about 3 feet long and 2 feet wide, made in two parts, the top being shallow, with a heavy sheet iron bottom, which is punched full of quarter-inch holes. The other part of the box was fitted with an inclined shelf about midway in its depth, which was 6 or 8 inches lower at its lower end than at its upper. Over this structure the miner placed a piece of heavy woolen blanket, then mounted it on two rockers. The miner set up his rocker near a good supply of water. He cleared away all the stones and coarse gravel, gathering the finer gravel and sand in a heap, then filled the shallow box of his rocker. With one hand the miner rocked while with the other he ladled in the water. The finer matter with the gold fell through the holes on the blanket, which checked its progress and held the fine particles of gold, while the sand and other matter pass over it to the bottom of the box and finally out of the box.

A mining manual explained the balance of the operation:

> Across the bottom of the box are fixed thin slats, behind which some mercury is placed to catch any particles of gold which may escape the blanket. If the gold is nuggety, the large nuggets are found in the upper box, their weight detaining them until all the lighter stuff has passed through, and the smallest ones are held by a deeper slat at the outward end of the bottom of the box. The piece of blanket is, at intervals, taken out and rinsed into a barrel; if the gold is fine, mercury is placed at the bottom of the barrel.[1]

The rocker worked well enough, but if gold seemed plentiful an advance in mining technology was called for. Sluice boxes were the next stage. They required large quantities of water within accessible distance and enough timber for building sluice boxes. If water and wood were available, it did not take too much effort to provide a dramatic acceleration of production. As explained in the manual:

> Planks are procured and formed into a box of suitable width and depth. Slats are fixed across the bottom of the box at intervals, or shallow holes are bored in the bottom, in such order that no particle could run along the bottom in a straight line and escape without running over a hole. Several of these boxes are then set up with a considerable slope, and are fitted into one another at the ends like a stovepipe. A stream of water is now directed into the upper end of the highest box. The gravel having been collected, as in the case of the rocker, it is shoveled into the upper box, and is washed downward by the strong current of water. The gold is detained by its weight, and is held by the slates or in the holes mentioned. If it is fine, mercury is placed behind the slats or in these holes to catch it. In this way about three times as much dirt can be washed as by the rocker, and consequently three times as much gold is secured in a given time. After the boxes are done with they are burned, and the ashes washed for the gold held in the wood.

The manual illuminated the seasonal difficulties of the miner and his utilization of local wood supplies:

> A great number of the miners spend their time in the summer prospecting, and in the winter resort to a method lately adopted and which is called 'burning.' They make fires on the surface, thus thawing the ground until the bedrock is reached; then drift and tunnel. The pay dirt is brought to the surface and heaped in a pile until spring, when water can be obtained. The sluice boxes are then set up and the dirt is washed out, thus enabling the miner to work advantageously and profitably the year around. This method also has been found very satisfactory in places where the pay streak is at any great depth from the surface. In this way the complaint, which has been so commonly advanced by the miners and others, that in the Yukon several months in the year are lost to idleness is overcome.

## Technological Progress

Early placer mining methods for the most part gave way to more advanced technology after the Klondike discovery. Underground driftmining was an expedient that took advantage of permafrost ground. Miners could dig underground from their entry shaft without extensive shoring of tunnels with timber and without the need to pump away excess water. Yet drift mining was basically a pick-and-shovel method of production, slow and cumbersome and capable of mining only bedrock, thus wasting any gold in the overburden.

Advancing from drift mining to more effective mining techniques required expensive machinery and more capital. The independent miner of the pre-Klondike period

almost became an anachronism as time passed, yet the transition was inevitable under the circumstances. Costs of mining in Alaska were always higher than elsewhere because of freight charges and peculiar ground conditions.

Established western mining methods included open-cut, hydraulic, and dredging. All of these were used singly or in combination in Alaska depending upon conditions, but there were some adaptations of each method in the North. Each had its disadvantages. Open-cut mining required the use of steam scrapers and other heavy expensive equipment so it was not commonly practiced. Hydraulic mining, used in combinations with open-cut and dredging operations, was usually a muck stripping operation. Since hydraulic operations required lots of water, a scarce item in most mining districts, its operation necessitated the construction of reservoirs, ditches, and flumes. Dredging, of course, required the bulkiest and most expensive item of equipment available. And, to aggravate the high costs of mining by any method, the factor of operating time had to be weighed. In most mining districts, the season ran from June to September, thus sharply reducing the profit-making time and lengthening the exposure time of equipment to fire, flood, and other destructive forces.

Despite all the adverse aspects of technological progress, the advance went on in Alaska. In time, the most feasible technology was employed in placer districts that warranted exploitation. Dredges were first used on Snake Creek near Nome in 1899 and in the Klondike from 1901, but their extensive use was delayed until circumstances demanded their utilization. From 1908-1915 it became increasingly obvious that all the richest ground of the upper Yukon, the Tanana, and the Seward Peninsula had yielded all it held to hand, sluicing, and drifting methods. Tests showed that the worked tailings and ground could still be mined profitably by the most advanced mining technology--meaning dredges. More and more of these expensive machines were brought in. Dredging became increasingly common from 1916, and production justified the heavy expense involved. A USGS report of 1936 shows the prominence of dredges:

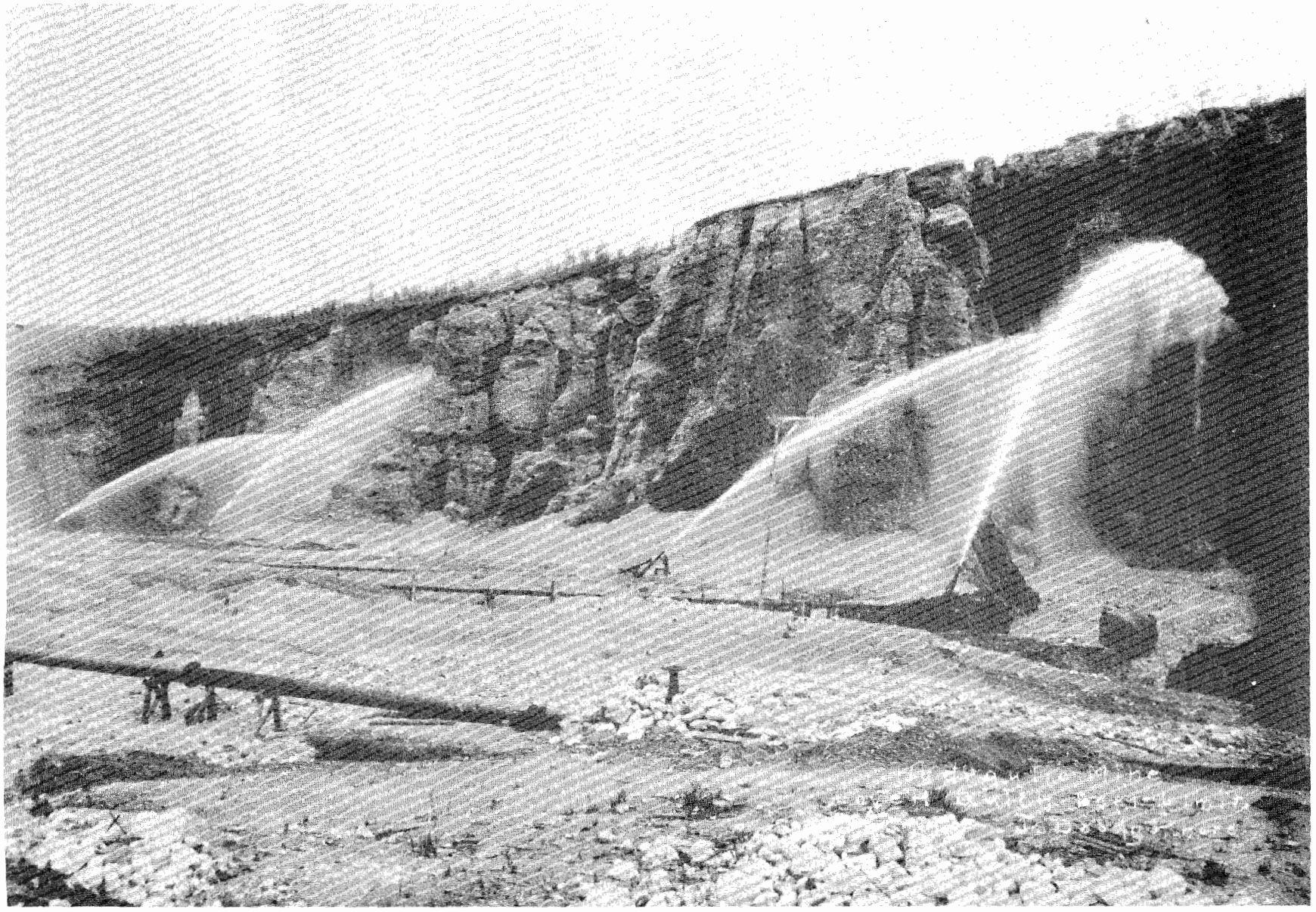
> Nearly 79 percent of all the placer gold produced in Alaska in 1936 was mined by dredges. The total value of the gold thus recovered was $8,905,000, of which the greater part came from 18 dredges in the Yukon region and the rest from 20 dredges in Seward Peninsula and 1 in the Kuskokwim region. This total is more than $1,200,000 in excess of the value of the gold recovered by dredges in 1935, and the quantity is about 34,000 fine ounces more. The accompanying table gives the value of the gold output and the yardage handled by Alaska dredges, beginning in 1903, the earliest year for which records are available. The total value of the gold produced by dredges since 1903 is nearly 26 percent of the total value of gold produced from all kinds of placer mining since 1880, and lately there has been a general tendency each year for a greater and greater percentage of the placer output to be mined by dredges. During 1936 the ratio of dredge production to the output from all other kinds of placer mining was

nearly 2.7 to 1, and there are no signs of a diminution in dredge mining in the near future-in fact, an even higher ratio seems not unlikely.[2]

**Gold Produced by Dredge Mining in Alaska, 1903-36**

| Year | Number of Dredges Operated | Value of gold output | Gravel handled (cubic yards)* | Value of gold recovered per cubic yard (cents)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1903-15 | -- | $12,431,000 | -- | -- |
| 1916 | 34 | 2,679,000 | 3,900,000 | 69 |
| 1917 | 36 | 2,500,000 | 3,700,000 | 68 |
| 1918 | 28 | 1,425,000 | 2,490,000 | 57 |
| 1919 | 28 | 1,360,000 | 1,760,000 | 77 |
| 1920 | 22 | 1,129,932 | 1,633,861 | 69 |
| 1921 | 24 | 1,582,520 | 2,799,519 | 57 |
| 1922 | 23 | 1,767,753 | 3,186,343 | 55 |
| 1923 | 25 | 1,848,596 | 4,645,053 | 40 |
| 1924 | 27 | 1,563,361 | 4,342,667 | 36 |
| 1925 | 27 | 1,572,312 | 3,144,624 | 50 |
| 1926 | 32 | 2,291,000 | 5,730,000 | 40 |
| 1927 | 28 | 1,740,000 | 6,084,000 | 29 |
| 1928 | 27 | 2,185,000 | 6,371,000 | 34 |
| 1929 | 30 | 2,932,000 | 8,709,000 | 33.6 |
| 1930 | 27 | 3,912,600 | 9,906,000 | 39.5 |
| 1931 | 28 | 3,749,000 | 10,214,000 | 36.7 |
| 1932 | 25 | 4,293,000 | 10,310,700 | 41.6 |
| 1933 | 25 | 4,146,000 | 8,889,000 | 46.6 |
| 1934 | 30 | 6,725,000 | 10,445,000 | 64.4 |
| 1935 | 37 | 7,701,000 | 12,930,000 | 59.6 |
| 1936 | 39 | 8,905,000 | 14,632,000 | 60.9 |
| Total | -- | 78,439,000 | 135,823,000 | 48.6 |

*Since 1915

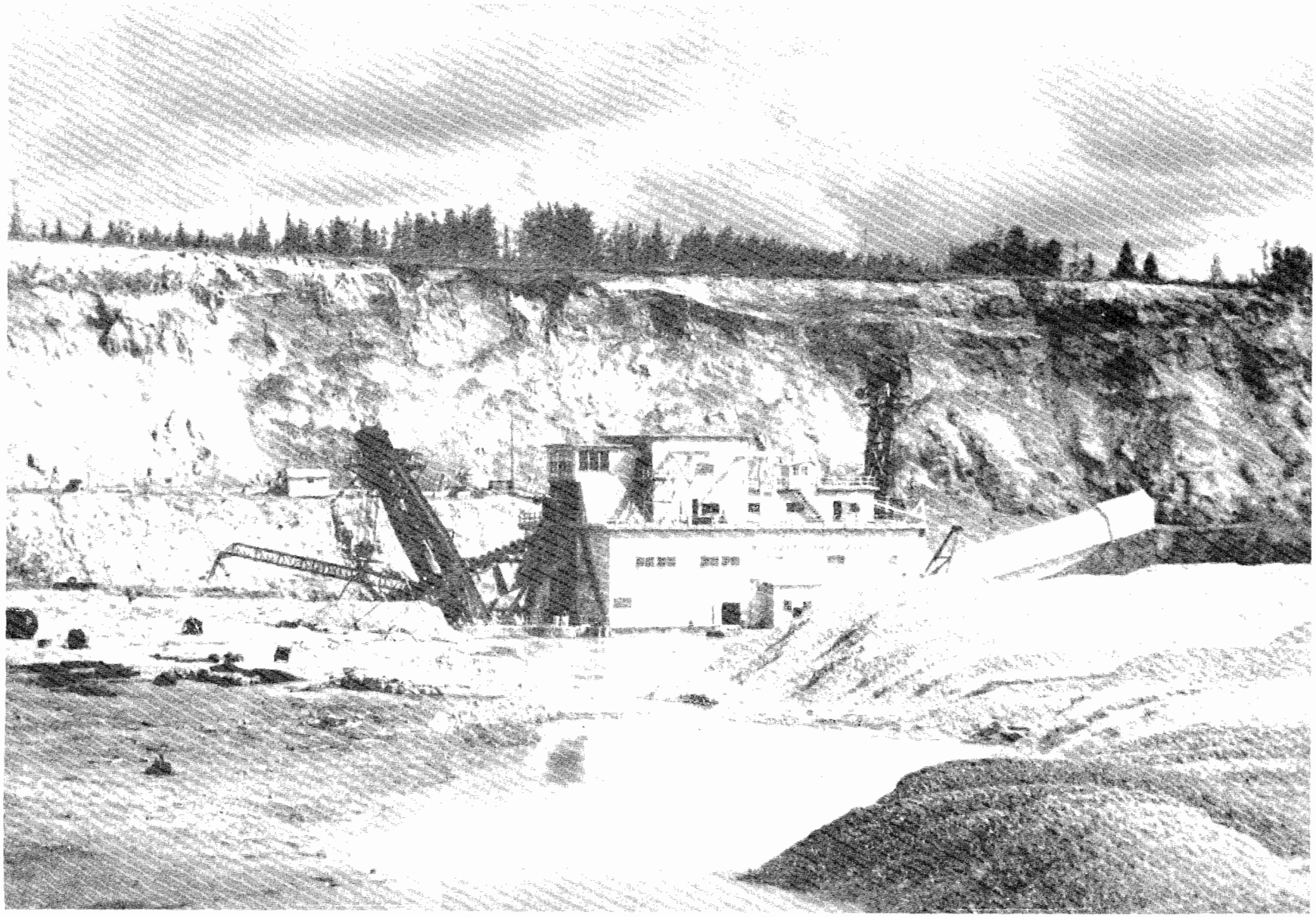


"Giants" at work, Tanana Valley

University of Alaska

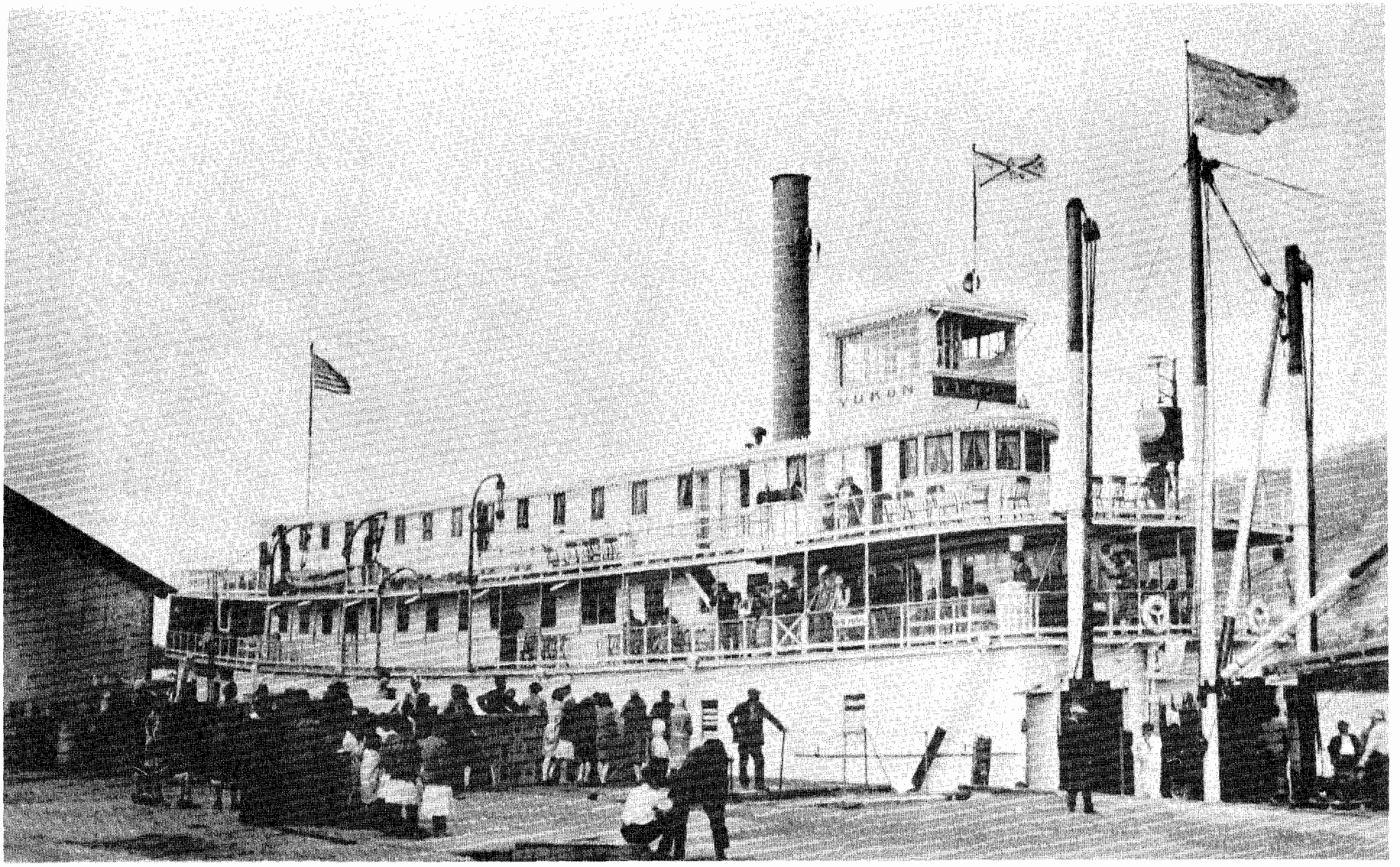
Cold water points thawing ground, Tanana Valley

University of Alaska



Dredge at work

University of Alaska




Steamboat Yukon at Dawson

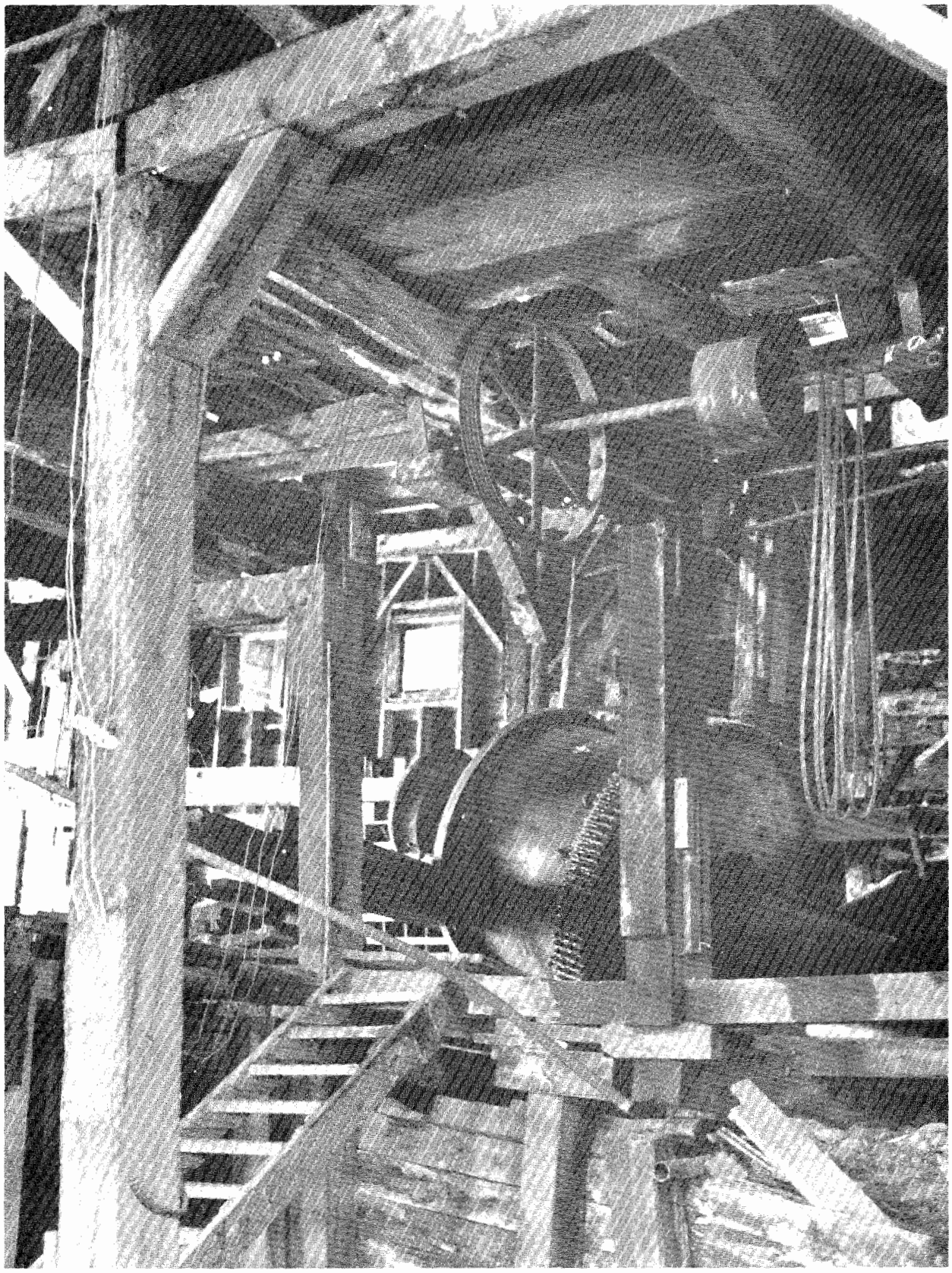
University of Alaska

Boiler abandoned at Nizina

National Park Service

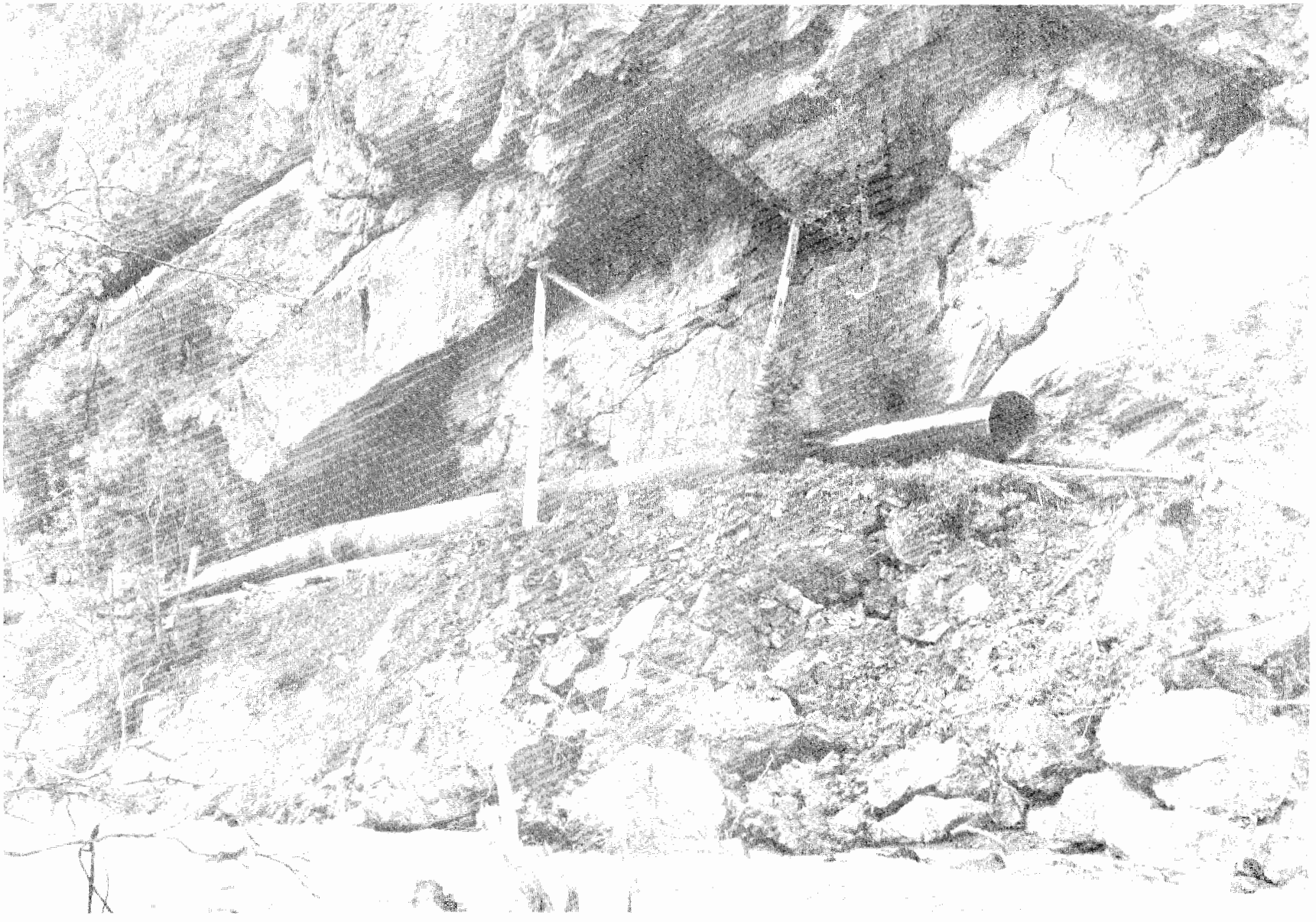
Tools left at Chititu blacksmith shop

National Park Service



Ball crusher at Nabesna Mining Company mill

National Park Service



Remains of flume system on Dan Creek

National Park Service

## The FE Company

The revival of interior mining with the introduction of dredges in 1916 was sustained by the entry of the Fairbanks Exploration Co. (FE Co.), a subsidiary of the United States Refining and Mining Company. In 1923 the parent company acquired the Hammon Consolidated Gold Fields, the major dredging operation of the Nome region. From 1924 the company started investigating the Fairbanks region and acquiring properties. Large-scale dredging operations carried on until 1964. A major project supporting mining involved the construction of the Davidson Ditch, carrying water for mining from the Chatanika River to workings on Cleary, Goldstream, and other creeks for a distance of 90 miles.

Prospecting was done with churn drills using standard 6-inch tools and thin placer bits. Test results varied greatly because some holes penetrated old drift-mine workings while others were sunk in virgin ground left untouched by earlier miners. But since it had been determined early that even ground that had been previously mined could be dredged profitably, the company could make a reasonable assessment of the values of various properties. In acquiring properties the FE Co. benefited by the general doldrums in mining activity at the time. Most miners realized that long-term production from their claims could only be achieved through dredging and were receptive to sale or lease offers. The lease option offered by the company was a strong inducement to miners who believed their claims were rich and wished to retain a share of expected earnings.

The eight dredges operated in the Fairbanks area moved much earth. In the first stage of the operation the ground had to be stripped and thawed, then flooded for the dredge's passage. After dredges finished their work on Goldstream, Cleary, Pedro, Fish, and Cripple creeks in the 1920s and '30s, some were moved, at great difficulty, in the 1940s and '50s to new ground on Fairbanks, Chicken, Eldorado, Dome, and Ester creeks.

In 1936-37 F.E. Co. departed from conventional mining methods and developed an experiment underground hydraulicking system on the Chatanika River opposite Ruby Gulch. The bedrock on this particular ground was too deep to dredge, and drift mining would have been prohibitively expensive. Miners sank a shaft to 52 feet to reach gravel, cribbed the shaft in local spruce, then thawed the ground from that level with 10-foot steam points, finally reaching bedrock at 172 feet. An 8-by-8-foot station was excavated at this level. Then a main and several crosscut drifts were driven along the bedrock, and the areas were thawed. The pay gravel and bedrock were hydraulicked into a main drift extending from the shaft, then hoisted out in sluice boxes. Water from Davidson Ditch was used for both underground hydraulicking and cleanup on the pay pile. Though the technical method worked, the results were not profitable as costs proved far higher than the bedrock yield of gold.[3]

Operations resumed after the World War II shutdown. The number of dredges operating at Fairbanks, Hogatza, Chicken, and Nome (the other area of operations that compared with Fairbanks in scope) varied from year to year. In 1940 Fairbanks had

eight dredges and Nome had three. Peak post-war years were 1957 and 1958, when Fairbanks had seven dredges and Nome had three. Hogatza had one from 1957 through 1974; Chicken had one from 1959 to 1968. The Nome mining was discontinued in 1962. The last two dredges operating at Fairbanks shut down in 1963. In the last few years other mining companies have become active in the Tanana Valley, and dredges have been operating near Nome.

Some statistics indicate the importance of the FE Co. operation to Fairbanks from the 1920s until the operation ended:

**FE Company's Impact in Alaska, 1910-1969**

| Year | Population Fairbanks | Population Alaska | Company Employees | Annual Payroll |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1910 | 3,541 | 64,356 | | |
| 1915 | 2,348 | 59,710 | | |
| 1920 | 1,155 | 55,063 | | |
| 1925 | 1,628 | 59,428 | 611 | |
| 1926 | 1,725 | 60,301 | 1,372 | $1,032,408 |
| 1930 | 2,101 | 63,793 | 851 | 831,046 |
| 1935 | 2,778 | 68,158 | 903 | 1,955,070 |
| 1940 | 3,455 | 72,524 | 1,163 | 1,955,070 |
| 1943 | 4,151 | 89,360 | 66 | 123,170 |
| 1945 | 4,613 | 100,579 | 247 | 275,323 |
| 1950 | 5,771 | 128,643 | 967 | 1,481,934 |
| 1955 | 9,341 | 177,405 | 871 | 2,204,757 |
| 1960 | 13,311 | 266,167 | 329 | 1,165.503 |
| 1965 | 14,041 | 264,170 | 99 | 347,870 |
| 1969 | 14,625 | | 50 | 143,575 |

Total payroll 1926-1969 was $50,552,175.[4]

These statistics do not include the successful dredging operations within Yukon-Charley Parklands on Coal and Woodchopper creeks (see Chapter 15).

## Evaluations and the USGS

The advances of mining technology, spurred by inventions and adaptations to the northern environment, were of immense importance. Quite simply, a better method lowered costs to improve profits or, often enough, to make mining feasible where it had not been earlier.

The development of the great Fairhaven Ditch on the Seward Peninsula, which crosses national park lands, is one example of an obvious technological need. Fred H. Moffit of the USGS investigated the Candle area in 1903, noting that the Kotzebue Sound region had produced $415,000 from 1901-1903. Miners could not expect to carry on without improving their methods. The season was very short, and only very limited quantities of water were available for sluicing. Something must be done, Moffit argued, or the operation would cease. The miners agreed and, fortunately, investors came forward with enough capital to build the longest water supply system in Alaska.[5] One indication of the magnitude of ditch construction for mining is in the total mileage of ditchworks on Seward Peninsula--some 700 miles.

It was the responsibility of Moffit and other USGS men to consider aspects of mining costs as they investigated a particular region. But the USGS also examined the general problem of mining costs on occasion. Chester W. Purrington of the USGS provided the first overall analysis of methods and costs in 1905. At the time most miners used open cut methods--either pick and shovel or mechanical means--or hydraulic methods. Sixty per cent of the placer mining relied upon open cutting methods, then considered the most economical modes. Purrington examined the merits of steam scrappers, steam shovels, and hand shoveling.

Drift mining was still a popular method used. It permitted underground work over the winter but required the thawing of auriferous gravels twice--once for removal, then again in sluicing down the dumps. Drifting was much preferred in frozen ground where it was not necessary to timber the tunnels.

Hydraulic mining was considered "the most economical method from the standpoints of power, capacity, and labor." But it was wasteful of water and limited to areas where topographical conditions made it feasible. Such areas were not common in Alaska "even in mountainous districts."[6]

In looking at the early efforts of dredges, Purrington was not notably optimistic about their value in Alaska. He conceded that the Yukon and other valleys were wide enough to accommodate the machines that had been used successfully in California but saw other inhibiting factors, particularly the frozen ground. No existing dredge was strong enough to dig frozen gravel, and the advance thawing with steam points or other means would be expensive. He figured that most Alaska gravels would not yield more than 15 cents a yard, and even at Oroville, California, recovery costs had been eight cents a cubic yard.

The only dredges Purrington examined in the North were on the Stewart River and in Atlin in Canada, but he also reported on a New Zealand-style dredge on Bonanza Creek in the Klondike. There were no dredges in Alaska's interior and only a couple on the Seward Peninsula. Conditions did not appear favorable to Purrington. He did not have much data on costs but calculated that costs would run to 49 cents per cubic yard for unfrozen ground and 80 cents on frozen ground. At such costs mining would not be practical in most regions.

Subsequent developments in Alaska showed Purrington was overly cautious about the future of dredging in Alaska. By 1914, 42 dredges produced 22 percent of Alaska's

gold, in 1924 only 28 dredges operated but they produced 51 percent of that year's placer production.

The success of dredges in Alaska came with the development of diesel engines and other means of reducing power costs and advances in cold-water thawing. In the 1920s the Alaska Railroad's construction helped reduce costs further, and an extensive dredging operation started in the Fairbanks region. In 1927, the USGS forecast "a new era" for dredging, "with prospects for success, particularly in the Nome, Fairbanks, and Kuskokwim districts."[7]

Dredge technology had also improved tremendously between the times of the Purrington and Wimmler reports. Earlier dredges were "often of freakish construction," and included so-called land dredges, dipper and suction machines that did not work. Early bucket dredge designs had often been too primitive for success. Eventually operators learned to avoid large dredges for inaccessible districts and confine bucket size to 2½ to 5 cubic feet. They learned, too, to insist upon strong construction to limit breakdowns and to maintain machine shops and spare part supplies to forestall loss of time during the working season.

For average Alaska conditions, where gravels were no deeper than 20 feet, a combination dredge was utilized, using a revolving screen, flume, and conveyer. The stacker or California dredge was used for gold that was difficult to save and in deep deposits. Operators also learned how to move dredges from one area to another, sometimes over distances of several miles. Moving dredges after dismantling and cutting the hulls was costly--up to $28,000 but since the costs of dredges was from $100,000-$500,000 moving could be practical. Over time, methods of saving gold that might otherwise disappear into the tailings were greatly improved with better screens and other means.

Preliminary mining requires the stripping of the overburden of moss, sod, muck, sand, and gravel except in drift mining or where artificial thawing is utilized. Generally, the removal of the overburden a year or two in advance of mining allowed thawing of the gravel beneath it. Stripping costs had to be kept low to make most mining operations profitable. An adequate water supply was essential for stripping unless hand methods, plows, drags, or scraper were not used.

A region might have several active periods of production, depending upon available technology and other economic factors. Many placer fields were mined, then abandoned when the yield decreased, then mined again when mechanical methods and/or reduced transport/supply costs made work attractive. In the 1920s Norman L. Wimmler of the USGS investigated costs in 50 placer regions and synthesized reports of earlier USGS men and territorial mine inspectors.

Statistics showed that from 1908 to 1923 the value of gold recovered per cubic yard had decreased from $3.74 to $.60 but that the total quantity of gravel mined had increased proportionately. Much of this shift followed the great increase in operating dredges after 1908. Only four dredges operated in 1908 but 14 in 1909 with subsequent increases to reach a peak of 42 in 1914.

By 1927 hand mining, with a minimum outlay for equipment for ground sluicing and shoveling in, was practiced only by a few miners content with a small return. Drift

mining was declining as well, but was still used for deep channel deposits at bedrock beneath frozen gravel.

When dredges were not practical, miners relied on other mechanical means--open cut by steam scrapers, drag lines, excavators, or hydraulic mining. Hydraulic mining was only practical in small areas where the water supply was adequate.

## Wasteful Mining

Alaska miners and investors could look to many publications, including technical and investment journals, for information on mining techniques and prospects, but all sources had to be used with caution. USGS made the government's chief contribution to technical mining information. Miners relied on its reports on regional geology and mining activities and what local knowledge they could gather in charting operations. Often information was hard to get. Operators were not inclined to reveal their gain of gold and the working costs per cubic yard--the basic statistics that determined a mine's profitability. If other mining men had ready access to this information, their ability to evaluate properties would have been greatly improved. Comparative records, for example, could show what kind of mining technology would be most effective with geographic conditions. But since mining traditions favored secrecy, the hit-and-miss system prevailed.

A USGS geologist in 1907 lamented the installation of equipment upon ground that had not been properly tested--a practice which caused three-fourths of the economic failures. Millions of dollars were being wasted on properties for which "the gold content or the working cost per cubic yard is not known within 25 per cent of the real figures."[6]

Bonanzas were rare and essentially unimportant to the general public because bonanza developers did not need to seek outside capital. But information was needed for less rich ground, and USGS expert John Power Hutchins summarized the means by which adequate testing could be achieved:

> Proper prospecting involves the determination of the following more important factors: (1) Volume of pay alluvium; (2) extent, value, and distribution of pay streaks; (3) character of alluvium; (4) its degree of induration; (5) distribution and character of boulders; (6) distribution and character of clay; (7) depth of alluvium; (8) depth to ground water; (9) character of bed rock. In addition to these, in Alaska, there is the prime necessity of investigating the distribution and character of ground frost, both permanent and seasonal. All the above factors influence working cost . . . It is safe to assume that in most Alaska placer camps labor and supplies will cost at least 100 per cent more than in the States.

Information, Hutchins observed, could be gained by drilling or sinking shafts:

> By the drilling method small samples are obtained. Briefly, out of each drill hole a cylinder of material about 6 inches in diameter is obtained from grass roots to bed rock. A prospecting shaft 3 by 6 feet has a cross-sectional area about 50 times as great as that of the drill hole. Thus the volume of material obtained from the shaft is often 50 times as large as that from the drill hole.

Clearly, mining practices into the early years of this century were wasteful. It had been one thing to push ahead in disregard of sound testing methods during the heat of early gold rushes, but once the excitement simmered down in a district rational investigation of prospects should have begun. Of course, testing could be costly and time-consuming and of no real advantage to claim holders more interested in speculative sales than mining. For such holders, the goal was to promote the property, to present it in glowing terms, and attract purchase bids. Promoters did not always wish for a careful scientific scrutiny of their claims. They offered a prospect of wealth rather than the certainty of wealth. After all, a buyer who really wanted a "sure thing" could buy into a working mine with an established record, but it cost plenty to gain a measure of certainty.

## Speculation

Investors in the Klondike and Alaska gold field included major financial interests and individual share buyers. The flow of capital into northern mining was swift and enormous. New companies, formed to buy mines or provide provisioning and transport, capitalized at totals far exceeding the highest estimates of expected gold production for several years. Many of the new companies failed to raise the capital they desired, but even so huge amounts of capital were available for northern enterprises. In New York the Yukon-Caribou-British Columbia Gold Mining Company was capitalized at $8,000,000; the Northwest Mining and Trading Company authorized 5,000,000 shares at $1 each. Stock issues of $1,000,000 and up were commonplace in New York, and there were many other companies capitalized at more modest amounts.

But New York was not alone in its bid for stockholders keen on Klondike investment. In other eastern cities in the Midwest, South, and on the Pacific Coast, hundreds of other companies vied for the investors' dollars. Chicago's major stock offering was by the North American Trading and Transportation Company of John J. Healy, Portus Weare, and the Cudahys. Stock for $25,000,000 was authorized. Overall, millions of dollars were made available for spending in a region that had never before experienced anything but a skimpy trickle of investment from a few trading companies. The money flowed in, and the people carrying it determined a permanent, economic revolution.

Individuals who were not familiar with the mining scene viewed the speculations with alarm. Capt. P.H. Ray of the U.S. Army saw how Circle miners suddenly rushed to Dawson in response to a stock promotion. Promotional efforts by Dawson interests panicked miners at Circle. He also observed that the Rampart miners touted their

claims with future sales in view instead of working them. Writing to his superior Ray reported:

> [O]wing to rumors of extensive sales of claims in the Klondike district, an exodus from this Territory to Dawson has commenced in this vicinity, and I am informed by Collector Smith at Circle City that all who are able to do so are leaving there. This is the natural result of the failure to discover any new mines in Alaska, as all interest is centered in the few very rich claims in the Klondike, and excitement is again stirred by purchases for speculation. The spirit that generally prevails among the people in this country is not one to be satisfied by any reasonable return for their time or labor, even where they are willing to work, but they have come here expecting to obtain great riches by some means or other than they have heretofore known; consequently they all flock where very rich deposits have been found. They see only the gold that has been taken out, but do not stop to consider that the same expenditure of labor and money in mines that, though yielding less per yard, but which could be worked cheaply, certainly would yield far better returns in the aggregate. To the masses everything is misleading and false except cold and hunger, and they are accordingly bitter and resentful at what they term their bad luck. I hear only far reports from Manook (Rampart City), the only mining camp in North Alaska besides Birch Creek, but nothing reliable as to any claims paying largely or at all. In my opinion they are only preparing for sales to the people expected up the river next spring. Up to date there is nothing in sight or reported to justify the great excitement the discoveries in Northwest Territory started, or to avert a collapse of the many schemes now being promoted in the States to float stock based on alleged mines in Alaska. The advertising given this country by the newspapers, transportation companies, and mining companies has become criminal in view of the distress and suffering it has caused."[9]

Ray's reporting showed his inexperience with the mining scene and his small regard for the intelligence of civilians. He may have been right about the superior reward involved in sustained labor, but miners knew that fortunes generally fell to those who got to new ground at the right time.

## Promoters

Promoters of mining companies and supporting enterprises like trading and transportation outfits were key individuals on the frontier. Their legitimate endeavors provided the capital necessary to development and pressure on the government to increase services to the community. Neither investors nor miners could trust the more visionary promoters regardless of their essential honesty. Promoters, exuding faith and confidence, usually depended upon the "expert" opinion of others in crying up a mining

property. Sometimes they were wrong. Similarly, promoters lacked the power to see the future perfectly, so their forecasts of population trends, government actions, world events, and other factors affecting their projects sometimes rested on shaky foundations.

The public had long disdained promoters. Promoters were ranked with experts (and sometimes professed to be experts), a class many miners believed "don't know beans" about mines. Such "experts," according to the strongly held opinion among practical miners, were confidence men who parted their hair in the middle and wore eyeglasses and diamond pins to attract the gullible.

Enumeration of the many northern promoters of the honest or the crooked kinds would be impossible. Many small-time miners became instant promoters of their own prospects and sometimes did better selling out than working their claims. Salting one's mine to encourage great expectations was not considered any great crime, particularly if the deceit went undetected. But even scrupulous men could victimize each other with the fervor of their own hopes.

Promoters did not take kindly to the resistance of investors. In pushing for his Seward Peninsula tin claims, John J. Healy advised friends that an English company was moving in:

> It takes the English to mine tin. They know a good thing when they see it . . . I am sorry to say that New Yorkers are becoming even worse, as they want the good things of the earth placed in their hands. In less than 12 months, you will see the American tin dealers ruing their lack of enterprise. Good miners don't always have to go begging.[10]

An unfavorable report by the U.S. Geological Survey was a distinct aggravation to promoters like Healy. He had his own theories concerning the geological conditions conducive to mineral discovery and sharply censured Alaska's long-time USGS geologist, Alfred H. Brooks:

> I am no admirer of Brooks. He appears to make his reports from the mass of information furnished by his assistants and supplements it all by introducing some of his own pessimistic themes. The development of the Tanana and the Kuskokwim will confound them. I pay little attention to their opinion.

Old prospectors knew better about mining: "What is wanted is a man."[11]

Healy also disparaged the big mining corporations who hoped for "a cinch" and were keen to squeeze out rivals by pretending to dismiss their optimistic findings. There were various kinds of promoters; some were honest; some were suspect: "I represent the hard working prospector, who devotes his life in pursuit of something which will keep him in food and clothing. His chances can not be thrown away." Healy intended to determine the value of his claims regardless of expert opinion: "An expert is useless. What is wanted is powder, steel, and having some good men to use

them." Healy needed $25,000 and hoped to expose a dozen new lodes worth millions: "No use in sending experts to look at surface indications. The money they waste will do the work. An expert follows the prospectors and miner."[12]

Eugene Owens, another mining man, echoed Healy's theme of the need for development money and his disdain for those unwilling to take risks: "My idea is to get a few prosperous businessmen who can afford to spend a few thousand dollars in development work. I do not mean by prosperous businessmen such cheapskates as mining engineers and lawyers or ex-Cape Nomers or Yukoners, but men willing to pay for a few open cuts to recover ore." For a little money, such determined men could prove his claim's values "then could turn it over for a good price."[13]

## Promotional and Professional Literature

Promotional literature did not differ much from any other product advertising copy. Much was promised while risks were downplayed. Iowa backers of the Clear Creek Mining Co. in the Koyukuk offered 50,000 shares of capital stock in 1898-99 at one dollar per share. The 17 company organizers had a claim "two miles long" ripe for development: "The actual expense, aside from wages, will be next to nothing, as water can easily be brought onto the bench; only provisions, a steamer, and a launch were required." Here is a chance of a lifetime. "You cannot afford to let it pass. Your hopes of realizing on your investment are not based on the luck that might attend some prospector in that frozen country." Clear Creek gold assayed at $19.70 to the ounce, "the purest ever found in Alaska," and existing "in such quantities that experienced mine operators declare there is no question but that it will pay good dividends."[14]

Clear Creek promoters did not treat potential investors as ignorant plungers. Their brochure explained the planned method of working the gravel benches and described geological conditions favorable to development. "Mine faces the south, hence the sun does good work in thawing the ground. Work can be prosecuted from twenty to twenty-four hours every day for three months." Backers also distinguished their efforts from many others going on in the Koyukuk: the country was known to them and further prospecting will go forward at Clear Creek's headwaters in the spring: "We offer shares in a company that already owns an immense claim that is going to send another expedition into a country they know is rich and under "MEN WHO HAVE BEEN THERE BEFORE."[15]

Alaska's mineral prospects seemed to promise limitless opportunities for wealth. It did not seem unreasonable that its vastness held many other sections to equal those golden finds along the Yukon, in southeast Alaska, and the Seward Peninsula and the spectacular copper deposits exploited by Kennecott. Promoters' greatest asset in attracting investment lay in the general public conception formed in the Klondike stampede days that the region abounded in fabulous riches.

More informed opinion expressed caution to counter the glowing optimism favored by Alaska miners and speculators. In *The Copper Handbook: A Manual of the Copper Industry of the World* (1905) editors issued a severe warning: "It may be said, in a

general way, that there is much copper in Alaska. It may also be said that there are many and able liars in Alaska. There is little question that the various placer gold camps of interior Alaska and the Yukon have been systematically boomed by an organized claque, to the benefit of sundry transportation and outfitting firms." Misleading press dispatches concerning gold were giving way to "systematic promotion of a copper mining boom." Watch out, warned the author, "the reported finds of mountains of pure copper must be taken *cum grano salis*. Attracting investors far from Alaska was a deliberate strategy for promoters because Alaska is "a *terra incognita*, where all things are possible, and a country of such magnificent distances that the natural-born liar finds opportunities of outdoing his own best records."[16]

The *Handbook* warned specifically of the Copper River Mining Co. which "lays claim, apparently without the slightest ground," to the famed Bonanza mine. "Company is regarded as a stock-jobbing scheme of the most brazen sort, and its promoters considered as a more than doubtful lot." Similarly, editors warned of the Nizina Gold and Copper Co. of Alaska: "Property may prove valuable, if properly developed, but was lied about shamefully in the advertisements of its fiscal agents, when peddling stock." Another company, the Valdez, Copper River and Yukon Railway Co. was dismissed as "a stock-jobbing proposition, promoted by the notorious L.E. Pike and Co., Boston."[17]

While investors could benefit to some extent from such information as the *Handbook* and other professional publications offered, a favorable report on a company did not guarantee its reliability. The *Handbook* reported well on the Reynolds-Alaska Development Co.'s holdings of 33 patented claims in the Valdez area in addition to timber, coal, and oil lands: "Company is free from debt and has clear title to lands, and property seems to be well managed and promising." Yet, within a couple of years, perhaps because of Henry Reynolds overreaching and disastrous Home Railroad project, the company crashed totally.

## Railroad Promotion

Investors were also attracted to enterprises relating to mining, particularly transport schemes. Thus when George Hazelet wrote to Tom Donohoe in 1901 "on the dead quiet," that the railroad from Valdez to the interior was coming soon, Donohoe's interest was great, especially in hearing that James Hill, the great western railroad magnate, was keenly interested. Another great feature of Hazelet's plan was in his ownership of the terminated site at Valdez.[18]

Hopes and speculation centering on railroad prospects stirred miners and others to transports of passion--especially if, like Hazelet, they had terminal townsite interests or claims that depended for development on better transportation facilities. Paper railroads puffed and chugged across tons of promotional brochures, stock certificates, newspaper stories, government reports, and business correspondence, whistling of success and of fortunes to be made. It was always so obvious to promoters that their railroad was urgently needed and certain to profit. Many promoters actually got far enough to commission a survey of the route and a handful even laid rail. Promoters

were interested primarily in profits but railroad ventures offered more glory and romance than other commercial ventures. A man who promoted railroads was a bona-fide visionary, a patriot, a heroic builder who might join the ranks of greatly celebrated captains of finance like James J. Hill and Edward Harriman.

Hazelet was not a full-time railroad promoter by any means. Most railroad adventurers devoted only a portion of their energies to transportation projects because their capital and time were already committed to mining, commercial, or townsite interests. John Rosene, Henry Reynolds, O.P. Hubbard, Richard S. Ryan, and others who participated in planning short- or long-line railroads that were actually built in whole or part necessarily focused on transportation, but many others only dabbled in it. Vast sums of money for construction were not easy to come by, and most promoters did not pursue their visions when capital was not immediately forthcoming.

John J. Healy's vigor in touting railroad after railroad suggest an obsession, despite that he always had other endeavors going simultaneously. On the Seward Peninsula, Healy's short-line railroad would have served his tin claims and his shipping townsite; in Yakutat another short-line railroad would have supported his lumber interest; but his Valdez-Eagle railroad would make a fortune by opening the interior rather than through exploitation of any of his local properties. With his grandest project, the trans-Siberian railroad, Healy's interests included a Port Clarence townsite, but perhaps his primary motivation for the ill-starred scheme was in the grandeur of the conception--and its potential for making the fame and fortune of its promoter.

More railroads were promoted than were constructed, but it should be noted that besides the Alaska Railroad and the Copper River and Northwest Railway there were a number of short lines that served mining operations, including the Tanana Valley Railroad and the Seward Peninsula Railroad.

## Litigation

Mining was an uncertain enterprise by the nature of its hidden wealth. It took time and money to learn a claim's value. But there were other uncertainties as well that affected production and transfer of title. A miner's property could be threatened in a number of ways. Floods might sweep away equipment and other vagaries of nature, like a late spring or early winter, could slow work and raise costs.

But the perils of nature were less often disruptive than the machinations and intrigues of men--greedy men, or, sometimes, just men pursuing an honest cause. Such interference usually took the form of litigation, a process that was invariably costly in time and money. How many miners gave up claims because of lawsuits or threats of lawsuits? Calculation, or even estimation, of numbers is not possible, but litigation was part of the experience and a cost factor to most miners--a major cause of their teeth gnashing, frustration, and wailing. Anyone with a personal claim against a miner for supplies, services, or other things could ask for a lien against his property. In this respect, the miner was not more vulnerable than any other entrepreneur, but the practice of claim jumping was singular in the mining industry.

The practice in Alaska accelerated during the Nome stampede of 1898-1900 and extended to other regions. Most claim jumpers believed, or professed to believe, that the established holder of a mining claim held it invalidly. The legal challenge by a jumper forced litigation or settlement by one means or another. Much of the Seward Peninsula claim jumping derived from jumpers' beliefs that the original discoverer of the most valuable properties were aliens who were not entitled to title. In fact, aliens' rights were not inferior to those of citizens, but the wave of jumping swept over the peninsula to create chaos before the issue was finally clarified.

Claim jumping elsewhere in Alaska did not approach the intensity of Nome, where the huge influx of prospectors, the muddled understanding of mining law, and the abuse of power-of-attorney filings created much havoc. But its occurrence elsewhere was common enough and a great source of anxiety among parties to a dispute. One incident in the Koyukuk involved a jumper's recourse to the supposed restriction on alien ownership. N.E. Nelson staked on Emma Creek in June 1900. A month later, V.G. Crocker, concluding that Nelson was not a citizen, recorded the claim. Subsequently, Nelson sold out to Virgil Lowery, who recorded the claim. Crocker sold parts of his claim to buyers, then the title was clouded further by John Schwartz who jumped in January 1901 because the necessary assessment work have not been performed. Then Joseph Matthews decided to stake because, so he said, Lowery had abandoned the claim. Lowery died, and his heirs brought a quiet title action against Crocker, Matthews, and others. Some four years after the original discovery, the court dismissed the case for the plaintiffs' failure to pursue the issue. Obviously, by this time, regardless of the legal issues, all parties had determined that the claim lacked enough wealth to sustain interest.[19]

Hundreds of examples could be cited of litigation tying up properties. If claim jumping was not a problem, civil actions against operators for recovery of damages in tort or contract violations might force the temporary or permanent closing of operations. It would be impossible to estimate the total costs of various forms of litigation to miners, but it was tremendous.

## Transportation

The progress of mining in many instances depended upon and followed the development of transportation. Riverboats, trails, roads, and traveler support services were essential components of the socioeconomic mining frontier, and important aspects of these deserve separate historic consideration.

### Yukon Traffic

Tracing the quantities and general destination of cargo shipped up the Yukon from 1897 to 1911 shows the continued importance of the route. Peaks during the Tanana and other gold rushes occurred, but the overall growth of traffic shows the stability of population in the interior:

**Freight Shipped Upstream from St. Michael: 1897 to 1911**[20]

| Year | Total Tons | To American Yukon | % to Canadian Yukon | Yukon |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1897 | 5,270 | 1,720 | 3,550 | 67 |
| 1898 | 22,117 | 7,997 | 14,120 | 64 |
| 1899 | 17,295 | 5,215 | 12,080 | 70 |
| 1900 | 19,170 | 5,580 | 13,490 | 70 |
| 1901 | 18,153 | 4,562 | 13,591 | 75 |
| 1902 | 17,008 | 5,824 | 11,184 | 66 |
| 1903 | 20,000 | 8,965 | 11,035 | 55 |
| 1904 | 17,356 | 14,077 | 3,279 | 19 |
| 1905 | 25,855 | 22,381 | 3,474 | 13 |
| 1906 | 31,999 | 30,383 | 1,616 | 5 |
| 1907 | 29,793 | 27,049 | 2,744 | 9 |
| 1908 | 23,785 | 21,758 | 2,027 | 9 |
| 1909 | 29,921 | 29,096 | 825 | 3 |
| 1910 | 24,462 | 24,098 | 364 | 1 |
| 1911 | 3,669 | 31,534 | 2,135 | 6 |

Yukon Steamers

Yukon traffic remained heavy even after the peak years of Dawson's gold yield of 1897-1900. Dawson continued to be an important population and trade center as new gold discoveries in Alaska created plenty of activity and the need for boats and barges. A survey of active vessels made by the Northern Navigation Company in the early years of the century shows the fleet available and its carrying capacity:

**Steamers on Yukon River, Alaska**
Headquarters, St. Michael

| Name | Tonnage |
|---|---|
| Louise | 717 tows three barges 300 tons each |
| Sarah | 700 |
| Susie | 700 |
| Hannah | 700 |
| Alice | 400 tows one barge 300 tons |
| Belle | 370 tons two barges 300 tons each |
| Margaret | 520 |
| Leah | 470 tows two barges 300 tons each |
| City of Paris | 300 |
| Linda | 692 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| Loon | 692 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| Arnold | 692 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| Herman | 456 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| F.M. Gustin | 716 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| T.C. Power | 819 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| John Cudahy | 819 tows one barges 300 tons each |
| P.B. Weare | 400 |
| C.M. Hamilton | 595 |
| John J. Healy | 450 |
| John C. Barr | 546 Foreign bottom owned in U.S. |
| St. Michael | 718 |
| Victoria | 718 |
| Seattle | 718 |
| Tacoma | 718 |
| Seattle No. 3 | 548 tows one barge 600 tons each |
| D.R. Campbell | 718 tows one barge 600 tons each |
| Milwaukee | 395 |
| Rock Island | 400 |
| Hideout | 300 estimated, tows one barge 600 |

Alaskans had to develop a certain mental attitude towards transportation--a toughness enabling them to accept frequent delays and high costs as part of their culture. Something of this essential spirit was addressed in a poster placed prominently on the steamboats of the Northern Navigation Company and the message could be applied equally to all forms of transport:

NOTICE

We desire to be courteous and to answer all questions not frivolous. Business on these Northern Waters is like a game of cards. Nature always holds a joker and a few of the best trumps besides, in the guise of *LOW WATER, SWIFT WATER, and FROST.* The cards are played against our connecting lines which spoils our play to a great extent. We have a 100 days to do a years work. These conditions make business expensive, and necessitate high rates. The cost of operating is about five times that of similar service in more favored climates. The high rates extend to all lines Mercantile and professional business, and are what attracted *you* to this country--SO DONT KICK. We are doing the Best possible against a hard and remorseless opponent. We are frequently without sleep 24-36-and 60 hours at a stretch. So if you find us irritable lay it to that and try to take as little of our time as possible to transact your business.

Earnestly yours,
Northern Navigation Co.[22]

## Overview

Mining induced capital investment and encouraged the development of transportation. Mining was responsible for the founding of numerous communities, including several like Fairbanks and Juneau which are among the state's larger communities and a good number of ghost towns. Mining history is often celebrated as if it ended with a whimper with the World War II restrictions but, in fact, production continues in many regions.

## Notes
## Chapter 9

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3. John Boswell, *History of the Alaskan Operations of the USSR&M Co.* (Fairbanks: MIRL, University of Alaska, n.d.), 55-56.

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9. Ray to Adjutant-General, January 13, 1986, P.H. Ray and W.P. Richardson, "Suffering and Destitute Miners in Alaska," *Compilation of Narrative of Exploration in Alaska.* Senate Reps., 56th Congr., 1st sess., No 1023, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1900), 553.

10. Healy to Adney, February, 1906. Adney Collection, Dartmouth College Library.

11. Ibid., March 2, 1906.

12. Ibid., January 29, 1906.

13. Owens to J.W. Bixby, July 10, 1931, W.A. Dickey papers, UW.

14. Clear Creek Mining Co. brochures, Wm. Michaels Collection, UAF.

15. Ibid.

16. *The Copper Handbook*, Vol. V (Houghton, Mich.: Horace J. Stevens, 1905), 97-98.

17. Ibid., 362.

18. Hazelet to Donohoe, December 2, 1901, Donohue Collection, UAF.

19. V.V. Lowery v U.G. Crocker, Case #54, RG21,FRC.

20. U.S. Alaska Railroad Commission, *Railway Routes in Alaska*, House of Representatives, 62nd Cong., 3rd sess., House Doc. 1346 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 155-156.

21. James T. Gray Collection, date uncertain, University of Oregon Archives.

22. Ibid.

# Chapter 10
## Government, Law, and Natives

"If only the government would . . . " This phrase began many conversations among Alaskans who always had plenty to say about what the government should do. Obviously, Alaskans expected the government to perform efficiently its traditional services, including mail service, telegraph communication, military protection, providing trails and wagon roads, and administering civil and criminal laws. Residents complained strenuously whenever the government appeared inefficient in providing these services. But Alaskans also made other demands for government help and protested generally if Washington did not respond in a timely fashion.

### The Army and Other Services in Alaska

From 1867 to 1877 the U.S. Army governed Alaska from its headquarters at Sitka with several posts along the southern coast. Aside from one reconnaissance of the Yukon River, the army did no exploration during this period. After the army administration of the territory gave way to the U.S. Navy, the army's role was limited. The U.S. Army Signal Corps was active in making meteorological observations in the Aleutians and in the Yukon-Kuskokwim delta. And in 1885, the army's Lt. Henry Allen achieved a major exploration of the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk rivers.

Other services also contributed to exploration and science before the gold rush. Between 1886 and 1898 the navy and the Revenue Marine Service explored the Selawik and Kobuk river valleys. The Coast and Geodetic Survey made astronomical observations, triangulation, and topographical surveys on the 141st meridian in 1889-1890. Another scientist, Frederick Funston, voyaged on the Yukon to make a survey for the Department of Agriculture in 1893.

With the gold rush in 1897 the army sent Capt. Patrick Henry Ray and Lt. Wilds P. Richardson to the Yukon. The officers did what they could to keep order; made recommendations on sites for army bases, which were established within a few years; and proposed a series of exploration ventures. These expeditions, made in 1898 under Capt. William R. Abercrombie on the Copper River and Captain Edwin F. Glenn on the Copper and Susitna rivers and to Cook Inlet and the Tanana River, included geologists of the USGS. The third army mission in '98 was a reindeer drive to Dawson, which was to be followed by trail marking from the Yukon to the Tanana. The reindeer trek was not successful, and the trail marking was cancelled because of the outbreak of the Spanish-American War.[1]

In 1899 the army again sent Abercrombie to Valdez to survey a military road to Eagle in the interior. A start was made on a trail through Keystone Canyon and Thompson Pass to the Tonsina Valley that year. Soldiers, limited to hand tools, carved out a 93-mile trail adequate for packhorse travel before the season closed in October 1899.

The government surveyed the trail from Valdez to Eagle in 1899-1900 and the army improved it over the next several years. During construction, the development of Fairbanks caused a redirection of the line from Eagle to Fairbanks. Building the trail over its 376-mile course was an expensive and difficult process because of the short construction seasons and the obstacles of mountainous terrain near the coast and where the Alaska Range had to be traversed. By 1906 the route was good enough to attract a commercial carrier: the Ed S. Orr Stage offered passenger and freight service over the full length of the trail.

Early in the century, the need became obvious for a permanent agency for Alaska's road work. The government established the Alaska Road Commission in 1905 to undertake trail and road construction and repair. The commission's budget did not permit construction at a pace speedy enough to please miners, but the agency performed with reasonable efficiency for many years.

Just as Abercrombie's 1898 explorations were continued in 1899, so were Glenn's explorations from Cook Inlet. He explored northward from the Matanuska, Susitna, Yentna, and Kuskokwim rivers to locate the best route from tidewater to crossings of the Tanana River. His mission was to find a route that would enable the army to service its Yukon River posts from Cook Inlet. Joseph Herron made the first exploration of the upper Kuskokwim River under Glenn's command.

The War Department reorganized its territorial efforts in 1900. It created the Department of Alaska with posts at Fort Davis near Nome; Fort Liscum near Valdez; and Fort William H. Seward at Haines. It also established four posts on the Yukon: Fort St. Michael at the mouth; Fort Gibbon near Tanana; Fort Rampart at Rampart; and Fort Egbert at Eagle. Money was appropriated for construction of the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS).

The army began construction of a telegraph line in 1900 after establishing a military post at Eagle in 1899. Initially, soldiers built a link from Eagle to the Canadian border so that messages could be dispatched over the Canadian line. At the same time survey work was commenced for an all-American line following the Yukon River. By 1902 the line was in operation, and the army maintained and operated the communications until recent times.

## The U.S. Geological Survey

In 1895 William H. Dall and George F. Becker did a mineral survey along the coast. A year later Joseph E. Spurr, H.B. Goodrick, and F.C. Schrader performed a geological reconnaissance from the head of Lynn Canal, over Chilkoot Pass to the Yukon, then downriver to St. Michael. From 1898 the USGS had its men in the field every year. Alfred Brooks, the future USGS chief in Alaska, became recognized in Washington, D.C., as the leading government authority on Alaska. Brooks and the other geologists won the respect of miners throughout the territory. What one man said of Stephen Capps (a geologist who served many seasons in Alaska) was echoed by others who praised the USGS worker: "A more experienced hard working man would

be impossible to find. He travels over the mountains like a goat; there was never a piece of rock or formation he did not reach. The marvelous part of it to me is how the government seems to be able to retain men of such calibre."[2]

Capps was just one of a distinguished group of men whose work was of great importance to miners. Their diligence and objectivity earned them an exemption from the general complaints about the government's actions or inactions.

## Mail Service

Mail service to the interior from Juneau began with mail carrier Jim Jackson's departure in December 1895. Weeks later, after crossing the Chilkoot Pass, he reached Fortymile and Circle. Along the way he had been forced to kill his dogs for food. In spring 1896, the Canadian government contracted with Capt. William Moore, still hearty at age 73, who traveled from Skagway to Dawson with a load of mail. Moore returned downriver to St. Michael, steamed down to Victoria by ship, gathered another load, and crossed the Chilkoot again for a second delivery.

Everyone admired the winter route mail carriers, in particular appreciating the value of their service and the hazards of their travel. "The men employed on this duty are without doubt the hardest worked public servants in the Territory," observed Lt. J.C. Cantwell in 1901, "there is no public service more arduous and hazardous and at the same time more faithfully performed." Fall and spring trips were particularly dangerous. Blizzards could wipe out trails and force delays. Accidents were frequent on trails washed out during breakup or iced over after a fleeting thaw. The frozen Yukon and other rivers were the main winter arteries of traffic, but carriers tempted to use river trails too early or too late in the season risked their lives.[3]

By Cantwell's time on his U.S. Revenue Marine Yukon station in 1899-1901, mail routes were well-established and winter service was regular. By then the White Pass and Yukon Railway existed to replace the travails of foot passage over the Chilkoot Pass. Rail head was Whitehorse, then carriers continued downriver on the Yukon. Other branch routes extended as other mining camps developed--as to the Koyukuk, Tanana, and Nome via Kaltag, Unalakleet, and St. Michael. Routes were divided into runs of 50 to 75 miles with one carrier assigned to each run. Small log cabins along their routes, spaced about 20 miles apart, sheltered the carriers. A good day's travel was 40 miles, but difficult conditions could slow the pace. Carriers stopping at these isolated cabins had to cut wood, then prepare food for themselves and their dogs, although along some trail roadhouses could accommodate them. For such essential and hard service, carriers were not richly rewarded. Most earned about $125 monthly after deductions for expenses. Mail customers paid a dollar or more to send letters in early days, but once government service was established, they paid only the standard postage of two cents on letters that cost the government about 50 cents a piece to transport.

Under the best conditions, mail from Outside reached a point midway on the Yukon between rail terminal and St. Michael in 40 to 43 days. Later, the time was reduced to 30 to 35 days. Sled loads, averaging 350 to 500 pounds, were hauled by five

or more dogs. Parcels and newspapers were held at Whitehorse or Skagway until rivers opened to steamboat navigation.

Ben F. Downing, formerly a freighter in Dakota and Montana, got the first U.S. government contract for the Yukon after the Nome rush in 1899. His contract required him to build shelter cabins and build an improved trail through to Nome. In four years of operation, before losing the contract to the Northern Commercial Company, Downing lived an adventurous life, including a close call when a drunken, vengeful miner killed an enemy who was traveling with the mail carrier.

Service from Valdez to Eagle started in fall 1899 with a disastrous October journey by packhorses over the newly constructed military trail. It was Christmas before the carrier staggered into Eagle carrying only three letters. The bulk of his mail and his 11 horses had been lost along the way. Oscar Fish and Al Paxon established a better route in spring 1900, reaching Eagle in 30 days via Tanana Crossing, Mansfield, and Ketchumstock.

Contractors came and went as other lower bidders replaced them, but some individual carriers hung on to their routes for decades. John Powers serviced the Eagle-Chicken route from 1908 to 1938; Ed Brederman handled Eagle-Circle from 1912 to 1938; and Percy D. Wolfe ran between Eagle and Dawson from 1915 to 1950. When these worthies gave way, it was not to other carriers but the airlines.[4]

Proper delivery of the mail was important and the heavy expenditures for service indicate that the government agreed. (See table on following page.)

## Aiding Development

No assessment of mining history could be complete without some consideration of the government's place in mineral resource development. A reasonable evaluation of the federal government's activities presents some vexing problems of interpretation when viewed retrospectively. For the pioneers, of course, the issues were clearcut: the government should foster development through heavy investments in transportation, services, and other benefits to miners--yet its efforts were tardy, ill-defined, parsimonious, grudging, inefficient, and indifferent to Alaskans' needs.

Historian Clarence L. Andrews observed that the national wave of conservation in the first decade of this century included a laudable effort to protect Alaska's resources from wasteful exploitation. Coal and oil lands were withdrawn, and forests and wildlife habitat preserves were created. Unfortunately, these protective measures halted development. The private builders of the Alaska Central Railroad from Seward to the interior and the Copper River railroad from Cordova to Kennicott stopped construction of lines to the Matanuska coal mines and Bering River coal deposits, respectively. Depression griped the land. The Alaska Central Railroad faltered after laying 79 miles of track, and the Alaska Syndicate did not consider carrying the Copper River and Northwestern Railway beyond Kennicott. In response to the clamor from Alaskans, the government authorized a public railroad in 1914, taking over the Alaska Central's 71 miles and the 30-mile short-line of the Tanana Valley Railroad near Fairbanks.

## Cost of Mail Service[5]

| Year | Star | Steamboat | Mail Messenger | Railroad | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1890 | $ 861.25 | $ 18,000.00 | $ 300.00 | | $ 19,161.25 |
| 1891 | 750.00 | | 750.00 | | 1,500.00 |
| 1892 | 750.00 | 10,465.00 | 750.00 | | 11,965.00 |
| 1893 | 765.78 | 10,465.00 | 575.00 | | 11,805.78 |
| 1894 | 765.78 | 10,465.00 | 575.00 | | 11,805.78 |
| 1895 | 1,625.00 | 4,685.00 | 575.00 | | 6,885.00 |
| 1896 | 5,727.00 | 4,895.00 | 575.00 | | 11,197.00 |
| 1897 | 5,727.00 | 8,386.40 | 500.00 | | 14,613.40 |
| 1898 | 9,749.00 | 9,938.40 | 4,171.00 | | 23,858.40 |
| 1899 | 83,495.00 | 59,387.36 | 4,171.00 | | 147,053.36 |
| 1900 | 119,755.56 | 54,117.50 | 2,080.00 | | 175,953.06 |
| 1901 | 127,300.56 | 67,958.49 | 1,600.00 | | 196,859.05 |
| 1902 | 165,229.56 | 50,013.71 | 1,525.00 | | 216,768.27 |
| 1903 | 181,626.29 | 125,716.67 | 725.00 | $2,216.67 | 310,284.63 |
| 1904 | 188,818.36 | 125,536.36 | 910.00 | 2,216.67 | 317,481.39 |
| 1905 | 201,993.60 | 160,174.83 | 905.00 | 2,216.67 | 365,290.10 |
| 1906 | 222,838.84 | 145,872.97 | 845.00 | 2,216.67 | 371,773.48 |
| 1907 | 337,579.01 | 185,698.44 | 815.00 | 1,866.97 | 525,959.42 |
| 1908 | 340,857.58 | 197,905.95 | 1,314.00 | 1,866.97 | 541,944.50 |
| 1909 | 302,121.44 | 189,440.25 | 1,890.00 | 1,866.97 | 495,318.66 |
| 1910 | 306,751.19 | 185,428.70 | 2,486.25 | 1,866.97 | 496,533.11 |
| 1911 | 233,139.43 | 236,289.18 | 2,662.00 | 2,165.24 | 474,255.85 |

Once the railroad builders started work, Alaskans were certain that their mining future would be prosperous. They liked to quote the character in Rex Beach's novel, *The Iron Trail*, who wailed that without transportation "the riches of Alaska are as useless today as if hidden away in the chasms of the moon." What Alaskans still had to learn was that transportation, for all its great importance, was only one factor in the development equation.[6]

Construction of the Alaska Railroad did not provide all the economic stimulation that backers had yearned for. World War I deferred progress until completion in 1923. Even then the government did not aggressively pursue traffic like James Hill showed in developing his Great Northern Railroad in the western United States. Hill subsidized colonization, aided farmers, and laid tracks to mines, while the government did little to promote the Alaska Railroad and mining. Alaskans believed that the delays of the government in opening the coal lands prevented their development, although, in truth, it was determined that better coal could be mined at lower cost elsewhere in the nation.

Similarly, when Alaska's population fell sharply between 1910 and 1920 from 64,356 to 55,036, Alaskans blamed the government. The decline continued into the 1920s, and Alaskans echoed the pleas made by Governor Thomas Riggs in 1919: "Unless the government pursues a more liberal policy . . . the territory can never reach that stage of productiveness for which there is every possibility."[7]

Miners did get help during the dark days of the Great Depression. In 1933 the price of gold, long fixed at $20.67 per ounce, was increased to $35. Gold production leaped immediately from $9,701,000 in 1933 to $16,007,000 in 1934, rising to $26,178,000 by 1940. Actual output over the 1933-1940 period rose from 469,286 ounces in 1933 to 749,943 ounces in 1940. But the recovery proved to be as short-lived, as the emergency of World War II forced the closure of most mines in Alaska. Mining did not revive much after the war. Some Alaskans continued to blame the government but, after statehood, these old cries have had a hollow sound.

Without question, the government was tardy in providing civil governance, adequate land legislation, and effective services before 1899. The government was also slow in exploring, surveying, and providing for the needs of natives. In the emergency of the gold era, however, the responses to Alaska's requirements came swiftly. Exploration, civil and criminal codes, postal services, military protection and assistance to destitute prospectors, and telegraph and trail building were among the achievements of the period. Local government developed slowly, and Alaskans complained at the quality of services rendered, but most of their requirements were attended to. Alaskans found the tie-up of coal land entry from 1906-12 inexcusable, and many accused the government of favoring the exploitations of the Alaska Syndicate. Alaskans were unanimous and vociferous in their insistence that the government should do more to aid economic development. The government's responsibilities to provide law and order, civil government, and essential services is clearer than its obligation to foster development with specific projects. Though the government had always encouraged road and railroad construction, it did not respond generously or quickly enough to suit most

Alaskans. Perhaps they expected too much. In retrospect, it also seems clear that the kind of progressive development Alaskans yearned for did not depend on government's bounty where the mining industry was concerned. Government help alone would not create a viable gold industry.

Writing in 1924, historian Jeannette Paddock Nichols summed up Alaska's arguments for economic development, stressing the need to eliminate

> the departmental red tape that has hindered and bound Alaska development . . . that the government may deal with the northerners efficiently and economically. The development of Alaska's resources will be of benefit not only to Alaskans but those not resident in the territory. Above all it will give opportunity for the settlement of this northern region, which is a boom to the American people who are still land hungry.

Nichols foresaw the struggle for statehood and considered economic development promoted by the government but not the particular programs demanded by miners. Alaska's growth mushroomed during World War II due to defense spending. Constructing the Alaska Highway and other roads, airfields, and military bases cost billions of dollars over the years. Government and government contractors' payrolls during the cold war era filled the economic vacuum in the economy left by the decline of the mining industry. With these benefits and population increases, Alaska was deemed ready for statehood in 1959.[8]

## Law and Order

The federal court system was in place when the Klondike excitement started, although the first court in the interior was not established until 1900. During the 1897-98 turmoil the only U.S. marshal was based at Juneau, and the corruption of his deputy at Skagway and a U.S. commissioner at Dyea contributed to the scandal of Soapy Smith's lawless ways at Skagway.

The government's tardiness in policing the Yukon interior cannot be justified. From 1886 the influx of miners into the interior should have called closer attention to the needs of law enforcement. By 1895 Circle's population was 500, yet the miners had to depend on the precarious justice administered by miners meetings to settle civil disputes and sanction criminals. Though the "pure democracy" of the miners meeting came to be praised by pioneers in later years, the system was imperfect and intolerable except in emergency conditions.

A deputy marshal was sent to Circle in 1897, but the man stopped at Dawson to mine gold and did not even reach his duty station. It was not until spring 1899 that a regularly appointed deputy settled in Circle. During the turbulence of the gold rush, officers of the U.S. Army were forced to keep order on the Yukon, and the task was beyond their capacity.

Government's neglect can account for some failures in law enforcement but not for the terrible scandal of Nome's court in 1900-1902. Nome did have a judge and marshal from 1900, but the judge participated in a conspiracy to deprive successful miners of their properties and was eventually removed from office. It took longer to clean up the corrupt marshal's office, but it was achieved in 1904.

Taken all together the lawlessness at Skagway, corruption at Nome, and tardiness in establishing law and order in the interior constituted an unpleasant blot on the government's record. It is hard to assess the long-range effects of such corruption and inefficiency, but certainly the record did not encourage veneration of the law among miners.

The Nome corruption of the "spoilers" led by Alexander McKenzie with the compliance of Judge Arthur H. Noyes also involved the participation of U.S. Senators and their efforts to legislate in their own interests. This corruption at the seat of power in Washington, D.C., was a nasty heritage for Alaskans. How could a trust in government be engendered when folks recalled toleration of such blatant misuse of political power?

It should be said that the judicial system operated with reasonable fairness and efficiency except in the short-lived instances cited here. There were occasional minor scandals just as in courts of other jurisdictions, but on the whole the system functioned well.[9]

## Mining Law

Although Sitka's records show mining claims filed as early as 1875, it was not until 1879 that improved prospects suggested the need for the organization of a mining district. The formal record of proceedings shows that the first order of business was to fix the boundaries of the district and establish the office of recorder. Most of the by-laws concerned the recorder and included the following provisions:

> VII - It shall be the duty of the recorder, or his Deputy, to go upon the ground and verify each location made, unless the same shall be certified or verified before him, by at least two witnesses.
>
> VIII - The recorder shall call a meeting of miners, at which any business may be transacted, upon the request of any ten resident claim holders; and by at least three notices posted in public conspicuous places, for ten (10) days previous to such meeting.
>
> IX - All examinations of records shall be made in the presence of the Recorder or his Deputy.

X - A notice to the Recorder to record a claim, when filed in the Office of Record, shall be equivalent to a record of said claim, or of any other matters, from the time of such notice filed, and, shall take effect from such date of filing.

XI - Each location, in order to be valid, shall have the name of at least one resident of the District on this notice, at the time of record.

XII - The term of ninety (90) days is allowed to all locations made, prior to this date, at which the parties interested may place their notices of claims or of work performed, on file for record, with such proof as may be necessary, of work or location, to protect such claims from relocation.

XIII - The work, as provided by the Revised Statutes of the United States, 1872 to 1875, of one hundred dollars, per year, on each claim, must be done in each year, dating from January 1st to December 31st in the same and sufficient work."[10]

The federal mining laws were extended to Alaska by 1884 congressional legislation. Laws governed some basic aspects of locating, recording, and holding claims while leaving other matters to local rules adopted by the miners of established districts. In all new mining districts, a miners meeting was convened to regulate the size of claims, staking practices and other technical points. It was almost inevitable that the miners meeting would also serve as an informal judicial body to keep the peace and settle disputes, but in such instances it was without authority.

Federal mining laws on placer claims permitted the location of 160-acre tracts which miners could hold indefinitely if they performed labor or made improvements of at least $100 annually. Early in the gold-rush era, miners complained of abuses by others who managed to control large blocks of ground in violation of the spirit of the law. Location by power of attorney was one well-recognized abuse that permitted a prospector to stake an entire creek if he so desired. The right of location by power of attorney was not part of the mining code but was an application of the established law of agency--allowing one to act through an agent.

One mining man from Rampart told a congressional committee in 1903 how to remedy the situation:

A law should be passed that will allow each miner to stake one claim on a creek and do the assessment work within six months instead of a year. I own 30 claims out here. I have got a lot of friends here who go out and stake claims and never do any assessment work at all. As soon as the time is up they go out again and locate the claims over again and that's all there is to it. But if a man could take up only one claim on a creek and the assessment work had to be done in six months, and if it were not done

anybody could go and stake it, he couldn't get his friends to come and stake it. This country would be developed a great deal if some such law were passed. If a man could have but one claim on a creek, and that creek is a good one, he has all he wants in that one claim. If the creek is not good he can let go of it.[11]

Another miner distinguished a stampeder from a prospector:

The stampeder is the individual who starts out with a bundle of stakes on the mouth of a creek, or any part of a creek, and locates all the creek as far as his stakes will hold out. Then he records these claims without ever having put a shovel in the ground. Sometimes he stakes these claims when there is 20 feet of snow on the ground. That is the stampeder's way of working. Those claims are tied up for two years against the bona fide prospector. Should the prospector happen to run across any of that part of the country, if the country has been staked in the winter, he will not find, possibly, a single stake to indicate that there had been any locations made. On the other hand, should he stop and prospect and find anything there he will find in the course of a few days that he has no right to the ground, but that it is owned by some one else. The prospector is the man who will take his little 'grubstake' and pick and shovel on his back and go across country prospecting for minerals. Should he find anything he will stay right with that piece of ground or in the neighborhood until he can actually locate a mine. The burden of doing assessment work or any other work is not burden to him, because he is compelled to do it. He would do it anyhow. He is willing to stay there ten years and longer if necessary. He would do things--the assessment work and all that--of his own accord.[12]

One ambiguity of mining law was impossible of solution. Courts consistently ruled that a prospector's claim would not be protected unless it had been based on actual discovery of a valuable mineral. The general test was whether the prospector located in the reasonable belief that further work would uncover enough mineral to repay his efforts. In litigating the question, the court would ask whether the prospector found minerals in such quantity and under such conditions as would justify an ordinarily prudent person, "not necessarily an experienced miner," in expending money and time with the reasonable expectation of developing a paying mine.[13]

Amendments to the federal laws on Alaska were the "Waskey Act" of 1907 which permitted miners to file affidavits testifying to their annual assessment work and the "Wickersham Placer Law" of 1912. The Wickersham law ended the 160-acre location.

Alaska's first territorial legislature enacted a comprehensive act in 1913. Changes occurred with every legislative session and in 1931 all previous acts were eliminated to permit claims of 160 acres. The territorial legislature repealed this measure in 1939 to

restrict claims to 40 acres and this limit still remains in force. Restrictions were also placed on power of attorney locations, limiting them to two uses within the same recording district during the same month--and limiting each such location to 20 acres.[14]

## Labor Organization

Though not a function of government nor an aspect of mining law, the matter of labor relations was a concern of government and the entire community. During the Klondike gold rush, miners who worked for wages generally earned up to a dollar an hour, a very high rate for the day. Many miners worked lays or shares for claim owners so could not be considered as wage earners. After the Fairbanks boom of 1903-1905, the majority of miners were wage laborers. Although some could be tempted to join new stampedes, they were likely to return to employment after a short time. As wages did not remain at the high Klondike-Nome level once the numbers of laborers exceeded the demand, miners began organizing in larger camps by 1905.

The Western Federations of Miners dominated the outside mining industry. Its 238 locals with 26,000 dues-paying members were located in most mountainous states and the western provinces of Canada. By 1905 the Western Federation of Miners had suffered a major defeat by Colorado mine owners but was moving forward elsewhere, particularly through its radical offshoot, the Industrial Workers of the World, familiarly known as the Wobblies.

Surprisingly, for all the militance of the Western Federation of Miners and the Wobblies, their leadership did not precipitate the establishment of locals in Alaska. It took a petition from Nome miners, who claimed an association of 1,500 members, to encourage the Western Federation of Miners' interest in sending an agent to the northern camp.

Nome miners did not wait long after achieving federation status as Local 240 before making demands on owners. In November 1905 the union demanded $3.50 per 10-hour day for its winter rate. But in December the union did not even threaten a strike before accepting the $3 rate that had prevailed for several years. On other fronts the local was more active. It demanded that public officials ban gambling and joined with the Federal Labor Union, the Nome waterfront workers, to create a new labor party in March 1906.

The WFM granted another charter to Local 104 of Ellamar, a small company town in the Prince William Sound district, in January 1907. Local 104 had only 42 members, and its strike for $4 for an eight-hour day was rejected by Ellamar's owners, who refused even to meet with union representatives. Local 104 called on the Western Federation of Miners headquarters for help, which was fast gaining strength in Alaska. Eight hundred miners in Douglas were granted a charter for Local 109 in April 1907. All three locals went on strike in 1907, but the federation's leadership, heavily involved in the prosecution of its officers for the murder of Idaho's Governor Frank Steunenberg, could not help much.

The Douglas miners had organized to confront the Treadwell owners, who had operated the territory's largest mining operation for 20 years. One of Treadwell's economy measures was the recruitment of cheap immigrant labor--Swedes, Montenegrins, Japanese, and "Hindoos"--were successive waves of immigrants employed at Douglas. Hostility to the immigrants boiled in the boardhouses and exploded in March 1907 when a Montenegrin shot a Japanese cook. Clever federation men convinced the miners that their unhappiness was traceable to company policies. Workers joined the Western Federation of Miners and struck for a $1.00 daily lodging fee. They wanted this lodging cost paid so that they could avoid the company's boarding houses and the presence of other nationalities.

Treadwell's superintendents had always been martinets, and the incumbent in 1907, Robert Kinzie, was no exception. Kinzie convinced the U.S. Marshal that his miners were dangerous anarchists. He requested federal troops to protect company property. But neither the sympathy of territorial officers nor the mass firing of the miners ended the strike. Kinzie's superiors forced him to compromise on most of the union's grievances, but he did resist the establishment of a union shop. Miners returned to work with the first victory for the Western Federation of Miners in Alaska.

Among the grievances of Nome miners was one that was inflammatory enough to unite all 1,600 members to a strike in January 1907. Instead of asking for a higher winter scale as in 1905, the union asked for a $1.00 daily increase in the existing summer rate of $4.00 for 10 hours. In addition, the union wanted a "wet diggings" differential that would reduce shift hours from 10 to eight for working wet or permafrost diggings.

This "wet diggings" demand created an emotional spark among miners who were very much aware of the dangers of drift mining in permafrost. By tradition, the tunnels driven 20 to 60 feet underground were not protected by support of the overburden. As the mining season advanced, the permafrost layers over the tunnels were inclined to thaw and collapse. This ever-present threat was alarming enough but concern over long hours in the damp, unhealthy, and uncomfortably cramped underground was even stronger motivation for asking shorter hours. Nome miners, unlike those in Douglas, were supported by the town's business interests. By late March, owners gave in to grant $5.00, eight-hour scales to wet miners.

A different pattern occurred in Fairbanks where a local union, the United Mine Workers of the Tanana, struck for the eight-hour day in April 1907. A compromise was arranged by Judge James Wickersham in December when owners agreed to the eight-hour demand. Meanwhile, the Western Federation of Miners had gathered most of the miners into Local 193, and its leaders rejected the offer because it only covered the April-October season. By January owners started the covert transport of strikebreakers over the Valdez Trail. Miners grew heated and forcibly held up the Valdez-Fairbanks stage on February 7--a foolish gesture that turned public opinion against the strikers. Mine owner Abe Spring orchestrated the destruction of the Western Federation of Miners local by bringing in 300 more scabs. One union man was provoked to gunplay, and the union leadership was prosecuted for "felonious riot." Wickersham got

a local judge to shut down the union hall and every saloon that had served as an informal meeting place.

As the Fairbanks local died, Robert Kinzie was assaulting the Western Federation of Miners local in Juneau-Douglas with great success. Miners were divided along ethnic lines, and Kinzie broke up a March 1908 strike with imported scabs. Local 109 faded away.

Among the federation's locals, which included those of Ketchikan, Valdez, Whitehorse, Prince William Sound, Fairbanks, and Nome, only Nome's survived into the 1920s. Fairbanks revived briefly in 1909-10, and other locals remained weak until dying by 1915. Juneau miners managed to strike the great Alaska-Juneau Gold Mine Company in 1919 but failed to win a $1.00 daily raise. Nature had destroyed Treadwell two years earlier with a flood.[15]

## Natives and Miners

A greater disruption of the culture of Alaska natives was a natural consequence of the northern stampedes. The process of cultural change, of course, had been going on long before the gold era commenced on the Yukon River and the Seward Peninsula. Russian fur traders made Pacific coastal Alaska a province of the czars in the eighteenth century, and by mid-nineteenth century, New England whaling fleets stood off the Bering Sea and the Arctic coasts each season. For the sparse and scattered population of interior natives, however, the contact with whites was minimal before the gold rushes; a few traders and prospectors and fewer missionaries were the forerunners of a wave that was to affect drastically the traditional native culture.

In 1880 the census taker estimated that about 3,100 Eskimos inhabited the Arctic. He guessed that 7,000 natives dwelled in the Yukon basin, while about 9,000, an improbably high estimate, lived on the Kuskokwim River. In 1888, Alaska's Governor Alfred P. Swineford estimated the total population: "Whites, 6,500; Creoles (practically white) 1,900; Aleuts, 2,950; Natives (partially educated and those who have adopted civilized ways of living) 3,500; Natives wholly uncivilized, 35,000. Total 49,850." A smaller population was estimated in the 1890 census, 23,531 natives and 1,823 of mixed races. Of these, 14,012 were Eskimos scattered along the lower Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers, Bristol Bay, and the Arctic, 3,439 were Athabaskans of the interior, while the remainder consisted of the Tlingits, Haidas, and Tsimsheans of southeastern Alaska. All these figures were only educated guesses. It is impossible to say precisely how many natives of Alaska were directly affected by the stampedes to the interior, perhaps from 5,000 to 10,000.[16]

Among the immediate consequences of the gold stampedes were movements of natives. On the Tanana, for example, the natives of the upper river moved down to be closer to Fairbanks, where they could help provide food for the thousands of miners. Another inevitable result was the depletion of game in the regions where gold camps were founded. Even if every gold camp had passed out of existence after a few years, the game depletion would have forced further relocation.

Violent conflicts between whites and natives seldom occurred during frontier days. Alaska natives were not aggressive warriors like the mounted hunters of the western plains. Stampeders were welcomed rather than resisted. Miners also were of a different stamp from the gun-packing cowboys of other regions. Somehow the rigors of the North compelled men of both races to more gentle deportment. It was also important that no natives were forced from their traditional lands by the pressure of miners.

The northern mining frontier offered natural hazards to the pioneer. It was fortunate that a kindly disposed aboriginal populace existed to ease the lot of the miners. Natives saved the lives of innumerable prospectors who lost their way along the trails. No record exists of the refusal of aid and hospitality by natives to whites, regardless of their own poverty. Explorers on occasion also owed their survival to such charity. In 1899 Lt. Joseph S. Herron led an expedition from Cook Inlet to explore the headwaters of the Kuskokwim River. In attempting to traverse a trackless, swampy region, Herron lost his way; the horses mired in the muck and encumbered progress. In some panic, the horses were abandoned, and the soldiers set out on foot for Fort Gibbon on the Yukon River. But for their discovery by the chief of the Tena Indians the lost explorers would have died of starvation and exposure before finding their way out of the swamps. For two months the Indians sheltered the soldiers in their village, before guiding them to the Tanana River, which they descended to Fort Gibbon.

During the same year, an army expedition to the Tanana River ran out of provisions. The soldiers ate their mules and stumbled on with clothing in shreds, shoeless, suffering from exposure and hunger. Just in time, they reached Tanana village where they were mercifully received. As Lt. J.C. Castner reported:

> It is but justice to say a word for these friends of mine, who found us all but dead in the wilderness, with the Alaskan winter closing in around us. Entire strangers and of another race, they received us as no friend of mine, white or colored, ever did before or since. They asked no questions and required no credentials. They were men. It was enough that their fellow-beings were starving. Unknown to them were the wrongs our race have done theirs for centuries.[17]

Eventually, roadhouses were established on trails carrying enough traffic, but this took some time and amenities never developed on rarely used trails. Yet travelers could move lightly, without tent or stove, through any region populated by natives. Miner N.N. Brown mushed from Nome to St. Michael and back, relying entirely on native hospitality. He was not disappointed. "They are the heartiest, kindest, most content people I have ever met."[18]

White northerners were generally aware of their debt to the natives and tried to treat them fairly. They learned to wear the native parka and mukluks and adopted native travel techniques. Natives were informal instructors in a school for survival, and whites who hoped to cope with the harsh climate were quick to learn. This is not meant to suggest that racial barriers did not exist in Alaska. The stampeders' attitudes

on race were fixed long before they journeyed north. In towns, if not on the trail, the white man felt himself to be superior to the native in all respects. It was not until recent times that natives were permitted to serve on juries, although their right to hold mining claims was affirmed in early court decisions.

Despite such bias, a closer relationship between races could be found in Alaska than on the earlier western frontier. After all, there had been few bloody conflicts in the North to create intensely felt hostilities. Natives posed neither a physical nor an economic threat to white settlement. Their contribution to the newcomers' development of their native land was substantial. As hunters they provided food; as trappers they gathered valuable furs for trade. They were good customers as well at the whites' stores.

Natives of Alaska were free to live where they liked, and their movements had economic consequences for the white man. Because of certain traders' "dirty work," warned the *Alaska Forum* editor, "Rampart's Indians will relocate near Fairbanks. Better do something about this." Natives were not scorned as were the immigrant "Chinks" or "Japs" of the time. The despised orientals, unlike the natives, took jobs away from white men. Orientals were considered dangerous and were forcibly expelled from Juneau by a vigilante mob in 1886.[19]

Particular racial harmony existed outside of the towns. Men like George Pilcher, the woodcutter and trader of the lower Yukon, depended upon native society, entertaining his neighbors on long winter nights with gallons of tea and phonograph music. He and other similarly situated pioneers could hardly be intolerant. They traded with the men and bedded with the women--what more could one ask of neighborly good will and harmony?

Selling booze to natives was a violation of law, and attempts to halt this illicit traffic heavily engaged law enforcement officials. It was an impossible task. The fulminations of the press against the sellers indicate the frustration involved: "The fear of God and the law should be put into the gizzards (they have no hearts) of the reptiles who furnish natives with fiery hootch," said one editor. Six months' imprisonment was the standard penalty imposed upon convicted liquor sellers, and prosecution for violation was vigorous. But comparatively few incidents resulted in prosecution. To many, the easy money to be gained in liquor transactions was too great a temptation. Then too, "squaw men," whites with native families, could buy booze freely and often acted as suppliers. Although many recognized the ravages of liquor, all the white communities could do was to register a sense of responsibility.[20]

"Squaw men," whites who lived with native women in or out of the married state were sometimes scorned by other white folks, particularly women. This harsh treatment was a reflection of bias when aimed at men who were not exploiting their women. The community and the court demanded that white men marry the women they lived with or leave them alone, and the enforcement of the co-habitation was vigorous.

Whites' adaptation to things native was always a positive gain. The reverse process usually proved unfortunate. Traditional Eskimo housing took the severity of the winter into consideration. Their half-buried dwellings heated by seal oil lamps proved

adequate to the severity of the climate. Yet some Eskimos were impressed by the frame shacks the newcomers built, imitated the style, and suffered accordingly. In giving up traditional housing, they became economically dependent; fuel oil was needed to keep the shack warm and could only be acquired from the whites.

It was the same with food. Natives developed a taste for sugar and such luxury items as canned fruit and thereby committed themselves to a cash economy--a shift that was hardly suitable to the traditional pattern of subsistence. With a few exceptions like Creole John Minook, the discoverer of the Rampart gold fields, natives did not participate directly in prospecting and mining in the early days. They chopped wood, fished, and hunted for the miners in exchange for tobacco and other trading goods. At one time in the early mining period, most of the Yukon riverboats were piloted by natives. Capt. Ellsworth West, whose steamer *Corwin* was traditionally the first ship to reach Nome each spring, always shipped an Eskimo crew because whites were too prone to jump ship and join the latest gold rush.

Natives did find employment as miners after the early years as they became accustomed to the particular requirements of employment. It appears that their labors were accepted on the same terms as those of whites.

Hudson Stuck, the far-ranging Episcopal missionary, was a close observer of native-white relations through the latter part of the stampede era. His conclusion on the effect of the white miners on the aborigines was unequivocal: They "brought nothing but harm to the native people of Alaska." As one instance Stuck cited the situation at Fort Yukon during the 1897-98 winter, when 350 Klondike-bound miners were stranded by the freeze-up. The miners had nothing to do but amuse themselves with the natives and their large stores of whiskey: "There was gross debauchery and general demoralization. It took Fort Yukon a long time to recover from the evil living of those winters and the evil name that followed."

Missionaries were not popular with whites who debauched natives. Missionaries were quick to report violations of the liquor law and this was resented. At Fort Yukon an indignant steamboat hand remonstrated with Stuck: "Why it's got so . . . that a man can't give a squaw a drink of whiskey and take her out in the brush without getting into trouble!"[21]

The diseases brought to Alaska by whites were also devastating to the natives. Measles swept through the villages of the lower Yukon in the wake of the 1900 stampede to Nome. Natives provided highly susceptible to tuberculosis and were devastated by the post-World War I flu epidemic. The government and the missionaries provided medical relief, but disease fatality rates have remained high among natives since the gold-rush era. Curiously, the missionaries and others who addressed native concerns focused much more on moral crises than health problems.

Respectable miners generally revered missionaries, the low-life's opinion notwithstanding. Most miners shared the missionary view of the importance of spreading Christianity and the whites' ways among the natives and had no reason to be in conflict with the clergy. There were men, however, who argued that the natives should be free from the influences of missionaries and all the whites. Hudson Stuck addressed himself

to this opinion on several occasions. He argued vigorously that the natives desperately needed the protection missionaries could give against the depredations of the white riffraff who followed explorers, traders, and prospectors into the country. He noted that a longing for an uncontaminated native people made no historical sense.

The natives most seriously affected by the influx of whites were those who abandoned their traditional pattern of life to live in mining towns. Some were women married to whites, whose children became an integral part of the white community, were educated in the local schools, and found employment within the mining economy. These town natives did not necessarily have a hard lot in making the transition to a new world. Even if the mixed-blood children were denied entry to the upper regions of society, they were, for the most part, treated decently by the tolerant white settlers. Other natives dwelled on the slum fringe of the community, sharing only marginally in its life, living between two worlds but fitting into neither. Their ghetto existence was unsanitary; they were ill-housed, likely to suffer from diseases, and often ravaged by alcoholism. Their fate was a visible reminder that the white intrusion brought disaster as well as prosperity.

It should be noted that natives did participate in mining activities. An Eskimo, Walter Smith, first discovered platinum at Goodnews Bay and is credited for the emergence of this area as a major platinum district. Also Jack Egnaty, another Eskimo, discovered several mercury deposits in western Alaska, including the profitable White Mountain Mine. At Red Devil, of the 45-man workforce, more than 50 percent was native, according to Takotna village chief Dave Miller, who worked there. The most interesting "native miner" account, however, is the Valdez Creek mining district near Cantwell. The entire mine crew were Athabascan Indians doing underground development work in the 1920s to 1940s. Earlier accounts indicated they were good miners.

But there were only a few scattered mining communities to attract natives, and their number diminished as the gold placers were worked out. The great majority of Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos maintained their village existence and avoided close, frequent encounters with whites. For thousands, the handful of missionaries and teachers provided the only contact with the white culture--not that their isolation assured them of a better fortune than town natives. Life for many was a hard struggle for sustenance--as it had always been. Famine and disease were very real specters.

Those who complained of the government's native policies in the North centered their grievances on neglect rather than aggression. But government failures or successes in education, welfare, and medical treatment were worked out in Washington, D.C., not by miners in Nome and Fairbanks. The role of the federal government in regard to natives is outside the scope of this study. To the extent Alaska miners did influence these policies, they probably showed no more wisdom or ignorance than other frontiersmen, considering the particular age and situation. Newspaper editorials consistently complained that the government was flagrantly neglectful of the natives and called for a sound welfare policy.

As might be expected, natives were praised or derided as their conduct and manners exemplified or varied from white standards. Few whites were scholarly or

curious enough to attempt to gain an understanding of the native culture. Judge James Wickersham tried to gather and record native legends, and so did a few others, but most were content with their superficial impressions. Native languages were rarely studied by any but missionaries who, of course, had very practical reasons for such labors. Yet such scholarship commanded respect among the whites, so long as the student was not a squaw man. Jack Hines, the "merry minstrel of Nome," was applauded for his facility in Eskimo by the author of an early history of Seward Peninsula mining activity. How much Eskimo Hines actually learned is another question, but certainly enough to impress some of his Nome cronies.

Some whites understood that the original civilization of the natives, previous to contact with whites, had substantial merit, that it had to have or the natives could not have survived in a harsh land. Sourdough Lynn Smith expressed this consciousness of the aboriginal achievement: "When one realizes that four hundred years ago, there were more natives living in Alaska than now [1931]; that they were living off the country without any doctor except their own medicine men and women; and that they had to work out their own salvation--we can take off our hats to them--for their system of way of life worked." Smith's sentiments were shared generally by whites and were the foundation for their basic respect for the natives, a respect that seems to have been greater than that extended by whites to aboriginal peoples on other frontiers. Human respect of northern people for other northern people derived from a shared experience that took the edge off racial antipathies and blurred distinctions in customs and manners that would otherwise raise unsurmountable barriers of disdain and suspicion.[22]

Such mitigating factors did not, however, sweep away all vestiges of cultural arrogance even if they did have a leavening influence. Whites could not help elevating their institutions over those of the natives. A good Christian like Lynn Smith must "thank God for the missionaries and schools that have uplifted the poor, unfortunate natives" so that they have the opportunity to "live as we do." Smith expressed the hope of well-meaning whites, a hope that extended to material and spiritual blessings alike. "Though they must have their seal oil even now," marveled Smith, "one cannot help but wonder how they managed years ago without the necessities of life."[23]

We can hardly expect men like Smith to have considered the dietary hazards of bacon, sugar, and tinned foods, any more than we can expect them to have doubted the advantages of stuffy, heated cabins or the truths of Christianity. The white's commitment to the values of his world and its benefits for aboriginal peoples was basic and unshakable. For all we might question today such convictions and their effects, it would be impossible to imagine what courses of the cultural disruption other attitudes might have directed. Attitudes towards natives have changed in recent times, a haunting consciousness of guilt has dictated new approaches, but the "native problem" has not disappeared. What has been done cannot be undone now and could not have been better done before.

## Moral Condition

In 1903 the Rev. E.J. Knapp of Rampart described the Yukon River Indians' condition:

> As far as the moral condition of the Indian people is concerned it is often very deplorable. The intimate association between the Indians and the whites in and about settlements on the river results unfortunately in the moral degradation of the Indians, both men and women. The Indians naturally crave whisky, which is the chief trouble of which I am speaking. The Indians seem to have no difficulty in getting all the whisky they may want. The law forbidding the sale of whisky to the Indians is not easily enforced, but . . . should be strictly enforced. Indians are not accustomed to frequent the saloons, but it is very easy for them to induce disreputable white men to purchase the whisky for them in payment of a slight commission. The whisky once purchased in that way is passed to the Indian outside of the saloon in some retired place. The sale of whisky to the Indians is most often made through middlemen, who buy the whisky in the store or saloon, take it out of doors and pass it to the Indian.
>
> I would like to say this, that in respect of the whisky evil the most deplorable one of all is the moral degradation of the Indian women by bad white men who ply them with whisky when opportunity favors. There is a class of white men in the country who have absolutely no conscience, seemingly, in regard to that iniquity. The Indians themselves--men and women--are easily led and readily fall into temptation whenever the opportunity to get whisky is offered. If I might make a suggestion, I would say that the penalty for the giving of whisky to an Indian, even to the extreme penalty of the law as it now stands, is not as great as it might be. The extreme penalty now is six months' imprisonment in the country jail. If the offense were made a felony, instead of a misdemeanor, and the severest penalty enforced, possibly this might produce or tend to produce a better state of affairs than at present exists.
>
> The physical condition of the Indians is not satisfactory. They are extremely liable to pulmonary afflictions, and they are scrofulous, due to too close intermarriage, and are often syphilitic, due to loose living. I do not think that the plan of putting the Indians on reservations would work well in this country. It is a very cold country, and a country in which the Indians would find it difficult to follow their usual pursuits on a reservation which would give them a livelihood. The Indians in this neighborhood value their liberty, and have often assured me that they would not want to live on a reservation. I think it is better for them to roam as far as they please, and hunt where they can find the best game.[24]

## The Liquor Question

Some commentators find it easy to characterize the impact of mining on natives as either a horrible disaster or as a remarkably peaceful process of acculturation. In fact, the whole question is far too complex to be treated satisfactorily with any certainty. Most discussions of the impact have little regard for the differences among regions in time and duration of contact, numbers of whites and natives involved, and the extent of natives actually involved economically in the mining industry.

Another question that makes intelligent assessment of impact difficult concerns liquor abuse. If instances of such abuse, where they are recorded in mining areas, are considered as inseparable from the contact, then, of course, they weigh heavily on the negative assessment of mining. While there is some justification for treating the liquor abuse this way it is also arguable that it is a separate issue. Natives had abused liquor acquired through trade or of their own manufacture before the mining era commenced. What the developing mining frontier did was to support large white communities where none had existed before. With such communities, natives had easier access to liquor than before, but the miners did not introduce a novelty to native culture.

## Opinionated Sources

There is no want of evidence of debauchery of natives by whites. Bureau of Education official Andrew Evans complained in 1909 about the mining towns of Nome, Council, Candle, and Deering on the Seward Peninsula. "The sale of liquor and mingling of white men and natives cause the greatest distress to the natives. Under such influences the native rapidly goes to pieces and is soon unable to support himself."

Whites even interfered with the schools, according to Evans: "Traders and squaw-men who cannot debauch the natives as they wish, on account of the teacher, use their influence to keep children away from school." Evans insisted that native villages be given reservation status and that the residents be allowed to ban undesirable whites.[25]

In Nome, Evans observed alcoholic natives and four Eskimos women working as prostitutes. It was understandable because "they are thrown in with the worse element of white men and naturally learn vices rather than the better instincts."

A Nome teacher confirmed this dismal conclusion: "Morally, conditions are very bad. Natives here are in contact with the most vicious element of other races. The susceptibility of the Eskimo makes him an easy victim of the designer of evil."[26]

In the reports of the Bureau of Education and the memoirs and letters of missionaries, we can follow the development of a "black legend." According to this legend, the white-native contact was almost invariably destructive to him. The other side, the "white legend," reflected the self-serving convictions of the group that also created the "black legend"--the missionaries. Only the missionaries and other good teachers stood between the wicked wiles of evil whites and their natural victims. Both legends are well enough documented to pass as historically accurate, yet each should be

examined more closely. The teachers and missionaries were not always good and wise in treating natives. And miners, traders, and squawmen were not always pernicious.

Missionaries sometimes could be alarmists in fancying abuses where none existed because they were convinced of their correctness and the essential superiority of their culture (even though it included whiskey traders and moral debauchers of native girls). The missionary ideal was a native village grouped around the church and school.

The Rev. Hudson Stuck once described the two villages of Anvik. One was the mission village. The other represented the dark side of things:

> On one side of the slough, the gloom and grime of underground chambers, the walls and floor saturated with filth and infested not only with body parasites but with the accumulated germs of all manner of diseases, the heavy air reeking with ancient fish and mildew; minds still cringing in terror before the senseless jabber of sorcery, apprehensive at every turn of some ghostly evil to be practiced upon them; children with matted hair and old impacted dirt running about in greasy rags never taken off day or night from the time they are put on until they fall off by their own disintegration of decay. On the other side--the church and schoolhouse side--new log cabins with doors and windows, even a little paint showing here and there; potatoes and turnips and cabbages growing behind a picket fence; children, I will not say clean children, as though any such miracle were possible, but children periodically cleaned, regularly washed and their clothes regularly washed, children that go to school each day with shining faces and combed hair; parents with a new gleam and a new confidence in their eyes, even a new pride in their port, the crushing weight of the old spiritual tyranny thrown off, a new dignity of manhood coming with the new freedom and faith and hope. There seems no extravagance, no perfunctoriness in the use of the figure.[27]

## Conclusion

One could quarrel with the Reverend Stuck's view or support it. It certainly expresses the notion that the natives, in the missionary view, had to be saved from themselves. This view contrasts with that of anthropologists and others who have rather preferred that natives be left to their own "ghostly evil" and "senseless jabber of sorcery" than have white men's religion imposed on them.

Without belaboring the "native question" or the "missionary question" any further it does seem fair to conclude that the missionaries' reports must be evaluated as closely as any others.

On matters of government, law, labor relations, and the influence of mining on natives, I consider my assessments as tentative. Few historians have studied aspects of governance, law, and labor relations with any depth. These are complex matters that should become clearer as more scholarly endeavors are undertaken. The literature on

natives is vast, and there are many books by and about missionaries but little of it is analytical. Much of the published work is useful but limited in its value for assessing the vexing problems briefly considered here.

## Notes
## Chapter 10

1. Claus Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails: The Work of the Alaska Road Commission* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 3-9 is an excellent summary of the government's endeavors.

2. William Beach, *The Shadow of Mt. McKinley* (New York: Derrydals, 1931), 113.

3. J.C. Cantwell, *Report of the Operations of the U.S. Revenue Steamer* 'Nunivak.' (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1902), 162-65.

4. Elva Scott, "Mail Service and Mail Carriers Upper Yukon River," (Eagle: E. Scott, 1985), *passim*.

5. Wickersham collection, Box 56, file 10, ASL.

6. Rex Beach, *The Iron Trail* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1913), 233.

7. Ernest Gruening, *State of Alaska* (New York: Random House, 1954), 230-31.

8. Jeanette P. Nichols, *Alaska* (Cleveland: Arthur Clark & Co. 1924), 405.

9. William R. Hunt, *Distant Justice* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), *passim*.

10. "Organization and Laws of the Sitka Mining District," Mining Records, RG 305, ASA.

11. U.S. Congress. Committee on Territories. *Conditions in Alaska*. Senate Reps., 58th Congr., 2nd sess., No. 282, Pt. 2, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904), 180.

12. Ibid., 182.

13. Henry Roden, *Alaska Mining Law*, (Juneau: Henry Roden, 1931), 35.

14. Henry Roden, *Alaska Mining Law*, (Juneau: Henry Roden 1940), 17.

15. James Foster, "The Western Federation Comes to Alaska," (*Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, October 1975), *passim*.

16. *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, Senate Reps., 56th Congr, 1st sess., No 1023, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1900), 4-7; U.S. Dept. of Interior, Annual *Report of the Governor of Alaska, 1888*, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1889), 7; Gruening, *State of Alaska*, 75.

17. *Compilation of Narratives of Explorations in Alaska*, 706.

18. *Nome News*, January 13, 1900.

19. *Alaska Forum*, October 29, 1904.

20. *Nome Nugget*, January 3, 1903.

21. Hudson Stuck, *Voyage on the Yukon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 103, 104; Hudson Stuck, *Winter Circuit of our Arctic Coast* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), 71.

22. Herbert L. Heller, Ed., *Sourdough Sagas* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1967), 169.

23. Ibid., 180.

24. U.S. Congress. *Conditions in Alaska*, 131-132.

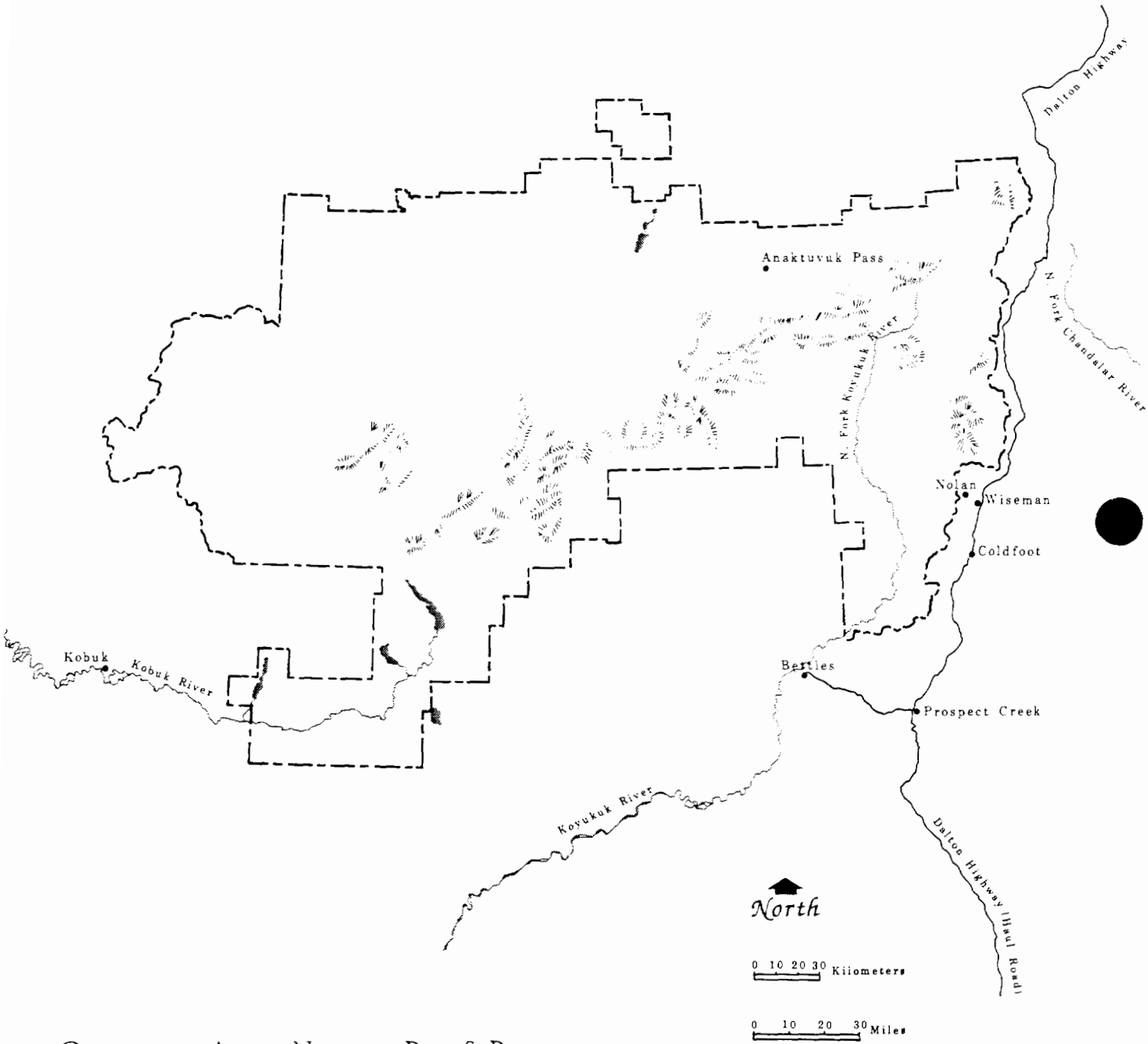
25. Cited in James Ducker, "Out of Harm's Way," unpublished paper, 6. Copy in author's files.

26. Ibid., 7.

27. Hudson Stuck, *Alaska Missions of the Episcopal Church* (New York: Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 1920), 67-68.

# Chapter 11
## Chronology: Gates of the Arctic

| | |
|---|---|
| 1885 | Lt. Henry Allen's explorations. |
| 1886 | John Bremner, who had been with Allen, is the first Koyukuk prospector. |
| 1887 | Bremner, Peter Johnson, Johnnie Folger and others work Tramway Bar; Bremner is killed by Indians. |
| 1888 | Party of Fortymile miners avenges Bremner. |
| 1894 | Gordon Bettles opens store at Arctic City. |
| 1898 | Stampede to Koyukuk of some 1,000 prospectors. |
| 1899 | Strike on Hammond River. |
| 1899-1900 | Coldfoot founded. |
| 1902 | Coldfoot post office opens. |
| 1903 | Mining activity declines. |
| 1907 | Strike on Nolan Creek revives Koyukuk interest. |
| 1908 | 200 men rush to Nolan Creek. |
| 1907-1911 | Three miners take over more than a quarter of a million dollars from Nolan Creek. |
| 1910 | Wiseman replaces Coldfoot as main service center. |
| 1912 | Strike at Hammond Creek; Coldfoot post office moved to Nolan. |
| 1915 | Peak year of second Koyukuk boom. |
| 1931 | Population of Koyukuk region is 71. |




GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

# Chapter 11
## Gates of the Arctic

In several respects the mining history of the Gates of the Arctic National Park is singular. Much of the Koyukuk River and its tributaries which drain the southern side of the central Brooks Range falls within park boundaries. Although the region is isolated and distant from population centers, it was among the first interior areas to be prospected. In 1885 Lt. Henry T. Allen followed an overland trail north from the Yukon on the divide between the Melozitna and the Tozitna rivers, eventually going down the Kanuti River to the Koyukuk.

Allen made the Koyukuk portions of his long reconnaissance of the Copper River valley and the Yukon interior with Pvt. Fred Fickett. At Nulato, Allen hired Koyukon Indians as guides and bought five packdogs. When the party reached the Kanuti River they acquired two birch canoes for the ascent to the Koyukuk, then went upriver on the Koyukuk, reaching a point not far above the later site of Bettles. They were forced to return to the Yukon for want of food. Game and people were equally scarce in the Koyukuk country; they saw no Indian villages along the way. In all, Allen covered 1,500 miles, charting three major river systems for the first time. As historian Morgan Sherwood said, "it was an incredible achievement that deserves to be ranked with the great explorations of North America."[1]

Maj. Gen. Nelson A. Miles praised Allen's work, but the public did not perceive the importance of the expeditions. Ironically, Americans of the day read Schwatka's lively narrative of his Yukon River exploration with enthusiasm, even though Schwatka covered familiar ground the whole way.

John Bremner, who had been with Allen on his Copper and Tanana rivers explorations, was the first Koyukuk prospector in 1886-87. Bremner was a pioneer of tragic distinction as the only white prospector killed by the usually unaggressive interior Indians in the early mining years. His death provoked the interior's first vigilante action when 22 men, including Gordon C. Bettles, formed a posse in 1888, voyaged by the steamboat *Explorer* up the Koyukuk, found an Indian who admitted his guilt, and hung him.[2]

### Gordon Bettles

Gordon C. Bettles, born in Quebec in 1859, was a trader-prospector who ranged widely in Alaska. When Bettles answered whatever stirred the winds of northern opportunity in his mind in 1886, he had accumulated diverse experiences in his 27 years. He had been typesetter on the *Detroit Free Press*; a miner in Colorado from 1882-1884; and a prospector and cowboy in Montana, Idaho, and Washington from 1884-1886, including stints driving a packtrain to Coeur d'Alene and mining at Libby Creek, Montana. Like many interior pioneers, Bettles first job in Alaska was at the great Treadwell mine in Douglas. After a short stint at the mine, Bettles crossed the

Chilkoot for Fortymile in 1888. After one winter there, he prospected in the Kuskokwim Valley in 1888-89. In 1890 he was among the vigilante party that executed the Koyukuk Indian who killed John Bremner.

Like trader Jack McQuesten, Bettles was well liked by miners. He was generous with credit and as quick off the mark on news of a new gold strike as any full-time prospector. In addition, this "prince of fellows," as he was sometimes described in the press, was an acclaimed storyteller who shared his imagination with his fellows. The vicissitudes of storekeeping in short-lived camps did not make him gloomy. He carried his commercial burdens lightly throughout his half century in Alaska. As a youthful prospector, he blazed an inscription on a tree atop the Wolverine Mountain between Rampart and Livengood, "I claim all the land I can see from here." His gains, in some respects, equalled his wide-ranging claims: Bettles did not become a millionaire but enjoyed a rich life that enriched that of his acquaintances as well.[3]

In 1894 Bettles was on hand at Fort Adams to help the Rev. Jules L. Prevost put out the first edition of the *Yukon Press*, the interior's first newspaper. Later that year, from his post at Nuklukyet, 18 miles south of the mouth of the Tanana, Bettles roamed the Koyukuk country above the Arctic Circle extensively.

Bettles contributed an account of early Koyukuk mining in the first issue of the *Yukon Press* in 1894 (see Chapter 2). He knew Bremner and the other miners who outfitted at Tanana, in 1886 "loading up their sleighs with a few necessities of life, together with plenty of rabbit skin blankets for bedding." The miners had little knowledge of the country and were pleased to reach a point on the Koyukuk, some 400 miles upriver, after 150 miles of overland. The prospectors did not have dogs and were relieved to commence river voyaging: "After hanging their sleighs, and snow-shoes (what was left of them) up in a tree, and forming resolutions to never hitch themselves into the collar again as long as they live," they started prospecting.[4]

As the water was too high for prospecting they could not accomplish much. The season was advancing and their grub was running out, so they started downriver by boat. The water fell as they voyaged toward the Yukon. At a point about 250 miles from its mouth, 20 miles below the Coldfoot site, they stopped at a promising-looking gravel bar. Washing a pan of gravel produced a quantity of flakes, so they built a rocker and worked several days in earnest. Hunger soon forced them to continue downriver. At Tanana some of the men reprovisioned and returned to Tramway Bar, as they named it, for the rest of the summer.

The party returned the following spring. Again, high water confirmed their prospecting to riverbars, which they worked when water levels permitted. Prospectors, more leisurely in the early days, did not tear around the country but stayed in camp when the water was high. "Such were the habits of the pioneer miners of the Koyukuk," Bettles reflected, "consequently nothing of any value was unearthed until quite recently."[5]

Two miners found good signs on the upper river in 1892. A year later they returned with others and prospected smaller streams. Gold was found on Chapman and Davis creeks. Quartz Creek seemed good, too.

Writing in 1894, Bettles was not sure whether the Koyukuk would prove out "as there has not yet been sufficient work done." As he wrote there were 22 men on the Koyukuk.[6]

Prospectors of the 1880s did not find a bonanza, nor did other prospectors of the 1890s who only managed to gather a small amount of gold from a few easily worked sandbars. It took the Klondike stampede to create wider interest in the Koyukuk. Stampeders who failed to get in on the rich Yukon ground were keen to look at other areas of potential wealth, and the Koyukuk was reported to be one of them. Thus in 1898, the region drew 1,000 prospectors whose movement put some 50 steamboats on the river. Mining camps sprang up at various points, including Beaver on the Alatna River, and Arctic City, Bergman, Peavy, Union City, Seaforth, Soo City, and Jimtown on the Koyukuk. What became Bettles, 500 miles up the river, was the head of steamboat navigation.[7]

Like most stampedes, this one disappointed all but a few of the new arrivals. Winter came early, and men's optimism faded over the cold months. Many of them left when navigation opened in the spring, but others rushed in to fill their places.

Bettles had his eye on Koyukuk possibilities for several years, but it was 1894 before he opened a "beanshop"--as miners termed such stores--at Arctic City, 400 miles up the Koyukuk from the Yukon. Mining was not too lively, but in '98 strikes upriver induced Bettle to found Bergman, where he was in place for an expected stampede. He ordered enough supplies for a camp of 1,000 men for the '99 season; but as river floods threatened Bergman, he moved farther upriver to found Bettles.

## Hopeful Men

Among those who reached the Koyukuk in '98 was Capt. Robert J. Young, who brought the sternwheeler *Lavelle Young* upriver. *Lavelle Young*, later used by trader E.T. Barnette for his Tanana River voyage in 1901 which led to the founding of Fairbanks, started from Astoria, Oregon, for the gold fields. Young was pleased to get as far upriver as Union City, 800 miles above the Yukon and farther than any other boat that season. With 50 tons of freight, he expected to make a small fortune trading with miners. That Young made it to the gold fields at all was somewhat remarkable. He had signed on at Astoria as second mate under Capt. George A. Pease, who took the boat a little ways up the Koyukuk, then decided to return to St. Michael. At St. Michael, Young took command after Pease and seven crew members found steamer transportation to the Outside and, fiercely determined, headed back up the Yukon to the Koyukuk.

Young's first letter to his wife from Union City cost him a $100 payment to a mail carrier, so he deserved to brag: "I think I have surprised them all and opened their eyes by bringing a boat of this size to this point. . . I believe there will be ten thousand people here before spring." From the short-lived settlement of Union City, Young pushed a little way up the north fork of the Koyukuk to Peavy, another short-lived camp. Over the winter the crewmen prospected, and with breakup tried their luck with

dredge equipment that had been carried on *Lavelle Young*: "We would have been better off if we had left it in Portland," he wrote ruefully. Young took the steamboat down to St. Michael in summer 1898, grubstaked one of the crewmen eager to try prospecting on the Seward Peninsula, and left Alaska.[8]

Stampeders arrived in '98 on a fleet of steamboats, most of which had been shipped in parts to St. Michael and assembled there. An early freeze-up caught 68 steamers in the ice and discouraged many stampeders who expected to locate ground before winter set in. Some 550 men mushed downriver in disgust, while 350 wintered at Bettles. If the miners' purses had been as long as their hopes, trader Bettles would have prospered because he added the stores of stranded steamers to his stocks. But money was short and the new arrivals had not yet found gold, so most of Bettles' sales were on credit.[9]

Other '98 stampeders included C.F. Haselman, William Michaels, and other members of the Iowa-Alaska Expedition who reached the Koyukuk in '98 via the Chilkoot Pass and Dawson. The party had its difficulties, including the drowning of one man on Lake Bennett before launching two boats for the river voyage. *Iowa*, the larger of their two steamers--60 feet long with an 18-foot beam--was believed to be the biggest ever taken down the upper Yukon. Fully loaded, with 25,000 pounds of wood, 5,000 feet of lumber, 10 horses weighing 10,000 pounds, hay, sawmill machinery, sleds, and provisions, *Iowa* drew only thirty inches and ran the dreaded White Horse Rapids without "a scratch to the paint." Seven days later, including 36 hours stuck on a sandbar, the argonauts reached Dawson. Other Iowans there treated them hospitably, permitting the first break in their bacon and bean diet of many weeks.[10]

The Iowans, organized originally as a joint-stock company, inspected a claim owned by John Maloney and Jack Dalton on Bonanza that had not profited the owners over the winter's digging because of too much underground water. Elsewhere, they saw better claims. In one cabin, they handled $10,000 "in fine nuggets" and saw $60,000 more in fine gold. They heard much talk about the Koyukuk in Dawson and decided "to try and find the elephant ourselves." It was obvious at Dawson that all the potential mining sites in the Klondike were taken. Most of the miners who had wintered there had worked for major owners at $10 daily, while paying almost that much for living expenses. "It is a shame for people to rush in here the way they are," T.T. Barbour observed, "men here are doing everything they can to get out. You ought to hear their tales of woe; it is heart rending." The Iowans were glad they had other prospects in view: "We still think we will find the Eldorado. Everyone we see who has been on the Koyukuk River says it is good and we are sure to hit it."[11]

One of the charms of the Koyukuk country was in its remoteness. To inexperienced men it seemed reasonable to believe rumors that "Indians bring out lots of gold from the country, but so far it has been impossible for whites to go up there, as it is too far to row a boat, and no steamers have yet gone up."[12]

In starting up the Koyukuk the Iowans were heading into the unknown. No one they talked to at Nulato had ever heard about Jack Davis, who had been indirectly responsible for the formation of the company. Davis' letter announcing a fabulous gold

discovery on the Koyukuk headwaters and inviting the formation of a stock company had inspired the whole venture. By the time the Iowans reached Lake Bennett, they knew that the letter had been a fraud and the company disbanded. Hope still lingered among some of the men that the letter was genuine, hence the queries at Nulato.

After pushing about 300 miles upriver on the Koyukuk, the party turned up a tributary, the Hogatza, for prospecting. Clear Creek, a tributary of the Hogatza, yielded 10 to 25 cents a pan. Excitement ran high at the discovery. The miners staked a group claim of 160 acres and formed a company, capitalizing at $250,000 with $80,000 of stock for public sale. Some of the party wintered over and reported optimistically on prospects, but expectations were not met and work stopped in summer 1899.

Other miners did not even enjoy the briefly held euphoria of the Iowa men. Among the many who left after one winter was J.N. Wyman, whose excellent photographs have been preserved. Wyman, one of a Galesburg, Illinois, party, left the party's camp for a two-month winter trip up the Allakaket River to prospect some copper quartz thought to contain gold. He did not travel far enough to reach the quartz prospect but did some fruitless digging on Young Creek before returning to camp.[13]

Over the rest of the 1898-99 winter, Wyman and other members of his party grew discouraged. No one had found any gold and there seemed little point in looking further. In mid-March, Wyman traveled to Bergman. The camp offered some entertainment worth photographing, a prize fight between boxers Ed Kelly and J.C. Cox, which was probably the first such event held north of the Arctic Circle.

While at Bergman, Wyman heard about the rich strike on Myrtle Creek on the middle fork of the Koyukuk but was not impressed. He busied himself selling photos of the prize fight, then joined other Galesburg company men at their steamboat for the long voyage home. The men felt like failures and would not risk more time.

The reminiscences of Capt. J.D. Winchester rank among the most affecting of personal gold rush narratives, encompassing the frustration of not finding gold, near death from scurvy, and a sense of abandonment. Winchester and his party had a long voyage from Lynn, Massachusetts, to San Francisco via the Straits of Magellan in '98. From San Francisco he got a ship to St. Michael and eventually made it to Beaver City on Helpmejack Creek in October. With the freeze-up the local prospectors got busy organizing Beaver City and setting mining rules. Claims were limited to 500 square feet and staking by power of attorney was prohibited.

Winchester's winter proved disastrous. The start was gloomy enough after a search party brought in a missing prospector who had frozen to death on the trail: "This affair seemed to cast a gloom over the inhabitants of Beaver. The deceased was brought down the river and buried in an icy tomb one hundred miles north of the Arctic Circle."[14]

Winchester's companions made a trip to Arctic City in mid-November, and scurvy struck him down about a week after they left. His neighbors cut wood for his cabin stove, loaded it in the morning, then left him alone until the following morning. In such cheerless surroundings he managed to feed himself with bread soaked in con-

densed milk: "My legs were so bad that it was impossible to straighten them out, and I moved about on the stools. My teeth were loose and gums sore."[15]

Winchester did receive one visit from a doctor who diagnosed his illness as inflammatory rheumatism. He advised drinking citric acid as a scurvy preventative. Winchester was near death when his partner finally returned to Beaver. Another doctor easily observed the evidence of scurvy and prescribed raw potatoes. One of Winchester's partners made a quick trip to Arctic City for potatoes and returned in time to save his life. The experience exposed the attitude of miners to victims of scurvy: they had little sympathy because it was believed to be caused by personal uncleanliness and inactivity.

Winchester and his party waited impatiently for the opening of navigation, their thoughts fixed on escaping from the country that had been so cruel and unrewarding. They looked for scapegoats, someone to blame for inducing them up the Koyukuk. There were men on the lower river who were always booming the country to voyagers on the Yukon. "I wondered," said Winchester, "if some were not in the employ of the steamboat companies, who were carrying on a nefarious business by inducing men to leave their families, and mortgaging their little belongings to pay their passage up to Dawson." Winchester was not one of the stampeders who was likely to recall his experiences with any pleasure. When time to leave finally arrived, he was delighted: "After I left the old shack, I never turned back to take a last look, for there was nothing to see or remember about it but suffering."[16]

Historian William Brown has noted the disparity in the responses of Winchester and Herman Carpenter to their Koyukuk ventures. Carpenter had not been more successful than Winchester in discovering gold in spring '98. He wintered over and kept his health, perhaps because he had wintered over on the Yukon the year before and knew how to take care of himself. He also made some wages by freighting supplies to outlying camps, by dog team. He did not see himself as a failure. The problem, as he correctly surmised, was with the region's geology. All the Koyukuk offered were "grubstake diggings . . . where a man can make a living from year to year, and scarcely anything more." With his money from freighting, Carpenter was prepared for the Nome rush and did well on the Seward Peninsula.[17]

Bill Fonda was another Koyukuk prospector who contributed to legend in a couple of ways. He not only entertained folks in Seattle as he grew older with stories of his "lost mine" of incalculable value but he also served as the model for Alonzo Lewis' bronze image of "the Prospector" which now graces Sitka. He liked to be called "Skagway Bill" because he claimed to have built the second cabin raised at Skagway in 1897.

Fonda's '98 venture upriver from St. Michael ended in a shipwreck and the separation of his party. Three members started downstream while he and two others continued upstream to Nulato. The downstreamers were never seen again, "murdered by Indians," according to Fonda, who believed that folks preferred a good story to dull truth.

The surviving trio awaited at Nulato until September 16 for the Koyukuk freeze-up, then sledded upriver, reaching Bergman after 33 days. After locating some bench claims, they went downriver to salvage their steamer, but all their work came to naught with breakup; the surging river carried the boat to destruction. Up the Koyukuk again, Fonda and a partner shoveled and sluiced for a month until he decided to quit. Fonda relinquished his share of the claim for $12,000, the product of their last eight hours of shoveling, then voyaged to Seattle. That Fonda would sell out at this point seems unlikely, but this was Fonda's story. At the assay office George Adams, later to become infamous for stealing gold from the mint, weighted Fonda's gold.

The next spring Fonda returned to the Koyukuk from Skagway. There he put down a shaft 70 feet before giving up. After working on a riverboat for a time, he went out to Seattle for the winter. In the spring he heard that two miners pushed his 70-foot hole to bedrock and took out $300,000.

For the rest of his life Fonda told a "lost mine" story. Whether it was true or not, he often said he planned to return to find a "rich mine" near the valuable one he had abandoned--but never got around to it.[18]

Probably no more than 100 miners remained in the Koyukuk after the summer of 1899, but those who remained developed the district. After the first major gold discovery on Myrtle Creek in spring 1899, prospectors investigated every stream and eventually found gold on Hammond River, Smith Creek, and elsewhere. The towns of Bettles and Wiseman (then called Coldfoot), places that had lost most of their residents, revived somewhat. Most of the gold was produced from the working of lower ground.

The discovery of the deep diggings of Nolan Creek in 1906 was the outstanding example. Earlier miners took some $50,000 from the upper stratum within 30 feet of the surface of the Wiseman tributary, but no effort was made to reach bedrock. In 1907-08 John and Gus Oleson and John Anderson reached bedrock at 120 feet, using a small boiler. Within three months they hauled out $105,000 from their 300-foot-wide strip and in three years made $250,000. It was the richest piece of ground ever mined in the Koyukuk, and other miners got busy and did well. Many of the miners worked lays (contracts) for owners like Captain Johnson and Nellie Cashman for percentages ranging from 50 to 75 percent. Once more, new arrivals hurriedly built cabins--expensive cabins, as neither timber nor cordwood could be found along the creek or hillsides. A new town, Wright City, was located 16 miles above Coldfoot at the mouth of Wiseman Creek.

Freight rates at the time were $100 a ton from Seattle to Bettles. From Bettles upriver scows drawn by horses or pole boats were used. Scows handled 6 to 9 tons, but passage was slow for want of a tow rail. The scow and the horses were poled from one side of the river to the other as boatmen searched for adequate footing for the animals along the bank. Fifteen miles daily was considered a good run, and costs ran from eight cents a pound to Coldfoot to 10 cents to Wright City. Poling boats handled 1,000-1,500 pounds, requiring three to five hardworking men at the poles.[19]

Pole boat transport had been the means used by some men to reach the country and others for their various prospecting ventures. T.W. Moore described the travails of getting a boat upriver. He and his partner had the aid of a sail mounted on their small, heavily laden boat, but had to depend upon their own muscles on the tow ropes for most of their progress:

> We labored all the way against a swollen stream and a very hard rain further up had raised the river higher. . . . The river had risen over a foot during the night and the cut off was booming. The sand bars were nearly all covered and we found the next four days it took us to go that 30 miles, days of torture. We had to cross the river repeatedly, as it was out of the question to buck the swift current. In doing this, we would run up along the sand bar until we came to the high bank, we would take a spurt and run as far as we could up into the swift current and then letting her play off at an angle of 45 degrees, would shoot across for the other side. The hardest kind of pulling at these times would barely hold us even and we would usually strike the bar on the other side some yards below the point we had left on the other side.[20]

Volney Richmond, later to be the head of the Northern Commercial Company, established the company's store at Bettles in 1901. Northern Commercial Company bought out Pickart, Bettles, and Pickart in 1899. Bettles was booming in 1901, and Richmond kept busy at the store. In 1902 he established a small branch store at Coldfoot, 75 miles upriver, putting R.D. Menzies in charge. The following year Richmond packed the season's gold yield as company rules prescribed--in mooseskin sacks of 100 to 500 ounces, then stowed in boxes of one-inch lumber, put together with screws. To each box a 50-foot rope with a float was attached--a precaution for locating the treasure in case of shipwreck. Richmond's shipment of $250,000 was a record for a Koyukuk, and his reward was a raise in salary to $300 a month.[21]

The comparative isolation and lack of amenities on the Koyukuk in 1901 can be gaged by a count of roadhouses. W.J. Peters of the USGS, who started mushing from Whitehorse, noted 53 roadhouses along the 369-mile trail to Dawson; from Dawson to Eagle, 106 miles, only four roadhouses; from Eagle to Fort Yukon, 240 miles, 12 roadhouses; and from Fort Yukon to Bettles, 330 miles, no cabins of any kind.

The remoteness of the Koyukuk district became particularly aggravating in legal disputes. Unscrupulous claim jumpers had an advantage because the bedrock was shallow on many creeks, allowing a miner in possession to exhaust a claim of all gold in a few weeks or months. U.S. Commissioner D.A. McKenzie complained that a jumper skimmed one of his claims of up to $10,000 in gold, then skipped to Nome before the title matter could be brought to district court. Court matters in the sparsely populated district did not justify a district court session there so cases were heard at Rampart before the Tanana strike made Fairbanks the interior's court headquarters. To reach

Rampart, parties and witnesses had to travel 800 miles, and there was no way a miner could be compensated for valuable lost time.

## The Midas Fraud

Miners remained skittish of rumors of gold strikes throughout the gold era. Though no other fake stampede compares with the number of dupes who rushed in to Kotzebue Sound in 1898 (see discussion later in this chapter), there was a notorious one to the Koyukuk in 1903. It was not an instance of response to a vague rumor of gold but one of a carefully cast fraud.

The perpetrators were George W. Duncan and Charles R. Griggs, who were known in Nome and had arrived in the Koyukuk region in January 1903 to start a little breeze of agitation. They looked as if they had been traveling for a long time with considerable hardship yet were obviously bursting with good news that they did not wish to indulge in any detail. Soon everyone in town heard that the prospectors had tried to record claims at the court clerk's office. Clerk George V. Borchsenius refused to record their claims because the men refused to divulge the location of their ground. Duncan grew indignant and insolent: "What a hell of a note that after a year or more of hardships in prospecting a new country, and after having traveled 600-800 miles to the clerk's office, we're told we can't record."

A day or two later the prospectors appeared at the clerk's office again, this time in company with an attorney. Once more the clerk explained the situation, but the men seemed determined to guard their secret at all costs. Soon Duncan and Griggs went to the clerk again with another attorney. The miners agreed to identify their location within a radius of 100 miles. Still this was not good enough because the location might have been in either one or another of two or three different designated recording districts. Again an impasse resulted. Unless we know the district of your "sacred creek," Borchsenius told them, you may not record claims.

Later the prospectors came back with District Judge Alfred S. Moore. Duncan's anxiety impressed the clerk: "It would not be easy to forget," he recalled later, "the appeals Duncan made for something to be done to save them the property which cost them so dearly." Judge Moore was impressed too and broke the deadlock by creating a new district that embraced the prospectors' 64 locations on Midas Creek, a tributary of the Koyukuk River. "There was no suppression of anything in forming the new district," and swiftly all Nome knew that wonderful riches could be found on Midas Creek. No one knew where Midas Creek was, but there were those who meant to find it and locate claims near those of Duncan and Griggs. The lucky prospectors may have been reluctant to tell the location of their finds until legal requirements made it necessary, but they had been willing to show impressively large nuggets around town.[22]

A few Nome men grew hot enough to try a winter trip into the distant Koyukuk country in hope of finding Midas Creek and beating others who would wait for the spring breakup. Duncan and Griggs felt too secure to concern themselves with such folly. They announced that they were going Outside for the winter, presumably over

the long trail up the Yukon River to Whitehorse and down to Skagway since Bering Sea navigation long had since closed for the season. Before they returned in June on one of the first ships of the season, the unfortunate prospectors who had tried to find Midas during the winter without guidance had returned to report their failure.

On their arrival at Nome, Duncan and Griggs announced the formation of the Treasure and Midas Creeks Gold Mining Association of Alaska, organized and incorporated in Oregon. Company assets included four claims of 20 acres each. Investors could buy 174 to 240 shares to become stockholders. Each share represented twenty square feet of ground, the same ground that had yielded $449.50 in gold per cubic yard to the original discoverers.

Some people in Nome remained skeptical. The *Nome Nugget* even published a lampoon purporting to be an interview with a company man, Mr. Othmer, who "could never think of Midas without associating it with the figure of $300,000,000." Mr. Othmer assured newspaper readers that such an amount of money was enough to free Ireland or to convert the United States to socialism," but it was not clear that he would divert his profits to either cause.[23]

The company prepared to send a party of investors into the field, but others who did not buy stock left earlier, seeking Midas about 200 miles above the mouth of the Koyukuk. According to persistent rumor, the golden creek could be found at that point. Other prospectors waited until Duncan and Griggs left Nome on a small motorboat, *Louise*, then tried to follow *Louise* or *Research*, another boat which carried company stockholders, in boats of their own. The stampede was on, and soon there were no boats worthy of taking to sea to be found in Nome or its vicinity.

When company stockholders, a group of 50 men including the commissioner for the new district, F.T. Meritt, reached St. Michael, they were disappointed when Duncan and Griggs did not rendezvous with them as planned. They cursed their lost leaders for delaying them and wondered if they had been deserted. The party finally pushed on up the Yukon to the mouth of the Koyukuk, then turned up the Koyukuk. Their map showed the Midas as a tributary of the Hogikakat River, and they intended to search for the claims despite their deepening suspicion of treachery.

Back in Nome, folks heard some news of Duncan and Griggs, the "Midas Prophets." Reportedly they had landed 40 miles up the Koyukuk River. It disturbed those who still believed in them to hear that the prospectors carried only $80 worth of food, enough to get them to a ship for Outside but hardly enough for men planning to settle in for a season of mining. Soon opinion in Nome crystallized: Duncan and Griggs were great rogues who by this time were outside with their fraudulently acquired gains from shareholders. Men who did not invest because they had lacked means assured others who passed up the opportunity that they had known all the time that the promoters were fakes.

It turned out that Duncan and Griggs had voyaged to the Koyukuk to confuse their pursuers. Once there, they found the riverboat they had concealed on their original journey and drifted back down to the Yukon. From concealment on the bank

they watched *Research* enter the Koyukuk, then they turned down the Yukon for St. Michael and transport Outside.

Other rumors kept Nome gossips happy for weeks. Someone said the Midas fakes had turned up in Fort Yukon, boasting of their $50,000 swindle. Estimates of their take varied, but $50,000 was the amount heard most frequently. Of this, $30,000 was said to have been raised outside; the rest came from Nome investors.

Midas argonauts on *Research* and others following in their wake had a hard time after leaving the boat to tramp the rough, swampy ground. Game was scarce; mosquitoes and gnats wanted to eat them alive; they had to kill some of their horses for food. In September they abandoned the search begun in July and returned to Nome, plotting revenge.

The district attorney ordered a grand-jury investigation that produced some information. Apparently the Midas Prophets bought the $1,500 worth of gold nuggets and dust they showed in Nome from a miner in Bettles. They had done a little digging at the mouth of Koyukuk River without finding anything. From the outset the whole scheme had been a deliberate swindle.

Finally, in October, Nome's newspapers carried the headline everyone was hoping for: "DUNCAN AND GRIGGS PICKED UP IN PORTLAND." The grand jury issued indictments immediately, and Deputy Marshal Al Cody left for Portland with arrest warrants. Navigation closed before Cody could return, but Griggs was lodged safely in the Portland jail. Meanwhile, Duncan disappeared.[24]

Cody returned Griggs for trial in July 1905 after wasting the winter looking for Duncan. Griggs remained tight-lipped on the matter of where the money had gone. People hoped that Duncan had cheated Griggs and that either someone else would rob Duncan or that he might be found. Griggs was convicted of fraud and got five years. Duncan was never found.

## Violence

It is a wonder that more disputes were not settled by direct action because of the law's delays and inadequacies. A few instances of violence are recorded, such as when Francis Ledger killed Dan McCarthy in May 1904. Ledger, busy rocking on a bench under a lay agreement, was warned by three other miners that their rights superseded his. When they ordered Ledger off the claim, he walked to Coldfoot, checked the recorder's book, and found no indication of the claimants' title. It appeared to be a plot to prevent Ledger from doing the required assessment work. "If that is their game," Ledger wrote Herman Bohrer, the owner who granted him his lay, "I'll fool them . . . I'm going to work . . . all the same, and if they try to bother me, somebody will get hurt."

Ledger was not so combative that he wanted to accomplish more than the assessment work under such threatening circumstances. "After September 1, I won't have anything to do with this bench for you or anyone else unless you send me a deed or quit claim of your rights." But the jumpers did not intend to allow Ledger a summer's

work. They tried to force Ledger off the claim, and Ledger shot two of them. McCarthy died from his wounds, and Ledger got 25 years for manslaughter.[25]

## Complaints

Development of the Koyukuk was delayed by more sensational strikes in other regions--Nome in 1899 and Fairbanks in 1903. Commissioner D.A. McKenzie and others who hung on at Coldfoot viewed such divisions sourly: "The people have all gone wild over the 'Munchausen' stories told about the Tanana and are going over to that camp in flocks. Times are very quiet here." Unfortunately, for the Koyukuk, the Tanana news was not an exaggeration.[26]

In 1903 McKenzie got an opportunity to describe his district to a congressional committee visiting Rampart. McKenzie's Koyukuk district extended from the Yukon to the Arctic Ocean and from the Chandalar to the Colville rivers. Its population was only about 1,000 souls, half of it white and concentrated around Coldfoot. McKenzie had much to say about the good prospects in his region and the need for changes in the mining laws to prevent speculation. The commissioner also caught the interest of the senators by describing Alaska as "a country without homes," one that "is not fit to govern itself." He believed that miners should not be burdened with the taxes needed to support local government because it would discourage mining. The miners did not intend to stay in Alaska anyway, McKenzie argued, "we all intend to get out of there as soon as we can get a stake."[27]

For the most part McKenzie's views on the matters he discussed with the senators seemed to reflect those generally held by Koyukuk miners. His calls for a wagon road from the Yukon and the creation of another judicial division to bring the district court closer to Coldfoot expressed local sentiment. He stressed that miners were

> at the present time receiving no protection from the United States in the way of protection to their property. This is account of the great distance to the courts. It would cost a man to come to this district court here [a third division session at Rampart] and bring his witnesses in a case some $6,000 or $7,000. People there have been driven off of their property and compelled to give it up to rascals, simply because the courts were beyond their reach. We should be given a reasonable government or let to run things ourselves.[28]

McKenzie described the Koyukuk and Kobuk Indians of his district in favorable terms. They were Christians who avoided whiskey and tobacco and were kind to whites. But the Indians had not fared well since mining developed: "The miners have come into that country, and, being brighter and smarter than the Indians and understanding hunting better than they, have virtually taken the game right out from the Indians, and those poor devils are left there every year almost starving." Something should be done, McKenzie argued: "We bought them from the Russians and we as-

sumed the obligation of taking care of them." Someone should look to their feeding and education.[29]

The government's provisions for authority in remote districts were certainly inadequate. If Commissioner McKenzie had to travel from Coldfoot to Bettles to fulfill any of his functions as recorder, justice of peace, probate judge, coroner, or notary public, he had to close his office during his absence. Since the government did not provide for a paid assistant, a miner who had traveled up to 150 miles to record a claim was out of luck until the commissioner returned. As the only official competent to advise on mining law, the commissioner was in demand: "For instance," as McKenzie once wrote to a U.S. Senator, a miner working far from Coldfoot "wants to know if it is lawful to stake a claim by power of attorney, and if the corners must be at right angles or otherwise, if he would be allowed to stake two claims on the same creek, and if it is necessary to record his annual assessment."[30]

McKenzie was not the only commissioner to complain about the woes of office, but certainly such a huge district, "larger in area than the state of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware," as McKenzie put it, exposed the limitations of the system. McKenzie served for a year before a deputy marshal was assigned to the district. Having a deputy helped McKenzie but neither officer had authority nor funds for dealing with commonplace problems. What should be done about a miner "with a broken leg or frozen feet needing help," or a native woman, "with the offspring of a white man," who has been deserted and is destitute.

In such cases, McKenzie complained, "the commissioner is again asked to put his hand in his pocket." Unlike some commissioners, McKenzie had some money in his pocket, but after a couple of years he resigned because the office cost him too much money. Commissioners were authorized a salary of $3,000--but could only receive such portion of their salary as had been paid into court as fees. This meant that commissioners located in smaller camps only made their full salary when there was a boom. The system worked best when the commissioner was an attorney able to earn some fees from his practice to supplement wages from the government.[31]

Though miners were justified in protesting against claim jumping, the inadequacies of the laws, or the poor administration of law, their own hands were not always clean. Miners' zeal in staking claims for themselves and others caused many of the problems they complained of. A party of Seward Peninsula prospectors once staked 181 claims covering 45 miles along a particular creek. Among those for whom they located were court officials, including the court clerk and his wife and the U.S. commissioner and his wife.

With such practices in mind, John Rustgard told congressmen in 1903 that "it has been the custom in Alaska, within the last four years, for prospecting parties . . . to stake a claim for the judge, then one for the clerk of the court, and then continue to stake for friends, and sometimes other members of the judicial family."[32] Congressmen were more than politely interested in Rustgard's statement about judges receiving locations as presents: "Why is that done?" one asked. "I presume," replied Rustgard

facetiously, "it is to show their love and respect for the judician of the country. I would not say."[33]

## Pattern of Development

After 1903 the peak population of some 300 miners declined sharply. Many of the shallow diggings were worked out, and the lure of the Fairbanks stampede was hard to ignore. As it was soon determined, the Tanana district, of which Fairbanks was the center, held gold deposits far more extensive than those in the Koyukuk.

There was some excitement over gold discovered on the John River in 1905, but hopes faded quickly. No real revival of mining occurred until 1907. John Anderson and his partner made the initial strike on Nolan Creek in 1907. They chose to sink a hole to bedrock at a spot where other miners earlier had started to dig, then gave up. Their hunch paid off with $7.00 in gold from the first bucket of bedrock gravel washed.[34]

The old channels of the Nolan were mined with drifting technology. Miners drove shafts to bedrock as deep as 300 feet, then tunneled from the shaft's bottom to follow the paystreak. Necessary equipment included a boiler to provide steam for thawing and powering the hoist; the gin pole which stood above the shaft with its bucket and cables; steam pipes and hoses for thawing; and wheelbarrows or ore cars for handling gravel from its removal point to the shaft.

While drift mining had been familiar in the early days of Upper Yukon and Tanana Valley mining, it gave way in those wealthy districts to more advanced technology. In the Koyukuk, however, the comparatively scarce yield did not justify investment in hydraulic and other types of equipment. Thus the very visible sign of active winter mining, an ever rising pile of dirt and gravel near the mouth of the shaft, continued to be a landscape feature for many years. Today most miners use hydraulic and mechanical equipment, but there are still drift mines on Nolan Creek and at Wild Lake.[35]

The pockets of gold on Nolan Creek were soon exhausted, but new discoveries on Hammond Creek kept the scene lively until World War I. With high employment opportunities during the war, miners left for other jobs.

In the mid-1920s the Koyukuk was still described as "prosperous." Although population of the region was small, there were only 135 miners but all did reasonably well. Construction of the Alaska Railroad benefited the miners a little because freight transhipped from Nenana reached the Koyukuk a month earlier in the spring and shipments continued a month longer in the fall.

Transportation costs still remained a problem, however, and in 1925 miners petitioned the Alaska Road Commission for a road between Bettles and Wiseman. Bettles was head of navigation on the Koyukuk for steamboats; towboat charges from Bettles to Wiseman ran high. Sam Dubin, a trader with three stores on the river, had to pay eight cents (summer) or 10 cents (winter) per pound for this short distance. With a tractor pulling loads along a road freight costs could be reduced considerably.[36]

The mining history of the Gates of the Arctic includes some memorable characters, like Gordon Bettles, Sam Marsh, Frank Yasuda, and Bill Fonda, and has also been memorialized in literature by gifted writers like Hudson Stuck and Robert Marshall. The Rev. Hudson Stuck, writing in 1916 of his mission inspection voyages in the little gasoline boat, *Pelican*, characterized the 500-mile voyage from the mouth to the Allakaket mission: "For nearly half the distance the journey is of the utmost monotony. The current is slack, the channel is serpentine, the banks are densely wooded with scrubby trees amongst which willow predominates."

Tributaries of the Koyukuk were small streams and the population had always been sparse: "The chief impression which the region will leave upon the visitor is its loneliness. More than once I have journeyed three hundred miles up this river without seeing a living soul, native or white." Along the banks "at rare intervals" Stuck saw a few dilapidated moss-covered cabins, "here and there a little group of overgrown graves; the rest is the wilderness untouched."[37]

By the time of Stuck's visits, the excitement caused by the revival of mining in 1907-1909 had declined as the richest claims of Nolan Creek and Hammond River were worked out. Steamboat service was reduced to some four sailings during the summer and, with the drift of miners away from the region during World War I, the area became quieter still.

News from the Koyukuk, where Wright City had been renamed Nolan, was still good in 1910. All that is needed for tremendous production, argued a writer in the *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, was equipment for dredging. The writer thought miners were shortsighted in leaving after gaining $50,000-60,000, citing the success of Oscar Johnson, Tom Ewards, and Charles Peterson. The three partners worked a lay from John Anderson for 40 percent of the proceeds, taking out $210,000 from a 300-foot claim. "There are now on the Koyukuk about 160 people," the journalist reported. "Most of them will go out this fall with enough to go into business on or to live comfortably on the rest of their lives. It is a strange condition of affairs, and seems almost incredible . . . People do so well here that the region is depopulated instead of growing up."[38] While the magazine writer's boosting of the Koyukuk can be understood, it should be noted that only a handful of miners made big money.

## Years of Decline

The peak year of the second Koyukuk boom was 1915 with gold production at $290,000 and a population of 300. The area was known as a "nugget" district, and Alaska's second largest. A 338.8-ounce piece was mined from a drift mine on the Hammond River in 1914. Production and population subsequently declined. By 1931 only 71 people inhabited the area. Visitors to the region in the 1930s gained the sense of a very particular kind of life even if conditions were not booming. In 1934 Elizabeth Hayes Goddard made a summer cruise on the Koyukuk on *Pelican* with a missionary party. At Hughes, trader George Light was the only resident. There were only a few miners working, including Al West, an old bachelor, who explained why he and his

**Koyukuk Population and Production 1898-1931**[40]

| Year | Permanent White Population | Gold Production in Thousands of Dollars | Number of Prostitutes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1898 | 200 | -- | 0 |
| 1899 | 120 | -- | 0 |
| 1900 | 270 | 107 | 2 |
| 1901 | 320 | 173 | 6 |
| 1902 | 350 | 200 | 10 |
| 1903 | 300 | 301 | 7 |
| 1904 | 210 | 200 | 0 |
| 1905 | 220 | 165 | 1 |
| 1906 | 160 | 165 | 0 |
| 1907 | 120 | 100 | 0 |
| 1908 | 240 | 220 | 6 |
| 1909 | 230 | 420 | 5 |
| 1910 | 190 | 160 | 8 |
| 1911 | 160 | 130 | 5 |
| 1912 | 230 | 216 | 9 |
| 1913 | 250 | 368 | 8 |
| 1914 | 270 | 260 | 13 |
| 1915 | 300 | 290 | 14 |
| 1916 | 250 | 320 | 12 |
| 1917 | 200 | 250 | 7 |
| 1918 | 150 | 150 | 2 |
| 1919 | 130 | 110 | 2 |
| 1920 | 119 | 90 | 0 |
| 1921 | 107 | 78 | 0 |
| 1922 | 101 | 132 | 0 |
| 1923 | 97 | 37 | 0 |
| 1924 | 92 | 54 | 0 |
| 1925 | 88 | 50 | 0 |
| 1926 | 93 | 68 | 0 |
| 1927 | 98 | 78 | 0 |
| 1928 | 90 | 46 | 0 |
| 1929 | 83 | 32 | 0 |
| 1930 | 77 | 31 | 0 |
| 1931 | 71 | 27 | 0 |
| Total | | 5,028 | |

partner remained in the Koyukuk: "If we lived out there, someone would be telling us what to do all the time. Here, there is no one to boss us."[39]

It was on this same cruise, near Tanana, where Mrs. Goddard learned a "splendid lesson in . . . Indian etiquette." She had asked an Indian man why he wore a heavy bead chain, "what is it for?" The Indian's wife intervened: "What you ask that for? We don't ask why your man wear necktie on his work."

Robert Marshall, who lived at Wiseman in the early 1930s, published *Arctic Village* in 1933. His account of the people and the land of the Koyukuk is among the finest books ever written about Alaska. Marshall was keenly interested in the Koyukuk's early mining history, and few of the historians tracing his steps can forbear use of his population statistics because he included a record of resident prostitutes. "The history of the upper Koyukuk since 1898," he wrote, "may be told succinctly in the three parallel columns of the following table." The white population, gold production, and the prostitutes all reached approximately simultaneous peaks in two different periods. The first occurred from 1900 to 1903 when successive stampedes were on to numerous creeks and nearly $800,000 in "sunburned" gold was recovered from the shallow gravels of their valleys. The second was from 1908 through 1916 when the deeply buried bedrock on Nolan Creek and Hammond River was being mined.

In conversations he recorded with old-timers Marshall caught the spirit of early days. Carl Frank, one '98'er still living in the Koyukuk, described a monumental drinking spree that ended tragically:

> We work all summer long. In the fall we come down from Twelvemile Creek, no gold after all. But we were going to get good clothes and go down to see town at Bettles. We got down to our cache and we couldn't find it. It had been a very dry summer, and the swamp had dried up, and the whole country was on fire, and our cache had all burned up. We couldn't find anything but a few burned blue dishes. That was all right, we couldn't help it. We go down to Bettles, as flat broke as could be. Then the South Fork fellows come down. They have pretty good blowout. We drink that squareface gin. I didn't know that stuff. It look like water but it did not taste like water. They drag several fellows home on sleighs. By and by my partner fall on floor, off counter. The fellows say, Let him lay there, he'll sleep good there. But just when I leave, Pat Judge, he say, Come, Carl, let's bring your partner home. So we took him home, he's nice and loose and limber, and I think he will be fine in the morning. Then he was sleeping to beat the deuce. After an hour I came away, he was still sleeping good. Sunday morning I look out of my cabin. The sun was shining so nicely on the new snow, and I stretch my arms over my head, and think this a great world. All at once I see Pat Judge run like the dickens. I run out, and shout, What's the matter? He say: Tom Dowd is dead. We bury him them. Israel make a speech. He mean it good, but it sound pretty funny. He says: We're living here in a cold country, and if we take a drink we

mean it well. It wasn't your business, God, to get sore at poor old Tom. Then we all start to sing a song, Nearer, my God, to Thee, or what was it they sing."[41]

Marshall's observations included much about the economy of the region. The active miners did not need too much money because much of their food came from the land. And some of them earned cash from trapping as a supplement to their gains in gold mining. Subsistence costs were low, but the same could not be said for mining costs. Harry Leonard, a Wiseman miner, described conditions of the region in 1937 in details that echoed those of earlier years. The handful of miners were working hard against the usual obstacles. Tramway Bar, the area first mined on the Koyukuk, had attracted several men interested in working the shallow ground with a dragline or dredge. Many areas looked good for low-grade placer mining, but working them would be impossible without a road to the Yukon: "Freight rates are too high for development with a dredge." Leonard gave some prices on staples at Wiseman: bananas, 65 cents a pound; eggs, 75 cents a dozen; flour, $17 per 100 pounds; sugar, $20 per 100 pounds; shovels, no. 2. $3.25 each; 4-foot lengths of wood, $16 per cord. Air freight from Fairbanks in less than plane-load lots was 12 cents per pound. Mail service was poor. Parcel post deliveries were only made during the summer when the river was open.

Leonard lived alone on Gold Creek, 12 miles above Wiseman, where he drift-mined in the winter and opencut in the summer. The upper Koyukuk was still the "hungry country" it had always been reported to be. There were few rabbits, grouse, or caribou.[42]

Irving M. Reed, an engineer with the territory's Department of Mines, reported comprehensively on the region in 1937. The total population of the upper Koyukuk, white and native, was only 110. Coldfoot was abandoned and Bettles was almost deserted, leaving Wiseman as the only real settlement. He found small, mining operations in the Wiseman subregion and saw some hope of eventual large-scale mining on Myrtle and Slate creeks. Neither the creeks of Wild or John rivers appeared likely prospects and little was known of the Alatna. In the Bettles subregion, the South Fork had "possibilities" for dredging and dragline operations.

"Under the present economic set-up," Reed wrote, "the upper Koyukuk region as a whole is gradually reverting to wilderness. At present, many of the miners are not able, with their crude methods of mining, to make a living from the depleted gold deposits left, and rely on work from the better-off miners and the Road Commission, to carry them over each winter." If no near strikes were made and no improvements were made in transportation, Reed expected mining to end in most of the Wiseman subregion within four or five years.[43]

It seemed shameful to Reed that one of the oldest mining districts in Alaska holding a great reserve of lower-grade mining ground should be undeveloped, "that the government has neglected the Koyukuk in its roadbuilding program is a great pity." Reed recommended a road following the old trail from the Yukon to Coldfoot, a distance of 175 miles with low passes, few engineering problems, and only the South Fork river to cross. A branch from this road could follow Boulder Creek and Cripple Creek to the Chandalar.[44]

There is no mystery about the decline of mining in the Koyukuk. As described by William Brown, the region soon lost its vitality after its several fleeting booms. "With the exhaustion of easy surface placers and development of a few good drift mines," Brown noted,

> the country attracted and held only a few long-term miners--both serious drift miners and the kind of pick-and-pan miners for whom gold was more a means to enjoy the country than to make a fortune. The term miners included claim owners, laymen, and laborers. As owners of the few rich claims made decent fortunes, they left the country, leaving their claims in the hands of laymen, who in turn might make good money and leave, opening the way for laborers to become laymen . . . and so on. Occasional new discoveries and new recruits kept the system open and balanced. The pace was deliberate, with periods of stability, because drift mines took time to develop, and rich pockets were few and elusive. A good part of the population, perhaps half of it, did little if any mining, performing instead the services that miners could not take time for: getting and hauling supplies and wood, running roadhouses and saloons, hunting, gardening, teaching school, and filling the few government posts.[45] Increasingly, as the years passed by, gold mining became a kind of medium for a way of life. It shifted from being the end of human endeavor to becoming a means, joined with others like hunting and trapping. An occasional modest fortune taken from some deep-hole pocket on Nolan or Hammond kept gold in force as the ostensible reason for it all. But the community of people meant more to most of those people than the driblets of gold that allowed them to stay on as members of the community. That this evolution was happening already before World War I has been documented (I seem to leave my heart here when I go out). That it gained strength after the war, on through the Thirties, was documented powerfully by Robert Marshall--actually by the friends he made, whose lives and words told him and us, why they stayed."[46]

## Kotzebue Sound and Kobuk River

In 1897 the Kobuk River region was only known through the exploration of George Stoney's U.S. Navy expedition in 1884. But in the wild excitement of the Klondike frenzy, some individuals determined that the distant arctic river was rich in gold.

Apparently, the rush to Kotzebue Sound and the Kobuk was triggered by fraudulent reports by Captain Barney Cogan. Cogan had taken a prospector south on his ship voyage from Kotzebue Sound in fall 1897 and advised people in San Francisco that the Kobuk was a rich stream. Though it was true that the prospector had found a little coarse gold, there had been no discovery significant enough to cause a stampede. But Cogan's exaggerations served well enough, particularly his story of the miner digging out $15,000 in two hours.

Cogan's stories were broadcast by others who wished to profit from a stampede, particularly shipping companies. In spring '98, Cogan's whaling bark, *Alaska*, carried 40 hopeful prospectors. *Alaska* was part of a great fleet of ships that embarked that season for little-known Kotzebue Sound. More than 1,000 prospectors combed the Cosmos Hills and other areas for precious metals.

One seaman aboard *Alaska* saw through Cogan's misrepresentations concerning the Kobuk. Eric Lindbloom, eager to find gold, jumped ship at Port Clarence on Seward Peninsula. There he met a couple of other prospectors and joined forces. Soon they made the original discovery at Anvil Creek that led to the Nome stampede.

The argonauts to Kotzebue Sound included Thomas R. Stewart of Albany, New York, who believed the wonderful newspaper reports of a great strike. His newspaper indicated that the region's natives had been staked by local government officials to prospect and were doing well. It was also reported that two Oregon prospectors landed in Portland with $15,000 taken from the Kobuk. So, clearly, it seemed the gold was there and, surprisingly, the rich country was even much more hospitable than the Klondike. For one thing it was flat and the "Gold Fields [were] only four days' boating from ship's landing; only one day's towing; absolutely no obstacles to the immediate working of mines."[47]

After a two-month voyage from San Francisco, Stewart and other passengers on *Catherine Sudden*, a 400-ton, three-masted barkentine that had been hastily put into passenger service, were landed at Cape Blossom. A startled missionary told the travelers that no gold had been discovered in the vicinity. Most of the stampeders resolved to take their chances despite such unpleasant tidings.

Stewart and his party, although entirely without practical experience, ascended the Kobuk River and established a winter camp. The winter proved to be grim. Several scurvy-ridden men died; others were lost on the trail or were suicides. Finally, Stewart noted signs of spring: "We stood and stared, blank-eyed across the ice of the Kobuk River. It was the one hope--the road back."[48]

Stewart was one of the fortunate Kobuk stampeders. He was among the few who wintered over a second time. When news of the rush to Nome reached him, he took

passage on a ship making the 200-mile voyage south to the boom town and, eventually, staked some rich claims.

During the gold era there were many false stampedes inspired by rumors of rich strikes or deliberate frauds, but none involved so many people or caused as much grief as that to Kotzebue Sound. Joseph Grinnell's narrative of his experiences is the best of several accounts. He was excited by the prospects as his ship approached Kotzebue Sound and felt fortunate to be among "men who are flying northward like geese in the springtime."[49]

Like Stewart, Grinnell and his party found their way up the Kobuk to make a winter camp. By February, few individuals retained any hopes for success. "There is unrest everywhere," Grinnell wrote, "all admit that they have been duped . . . chagrin is the rule . . . men left families to live as best they might, in vain hope, in narrowed circumstances at home, selling or mortgaging all they possessed to outfit themselves." Grinnell knew about some 25 men lost to scurvy, drowning, or freezing, but the accurate count was actually from 50 to 100, and others of the 200-300 sick men rescued in 1899 suffered ill effects afterwards. "It is worse than war, for there is no pension," Grinnell noted.

Grinnell, himself, did not lose by the experience because of his youthful exuberance and dedication to ornithology. Gold hunting had not occupied him as seriously as observations of wildlife, specimen collection, and keeping a diary that became one of the classics of northern narrative literature as he honed the skills that were eventually to make him a world-famous zoologist.[50]

Grinnell observed that many stampeders could not recover from their original expectation that finding gold would be easy. After a little fruitless panning, most kept to the camp, not caring to do any more work, as if they were conserving energy for the day someone made a big strike: "It seems that people expected to find mines all ready to work, and, since none are visible, sit down and give it up."[51]

Some men showed energy and imagination. A keen German, soon known as the Flying Dutchman, acquired a pair of ice skates and started a mail service. For one dollar he carried letters from the various small camps on the river--Riley, Kate Sudden, Stoney, Jesse Lou, and Nugget--to Kotzebue Sound for eventually shipment Outside.

Grinnell's company prospected on the Kobuk and along the upper Koyukuk but found no gold in either area. All winter the miners debated their prospects, pondering on what course of action to take. Some suggested that the company would be held together for another year. Others considered that staying on made no sense.

Sensational news did reach the winter-bound miners in mid-April. A marvelous gold discovery had been made--not on the Kobuk or Koyukuk--but at Nome. This news decided the future for Grinnell's company. With breakup, they took their small steamer downriver to Kotzebue Sound and on to Nome. At Nome they were in time to get in on the beach sands mining that provided some easy dollars. A claim Grinnell made on a creek was jumped by some of the tough customers who infested Nome, and he was glad to end his mining career by sailing south in October.

Another diarist, M.H. Hartnett, a member of a party organized in Seattle, helped tow boats up the Kobuk River en route for the Ambler region where discoveries were reported. When news came that the Ambler "is a fake" the men coursed downriver to Kotzebue Sound with the idea of ascending the Selawik River, then decided to winter on the Kobuk instead. By mid-August, Hartnett revealed his discouragement: "Three months since leaving Seattle . . . wish we were there again for prospect of putting winter here and accomplishing nothing is not very bright." In November the party considered sending two members to investigate reports of strikes in the Koyukuk region, then decided to prospect local streams in the spring. To pass the time during the winter, literary-minded fellows of the "gulch camp" formed a reading and discussion club, starting with Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*.[52]

In spring Hartnett headed for the Ambler, prospected fruitlessly, then returned to Kotzebue Sound in July to act as a passenger agent for the schooner *General McPherson*. For each passenger ticketed, Hartnett got $2.50 and, in addition, free passage to Nome where gold excitement was intense. Other Kotzebue Sound miners who retained health and optimism after their discouraging experience also headed for Nome where, at least, one could be certain of earning wages.

George L. Webb, age 40, a Utah cattle rancher, was another Kotzebue Bay argonaut. He sailed from San Francisco aboard *Falkenburg* on May 17, 1898, and landed near the mouth of the Kobuk River on July 14. On August 4, Webb and his party had a camp 90 miles below Fort Cosmos. Already some disappointed men were leaving the country, and Webb bought 100 pounds of beans at a good price. Webb had seen no signs of gold, and men returning from upriver reported that things were "no good."

Webb wintered over and worked hard sinking a shaft on his claim. The season's cleanup was not rich enough to justify staying on and Webb moved up the Reed River for the 1899-1900 winter. By this time the region's population of prospectors had dwindled from an estimated 900 to 32 still hopeful souls.[53]

By late June 1900, Webb had had enough. "I am going back to my little old Utah Ranch," he wrote his mother, "it is better than any place I have seen since I left, and I can find as much gold there as I have here. We had great hopes in the Noatak River country, but I am satisfied there is no use fooling away any more time here."[54]

But Webb's adventures were not over. In late June he carried all his supplies from his Noatak River camp over the range to the headwaters of the Reed River. He rafted down the Reed to the Kobuk, then reached the Koyukuk, rafting down slowly while prospecting along the way. His voyage ended when the raft struck a rock and dumped him. He lost everything he owned but made it to the coast on foot, going from one prospectors' camp to another for food.

No transport was available at Kotzebue Sound, so Webb followed the coast to Nome, arriving in time to ship aboard the Revenue Marine's *Bear* for passage to Seattle. *Bear* carried a load of broke prospectors on that voyage.

Webb's movements reflect the trend of 1894-1900 among the miners who stayed in the country. Only a few who had managed to find small paystreaks on the Kobuk remained there. Most of those who stayed on for a second year moved into the Koyukuk country and did not prosper there either.

## Notes
## Chapter 11

1. Morgan Sherwood, *Exploration of Alaska* (New York: Yale University Press, 1965), 115; Fickett's diary, UAA.

2. Bettles, "Some Early Yukon River History," Bettles papers, UAF.

3. Cole, "Gordon Bettles," unpublished manuscript in author's files.

4. *Yukon Press*, January 1, 1894.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. A.G. Maddren, *The Koyukuk-Chandalar Region Alaska*. USGS Bulletin No. 532, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1913), 84-85; Irving M. Reed, "Report: Upper Koyukuk Region, Alaska," (Juneau: Alaska Territorial Dept. of Mines, 1937), 145-46; Cole, "Early Explorers" in Alaska Geographic Society, *Koyukuk*, (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publ. Co., 1983), 29; Claus Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 252, gives the number of stampeders who wintered over in '98-99 as 200.

8. Evey Ruskin, Ed., "Letters to Lizzie: A Koyukuk Gold Seeker Writes Home" (*Anchorage Daily News*, May 6, 1980), "We Alaskans," 12-13.

9. John Clark Hunt, "Adventures of the Iowa Goldseekers," (*Alaska Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 2, Spring 1977), 5.

10. Ibid., 5-7.

11. Ibid., 8.

12. The William Michaels Collection at the UAF archives includes letters from Clear Creek and letters published in an Iowa newspaper, including the exuberant letter from Frank Davis that started the Iowa enterprises.

13. *Journey to the Koyukuk*: *The Photos of J.N. Wyman, 1898-1899* (Missoula: Pictorial Histories, 1988), *passim*.

14. *Capt. J.D. Winchester's Experience on a Voyage from Lynn, Massachusetts to San Francisco, Cal., and to the Alaskan Gold Fields* (Salem: Newcomb and Gauss, 1900), 218-19.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. William Brown, *Gates of the Arctic* (NPS manuscript in press), 181-82.

18. Fonda scrapbooks, UW Northwest collection.

19. Geo. M. Hill, "The Koyukuk," (*Alaska - Yukon Magazine*, June, 1909), 211.

20. Quoted in William Brown, "Gates of the Arctic," (NPS manuscript in press), 169.

21. L.D. Kitchener, *Flag Over the North* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1954), 158-61.

22. Borchsenius to Day, August 22, 1904, NA, RG60, Letters Received.

23. *Nome Nuggett*, May 4, 1904.

24. Ibid., October 22, 1904.

25. U.S. vs. Francis Ledger, Court record, case No. 92, RG 21, FRC.

26. McKenzie to Winchester, March 20, 1903, Wickersham Collection, AHL.

27. U.S. Congress. Committee on Territories. *Conditions in Alaska*, Senate Repts., 58th Congr., 2nd sess., No. 282, Pt. 2, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904), 112.

28. Ibid., 113.

29. Ibid., 114.

30. McKenzie to George Turner, December 17, 1903, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

31. Ibid.

32. Wickersham to Rustgard, July 6, 1904, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

33. Wickersham to Rustgard, July 6, 1904, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

34. Cole, "Early Explorers," 40.

35. Ibid., 279.

36. *Alaska Weekly*, March 23, 1923; September 19, 1924; April 17 and June 12, 1925.

37. Hudson Stuck, *Voyages on the Yukon* (New York: Charles Saibner's Sons, 1917), 314.

38. Ida Williams, "Nolan on the Koyukuk,"(*Alaska - Yukon Magazine*, August 1910), 221.

39. Elizabeth H. Goddard, "Yukon and Koyukuk Rivers," typescript manuscript, Goddard Collection, UAF, for this and following quote.

40. Robert Marshall, *Arctic Village* (New York: Literary Guild, 1933), 37-38.

41. Ibid., 36-37.

42. Clip from Fairbanks newspaper with Reed, "Report: Upper Koyukuk Region; Alaska, 1937," i.

43. Reed, "Report," 165.

44. Ibid.

45. Brown, "Gates of the Arctic," 287-88.

46. Ibid., 309.

47. Thomas R. Stewart, "From Rags to Riches," (*Alaska Sportman*, September 1944), 10.

48. Ibid., 11.

49. Joseph Grinnell, *Gold Hunting in Alaska*, (Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook, 1901), 7.

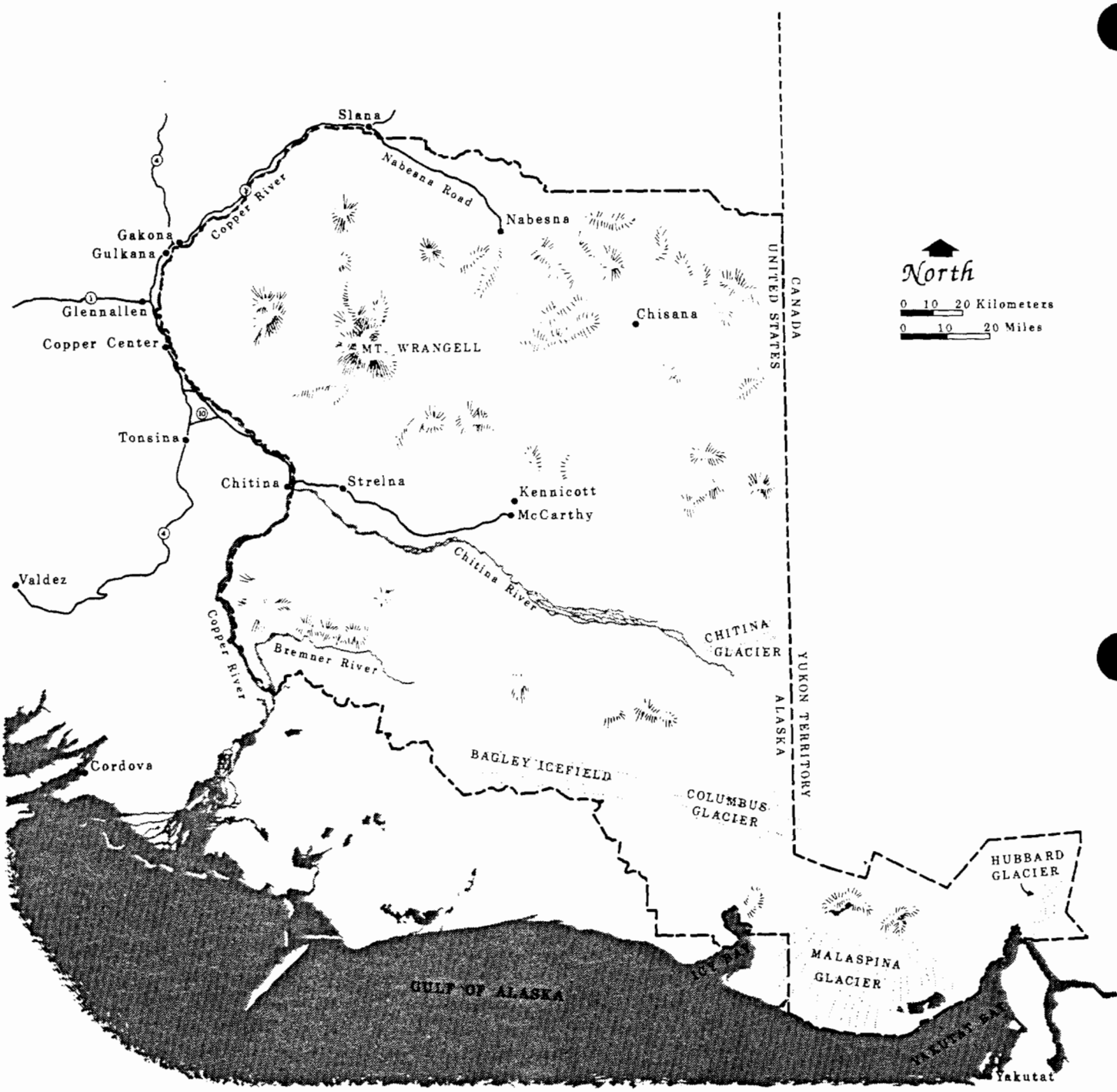
50. Ibid., 52.

51. Ibid., 27.

52. Hartnett diary, August 19, 1898, Hartnett collection, UW.

53. Webb diary, 12, author's files.

54. Ibid., 48.




WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS
NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

# Chapter 12
## Wrangell-St. Elias

Mining in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park has covered more territory than in any other Alaska park area. Much of the park's history concerns the copper development at Kennicott (the subject of Chapter 13), but the more common gold mining activity has contributed to the region's prosperity and development as well.

The Copper River basin and adjacent parts of the Yukon basin harbor two mineral-bearing zones on the southern and the northern slopes of the Wrangell Mountains. USGS called the southern belt the Kotsina-Chitina region, which included the great copper deposits, and the northern belt the Nabesna-White region. Mining in both areas, primarily was for gold, is reviewed in this chapter. Chapter 13 covers the Kotsina-Kuskulana area. Mining in the Bremner River and Chistochina districts is also discussed here, although Chistochina is not within park boundaries.

Remoteness inhibited prospecting and mining in the northern belt. As late as 1909 Alfred Brooks of USGS observed that travelers to the area were forced to use "a rather circuitous route, between 200 and 300 miles in length," from tidewater. Early exploration and mining travel into the southern belt was not easy either, but the construction of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway in 1911 mitigated some of the difficulties.[1]

### Russian Exploration

Russian settlers heard reports of rich copper deposits in the eighteenth century, but exploration efforts were thwarted by their inability to ascended the fast-flowing Copper River and the hostility of the natives. Four expeditions made faltering attempts between the discovery of the river's mouth by Nagaieff in 1781 and the effort by Klimovskii in 1819. Apparently, Klimovskii got as far upriver as the mouth of the Chitina, and a post of the Russian American Company existed there for some years. The duration of the trading post and even its location is not known.

In 1847-48, Rufus Serebrennikov led a major undertaking to explore the river's headwaters. He and three companions wintered at Taral, then moved up to the Tazlina River in the spring. Soon after starting down the Copper for the return to the coast, the Russians were killed by Indians. According to what Lt. Henry Allen learned from Chief Nicolai at Taral in 1885, the Russian's mistreatment of Indians caused their destruction. The loss of Serebrennikov soured the Russians on the Copper River interior. Later the post was reopened, then abandoned after a short time.

### American Exploration

No further interest was taken in the country until C.G. Holt, an Alaska Commercial Company trader, ascended the river in 1882 to investigate trade possibilities.

As the Indians did not appear friendly, the company decided against establishing an interior post.[2] Holt's priority as an interior traveler--probably the first prospector to use the Chilkoot Pass--is well documented. It is possible, however, that his Copper River travels followed those of a mysterious prospector whose wanderings have not been traced with certainty. A Capt. I.N. West told his story of an early gold discovery to Addison Powell in San Francisco. Powell, then preparing to join the '98 stampede, believed West's story and acted in reliance upon it. Powell's admirable narrative, *Trailing and Camping in Alaska*, suggests that he was an honest man, but West's tale remains hard to believe. West's travels in the 1880s took him from Yakutat across the range between the Bering and Malaspina glaciers, down the Tana River to the Chitina, then down the Nizina. He next crossed a pass south of Mount Wrangell to reach the White River, crossed to the headwaters of the Tanana, moved down the Copper, then ascended the Chistochina before returning to the coast at Valdez via the Copper, Klutina river and lake, and the Valdez Glacier.[3]

West is an intriguing character. If he did even half of what he alleged, he deserves recognition as one of Alaska's great explorers. And if he actually found the gold he claimed, the publication of it at the time might have changed the pattern of the northern stampedes. At the time he "confided" in Powell he was 72 years old. Before agreeing to pay Powell's expenses to Alaska and giving him a share of his gold, West wanted a pledge of secrecy. "He inquired also whether I had been bewildered; what I would take with me on such a trip; the kinds of guns and ammunition, and even what kinds of matches I would take along."[4] Powell guessed that West's discovery had been made at the headwaters of the Chistochina, but, wherever it was, West insisted that he and his Indian companion panned $600 in no time. "Gold! Why, man--come up there and I'll pay you, not only for your trouble, but you shall have an interest with me, for there is gold enough for all of us."[5]

Powell was convinced. He answered West that he would travel into the interior with the U.S. Army's trail-blazing Abercrombie expedition and would be available when West got word to him of his claim's location. Powell headed north but never heard from West again and did not stumble on West's claim either. Considering the matter later, Powell could imagine other reasons for West's failure to keep his promises than his fraudulence. Many ships that left San Francisco for Alaska went down with all hands. This or another accident might have taken West's life. At least in Alaska Powell did meet another prospector who knew West and was also searching for the "lost mine," but it still remains difficult to credit West's uncorroborated story.

## Abercrombie's Explorations

Gen. Nelson A. Miles, the U.S. Army commander of the Department of the Columbia and a famed Indian fighter, was not content to see the army excluded from Alaska. Exploration of the territory was essential, he reasoned, dispatching Lt. Frederick Schwatka to the Yukon in 1883 and Lt. William Abercrombie to the Copper

River in 1884. Miles ordered Abercrombie to ascend the Copper then explore the Tanana River valley. To justify the expeditions, Miles directed his explorers to investigate the alleged hostility of natives--a proper matter of concern for the army. As Abercrombie put it:

> The conflicting interests between the white people and the Indian of the Territory were likely in the near future to result in serious disturbance, hence it was deemed important that all possible information as to the facts should be obtained for the guidance of the military branch of the Government.[6]

Abercrombie's party landed at Nuchek, site of a trading post, on June 16, 1884, and reached the Copper River mouth five days later. The soldiers commenced the arduous job of pulling their small boats upriver and soon wondered if the river was really a serviceable path to the interior. Abercrombie described their travails:

> The water had now grown so cold that it was impossible to make any headway against it. Wading deeper than midway between the knees and trunk, one would be paralyzed after submersion for fifteen or twenty minutes so that all draft power was gone for a time, forcing the men to let go the towline and run up and down the bank to warm themselves. The water was running off a bank of ice of many thousands of acres in extent, and its effects were beginning to show themselves upon the men, whose members were becoming more or less rheumatic and swollen.[7]

As Abercrombie ascended the river, he saw other evidence that navigation of the river would be perilous even for larger, well-powered boats. The presence of two great glaciers gave the officer a nice opportunity to flatter his patrons (he named one for General Miles and the other for George Washington Childs of Philadelphia), but was otherwise threatening. The glaciers' movement sheared off its leading edge of ice and rock into the river: "The water fairly hissed, carrying with it boulders, some of them two feet in diameter, the impetus of which would break a keg or rip the bottom out of a skin boat."[8]

As Abercrombie watched, the glaciers provided an even more exciting display of nature's force in calving great slabs of ice into the rushing current. Abercrombie estimated that some of the slabs were 500 feet long, 250 feet wide, and 80 feet thick and they carried a surface burden consisting of tons of dirt and rock. Sometimes the ice movements provided scenes of unworldly splendor:

> On the night of the morning in question I beheld one of the grandest spectacles ever witnessed by living man. First, bergs came majestically sailing down stream, passing and repassing each other as the force of water backed up by their united presence became sufficient to force them through the sandy bottom of the river. . . . These monsters differ in color. Some are

white, others black, and yet others (the latter predominating) are of an aquamarine color. As they backed and filled they somewhat resembled the maneuvers of a fleet of men-of-war.[9]

## Allen's Exploration

Soon after witnessing this spectacle, Abercrombie gave up and returned to the coast, convinced that the Copper was unsuitable for navigation. His conclusion was reasonable, but his recommendation that the Susitna River be explored for its suitability as a route was not followed. Abercrombie had not visited Cook Inlet or the Susitna himself but passed along the recommendations of Ivan Petroff--census-taker, farmer, soldier, trader, and one of Alaska's most traveled men. The army command determined that another officer might succeed where Abercrombie failed and dispatched Lt. Henry Allen to the Copper River in 1885. While Allen did manage to push upriver and eventually complete the single most distinguished Alaska exploration expedition of the century, his attainments did not tame the Copper River.[10]

Allen, Sgt. Cady Robertson, and Pvt. Fred Fickett reached Nucket in March 1885, where he got valuable information from trader C.G. Holt, who had gone up the Copper to the Indian village of Taral in 1882. He also hired Peder Johnson, a prospector who had traveled with Abercrombie in 1884, and whose partner, John Bremner, had wintered over at Taral. The place of prospectors on early official exploration expeditions and the reliance of explorers on information derived from them should be noted. Fur traders had followed the explorations of Lewis and Clark on the Missouri and Columbia rivers, but in Alaska the official explorers of the American era sometimes followed the tracks of traders and prospectors.

Allen's early season start upriver allowed him to avoid the river navigation that had slowed Abercrombie. Using sleds and snowshoes, the men got beyond the Miles and Childs glaciers, over the frozen river, inside a week. Within 11 days of leaving the coast, they reached Taral, added Bremner to the party, and began exploring the Chitina River, the very name of which meant "copper" in the native language. Actually, Allen had more than rumor to incite his interest because he had been shown pure copper fashioned into knives on the coast, supposed to have originated on the Chitina. In three weeks on the river, Allen did not discover any copper lodes, which is not surprising as he had no time for prospecting. He did gain information about the country from Chief Nicolai at Taral, who later directed prospectors to copper deposits.

His mission was to push on to the Tanana. With the river's breakup, he relied upon canoes hauled up from the coast. Now he learned why Abercrombie had been discouraged by his upriver passage, tracking their boats with a 150-foot rope against the 7-to-9-mile current. Eventually, Allen left the Copper country to make the first explorations of the Tanana and Koyukuk. In all, he managed 1,500 miles of previously unknown country and showed that the Tanana could be reached from the Copper. The Copper River had provided an entry of sorts and much was learned about the region, but his exertions confirmed the unsuitability of the river route to the interior from

Valdez. It benefited the Klondike stampeders though to have Allen's published map of the Copper and Chitina rivers available.

In 1891, Lt. Frederick Schwatka and C.W. Hayes, in the course of Yukon Basin explorations, ascended the Taku River, rafted down the Teslin and Lewes rivers, then went overland from Fort Selkirk to the head of White River, then to Chitina and Taral.

With the 1897-98 gold rush, Capt. W.R. Abercrombie of the U.S. Army returned to explore the Copper River in 1898 and 1899. F.C. Schrader of the USGS attached his party to Abercrombie's expedition in 1898 and reached the present Copper Center before returning downriver. Schrader and other USGS men were to return in 1900 to investigate the great copper deposits of the country but their observations in 1898 provided excellent descriptions of the gold-rush setting.

Abercrombie asked Schrader and one of his officers to investigate the Valdez Glacier trail after miners, aware of the difficulties in ascending the Copper River, requested information on the alternative route to the interior. Late in April, the two men started up the glacier, then were stopped for five days by a blizzard that dumped 8 to 12 feet of fresh snow on the glacier. When the snow ended in rain on May 2, the men rushed on to the summit where they saw "the size and trend of the Valdez Glacier, the character of the country in which it lies, the altitude of the summit and surrounding mountains, and the nature of the country at the head of the Klutena River on the inland side of the divide."[11]

The glacier trail was difficult but, for want of a better entry, it became the chief trail to the interior. Much was made of its dangers but, as with the Chilkoot, its travails for travelers were multiplied in direct proportion to the number of trips needed to move provisions inland. Though the trail itself was not innocent of terrors, much of its bad repute should have been traced to difficult conditions the stampeders faced when they gained the interior. Unlike the Chilkoot travelers, those first crossing the Valdez Glacier did not benefit from the existence of an established route to the gold fields along with the kind of aid and security the Mounties gave to Klondike stampeders.

Despite the frustrations and hardships of 1898, conditions looked very bright for the region in 1899. The new town of Valdez was thriving as a transportation and service center to the huge Copper River country, gold had been discovered on the Chistochina district, the Nikolai copper claim on the Chitina River was located, and Abercrombie began construction of the Trans-Alaskan Military Road from Valdez to Eagle.

The start of the army's trail was not as immediately beneficial to miners as the construction that year of the White Pass and Yukon Railway to Lake Bennett was to travelers to Skagway and Dyea, but it was meaningful. By choosing the route, the government was not indicating faith in southcentral's mineral prospects. The route simply seemed a better choice, considering all distances involved than one from Cook Inlet--the other major possibility for an "All-American" route to the interior. But the trail certainly helped prospectors who remained in the region. Copper Center and other points along the trail developed and Valdez became one of the leading towns of

the territory. Notwithstanding the trail's advantages, transportation costs remained high to the districts removed from the trail and conditions did not improve until the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad was constructed.

## Cold Feet and Persistence

Sentiment for an "All-American" route created some interest in the Copper River entry to the interior. Early enthusiasm for the route was based on the belief that the lower Copper River could be ascended in small boats--which was not the case. Some of those who tried and failed remained to found Valdez and help promote the glacier route.

In 1897-98 numbers of stampeders succumbed to the apparent logic of the Valdez route to the interior despite that army explorers had not found a good entry. By choosing a port far closer to Seattle than St. Michael that did not require passage of the fearsome Chilkoot or White passes, they reasoned that they would accomplish a quick journey to the gold fields. More importantly, the route attracted stampeders because its true difficulties were not known and because rumors of mineral wealth in the Copper River region were persuasive. Most of those who chose the Valdez entry rued the day, as except for the Canadian overland routes, it proved the most arduous of all others. Many of those who wintered in the interior over 1898-99 were ravaged by scurvy. Some of the afflicted died, and most others returned to the coast resolving to leave gold hunting to others.

The experience of Charles A. Margeson and his party after crossing the glacier in 1898 were typical of many stampeders. Before moving on to Lake Klutina, the next stage of travel, the men spent a week prospecting the headwaters of the Klutina. All they found was color and a little "flour gold" but it was enough to encourage them about prospects further distant in the interior. On the 4th of July after the camp of 100 prospectors paraded and watched a baseball game and other events to celebrate the "Glorious Fourth," Margeson's group boated downriver 16 miles to the lake.

After establishing a camp at Lake Klutina, Margeson and others in his company, stamped to a reported strike nearby in "Robinson's Gulch." They found color, so they built sluice boxes and worked down to bedrock but did not recover enough gold to justify a couple of weeks' work. Now it was late summer and Margeson was amazed at the steady exodus of men leaving the country. He figured that many of those afflicted with "cold feet" had never dreamed that hardship would attend their fortune-seeking or had believed that the work of a few weeks would make them rich. Others had received bad news calling them home or were simply homesick. Once the number of "home-seekers" exceeded that of the "gold-seekers" the latter were in a good position to buy provisions cheaply. Margeson bought pork and bacon for two cents a pound and 100 pounds of beans for 75 cents. He felt very good about his bargains as winter neared, then suddenly he, too, got "cold feet" and left the country before winter.[12]

Despite sickness and discouragements more besetting than those experienced by any other aggregation of prospectors, the situation was not totally bleak for the Copper

River argonauts. During winter 1898-99 they focused more on local mineral prospects rather than on the region's access to the Klondike. Prospectors located the Nikolai Copper mine in 1899, foreshadowing what would be the greatest of all regional mineral developments, and also made more modest placer gold discoveries at Chistochina. Chief Nikolai had hosted Lt. Henry Allen in 1885 and later pointed out the copper deposits to other prospectors.

The Chistochina discovery was made by George Hazelet, whose northern career encompassed the historical trend of mining from individual entrepreneurship to corporate organization. Hazelet's future interests were to include mining at Chistochina and elsewhere in the Wrangell-St. Elias region, trail building from Chitina to Chisana, town site speculations, and, as mining field boss for the Alaska Syndicate, the direction of corporate strategies and management policies. All this grandeur was far from view of the schoolteacher-turned-prospector who crossed the Valdez glacier in '99 with his partner, A.J. Meals. Hazelet's diary catches the mood of one man who committed himself to a hard struggle in hope of improving his family's well-being. He was no daring, reckless adventurer risking a year or two in careless disregard for the future.[13]

Hazelet reached Valdez in March on the Pacific Steam Whaling company's *Excelsior*. There was no wharf, but because of the harbor's great depth, ships could run right to shore for unloading. Hazlet and Meals wasted no time before hauling their freight to the glacier. It was strenuous work: "I have now learned," said Hazelet, "what it is to make an ass of myself in earnest . . . harness yourself up to a six foot sled, put 200 pounds on it and strike for the foot of the glacier which is five miles away. Repeat this twice a day for a week and you soon have long ears." The glacier trail was crowded with about 2,200 footsore men and women. Hazelet counted about 20 women, admiring one who "helps her husband pull every load and seems as happy as if she were presiding over a nice little home."[14]

Enterprises on the trail included the quack medical practices of several suspicious characters. "If I had a sick dog that I wanted to get rid of I would call them in but not otherwise," said Hazelet.

Men represented all nationalities, shape, and ages, from boyhood to old age, "a fair representation of the average middle class Americans." Observation of divergent types amused Hazelet. Some pulled their sleds with

> all the horrors depicted in their countenances, others go along quietly with a Good morning or a How do you do, seemingly happy or pretending to be. Still others will whistle or sing some old familiar air, but there are few of that sort. The sled really seems to develop the worst side of a man, for most all are ready to 'scrap' on the least provocation.

One woman was concerned that one of the lakes of the interior, where a boat building camp rose, commemorate her name. This is "Lake Blanch," she announced to all new arrivals. Some stampeders knew the lake as Sheppard's Lake, yet Blanche had a chance because no name had been firmly established. But it is not easy to assure

such matters as Hazelet noted: "She had it written on board and posted upon the ice, but some careless cuss tore it down and now, like the women, the name must die."

Hazelet prospected on the Klutina and other streams while learning the country. Several encounters with Indians impressed him favorably with their good qualities, especially when a party of them recovered a load of blankets from the river and held them for the owner's return: "this act of the Indians shows plainly they are not of the same blood of our Nebraska Indians."[15]

On July 1, Hazelet ascended the Chistochina, one of the Copper River tributaries. Indians had told him that the river showed gold signs. Later that month, the miners sank a shaft about 4 miles from the river's mouth but were flooded out before bedrock was reached. But color signs were good. Moving upriver, they worked a sandbar and gathered some promising gold specimens. In September the miners voyaged down to Copper Center for welcome mail and provisions. Hazelet met Captain Abercrombie there and let F.C. Schrader of the USGS examine his samples of placer sand and lode rocks. Schrader's conclusions brought joy to Hazelet: "He says that if we can get to bedrock, we will surely find good paydirt." Ore samples were also promising, and Schrader agreed to gather larger samples and ship them to Washington, D.C., for a full assay.[16]

Though the Chistochina district lies outside of Wrangell-St. Elias park boundaries, the development bears on the park's history because it encouraged other prospectors in the region. Eventually, the Chistochina in the northwestern part of the Copper River basin along the southern foothills of the Alaska Range proved to be the richest placer producer in southcentral Alaska, ranking 15th overall among Alaska discoveries.[17]

## Trails of '98

The USGS, in addition to geologic investigations and surveys, was an information agency providing facts on the various routes into the country as well as mineral prospects. Pulling together and publishing such information from prospectors and other travelers was an extremely valuable function. The following summary from a report on geological investigations in 1898 gave interested miners all the most essential facts on reaching the gold district in concise form:

> From Copper Center to the Tanana, Yukon, and Fortymile rivers, the best and shortest route is the Millard trail by way of Mentasta Pass. This trail, crossing the Copper, bears northeastward somewhat near the base of Mounts Drum and Sanford, over the high ground of the big bend of the Copper, and is said to be a good, cut horse trail from Copper Center to near the Copper River below the mouth of the Slana. From Copper Center another route leads along the northwest side of the Copper River to the mouth of the Slana; this trail, however, is much longer than and not so good as the Millard trail.

> From the northwest bend of Lake Klutena at Cranberry Marsh a trail branches off up Salmon Creek Valley and leads by way of Lake Lily northward to the Tazlina River, thence down that river to the Copper. This route seems to have been started chiefly by prospectors before the snow disappeared in the spring of 1898, after which the marshiness of the country over which it ran led to its disuse. That part of it down the Tazlina, however, is an Indian trail, and is said to be pretty fair and to continue westward down the Matanuska and Knik rivers to Cook Inlet. Long ago it was in use by the Russians in traveling from Cook Inlet to Copper River.[18]

The geologist noted that earlier maps had reported a good trail from Taral northward on both sides of the Copper. "This is a mistake, for although portions of a trail are here and there met with, they are liable at any time to run out, usually extending but a short distance from the native villages. The Survey party, in coming down the Copper to Taral, found it necessary to cut trail most of the way."

Schrader did not hesitate to make route recommendations. A proposed route from Valdez into the Copper River country via the Lowe River valley, then north to cross the headwaters of the Tonsina and, descending Manker Creek valley, strike the Klutena River and trail just below the lake. "It runs over some unexplored country, but seems to be by far the most suitable of all for railroad and pack train purposes."

Another feasible route, noted by Schrader, would be from Valdez "up Lowe River, across the divide (which is only 1,800 feet high), and down the Tasnuna River the Copper, whence the transportation up the Copper would be by boat, preferably a light-draft steamer of special power." Schrader provided a useful mileage and elevation table to guide prospectors, as illustrated on the following page.

## Nizina District

The Nizina district is drained by the eastern tributaries of the Copper River between Chitina and Miles glaciers, but most mining was concentrated on Dan and Chititu creeks and their tributaries. Dan Creek was described by U.S. Army explorer Henry Allen and other early white travelers in the region. Chief Nicolai, who had a camp at the mouth of Dan Creek, was interesting to the whites because he was eager to show them copper lodes nearby.

From its development in 1901, Dan Creek has been mined continuously until recent times, which distinguishes it from virtually all other regions of Alaska. Gold has been the chief yield although about 40 tons of copper nuggets have also been produced. Dan Creek has also been famed as the discovery site of a huge copper nugget, nearly 3 tons, which has become a museum piece. The history of Rex Creek, a tributary of the Chititu, has been similar to Dan's except for the lack of copper mining. Golconda Creek is the only other stream in the district where successful placer production has occurred. Most of the gold was mined at Golconda from 1901-1916.

**Schrader's Mileage and Elevation, Copper River Region**

| Place | Miles | Elevation in feet |
|---|---|---|
| Valdez | 0 | 0 |
| Foot of Valdez glacier | 4 | 210 |
| Top of third bench | 8 | 830 |
| Twelvemile camp, at foot of fourth bench | 6 | 2,750 |
| Foot of summit | 22 | 3800 |
| Summit | 23 | 4,800 |
| Foot of Klutena glacier | 29 | 2,020 |
| Onemile camp | 30 | 1,960 |
| Twelvemile camp | 33 | 1,930 |
| Sawmill camp | 35 | 1,740 |
| Twenty-fourmile camp, at head of Lake Klutena | 46 | 1,673 |
| Cranberry marsh | 64 | 1,673 |
| Foot of Lake Klutena | 79 | 1,670 |
| Amee Landing | 85 | 1,370 |
| Coxe Landing | 90 | 1,320 |
| Cook Bend | 95 | 1,240 |
| Bowder Spring, on bluff | 97 | 1,590 |
| Copper Center, at mouth of Klutena | 112 | 1,050 |
| Mentasta Pass (by Millard trail) | 205 | 2,300 |

Clarence Warner and Dan Kane were the original locators of Dan Creek (named for Kane) in 1901 and were grubstaked by Stephen Birch. The Dan, which flows into the Nizina River 4 miles north of Chititu Creek and four miles south of the Chitistone River, drains an area of 45 square miles. After a strike on Chititu Creek the following year, a modest stampede into the region occurred in 1902 and 1903.[19]

In 1902 Robert Blei grubstaked several prospectors to search for copper prospects in the Nizina district. Instead of copper, the prospectors found gold on Chititu Creek. News of the discovery caused a small influx of miners but did not prevent Blei, Frank Kernan, and Charles Kopper from gaining control of most of Chititu, Rex, and White creeks. Production in 1903 involved 135 miners hired by Blei (lower Chititu), Kernan (upper Chititu), and Koppers (small section between others' claims). The base camp for the Chititu and the Young and Dan Creek diggings was Sourdough City on the south bank of the Nizina River at the mouth of Young Creek, 8 miles southeast of McCarthy. Smaller camps--Kernanville and Kopperstown--were built on the Kernan and Kopper claims.[20]

Walter C. Mendenhall and Frank C. Schrader of the USGS reported on the new district in 1903. Their short published description of the discovery, geography, and current mining was the only official information available to eager readers of government reports. The government men used a map of the district given them by miner George M. Esterly and were cautiously optimistic about future prospects:

> In June and July, 1902, reports reached Valdez to the effect that coarse gold had been found on the upper Nizina. The reports were sufficiently definite to cause considerable excitement in the town, and many who were free to go promptly stampeded to the new district, only to find that through the abuse of the power of attorney practically all of the available property had been staked. The Nizina field includes the drainage basins of three southeast tributaries of the upper Nizina River--Young Creek, Chititu Creek, and Dan Creek . . . In the present embryonic state of development it is not possible to predict with any definiteness the future of these creeks as gold producers. It is thought, however, that a district may be created here which will yield as well as the Chistochina. More than this is scarcely to be expected.[21]

In 1903 mining engineer L.A. Levensaler voyaged to Alaska with Horace V. Winchell who had options on the Nizina River and Chititu Creek. After Levensaler reported somewhat favorably on the properties--placer ground consisting of benches, Winchell sold out to the Marcus Daly estate. The new owners of the options sent Levensaler back in February 1904 to survey and make "a contour map from which yardage could be computed." The party included "an experienced placer man" and some Butte, Montana, miners who were to run prospect tunnels to bedrock.

George Hazelet conducted the party from Valdez in horse sleds. The trip was eventful because an early breakup of a lake impounded by the Kennicott Glacier caught

them on the Chitina River. They lost 6 tons of food and horse feed and had to push on overland with pack horses. Their investigation was a major effort involving 20 men for the entire summer and the ground did not prove valuable enough to take up the options.

Levensaler returned to the region in 1908. His employer, Stephen Birch, the Kennecott Copper developer, wanted the creek prospected and mapped. In 1909 Levensaler was dispatched to Kennicott to prepare the Bonanza and Jumbo claims for mining and remained with the copper operation for many years. Birch sent James Galen to Dan Creek for further testing, then in 1910, turned over his properties to his brother, Howard Birch, an engineering graduate of the Columbia School of Mines.

Mining was confined to pick-and-shovel methods until 1907-08 when the first hydraulic plant was installed. Birch and other miners were encouraged by the construction of the Nizina Bridge in 1914 which gave them the use of an all season haul road.

The vicissitudes of mining included the destructive force of nature. Birch's hydraulic plant valued at $70,000 had been in operation for only three days in September 1913, when swift rising water tore through the valley carrying dams, pipelines, sluice boxes, cabins, and huge trees downstream in a rampaging flood. For an area of 3 miles the turbulent stream altered the landscape. As a newspaper noted, "the creek had taken on the appearance of a glacial moraine." Within a month Birch and his 25-man crew managed to repair the damage and re-establish operations on safer ground. A similar mishap had occurred in 1911 and this time Birch relocated on ground high enough to prevent any further flooding.[22]

Dan Creek's development as a well paying district had come slowly. In the early years of the century individual miners did not do very well as they lacked machinery to remove the scattering of large boulders. It took a corporate organization to acquire 700 acres from the original holders and finance a hydraulic operation.

In 1918 Birch invested in an extensive hydraulic system that enabled miners to attack a considerable hill lying over the ancient creek bed. Birch sold out to J.J. Price in 1924 and Price, with H.A. Ives and L.A. Levensaler, formed the Dan Creek Hydraulic Mining Company. The company improved Birch's hydraulic system on the lower creek.

Despite such intensive mining of the limited area, speculators became interested in the Dan's prospects again in the 1930s. The Nicolai Placer Mines Company, successor to the Dan Creek Hydraulic Mining Company from 1928, was reorganized in 1934 as the Pardners Mine Corporation. New equipment was brought in and a dam and reservoir was constructed just below the canyon, connecting it with several hundred feet of wood flume and a mile and a half of pipe to a water source. The company mined with a workforce of seven to 14 men until 1940 (although the name changed back to the Nicolai Miners Company in 1937). In 1940 the claims were leased by the Joshua Green Association, but the closure of the railroad and, subsequently, wartime restrictions on mining effectively ended large-scale mining.

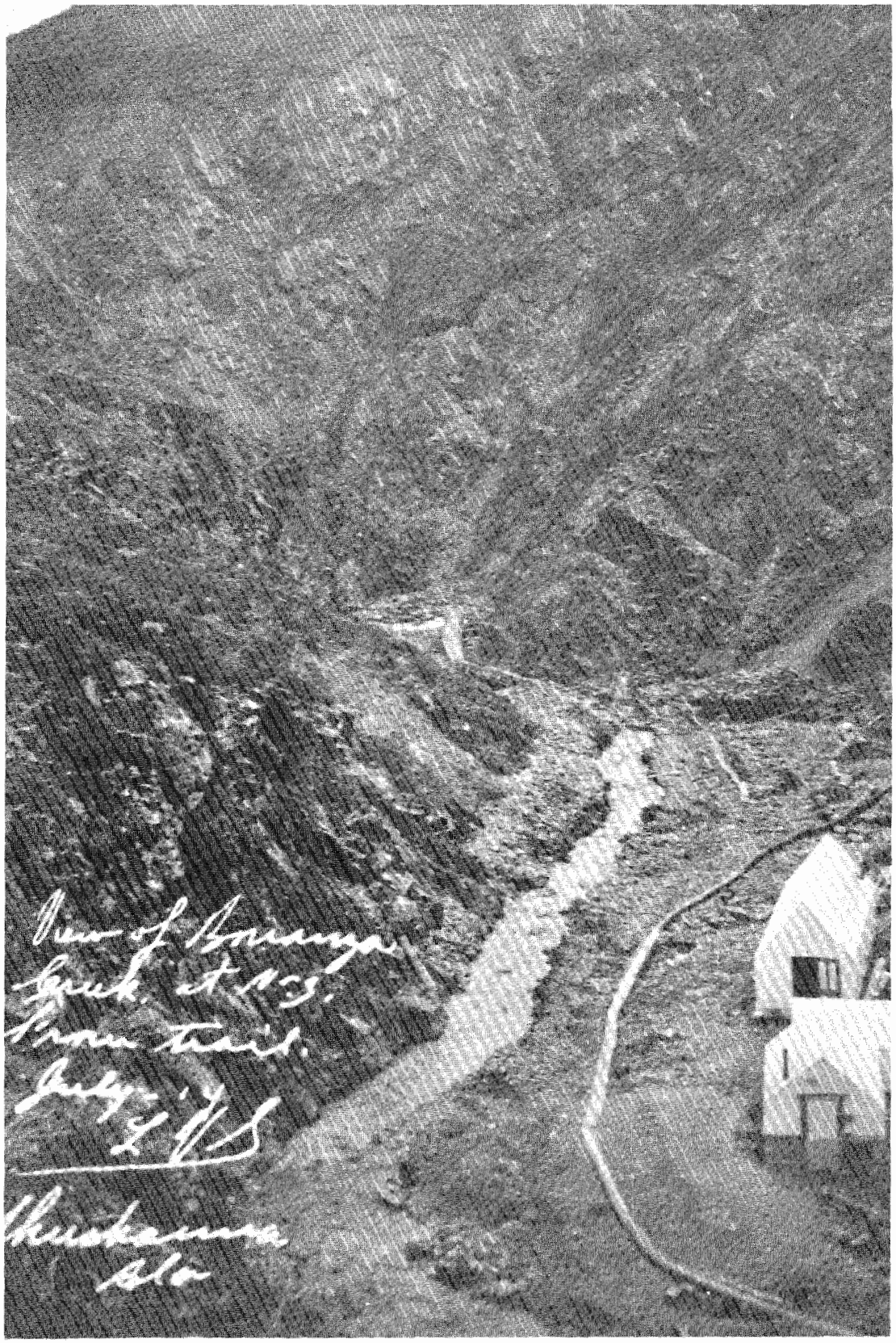
Chititu had a sawmill and, from August 1902, a road tramway connecting the camps to the diggings. Charles Bridges designed the system which used local spruce


Three-ton copper nugget found in Nugget Creek, 1903

Anchorage Historical & Fine Arts Museum

Freighting to Chisana

Alaska State Library




Bonanza Creek, Chisana district


Nabesna Mine

Anchorage Historical & Fine Arts Museum


Pack mules deliver the goods, Chisana, 1914

Alaska State Library

Camp on Little Eldorado Creek, Chisana district, 1913

University of Alaska

logs for rails and ties for its 5-mile length. Gold production was $135,000 in 1903, but unfortunately this nice yield was not a harbinger of a bright future. Subsequently, production dropped, and in 1906 Blei's Chititu Development Company was bankrupt. George Esterly purchased the property for $10,000.

Esterly built another sawmill, a lighting plant, machine shop, pipeline, and even a telephone line from the camp to the diggings. In about 1907, Esterly sold out to J.D. Meenach but remained to manage what was called the Nizina Mining company. By 1909, between Esterly and Kernan, the creek's hydraulic operations employed 50 men. Production was $40,000 in 1910.

Most of the Chititu activity from 1910 to 1919 consisted of the movement of paper as various parties gained and then relinquished control of claims. Even the completion of the Nizina Bridge in 1914, which made it easier to haul in heavy equipment, did not immediately revive mining. Technology did advance by 1921-22 with the installation of a hydraulic plant on Rex Creek, giving the area its highest production since 1907.

For new owners, the Hanover Bank and Trust Company, Hamlin Andrus expanded the Nizina Mining Company (or Rex Creek Mining Company) operation in 1924 with the employment of 35 men. Andrus improved the hydraulic plants on Chititu and Rex creeks in the early 1930s. It was during this period that Andrus' superintendent, C.H. Kraemer, moved the camp from Nizina (which had lost its post office in 1926) to the present and well-preserved Chititu at the confluence of Chititu, Rex, and White creeks.

Production continued through 1950, although yield was modest. Thanks to Tony Dimond, once the underpaid U.S. Commissioner at Chisana in 1913 and a hopeful miner on Young Creek earlier, the Chititu mine was exempted from wartime restrictions on mining. The influence of Dimond, then Alaska's delegate to Congress, could not insure prosperity. The mine was shut down in 1952, and the Hanover Trust employed Walter Holmes as caretaker until his death in 1964.

## Miners of Note

Among the Nizina miners was Edward H. Stroecker, whose peregrinations suggest the restlessness of the typical gold hunter. Stroecker, a young San Francisco accountant, resisted the Klondike lure until 1900, when he joined a group heading for the Kuskokwim. The venture showed no success, and Stroecker returned to San Francisco after a few months. Within weeks he headed north again with a companion, landing from *Excelsior* at Valdez in January 1901. In March they crossed the Valdez Glacier, sledded up the Copper and Chistochina rivers to Slate Creek, prospected over the season, then rafted back to Valdez. In 1902, Stroecker mined for wages on Slate Creek and wintered again in Valdez, tending bar at the Montana Saloon, then stampeded to Nizina in 1903. After a few weeks on Chititu Creek, he joined a group of miners grubstaked to prospect at the head of White River. En route, the party crossed three glaciers, the Nizina, Frederika, and Skolai, then prospected on Hosfeldt Creek without

success. In spring 1904 Stroecker returned to Chititu Creek for the mining season. In early fall they joined a party traveling to the head of the White River and over the divide to the head of the Chisana, thence down the Tanana to Fairbanks by boat. From this time Stroecker's adventures lie outside the Wrangell-St. Elias region, but more years passed before he chose a settled life and eventually became an important banker in Fairbanks.[23]

The country attracted Tony Dimond, a man who was to move from mining to distinction in politics. In 1905 Anthony ("Tony") Dimond and his partner, Joseph Murray, traveled from Valdez to the Nizina River. Murray led Dimond to prospects he had investigated a year earlier, including Young Creek and Calamity Gulch, tributaries of the Nizina. The men worked through the summer and fall, returning to Valdez in January to file on their claims. Although they told people they had found "good prospects," their claims were only mildly encouraging--and they were broke. Murray got the city magistrate's job, while Dimond supported himself with odd jobs but made summer excursion to the Nizina for prospecting and some work on his claims. In 1909 he prospected the Chitistone River and located a copper claim there. After a few years of divided interest, Dimond commanded work as a miner for others. He was a powerful 200-pound 6-footer, and the Houghton Alaskan Exploration Company hired him in 1909 and 1910 to oversee the assessment and improvement work on its copper claims on McCarthy Creek in the Kennecott area.

The Young Creek claims held by Dimond and Murray began to look promising when Dimond started working them during the 1911 season. A reporter for the *Chitina Leader* was pleased to predict that a rich strike was coming: "There are veritable mountains of pay gravel in many places, which the creek shows good colors in almost every pan. Numerous holes have been sunk and some tunneling has been done by the owners, and in every instance the most flattering results have been obtained."[24]

Dimond tried to sell an interest in his properties to investors capable of doing hydraulic work, but nothing came of it. The uncertainty of mining was one reason for Dimond's pursuit of a legal education during these years, first through study on his own, then by clerking for Murray and Tom Donohue in Valdez after an accident left him with a badly shattered leg. When Dimond became a member of the bar, he was eligible to receive an appointment as U.S. commissioner for Chisana in 1913. Later he was to hold the most important of Alaska's elected offices, that of delegate to the U.S. Congress.

Nizina had a post office from 1903-1926 during its existence as a mining camp. The camp was located on Chititu Creek, 5 miles southeast of its junction with the Nizina River, and served diggings on Dan, Young, and Chititu creeks. Later another camp, Sourdough, on the south bank of the Nizina at the mouth of Youngs Creek, was active from 1908 to 1911 when McCarthy became the region's trading center. Even during Nizina's heyday of 1902-1905, the boom and building bustle was of modest proportions. By aoubt 1906 virtually all the claims were held by George Esterly (lower creek) and his principal or by Frank Kernan (upper creek). Though the usual exaggera

tions of great wealth spread abroad, it was obvious to the first miners that the gold-bearing areas were small.[25]

Miners hired Outside soon learned first-hand about the remoteness of their workplace. When Harold Smith left Oregon in 1909 he voyaged to Valdez to join several other men hired by Kernan. In late March the men left snowed-in Valdez over the Richardson Trail, hauling a hand sled. After five days, they reached Tonsina and took the Copper River-Chitina trail, leaving the comforts of roadhouse stations behind. Another five days brought them to the mouth of the Tonsina and a halt of three weeks. News from the mines indicated there was no hurry as everything there was snowed in. Fortunately, the miners were able to bunk with a freighting outfit bound for the mines. When the miners finally reached Chititu, they mucked out one of the many empty log cabins and settled in. John Fagerberg operated the only business in Chititu, a store-roadhouse. Fagerberg's contribution to the isolated camp's economic amenities was an important one. More information exists on Fagerberg's affairs than other storekeepers because his wife Anna sued him for divorce in 1912. They had married in 1907 at Seattle, but Anna made only two short visits to Alaska because of a disagreement over her role. She wanted a separate dwelling and no roadhouse duties, while he thought she should run the roadhouse and be content living in it. "She is a woman," Fagerberg complained, "who insists upon having her own way or will in all matters of marital interest." When thwarted, he alleged, she grew hysterical and threw herself on the floor.

Anna denied all this. She had been keen to run the roadhouse, but John wanted her to remain with her parents in Seattle. When she came to Nizina, John put her out of the house, then hired a housekeeper who was lodged in two rooms furnished more splendidly than those Anna had occupied. The judge believed Anna and allowed her alimony. It appeared that Fagerberg's frugality had caused the domestic problems. He was channeling income from Nizina and properties owned in Seattle into a venture involving the shipment of cattle to Alaska. As a meat provider, Fagerberg took advantage of Alaska's natural wealth in cold storage facilities, caching his meat in a cave carved into the Kennicott Glacier until needed.[26]

Mining could not commence until Smith and the others removed 14 feet of ice--frozen floodwater that covered the diggings. With dynamite, pick, and drill they cleared the obstruction by June 1 and were joined by other miners who had worked on railroad construction over the winter. The 16-man crew worked a hydraulic ("giant") to tear away the overburden and wash the soil into the sluice box. Cleaning away large rocks was a major part of the work. The weekly cleanup required the pulling of riffles and lining boards from the sluices and the direction of a light head of water to separate the gold from the gravel. Copper nuggets found with the gold were discarded because separate handling of them was not economical. Copper and silver were much more plentiful on Dan Creek, where the annual cleanup of copper yielded about a ton of nuggets which were sacked and transported to the railhead at McCarthy.[27]

Although the community of Nizina retained its post office until 1926, most of its trade activity shifted to McCarthy in 1911. As the station on the Copper River and

Northwest Railway closest to the company town at Kennecott, McCarthy's advantages as a regional hub were obvious. McCarthy was laid out on John Barrett's homestead. Barrett, once holder of Mother Lode and Green Butte copper claims, sold the Mother Lode to Kennecott in 1919. His efforts to develop Green Butte were aborted because of declining copper prices in the 1920s.

## "The Feudal Barons"

Mining operators of these times generally were reputed to be hard-working fellows of no particular romantic distinction, but a federal judge considered two of them as akin to greedy medieval aristocrats. One of them, Frank Kernan, who employed Smith at Nizina, was no stranger to litigation. Lawsuits were one hazard of mine ownership, and some of Kernan's were particularly interesting. On one occasion he destroyed a cafe building next to the Vienna Bakery owned by Charles Malander at Nizina. Malander, aggravated by Kernan's removal of the building he thought he had purchased from two woman who ran the cafe, wanted damages. But Kernan prevailed because he still owned the ground and structure. Besides no one disagreed that the cafe building had to go because it sat over potentially rich bedrock.[28]

As might be expected, strife was no stranger to Kernan and George Esterly, the two dominant operators in the Nizina. George Esterly, who managed the claims of John E. Andrus and some of his own, was a mining engineer who had stampeded north in 1897. As pick-and-shovel miners exhausted the gold they could recover with primitive methods and moved along, Esterly acquired their claims for hydraulic operation. Esterly spent about $250,000 for improvements between 1907 and 1910. Kernan followed the same practice in his section of the diggings, and the two operators cooperated on some ventures. For a time Esterly held an appointment as U.S. deputy marshal while Kernan was U.S. commissioner, so major property owners had the advantage of some official authority in dealing with outsiders. Esterly used his authority to have a jail built, specifically, he told friends, to lock up a claim jumper who challenged his rights on a particular claim.

The two operators benefited through cooperation, as in arranging their seasonal outfitting together. But cooperation gave way to bitterness and litigation when the men fell out over payment of their shares of the shipping costs. A more serious dispute occurred over the essential matter of water. When Kernan diverted water from White Creek to his claims, Esterly destroyed his flume. Kernan got an injunction against Esterly's interference, so Esterly retaliated by suing for recovery of Emma Bench claims allegedly jumped by Kernan.

Such litigation was no light matter for the parties involved or for the court. After years of wrangling in the courts, a fed-up district judge decided that the claim-jumping suit "illustrated feudal barons or, modernly, financial barons exploiting their domains, relying on the tacit acquiescence of neighboring barons not to invade their territories except in cases of falling out. Plaintiff and defendant had absorbed all individual claim

owners and were alone and in conflict." The court decided for Kernan, concluding that Esterly's suit was more retaliatory than substantial.[29]

The water dispute case brought by Kernan against Esterly was decided at about the same time as the "feudal baron" claim-jumping case described above and was won by Kernan. Former miner Tony Dimond was his attorney. Aside from the legal issues involved, litigation sometimes produced documentation on famous characters. In this case, testimony established that Charley Anderson, the famed "Lucky Swede" worked a lay at Chititu in 1903 with three other men who had worked for him on his rich Klondike claim.[30]

## Early Days on the Nabesna

North of the great Wrangell and Saint Elias ranges are two extensive glacier-fed river systems, the Nabesna and Chisana. Jacksina Creek forms the headwaters of the Nabesna, and the Chisana heads directly at the Chisana Glacier. At Northway Junction, the Nabesna and Chisana converge to form the Tanana River, the longest tributary of the Yukon, which flows 440 miles to reach the great river.

The Nabesna Valley was not carefully investigated until 1899, when Alfred Brooks and William Peters of the USGS and Oscar Rohn and A.H. McNeer of the U.S. Army conducted separate expeditions. Early prospectors seeking placer gold had traveled through the area, but none found anything of note. Post-Klondike era prospectors sought copper, but the region's chief resource proved to be in quartz, and that in limited quantities.

Of the routes used by prospectors, Brooks wrote:

> In the past the few prospectors who penetrated this region limited their journeys chiefly to the larger waterways. In the open season they followed these in boats, or more often in downstream trips on rafts, and in the winter traversed their frozen surfaces with dog teams. The Indians also use cumbersome rafts for navigating the rivers, which they construct very ingeniously without the use of tools. When they are unprovided with axes, they use drift timber or burn off dead trees, and fasten them together with withes. They also construct well-shaped birch-bark canoes, which are decked over in the kayak fashion and are usually only large enough for one or two persons.[31]

On their 1899 expedition, Brooks and Peters met two prospectors, E.J. Cooper and H.A. Hammond, while examining copper prospects on Kletsan Creek, a tributary of the White River. Copper and Hammond are credited as the first to have taken pack animals through Cooper Pass on the old Indian trail.[32]

The army explorers, Oscar Rohn and A. McNeer, who also looked over the Chisana and Nabesna valleys had entered the region after crossing the Nizina Glacier, which had not been easy. They spent 15 days traveling just 47 miles to reach the Chisana. Once at the Chisana, the explorers were uncertain about their location and

the relationships of the region's rivers, but they learned more after pushing on to the Nabesna:

> During the trip over the glacier the storms which are almost constant on the summit at that time of the year, the difficulties of traversing glacial ice, and snow-blindness absorbed our attention and left us no time to speculate on what drainage we were reaching. When, however, the glacier had been crossed, the latter became the all-absorbing question. After following the stream which headed in the glacier for a distance of 12 or 15 miles in a northeasterly direction, and finding that it led out of the mountains in a direction almost due east, we became convinced that it was the Tanana River, and we decided to make a portage through a gap in the mountains to the west, by which we hoped to reach what we felt sure was a branch of the Tanana, called by the natives Nabesna.[33]

The first quartz gold discovery was made on Jacksina Creek, the headwaters of the Nabesna River, in 1899. Prospectors were not too excited because quartz mining required heavy equipment, including a stamp mill. During the gold-rush stampedes, quartz might be noted and, if convenient, located, but the prospectors quickly moved on looking for placer deposits offering an immediate return from their pick-and-shovel efforts. It was not until 1903 that the 1899 discovery was reported by a Valdez newspaper in an interview with K.J. Field:

> In 1899 a party of prospectors were camped on the Jacksina and were looking for placer gold. Mr. Field was one of the party and during his prospecting he discovered that a certain slide which came off the mountain contained much fine gold though not sufficient to pay. He concluded that this gold came from a quartz ledge which could be plainly seen above the slide but as in those days quartz in that locality was considered worthless he continued his search for placer.[34]

In 1902 the USGS again investigated the Nabesna country, looking particularly at quartz finds reported on Monte Cristo Gulch, California Gulch, and Orange Hill and at the head of the Nabesna River east of the Nabesna Glacier. They found only low-grade gold quartz of uncertain economic potential. There was a small stampede from Dawson to Beaver Creek near the international border in 1902. Beaver and its tributaries were staked far and wide, but the few holes put down did not yield anything very valuable. Rumors of a placer discovery had triggered this stampede, but subsequent prospecting was generally confined to the search for lode deposits, particularly copper.

Copper seemed more promising than gold in the Nabesna region, particularly after the discovery of the great Bonanza claim at Kennicott. Ever-optimistic, miners speculated that the north side of the mountains would be as rich as the south side. One prospector told awed folks in Valdez in 1902 that he had discovered a ledge of copper

500 feet long between the Chisana and Nabesna rivers and could actually see a million dollars worth of exposed copper.[35]

This exaggerated report stimulated prospecting endeavors in 1902. B.F. Millard of Valdez grubstaked W.A. Dickey who staked 41 copper claims on the Nabesna and carried out ore samples for testing. Dickey's prospects did not amount to anything, but he found a fame of sorts later by suggesting the name adopted for Mount McKinley.

Prospecting went on in 1903-04, but most was done by Nizina miners who were en route to the gold strike at Fairbanks. The Nizina men crossed the Skolai Pass to White River, thence to the head of the Nabesna or Chisana and on the Tanana to Fairbanks.

In 1903 K.J. Field, who had located gold quartz on Jacksina Creek in 1899, returned with other miners to stake gold and copper claims. Field and Paul Paulson formed the Royal Development Company (originally to Royal Gold Mining Company) in 1905 to develop 28 Jacksina Creek gold claims. Two years later the company installed a three-stamp mill. According to contemporary sources, this was the first mill moved into the interior from Valdez.

Another energetic prospector was Henry Bratnober, an Englishman considered a quartz mining expert, who first saw the country in 1898 on an expedition with Jack Dalton. Bratnober and Dalton took a mule packtrain into the upper Tanana in 1903 looking for copper prospects. On reaching Valdez, Bratnober told newsmen that he found nothing exciting but saw 300 starving prospectors at the head of the Tanana. Such disparaging remarks were considered bad. "This pot-bellied old reprobate," declared the *Valdez News*," has some object in spreading these slanderous reports aside from the mere pleasure which some people take in lying."[36]

The *News* might have been right because Bratnober visited Jacksina Creek the next season. Although he refused to invest in the Field claims, he returned again in 1905 with a small steamboat. The 120-foot *Ella*, a gas-powered sternwheeler launched at Whitehorse, had trouble reaching the Nabesna on the Tanana waters but finally succeeded in late July. Bratnober returned to Fairbanks, then dispatched *Ella* with men and an outfit for wintering on the Nabesna. On leaving the country this time, Bratnober talked like a booster; his expedition would open up "a good district." He did hedge somewhat on his expectations by insisting that a railroad was needed. He hoped that the Copper River Railroad would be extended to the Yukon.[37]

Bratnober did not persist in developing properties in the region. The Royal Development Co., unlike Bratnober, did work its claim. In 1907 a three-stamp mill was brought in to mill 60 tons of ore, but the yield was a disappointing $12 in gold per ton of ore, so the company ceased operations.

Prospecting in both the Nabesna and Nizina districts dropped sharply as miners stampeded from these districts to Fairbanks in 1903-05. It took the Chisana strike in 1913 to revive interest in the Nabesna. Men stampeding from Fairbanks to Chisana passed through the Nabesna district and some stopped for a closer look.

Bratnober and other mining men knew that development in the Nabesna, even assuming the discovery of large mineral deposits, would require an effective transporta-

tion network. By effective transportation he meant railroads: "It is no use to build wagon roads for what would you do with them when built." Roads would not get ore to the coast cheaply enough, so Bratnober hoped for an extension of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway to the Nabesna and the Yukon.

But the Alaska Syndicate did not extend the Copper River and Northwest Railway nor did the government provide the rail service Nabesna miners wanted. Such an expensive undertaking was not justified as the district never produced much ore. USGS continued its mineral investigation in 1908, but the survey men did not see much mining activity. The Royal Development Company had shut down its stamp mill after milling only 6 tons of ore, and there were no other hot prospects in the country.

## Chisana

There was a major gold rush in Alaska to the Chisana River in 1913 (always spelled Shushana earlier) following the discovery of good prospects by partners William James, Peter Nelson, and Frederick Best that year. They had been in the region in 1912 when a local native called Indian Joe claimed to have led James to a gold-quartz lode and placer gold. James later insisted that the placer discovery owed nothing to direction from Indian Joe. Whatever the truth, James had been encouraged, and in 1913 James, Nelson, and Matilda Wales returned for further prospecting on Bonanza Creek.

Andrew Taylor, also prospecting in the area, returned with Nelson to Dawson for supplies while James moved up to Little Eldorado. About 700 feet upstream, he panned "$30 to $40 within a few minutes." This yield stirred James' expectations mightily. Perhaps he had found something of Klondike proportions![38]

William James had been a hard rock miner in California when the Klondike discovery drew him north in '97. According to one story, his eagerness induced his sale of a Ransburg prospect for $4,000--a claim that later produced millions. At any rate, he prospected in the Yukon region and on the Seward Peninsula without achieving any remarkable success. By 1908 he was ready to try the yet-undeveloped White River country, grubstaking himself by trapping and hunting.[39] Matilda Wales, James' wife, must have been considered a hearty prospector in Dawson because she was chosen by Edward Erikson to locate claims. She staked No. 1 Chicken Creek for Erikson on June 30, 1913. Wales and other discoverers could not immediately protect their claims by recording them as a local recorder did not reach the remote district until July 22. This lag in time encouraged claim jumping litigation and some violence.[40]

Among the original discoverers, Fred Best was well-known in the Fortymile country as co-owner with Fred Purdy of the Cassiar Roadhouse. His letters home comprise an informative, personal record of the development. Best's ground on No. 3 Bonanza Creek did not compare with No. 1 Eldorado, where "four men took out $800 a day last summer." He had hopes for profits in 1914 despite the high wages needed for miners ($6 daily plus board, which amounted to another $3.50 per day) and high transportation costs. Food prices were high; flour was 40 cents a pound, and beans cost 25 cents a

pound. "The stampeders," Best complained about suppliers, "are trying to get rich quick."[41] His ground was easy to work, however, as it was shallow and easily shoveled into sluice boxes.[42]

Miners had no trouble figuring out when the season ended in 1914. Creeks rose several feet in a few hours in mid-August, wiping out the unwary along the creeks who lost flumes, dams, and sluice boxes. Others, whose claims were not along the creek, continued cleanup. Best made a few thousand dollars, even though he hired some 40 men in July and August and paid $400 daily in wages. Bonanza Creek had been good to him, and he could safely exult: "I am on the paystreak at last! And I hope it will keep up."[43]

## Boosting Chisana

The evolution of every mining camp was affected to some extent by the quality of its boosters. "There is no doubt that it is the richest since the Klondike," cried the *Chitina Leader*, of the Chisana strike, on July 22, 1913. Stampeders were arriving from every camp in the interior, and mines on Dan and Nizina creeks had been shut down for want of men, trumpeted the *Leader*. Blackburn and McCarthy were "practically deserted," and half of Chitina's population had left. The railroad had to put on a special car at Chitina to handle the flow. Even Seattle felt the excitement. The *Leader* was delighted to report that President J.E. Chilberg of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce predicted an immediate "exodus" of a thousand people from Puget Sound. A report from Cordova indicated that modern technology might play a role in the stampede:

> [A] movement is on foot to secure Captain Martin, the aviator who made the aeroplane flights at Fairbanks, July Fourth . . . and prevail upon him to go to McCarthy and run an aerial express for passengers . . . the distance is little over 100 miles, and it is believed that many of the stampeders would avail themselves of this means of travel.[44]

News remained exciting through August. A real stampede from Outside was expected. The *Leader* also noted a sensational advance in transportation: the arrival of John Ronan and John Ferguson from Fairbanks by auto "in 45 hours running time. It demonstrates that with the expenditure of a reasonable sum of money" the Alaska Road Commission could make a summer auto route of the government road. Somewhat prophetically, the *Leader* suggested that if Col. Wilds Richardson "were to succeed in building a boulevard in the interior country he might succeed in immortalizing his name." The highway between Fairbanks and Valdez from which a branch reached Chitina is officially the Richardson Highway.[45]

According to the *Leader*, terrible wrongs had been committed by folks in other towns trying to influence stampeders' selection of the best route to the gold fields. In Skagway an extra edition of the newspaper falsely described the drowning of 16 men

and 14 horses on the Chitina route. Sponsors of this "viciously false rumor" were, of course, promoting travel via Skagway and Whitehorse.[46]

Changes in the mining law enacted by the territorial legislature encouraged expectations for the new district. The laws became effective August 1 and required $100 discovery work on a claim within 90 days of discovery. This change seemed a hardship to some Chisana miners, who did not believe 90 days was enough for staking, then getting out and back in with a winter's outfit. Of course this and other new provisions--like limiting each prospector to two powers of attorney--were moot points for the first discoverers, who worked under the previously existing laws.

By August 16, stampeders were already returning to Chitina. They did not knock the Chisina strike but had been unable to stay long for want of provisions. Will James, Carl Whitham, and others were still making big cleanups, but the ground was already beginning to freeze.[47]

## Fairbanks and Chisana

As a stimulant to a flagging economy, a gold stampede could hardly be beat. Though a gold discovery near a town was preferred, distant locations did not always deter promoters. Thus in 1913, news of the Chisina (Shushana) strike galvanized Fairbanks businessmen into activity and advertising in Seattle and Alaska newspapers. Never mind that Fairbanks was 500 hard miles away from Chisana, there was no better supply center nearer, argued the Fairbanksons. A glance at the map might make such claims appear exaggerated, but there was some merit in the argument. Dawson, much neared to Chisana, had drawbacks as a jumping-off place. "Remember," the *Fairbanks Times* noted, "goods shipped by the Canadian route are subject to customs duty at boundary line."[48]

Geography and sentiment were called into play by Fairbanks promoters. The Tanana was the "natural highway" because the Chisana actually formed part of the Tanana River headwaters and, of course, Fairbanks lay on the Chena River a few miles from the Tanana. And the Tanana route was "All-American," they insisted, hoping to evoke patriotic support for a route that avoided the upper Yukon and Canadian territory. Miners should not be misled by the apparently logic of the White River route to Chisana, promoters argued: "The river at best is only navigable to the head of the Donjek, by boats such as those of the Sidestream Navigation Company, and that point is 105 miles from the scene of the strike . . . any kind of steamboats at most times of the year have all kinds of difficulty in navigating the White River."[49]

Part of the optimism in Fairbanks was founded upon the belief that the upper Tanana could be reached with ease. Everyone realized that even shallow-draft steamboats could not find passage, but poling boats would do fine. W.H. Merrit, an upper Tanana miner, alleged that "it is possible to get within twelve miles of the diggings in a poling boat." Another trader, W.H. Newton from the Healy River on the upper Tanana, said that from Tanana Crossing to the Chisana "the water is so slack that the wind will blow a boat upstream." This good news was appended to Newton's warning

that swift currents between Fairbanks and Tanana Crossing would inhibit travel: "The best way then would be to mush to Tanana Crossing, build a boat there, and pole to the near field."[50]

Logistical factors dominated individual planning and the economic development of all mining regions. Transportation to the Chisana was complicated by the fact that no reliable supply base was any closer than the points of origin of most stampeders (Dawson, Fairbanks, or the Copper River railbelt). Small traders on the upper Tanana like W.H. Merrit and W.H. Newton were not prepared to supply the influx of miners a stampede triggered. Merrit did try to seize the opportunity for his Nabesna Trading Co. by establishing a new post farther up the Tanana. He loaded 10 tons of provisions on *Dusty Diamond*, a shallow-draft steamboat of 101 tons that had been in service since '98. Even with a new post he warned that supply costs would be high: "The camp for the present at least will be a dollar a pound camp."[51]

*Dusty Diamond's* voyage ended at Thirty-mile House on the Tanana, where Merrit was forced to unload his cargo. He had hoped to reach the mouth of either the Nabesna or Chisana, but his boat could not buck the swift waters of the upper Tanana and suffered hull damage. Others tried with smaller boats, including *Martha Clow* (98 tons), *Reliance* (291 tons), *Sushana* (49 tons), and *Tetlin* (65 tons). All the shippers expressed optimism of getting near the new diggings but by August 7 the Tanana was falling rapidly. Even small motorboats could not get above Salcha. The most notable success was the voyage of the Northern Navigation Co's. *Reliance* to the mouth of the Nabesna. Miners aboard the vessel hiked or poled from that point, and the NNC men laid out a townsite. The place proved too far from the diggings to thrive as a supply center.[52]

When navigation closed in October, boats were stuck at various points on the Tanana. Only *Tana*, which got within 9 miles of the Nabesna mouth, and *Tetlin*, which got a little way up the Nabesna, got within striking distance of Reliance City. The much-touted Tanana route proved to be a flop, although poling boat traffic remained steady through 1914. Promotion alone could not overcome geographic realities. By late 1913 a more rational all-American route from McCarthy and the Copper River and Northwest Railway had been established via Skolai Pass.

## Boosting Cordova

Cordova interests promoted a route to Chisana that would help its economy. The *Chitina Leader*, deploring "the peculiar transportation conditions which forces American mining companies operating in American territory to buy their outfits in Canada to escape payment of entry," called for a Copper River and Northwest Railway extension over the Skolai Pass--"A feasible and comparatively inexpensive extension." The *Leader* was sure that such an extension would have been built long before to reach reported copper deposits but for "the repressive attitude of the government in its Alaska railroad policy." When Chitina got the news of the Chisana strike in early July, the *Leader* quickly reported that Cordova offered "the most feasible and short route" to the stam-

pede. With the railroad it had the "logical route" for prospectors from every part of the Tanana and Yukon below Fairbanks and from Outside. Rushers from Fairbanks could travel light over the government trail to Chitina and take the train to McCarthy, outfit there, then take pack horses over the Skolai pass to White River. "From there the crossing of a small divide, a little over 20 miles, places outfits on the Sushana River. By contrast, from Dawson the route was 350 miles.[53]

## U.S. Commissioner Tony Dimond

Tony Dimond's appointment as U.S. Commissioner was warmly applauded in the district. "He is courageous and has a mind and will of his own," said the *Leader* whose editor knew the new officer: "There will be no juggling with records, no over charges and no connivance with big interests to the detriment of the hardy son of toil."[54] Dimond's predecessor had been considered corrupt and after his removal the Chisana commissionership was offered to him. Dimond hesitated, then agreed to accept the appointment. Taking the post was a gamble because a commissioner had to depend on fees for his renumeration and if claim recording declined, fee opportunities decreased. "If the camp is good," Dimond told a friend, "I will make a lot of money, if it's a failure, I'll lose a thousand dollars, which it will cost me to get in there."[55]

Dimond trekked into the Chisana from Valdez with Frank Hoffman, another new appointee as deputy marshal. Arriving in November, Dimond was appalled at the state of recording records, the food scarcity in camp, and the paucity of gold. "If they could find as much pay as we can find on Young Creek," he wrote Murray, "They would go wild." By spring as disappointed miners drifted away, Dimond realized that his gamble had not paid off: his fees were not enough to support him. In July he returned to Valdez to join Donohue's law firm.[56]

## Trail Improvements

George C. Hazelet returned to Cordova in October after blazing trail across the Nizina and Chisana glaciers. His route would serve as a trail or wagon road winter and summer. It was short and practical with no grades exceeding 10 to 12 percent. He had staked the Nizina glacier so travelers would have no trouble following the trail 16 miles to the summit. Work was under way staking the descent and Chisana Glacier. Conveniences developed rapidly. Relief stations had been built on both sides of the summit, and roadhouses sprang up at locations reaching to the foot of the summit. Within 30 days Hazelet expected travelers would find "all the comforts of home" in existence from McCarthy to the Chisana diggings.[57]

Hazelet's initial promises for the trail were fulfilled. In late November his party, using horses and double-enders returned to McCarthy over "the splendid trail" of 78 miles. Doubters of the trail and those who did not conceded that the Chitina-McCarthy route to the gold fields was the best were scolded by the *Chitina Leader* and citizens of Cordova and the Copper River country were enjoined to "spread the facts."[58] Unfortu-

nately, the trail was only used for the Chisana's first season. Funds raised by subscription had not met all costs, and a bank note of $2,100 was still outstanding in 1915.[59]

Great improvements were announced in November 1913 with the Alaska Road Commission's decision to build a bridge over the Nizina River during that winter. Work had begun the previous year, but materials were delayed and construction was postponed. The bridge, 525 feet long with two spans of 150 feet each, would rise 7 miles from McCarthy.[60]

## Litigation

Miners followed litigation over mining claims very closely. In the 1914 term of district court there were 16 major cases on the calendar. Of these, 12 concerned the power-of-attorney issue raised when locations were made before the arrival of Recorder H.E. Morgan. The facts varied in the several cases, but the basic question--whether claim jumpers could take advantage of the inability of locators to file in a new district--was decided against the claim jumpers.[61]

The landmark case which also determined the rights of parties in other related cases was Sutherland vs. Purdy. Other cases like Cloninger vs. Findlanson were determined by the Sutherland decision, although the facts differed somewhat. The Cloninger case showed clearly the opportunism of claim jumpers. Cloninger, a waiter in a Chitina hotel, heard that locations made by Chisana's original locators were invalid because the power of attorney had not been recorded validly. He had rushed to the new district in July 1913, reached Bear Creek on 1 August, examined the monument and corner stakes left by Taylor on No. 1, then checked the recording book kept by H.H. Waller. Since there was no recording of a power of attorney held by Taylor for Findlanson, Cloninger returned to Bear Creek, staked, and begun work. Soon he and his partner, Ed Maddox, made an open cut 40 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 4.5 feet deep. On August 15, Taylor ordered him off the claim land, subsequently Cloninger sued for possession.

At trial, Findlanson's attorney let jurors know that Cloninger was not a true miner but an unscrupulous fortune hunter who, instead of prospecting, had headed straight for honestly made locations to seize the benefit of a technicality. Cloninger would only admit that "I found what I was looking for," and jurors probably agreed with Findlanson's attorney. The decision in Findlanson's favor, however, turned on a stipulation between parties that the result would be governed by the circuit court of appeal's decision in Sutherland vs. Purdy.[62]

Dan Sutherland, like Tony Dimond, was a well-known miner at the time of the Chisana stampede. In 1898 he had been with Jack Dalton and others at Pleasant Camp, British Columbia, for the Porcupine strike. A year later, Sutherland got involved in a criminal prosecution, charged with assault with a deadly weapon for throwing rocks down on a group on miners. Apparently, Sutherland and his friends considered the others as claim jumpers. In any event, there was not enough evidence to convict him of assault.

Sutherland was also involved in important civil litigation at Chisana. Frank Purdy, who ran the Cassiar Roadhouse with Fred Best, took exception to Sutherland's staking of a fraction on Big Eldorado Creek. Purdy worked the fraction despite Sutherland's location, and Sutherland sued for possession. For some miners, litigation involved more than a resolution of legal issues but a serious disruption of work. Sutherland left the White River in December 1913 for the trial in Cordova. At the end of March the case had not yet been heard, and Purdy petitioned for a postponement. Sutherland complained about the time for prospecting he had already lost by leaving the Chisana district and the prospect of further losses if he were forced to remain in town: "A poor man is dependent upon his labor as are his witnesses. All are waiting. They need to get off for summer work . . . and could be ruined by ten days delay. They would be unable to do annual assessment on their claims."

Genuinely, practical problems were involved. The winter trail over the Nizina Glacier between McCarthy and Chisana would start breaking up in early April. After mid-April it would be dangerous to travel. Men would have to go in by the Chitistone and White rivers, crossing the Nizina, Dan Creek, Chitistone, and White several times, then go across the Russell Glacier for 12 miles. They faced a great risk to themselves and their horses as they swam across raging waters.

Sutherland's protests forestalled Purdy's delay tactic, but the trial result was not favorable. A jury chaired by famed photographer E.A. Hegg ruled against him in April 1914. Eventually, Sutherland prevailed after an appeal, but it was January 1919 before another jury declared in his favor.[63]

Sutherland did not grow rich in mining, but he did make friends, including Judge James Wickersham who became congressional delegate in 1908. Sutherland later acted as Wickersham's campaign manager and succeeded him successor as delegate in the 1920s. Sutherland and Wickersham were Republicans and lost their influence when the Democrats came to power in 1932. Wickersham had gotten back into political harness, replacing Sutherland in 1930, but was badly beaten by Tony Dimond in the Franklin D. Roosevelt landslide two years later.

## Chisana's Development

The big question about any new camp was its duration. Would the camp develop into a town or quickly fade away? Everyone watched for signs, and no sign seemed more decisive than major investments in mining properties. Thus when Frank Manley, J.J. Price, and E.V. Ives paid a reported half million dollars for the 13 discovery claims of W.E. James and his partners, Matilda Wales, W.A. Johnson, and Nels P. Nelson the future looked bright. The James group had cleaned up $35,000 in 1913, and experienced mining men had enough confidence in the long-range potential of their claims to buy them for big money (although probably less than the half million reported).[64]

The Chisana decline was obvious by summer 1913, but those who remained continued to demand better services. Trail work was always a priority. The *Chitina Leader* described the bad trail: "You load your horse up with a hundred or so of grub and

lead him into the mire. He flounders around until he is all in and you then remove his pack and cut poles which are placed under his body and head." Then you try again over "a ten mile wavering road of muck."[65]

But mining went on as some 150 men, most of them on Bonanza Creek, extracted gold "with satisfactory results." Yields were not as high as expected but the problem was with a scarcity of water.[66]

U.S. Commissioner Dimond resigned in 1914, the same year Manley, Price, and Ives sold their option to purchase the discovery of James and his partners. While the option price paid Manley, Price, and Ives had been $40,000, that paid by their purchaser, English investor Fletcher T. Hamshaw, was not made public. Price could not help bragging though, claiming that his gain on the transaction had been $50,000. Obviously Dimond and Manley-Price-Ives saw the future more clearly than did Henshaw, one of the many victims of mining speculation.[67]

In February 1914 Chisana folks argued that their community had more log cabins than Circle, Fairbanks, or Dawson and deserved to be called "the largest log cabin town in the world." Four hundred cabins was one estimate, including seven general stores, a saloon, two restaurants, a clothing store, and "roadhouses galore." Among the 500 to 600 residents, 25 women graced the place.[68]

All the anxiety over transport routes among rival businessmen proved to be pointless after a couple of production seasons. The new diggings played out rather quickly after 1915. The peak yield in 1914 was $250,000; in 1915 the gold valued $160,000; and by 1916 the take was only $40,000. As with any placer district, the life of the camp can be traced in gold production statistics. Records kept on Chisana were excellent and even extended to the numbers of working mines in each season and the numbers of miners on the job. A table illustrating these statistics appears on the following page.

## Nabesna: Carl Whitham's Mine

The good fortune of Carl Whitham gave pleasure to veteran Alaska miners. He had been one of the original party led by K.J. Field that discovered a valuable gold lode on Jacksina Creek in 1899, the property worked by the Royal Development Company from 1905 until shutdown in 1908. After mining at Chisana, Whitham started prospecting in the Nabesna in 1922. His investigations of the abandoned quartz mine convinced him that the Royal Development Company had given up too soon; he restaked the claims in 1924. In 1925 an "accident" of the kind much favored in mining lore excited Whitham: a bear trying to dig a gopher from a moss-covered outcrop exposed a rich looking vein. He named it the Bear Vein, noting that it was only 1,000 feet from the old Royal Development Company diggings.

During the next three years, Whitham and three helpers trenched the outcropping and sank a 30-foot shaft to recover ore for testing. Ore tested at various levels confirmed the lode's value. In 1929 Whitham formed the Nabesna Mining Corporation and took in enough capital to build an aerial tramway from the mine to the millsite and install a 35-ton-per-day mill. A young engineer, Phil Holdsworth, helped him. Later

**Chisana Mining District - Annual Production, 1913-1940**[69]

| Year | Number of Mines | Number of Men Employed | Total Production |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1913 | | | $ 40,000 |
| 1914 | | | 250,000 |
| 1915 | 17 summer | 110 | 160,000 |
| | 2 winter | 8 | |
| 1916 | 12 summer | 40 | 40,000 |
| 1917 | 11 | 44 | 40,000 |
| 1918 | | | 15,000 |
| 1919 | | | 27,000 |
| 1920 | 8 summer | 18 | 20,000 |
| 1921 | 6 | 16 | 23,000 |
| 1922 | 9 | 25 | 29,000 |
| 1923 | 9 | 22 | 23,000 |
| 1924 | 8 | | 23,400 |
| 1925 | 6 | | 24,000 |
| 1926 | 5 | | 18,000 |
| 1927 | | | 15,000 |
| 1928 | | | 16,000 |
| 1929 | 5 | 12 | 7,000 |
| 1930 | 6 | 12 | 5,800 |
| 1931 | | | |
| 1932 | | | |
| 1933 | | | |
| 1934 | | | |
| 1935 | | | 21,000 |
| 1936 | 5 | 20 | 37,500 |
| 1937 | | 20 | 30,000 |
| 1938 | | 20 | 29,000 |
| 1939 | | 20 | 20,000 |
| 1940 | | 20 | 14,000 |

Holdsworth became the commissioner of the state's natural resources department and is still active today as a private consulting engineer.

Getting new equipment to the mine was not easy. Much of it was freighted in during the winter of 1930-31 on sleds pulled by a 30-horsepower tractor from Chitina. Whitham even had his own sawmill to cut local timber for his mill buildings. The mill was operational in July 1931, and 22 men, who lived in tents on the property, were on the job. In 1932 Whitham had a 25-man crew. Over the two seasons, gross production yielded $175,000 in gold.

Whitham's persistence was paying off. He became something of a folk hero. Other miners admired the accomplishments of someone like themselves who managed to retain control of his properties and develop them. With some pride Whitham wrote to President Franklin Roosevelt in August 1933, applauding the president's support of higher gold prices and the construction of mining roads. "There was not even a blazed trail connecting the valley of the Nabesna with the great Richardson Highway," Whitham told Roosevelt, "and in order to get supplies in here it was necessary to wait for winter snow and bring in necessities with dog team." Now, thanks to government road funding, he was providing the country with new gold. Whitham praised the work of the Alaska Road Commission, then working on a winter road into the Nabesna that would certainly lead to other developments.[70]

The winter road was extremely important to Whitham. In addition to front end hauling costs, he had been paying high air-freight charges to get his ore out. Before the Nabesna Road was built, ore was shipped by pack horse the 6-mile distance to Nabesna Bar. From there bush pilots Harold Gillam and Bob Reeve flew the ore 120 miles to Copper Center. From Copper Center it was trucked 50 miles to Chitina, then sent by rail to Cordova, then by ship to the Tacoma smelter. The road was also important because Whitham wanted to establish a year-round operation. For winter operations, he needed a pumping plant, a 2,600-foot pipeline to a spring, and a heating plant capable of serving his buildings.

The winter road was completed to the mine in fall 1933, allowing the trucking of ore to the railroad at Chitina during the winter or directly to Valdez in summer. In 1934 Whitham began working through the winter, and his annual production accelerated. From 1931 through 1937 he shipped ore valued at $965,000 to the Tacoma smelter. By 1940 the mine had shipped 73,000 tons of ore valued at $1,869,396. Since investors had only had to put up $175,280, the return was favorable.[71]

By 1939 the veins were virtually worked out, and no new ore deposits had been discovered. Wartime restrictions closed down the operations until 1945, when Whitham tried to get started again. Bad health limited his efforts. Whitham's death in 1947 led to the permanent closure of operations.

## Bremner River

The Bremner River region has supported both placer and lode gold mining. Spread along the Chugach Range about 80 miles south of McCarthy, it includes the area south of the Chitina River to the Bremner River and west from the Chakina River. In 1902 a number of prospectors rushed to Golconda Creek, a tributary of the North Fork of the Bremner River.

Reaching the remote area was not easy. Originally, the prospectors traveled from Valdez via Marshall Pass, crossed the Copper River, thence to the Bremner drainage. Miners found some gold, but most left when gold discovery on the Nizina was reported. The few who remained produced modest quantities of gold until 1916.

With the completion of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad in 1911, supplying the camp became somewhat easier. Over winter trails miners traveled from McCarthy to the mouth of the Nizina River, then up the Chitina and Chakina rivers to Monahan Creek and on to the several mines. The trails had been improved by individual miners even before the railroad's completion, and in 1914 the Alaska Road Commission worked on a trail from McCarthy to Golconda Creek.

Efforts at lode development were thwarted by the region's remoteness until the price of gold was raised from $20 to $35 per ounce in 1933. The Bremner Mining Company built a mill and tram and hauled ore to the railroad with caterpillar tractors. An airstrip was built to support mine operations.

Another lode mine, the Yellowband, was developed by Asa Baldwin in the 1930s. Baldwin, a mining engineer, had been a consultant to the Kennecott Copper Co., a surveyor for the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, and helped on the Canada International Boundary Survey, 1910-1913.

All the lode mines shut down during World War II and were never reopened.

## Conclusion

The miners and investors who held great hopes for the northern part of the Wrangell-St. Elias ranges were largely disappointed. In the south gold production was continuous for decades, but the output was always modest compared to other major mineral districts in Alaska. Copper, of course, was the great wealth of the southern range, and its exploitation is one of the grand stories of industrial development in Alaska's history.

## Notes
## Chapter 12

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24. Cited in Mary Mangusso, "Anthony J. Dimond," (Dissertation. Texas Tech University, 1978), 27-28.

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29. John E. Andrus vs. Frank Kernan and Charles Schlosser, court record, case no. 910, RG21, FRC.

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# Chapter 13
## Kennecott and Other Mines

Most of the copper mining within Wrangell-St. Elias National Park was done by the Kennecott Copper Company (also known as the Alaska Syndicate). Kennecott's role in Alaska's mining and political history was unique and a matter of considerable controversy from 1905 through 1938.

In addition to Kennecott's activity this chapter also reviews copper and other mining in the Kotsina-Kuskulana district, particularly on Elliot Creek, and the North Midas Mine on Berg Creek.

### Discovery

Original location of the huge copper deposits in the region was made by a party formed in 1898 by R.F. McClellan. After failing to find anything worthwhile along the Copper River tributaries in '98, the Minnesota men reorganized for another expedition the following year. In late August 1899 E.A. Gates, acting for the McClellan party, and James McCarthy and Arthur H. McNeer, representing other parties, located the Nikolai group of copper mines on the right limit of the Nizina, a branch of the Chitina Fork of the Copper River about 180 miles east of Valdez. Subsequently, the Chittyna Exploration Company was organized, and more exploration was carried on in 1900 which culminated with the discovery of the Bonanza mines some 20 miles from the Nikolai mines. Controversy erupted over the Bonanza discovery because it was not clear whether prospectors Jack Smith, Clarence Warner, and others were acting for the Chittyna Exploration Company or other individuals who eventually formed the Copper River Mining Company.

Litigation, started in 1902, resulted a year later in a decision by Judge James Wickersham in favor of McClellan and his partners of the Chittyna Exploration Company. This hard-fought legal battle cleared the way for development.[1] The Alaska Syndicate was formed in 1905 through the efforts of Stephen Birch, a bright, determined young man who from 1900-1902 purchased the fabulously rich Bonanza copper claims with backing from capitalist H.O. Havemeyer. Syndicate parties included the banking houses of the Guggenheim brothers and of J.P. Morgan. The Guggenheims, because of their mining experience, directed development of several mines located on tributaries of the Copper River. In 1908 the enterprise was reorganized as the Kennicott Mines Co., then in 1915 as the Kennecott Copper Corp. with Birch as president. The spelling of the new company's name was unfortunate. Someone, noting the proximity of the Kennicott River and Glacier meant to name the company after those places--but the spelling went awry. In this study the community is spelled Kennicott, but it has been spelled both ways over the years.

Smith and Warner, the Bonanza discoverers, had been searching for the source of the copper float reported by Oscar Rohn of the U.S. Army in 1899. Rohn found rich

pieces of chalcocite ore in the glacial moraine on the Kennicott River, so the prospectors moved up the Kennicott to National Creek, where they staked claims. Every great mineral discovery spawns its legend, and the Bonanza was no exception. According to their stories, Smith and Warner were eating lunch when they spotted a large green spot on a mountain across the gulch from them. "A good place for sheep," observed Warner. "Don't look like grass to me, " said Smith. Their argument over whether it made sense to climb for a look was resolved when they found of piece of rich looking chalconite on National Creek. A scramble up to the "green field" revealed a sensational discovery.

It was in August 1900 that Smith and Warner examined the lode near the Kennicott Glacier, then returned to Nikolai to alert the other nine members of their Chitina Mining and Exploration Company. Soon after, Arthur Spencer of the USGS made an independent discovery. The claims located extended a mile in length along the limestone--greenstone contact at 6,000 feet elevation. The mass of the ore was in the limestone, from the contact to a height of 150 feet along the slope of the hillside, with widths from 2 to 7 feet. Spencer confirmed that "the ore was practically pure chalconite with solid masses exposed from two to four feet across, fifteen or more feet in length and their depth not apparent." A sample showed 70 percent of copper, a good measure of silver, and a trace of gold.[2]

## Railroad Development

The Guggenheim and Morgan interests realized that they had acquired one of the world's most valuable mineral deposits. They also realized that their holdings were worthless without the construction of an enormously expensive railroad. Engineers examined four different routes for a railroad into the upper Copper River. Two from Valdez would use either the Thompson or Marshall Pass into the Tsaina or Tasnuna tributaries of the Copper, but both involved steep grades. Two more direct routes up the lower Copper started in Cordova or Katalla. The Cordova route did not appeal initially because it entailed the bridging of the Copper River between two active glaciers and laying track over the Baird Glacier's moraine. Katalla's route looked promising, particularly as it, like the Cordova route, would also give access to the Bering River coal fields--assumed to be a resource wealth of immense potential. Katalla's location on an unprotected ocean shore, however, contrasted with the deepwater harbor advantages of both Valdez and Cordova.

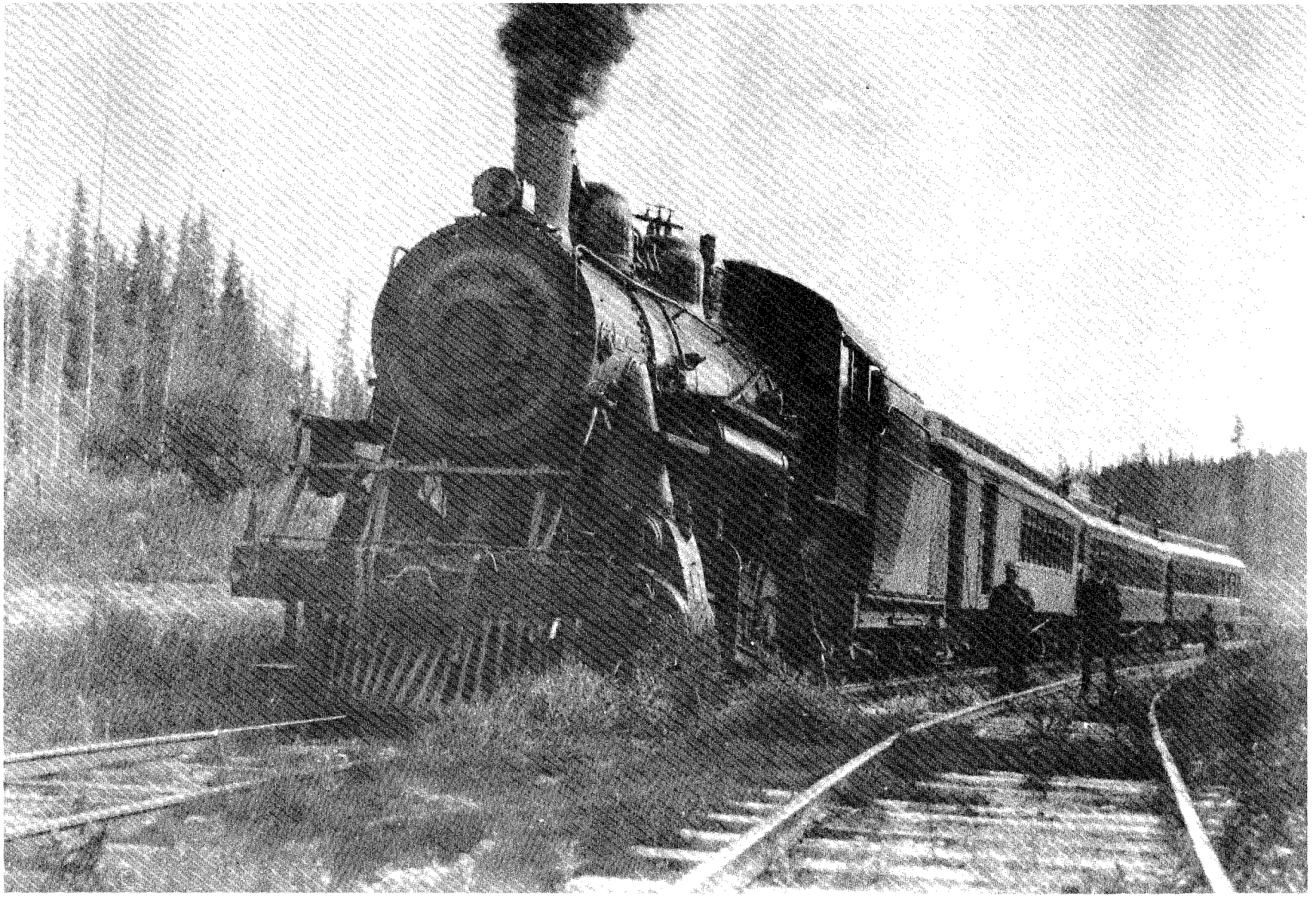
The mining business depends on the views of engineers, but this time the syndicate did not get the best advice from its consultants. Initially, construction started from Valdez under George Hazelet. Subsequently, company officers concluded that the Copper River route made much more sense and engineer M.K. Rodgers urged a move to Katalla. Rodgers was sure that he could construct a breakwater capable of protecting ships and a wharf to be constructed on the unsheltered coast. At a cost of $1 million the breakwater and wharf were built but a fierce storm in 1907 swept both structures away. The syndicate abandoned Katalla and the proposed route.

Ed Hasey's barricade in Keystone Canyon shooting

University of Oregon


River steamboat in Copper River and Northwestern Railway construction.

Washington State Historical Society



Copper River and Northwestern Railway

Alaska State Library

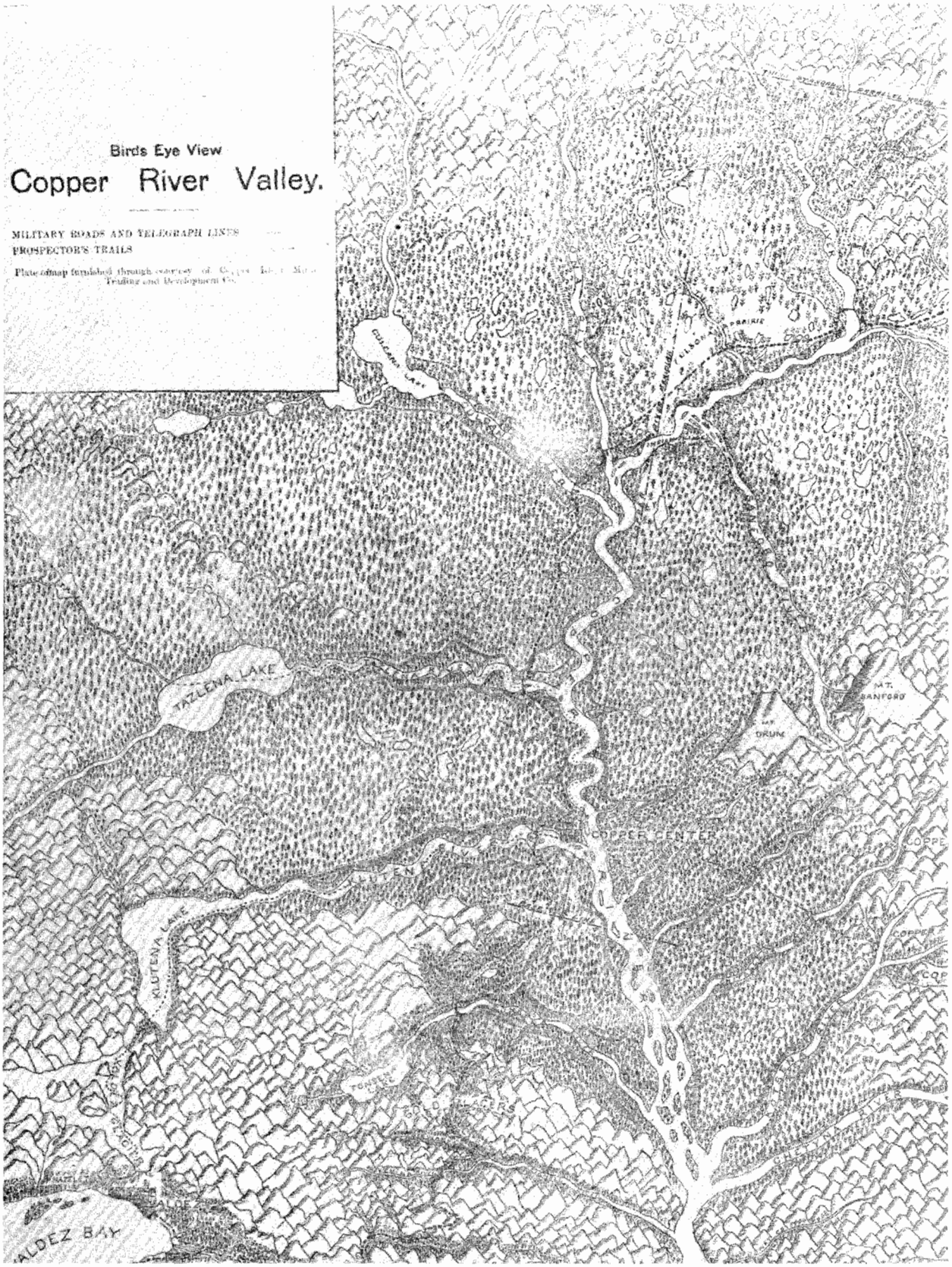
Kennecott mill

University of Oregon


"Sand hogs" in Caisson Building, Miles Glacier Bridge, Copper River and Northwestern Railway

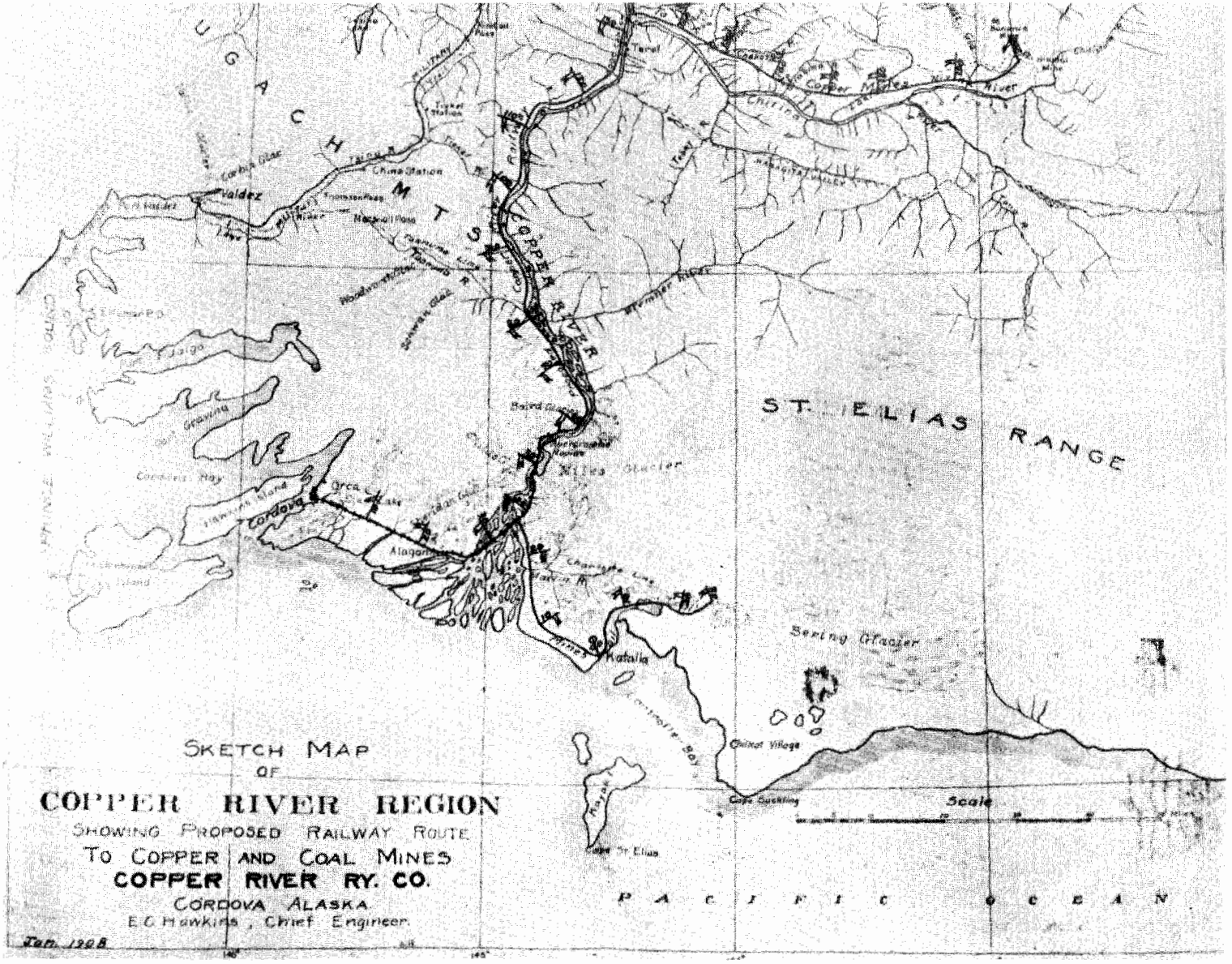
School at Kennicott

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park

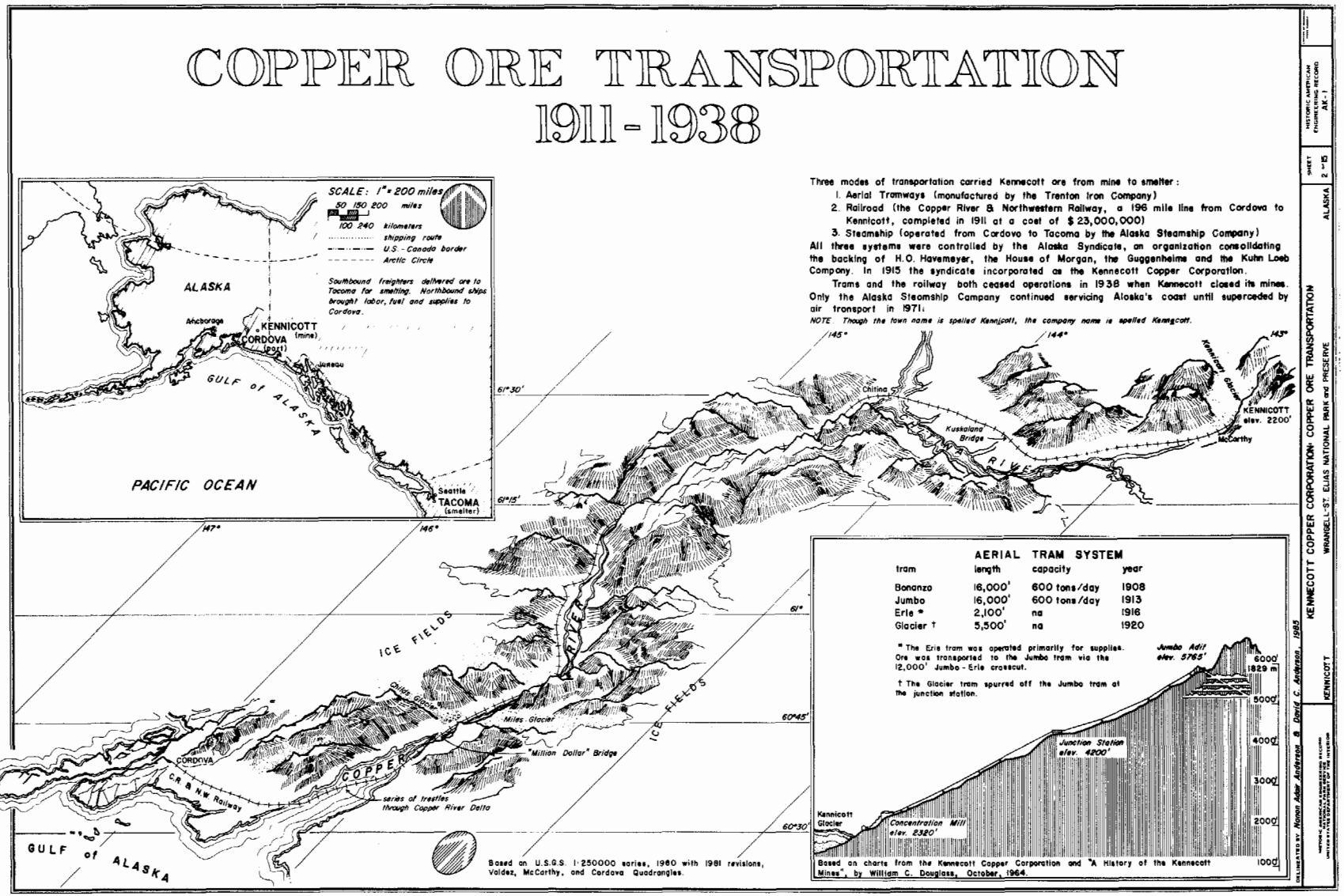



Copper River valley

Anchorage Historical & Fine Arts Museum

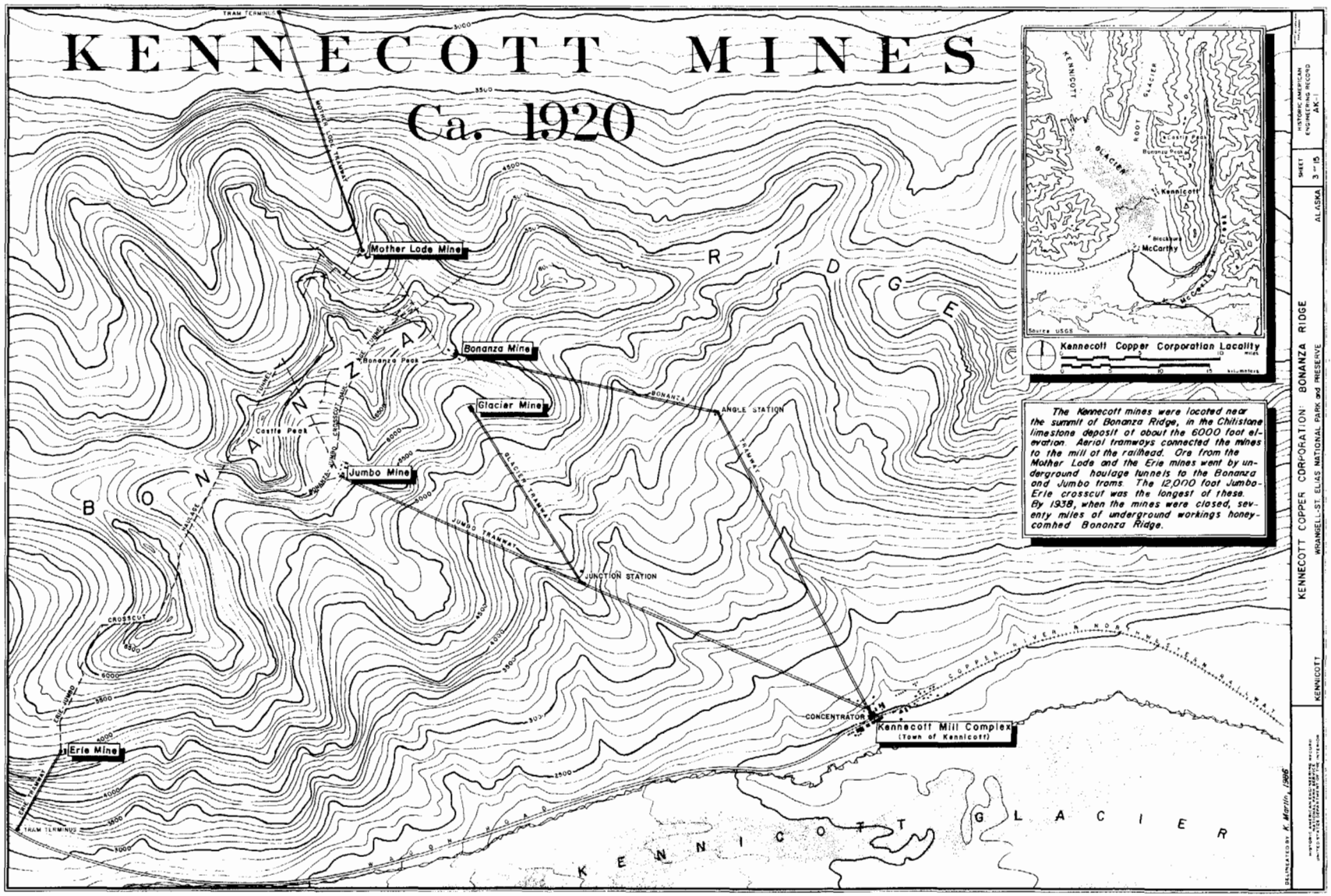



Copper River region




Copper ore transportation 1911-1938

National Park Service




Kennecott mines

National Park Service

Michael J. Heney showed better judgment than the syndicate people. Heney, famed for his construction of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad from Skagway, started railroad construction from Orca Inlet (later Cordova) in 1906. Heney expected to sell out to the syndicate when they realized the error of their ways and concluded that his route was the only feasible one. It turned out as Heney anticipated in 1907 after he had pushed the grade work to Alaganik. The syndicate bought out Heney's interest and hired him as grade contractor so he could continue the work. Heney, one of the few Alaska folk heroes, showed his usual drive and organizational genius working for the syndicate but died before the work was completed.

The rejection of the Valdez route by the syndicate encouraged the ambitions of promoter Henry D. Reynolds. Reynolds' place in mining history would be notable even without reference to the railroad rivalry. He was a wily operator of mining, transportation, and other commercial ventures whose ethical sense was perhaps overcome by his magnificent visions. Reynolds first appeared on Prince William Sound in 1901, and by 1907 his Reynolds Alaska Development Company was flourishing through mineral production on the sound and Latouche Island. The syndicate's desertion of Valdez as a rail terminal inspired Reynolds to venture into the railroad field. Money flowed in from Valdez residents who believed that their future prosperity would be determined by a railroad. Investors were encouraged by Governor John Brady's enthusiastic support of Reynold's schemes. Brady, an honest, well-respected man, soon rued the day of his association with Reynolds as the apparent conflict of interest caused his dismissal from office. The interior department secretary was aghast that the territory's chief executive would identify himself with commercial promotion.

Reynolds raised $200,000 for the Alaska Home Railroad in Valdez and arranged for the hiring of workers in Seattle. He also sought additional funding in Seattle and the Northeast, where he sponsored a weekly newspaper to promote company interests. He was no piker, as the purchase of the Alaska Coast Company--a shipping firm, revealed. One thing folks enjoyed about the ebullient promoter was his refusal to be intimidated by the syndicate. In fact, he deliberately antagonized his great rival by sending a ship to Katalla to woo 300 railroad workers away from the syndicate.

In moving too far, too fast, with inadequate financing, Reynolds' railroad venture reached the point of collapse. He tried desperately to get Tacoma capitalists to bail him out but failed. In forfeiting his $100,000 option for purchase of the Alaska Coast Co., he lost the $47,500 already invested. More disastrously, he could not meet railroad construction payrolls. His Valdez bank closed, and Reynolds left Alaska. His efforts to raise money in the East were not successful, and he resigned his chairman's position in January 1908. In April he was indicted for mail fraud on charges of misrepresentations to attract investors. Charges were dropped after he was adjudged insane.[3]

## Keystone Canyon Affair

Before Reynolds' fall, he contributed to an instance of corporate violence that marred the achievement of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway's construction.

The confrontation in September 1907 between Reynolds' Alaska Home Railroad and the syndicate was perhaps inevitable given the high stakes and the intemperate individuals involved. The Alaska Home Railroad had graded several miles out of Valdez with the enthusiastic support of Valdez folks unwilling to face the death of their hopes for a railroad.

At Keystone Canyon, a narrow defile leading to Thompson Pass along the old Valdez-Eagle road, the Home Railroad crew was confronted by a rock barricade placed by Copper River and Northwest workers. The Home Railroad was on the verge of bankruptcy and its officers resented the interference of the well-funded syndicate road. Since the syndicate had abandoned its Keystone Canyon grade its defense of it seemed surly--and provocative. Of course, the Copper River and Northwest had the legal right to defend its grade against trespass, but this did not extend to the right of shooting trespassers. George Hazelet, a feisty mining man in charge of syndicate operations in the region, tried to awe the trespassers by getting U.S. Marshal George Perry to issue temporary deputy commissions to two syndicate employees, Edward C. Hasey and Duncan Dickson. Hazelet armed the two men and advised them to "be patient, take it cool, but I look to you boys to protect my rights."[4]

Marshal Perry anticipated but could not hold off violence. He wired Valdez Deputy Marshal James Lathrop on September 16: "See that Dickson and Hasey don't exceed authority and get us into trouble." Lathrop responded on September 19: "I am satisfied Hasey has overstepped his authority. Hazelet is not trying to hold canyon but only his grade. I advise you wire Hasey and Dickson to be careful and don't involve this office. Also wire Hazelet to same effect. I look for no trouble over there of any nature. It is simple bluff."[5]

On September 25, the Home Railroad men, armed with tools and clubs marched in a menacing manner onto or near the syndicate's grade and Hasey, sheltered behind the rock barricade with a rifle, shot three of them. Fred Rhinehart later died of his wounds. As most Alaskans denounced Hasey's violent behavior, court officers swiftly convened a grand jury. Governor Wilford Hoggatt hurried to Valdez to investigate the affair. His sympathy for the syndicate was obvious but U.S. Attorney Nathan V. Harlan refused the governor's demands for indictments against the Home Railroad men. The grand jury indicted Hasey for murder and assault but, on the advice of Harlan and his deputy prosecutors W.T. Scott and L.V. Ray, they did not indict Hazelet. At the time, they did not have evidence of Hazelet's instruction to Hasey to "protect my rights."

Hasey's case was transferred to Juneau to avoid the partisanship in Valdez, and to forestall chicanery the Justice Department sent Secret Service agent E.P. McAdams to assist the prosecutors. Reporting in February 1908, McAdams found the atmosphere "terrible," and warned that the jury "will be subject to influences." Alaskans, who traditionally identified New York City and Washington, D.C., as the centers of corruption, would have been amazed at McAdams' opinion of their integrity: "It would take a Constitutional amendment to purify Alaska," he reported to his chief.[6]

Part of the unrest in Juneau grew out of the dismissal of Harlan at the governor's instigation. Within a month of the shooting, Hoggatt had opened his attack on Harlan,

blaming him and Scott for failing to prevent the violence and refusing to indict the Home Railroad workers for inciting riot. Hoggatt charged that both men were private counsels to the Home Railroad contractor and that Harlan was a conspicuous drunk. Harlan considered himself a victim of the syndicate for his vigorous prosecution and rallied friends to protest Hoggatt's charges. It does not appear that Harlan was entirely a martyr of the Keystone Canyon shootout because some of Hoggatt's charges, notably those concerning drinking, were confirmed by others.[7]

President Theodore Roosevelt, who always kept a close watch on Alaska events, responded decisively to Hoggatt's charges: "It seems to me Harlan and his sort should be removed at once and steps taken to provide men who will prosecute leaders on both sides in the recent troubles in Alaska, as Hoggatt recommends." Soon after the president heard from the attorney general of Hoggatt's interference in the case and reacted with anger: "It seems well-nigh impossible to be sure that we have got a decent man in Alaska."[8]

As the government's attorneys, John Boyce, William Barnhill, and Scott prepared to try Hasey for murder in Juneau, they were well aware that the attorney general and the president were watching closely. "With an honest jury we can't keep from winning," McAdams assured John Wilkie, chief of the Secret Service.[9] Hasey's defenders, Thomas Lyons of Juneau, John Carson of Tacoma, and Fred Brown and John Ostrander of Valdez, conferred often with Jarvis, Birch, Hazelet, and the syndicate's law firm of Bogle and Spooner in Seattle. Ostrander, the defense team leader, derided Scott and Boyce as "a pair of old grannies," and complained of Judge Royal Gunnison's slow pace. The presence of McAdams, "a bad actor," and "so-called detective" did not awe him: "I think we will be able to show him up."

Ostrander planned to use M.B. Morrisey, a Home Railroad worker, as a defense witness, although he had been subpoenaed earlier by the government. Morrisey seemed eager to testify that some of the Home Railroad men had been armed so the prosecutor had no use for his testimony. "Morrisey is acting on the square," Ostrander believed. The true role of Morrisey later taxed investigators of the trial. It was not his testimony, which had corroboration by other defense witnesses, that aroused suspicion, but his open-handed entertainment of and loans to other defense witnesses. Morrisey spent money provided by the syndicate and drew a salary from it during the trial and afterwards until he departed for parts unknown.[10]

The trial opened in April 1908. Ostrander's confidence was not diminished by the sudden illness and death of Assistant U.S. Attorney Scott, or even the hostility of Judge Gunnison, "the most ignorant fool that ever sat on this or any bench." After several weeks of trial, jurors found that Hasey's apprehension of bodily harm from the Home Railroad gang justified his shooting and acquitted him of second degree murder charges. The government persisted, trying Hasey for assault with intent to kill in February 1909. This time jurors decided that Hasey's gun play had been unnecessary and unreasonable and found him guilty. Judge Gunnison sentenced him to 18 months at the McNeil Island, Washington, prison. Initially, Hasey's attorneys prepared to appeal, then dropped it when syndicate officers encouraged Hasey to serve his time in return for receiv-

ing his full pay and other benefits. According to rumor the syndicate followed this course because of Morrisey's persistent demands for money.[11]

With Hasey in jail and the Alaska Hor Railroad bankrupt and disgraced because of questionable activities by its promoter, the syndicate's reputation improved. Construction of the Copper River and Northwestern Railway and other developments captured public attention. Michael J. Heney, "the Irish Prince," was the railroad contractor and a universally admired figure. Heney had built the narrow-gage White Pass & Yukon Railroad from Skagway to Whitehorse during the Klondike gold rush. The new railroad was a greater challenge because of its far greater length, wider gage, and the formidable obstacles posed by huge glaciers. It also answered a long-expressed desire of Alaskans for an "all-American" route to the interior. Syndicate officers often declared their intent to carry construction of the railroad all the way to the Yukon River to achieve a combined rail-river route that would aid territorial development. Whether the syndicate was ever genuinely interested in building beyond Kennicott is not clear, but when the line reached the copper mines in 1911, construction ended.

## Railroad Construction

Construction plans called for a single-track, standard-gauge railroad running 131 miles to Chitina from Cordova; then branching to extend 65 miles to the Kennecott mill. The route from Cordova was south and east across the outwash from the Sheridan Glacier to Alaganik, a western slough of the Copper River, then northeast to the main channel of the Copper River delta. The first bridge was constructed at mile 27. The line crossed the delta to mile 39, Katalla Junction, then turned north for 10 miles and its main crossing of the Copper at mile 49. Following the right limit of the Copper, it ran through Abercrombie Canyon, across Baird Glacier moraine and the Aken Glacier outwash to the confluence of the Tasnuna and Tickel rivers. Thence, the line entered Clay Wood Canyon and followed the Copper to Chitina.

Local hemlock was cut for rail ties, and 70-pound steel was used for the Cordova-Chitina line. From Chitina, 60-pound steel was used for the rest of the route. From Chitina, the line crossed the Copper and continued east on the north side of the Chitina River. As with the steel weight, construction standards were reduced for the Chitina mill route. From Cordova the maximum gradient was 0.5 percent and the maximum curvature was 10 degrees; from Chitina 2.5 percent grades and 14-degree curves were permitted. E.C. Hawkins, another veteran of the White Pass and Yukon Railroad project, was the chief engineer in charge of railroad construction.[12]

Bridge building, particularly that of the "million dollar bridge" at mile 49, provided the most dramatic highlights over the 1907-1911 construction period. In the summer of 1909 Hawkins and A.C. O'Neil, superintendent of bridge construction, took on the formidable task of bridging the 1,500-foot channel at mile 49 where the Copper flowed between the Miles and Childs glaciers.

The project was unique because of the glaciers' impact. Just a mile above the crossing, the 3-mile front of the Miles Glacier discharged a valley of icebergs from early

spring through late autumn. The largest of these icy behemoths weighed thousands of tons and coursed downriver with a 12-mile current. Somehow the ice had to be diverted while the bridge was constructed. Once in place the bridge had to be protected from the annual spring river breakup, when ice frozen to depths of 7 feet would be loosed to smash against any structures in its way.

Construction started with three giant piers sunk 50 to 60 feet to bedrock. The piers, with their greatest diameter at 86 feet, were solid concrete armored with steel rails to better withstand the impact of ice. Work was done after freeze-up to avoid ice movement. With the piers in place, work proceeded rapidly in April and May in a desperate race to complete the structure before breakup. All the necessary timber falsework rested on the river ice, and a disaster was narrowly averted when, after a series of fierce storms, the river began to rise, lifting its 7-foot ice cover and the bridge falsework with it. All hands worked furiously to thaw and cut out ice from around the piles to prevent pressure on the falsework. Despite these efforts, the cantilever construction falsework of the third pier was driven 15 inches out of line. Hawkins, through a herculean effort, managed to force the 450 feet of heavy piling and substructure back into line with tackle rigging. Bridge work was then pushed forward and all the work was completed just two days before breakup.[13]

Construction support and transport of materials was aided by the service of a steam sternwheeler, *Chitina*, assembled on the Copper in 1907. Two other steamers were built in 1907-1908. Much of the material and provisions had to be transported during the winter by horse-drawn, double-ender sleds until construction permitted operation of a supply train. An incident in 1909 illustrates the vicissitudes of winter construction--the blockage of a work train by snow for 21 days. The 160 men aboard the train had to wait out the storm before they could start digging their way from beneath a mountain of snow.[14]

At the peak of railroad construction, 6,000 men labored on the project. Excavation totaled 5,180,000 yards, more than half of which was solid rock and embankments placed comprised 1,200,000 yards. Fifteen percent of the 196-mile railroad was built on bridges or trestles with 129 bridges between Cordova and Chitina. Of these bridges five were major steel structures totaling 4,000 feet. Construction cost $23,000,000.

Geologist Alfred H. Brooks did not exaggerate in calling the completion of the railroad "the most important advance made in the history of Alaska transportation since steamboat service was established on the Yukon."[15]

## Cordova

Valdez did not fade away because it did not get a railroad but Cordova developed into a substantial town. Cordova's site had been the old Indian village of Eyak and a cannery location before it was designated the railroad terminal. Its natural features include a good harbor, plenty of level ground, and its location--only 20 miles from the mouth of the Copper River. By 1909, a year after its founding, 1,500 people lived in

Cordova, served by 10 stores, two hotels, two lumberyards, three churches, 10 saloons, and a school. Cordova's interests were bound to the railroad and to the syndicate.

Nominally, Cordova was an independent community, but it resembled a company town in many respects. The local newspaper, the *Cordova Times*, supported the syndicate and attacked anyone who criticized the Kennecott Company. As with other mining towns, the editors boosted Cordova constantly and viewed the community's economic future as one of boundless potential. George Hazelet, the first mayor and townsite developer, was a syndicate man. Nevertheless, he exhibited a somewhat restrained view of the town's future. Eventually, he told a reporter in 1909, Cordova will have 5,000 to 10,000 people supporting the mining and transportation industries, but 1,500 was plenty at the time: "No greater misfortunes could befall the town than a large influx of people before this is warranted by the permanent development of the country."[16]

Even in its raw beginnings, Cordova offered some amenities, including places to eat, drink, and gamble. For those who did not like saloons, there was the clubroom of the Episcopal Church, which was supervised by E.P. Ziegler, later a famed painter. Men could play cards, shoot pool, smoke, drink coffee, and read magazines without any obligation to attend church services.

Among the interesting shops in town was the photograph studio of E.A. Hegg. Hegg's photos of the Klondike stampede are among the best-known pictures of that event. After the Klondike rush, Hegg went Outside for a time. Later, he returned for employment as photographer on the construction of the Copper River and Northwest Railway, then ran a studio in Cordova.

Cordova, of course, survived the closing of the Kennecott operations and the end of the railroad. Its modern economy depends upon fishing and the burgeoning recreation and tourism industry.

## McCarthy and Chitina

McCarthy, 150 miles inland from Cordova, developed into a small community in 1908, serving the railroad and Kennecott mining interests. About 4 miles from Kennicott, its facilities provided some relief for mine and mill workers who preferred recreation away from the company town. The town's peak population in the 1920s was 127. A few of these were prostitutes, who were not allowed at Kennicott. McCarthy survived the closing of the Kennecott operation to exist in a ghostly fashion and even survived the loss of the bridge that linked it to the Edgerton and Richardson highways, but it has been home to few since the 1920s.

A town's fading from a vital community to a marginal one is signalled by many events, but the closing of the school is certainly strong evidence of decline. In December 1931, while Kennicott was still going strong, the commissioner of education closed the McCarthy school which then had only two pupils. McCarthy's weekly newspaper, the *News*, published from 1917 to 1928.[17]

Chitina, a railroad town 100 miles inland from Cordova on the Copper River, was another small community that gradually died after Kennecott shut down. It functioned

as a transfer point for a stageline that connected Chitina with Willow Creek Junction on the Valdez Trail. Quite a few Indian families made their homes at Chitina during the railroad era.

O.A. Nelson, who quit teaching school in Missouri to take up railroading, took a surveyor's job with the Copper River and Northwest Railway in 1908, then settled in Chitina. Forty years later he was one of its few residents. He recalled many things that made life singular in Chitina. One was the spring rite of watching the ice movement at breakup destroy the wooden trestle bridge which spanned the Copper and Chitina rivers. After 1939 this annual destruction ceased because the bridge was no longer rebuilt.[18]

## Evaluating Copper Ore

According to legend, the visible wealth of the copper lodes developed by Kennecott had been obvious to beholders for years prior to their actual mining. In fact, W.E. Dunkle, a mining engineer employed by Kennecott in the company's early years, found that determining the lode's value was not easy. Company experts made a microscopic study of the Kennecott chalcocite--the main ore body--which resulted in a wrong assessment of its value. Their investigation "seemed to show that the copper glance was secondary after bornite." At the time, around 1912, the only mining that had been done on the Bonanza fissure and the rich cliff outcrop ore body of glance pinched out at 300 feet. Little work had been done on the parallel Jumbo fissure, and nothing on the surface indicated the enormous ore bodies that would be found there.

Dunkle believed that rich ore veins would be discovered eventually, but Kennecott's management disagreed and accepted the more pessimistic view, concluding that the rich ore was secondary. As a consequence the company, deeply in the red because of railroad construction costs and only beginning to ship out ore, passed up the chance to buy the Mother Lode Mine at a modest price. Mining proceeded and eventually Dunkle's prognosis was proved correct. Later, Kennecott had to pay a heavy price for a joint mining agreement with Mother Lode owners.[19]

## Kennecott Production

With completion of the railroad in 1911, the syndicate's heavy investment finally began to pay off. Mining and milling had been going on for some time, and the loading dock at the mill was full of ore. To reach the main adit level of the Bonanza Mine at 5,600 feet, workers either hiked a 4-mile trail or rode the bucket tramway. Miners much preferred riding the aerial tramway to walking, despite the risk. The Bonanza tram was capable of moving 1,000 tons of ore a day to the mill. Some high-grade ore was shipped out directly, most passed through the mill for concentration. Further processing of mill tailings followed in the beaching plant, which could treat 600 tons a day. Equipment for a 400-ton mill, the tramway, the power plant, and other structures had been transported from Valdez by pack horses and sleds long before the

railroad was completed. By that time the first mining tunnels had been driven into the Bonanza and Jumbo mines, and each had its own aerial tramway. The Jumbo tramway, extending 16,000 feet, was the second one built and began operation in 1913.

By 1916, with high war prices encouraging production, the mines and mill were operating around the clock with three shifts of workers. Each tramway carried 400 tons of ore each day. Most ore was low grade, averaging 7.5 percent copper, but the Jumbo mine's output of high grade, 70 percent copper, was almost half of its yield.

William Douglass's comparison of the Kennecott operation in 1916 with the famed Anaconda Mine of Butte, Montana, is illuminating. At Butte, there were 30 shafts, some down to 4,000 feet, equipped with fast, modern hoists. Anaconda employed 15,000 men to produce 30,000,000 pounds of copper each month. By contrast Kennecott had two small mines being worked "through single compartment incline shafts. Its hoisting equipment was of modest scale and low powered. The total payroll of mines, mill, and surface staff was only 550 persons yet Kennecott produced 10,000,000 pounds monthly--one-third of Anaconda's output." At the time, in 1916, Kennecott did not have a large reserve. Bonanza was fading but the Jumbo ore was wonderfully rich "solid chalcocite for a stope length of 350 feet, with a width of 40 feet and a height of 40 feet." That block produced 70,000 tons of 70 percent ore, which also included 20 ounces of silver per ton.[20]

Maintaining year round operation of the railroad, mine, and mill was a formidable responsibility. Heavy snows sometimes taxed the abilities of railroad crews, despite use of the largest rotary snowplows made. Heavy storms hindered mill-mine operation at times, as in spring 1919 when communication between mines and mill was disrupted for several days when slides wiped out telephone lines, demolished tramway towers, and closed trails. Slides at the Mother Lode threatened bunkhouses and forced miners to live in the mine tunnels for several days.

In 1919 the company formed the Mother Lode Coalition Mines to mine and mill the valuable ore located between McCarthy Creek and Kennicott Glacier. The Bonanza tramway transported ore from the Mother Lode to the mill. Passages between the Mother Lode and Bonanza and Jumbo mines provided for efficient movement of miners underground.[21]

The Erie was the fourth mine of the Kennecott group. It perched high in the cliffs above the Kennicott Glacier, 4 miles north of the mill. It was connected to the Jumbo by a 12,000-foot crosscut. Erie's production did not compare in volume with that of the other mines, but it helped maintain production after Jumbo reserves dwindled and served to justify an expansion of the tramway and mill in 1920. Tramway capacity was increased to 600 tons and the mill's to 1,200 tons daily.

Production statistics from 1901-1940 summarize the rise, flourishing, and decline of the industry. Note that the following production statistics include output of all Alaska's copper mines. Kennecott and the mines of Prince William Sound (see Chapter 7) contributed 96 percent of the total. Prince William Sound production amounted to 214,000,000 pounds from 1904-1930.

**Copper Provided by Alaska Mines, 1901-1940**[22]

| Year | Pounds | Value | Year | Pounds | Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1901 | 250,000 | $ 40,000 | 1921 | 57,011,597 | $ 7,354,496 |
| 1902 | 360,000 | 41,400 | 1922 | 77,967,189 | 10,525,655 |
| 1903 | 1,200,000 | 156,000 | 1923 | 85,920,645 | 12,630,335 |
| 1904 | 2,043,586 | 275,676 | 1924 | 74,074,207 | 9,703,721 |
| 1905 | 4,805,236 | 749,617 | 1925 | 73,855,298 | 10,361,336 |
| 1906 | 5,871,811 | 1,133,260 | 1926 | 67,778,000 | 9,489,000 |
| 1907 | 6,308,786 | 1,261,757 | 1927 | 55,343,000 | 7,250,000 |
| 1908 | 4,585,362 | 605,267 | 1928 | 41,421,000 | 5,965,000 |
| 1909 | 4,124,705 | 536,211 | 1929 | 40,510,000 | 7,130,000 |
| 1910 | 4,241,689 | 538,695 | 1930 | 32,651,000 | 4,244,600 |
| 1911 | 27,267,878 | 3,408,485 | 1931 | 22,614,000 | 1,877,000 |
| 1912 | 29,230,491 | 4,823,031 | 1932 | 8,738,500 | 550,500 |
| 1913 | 21,659,958 | 3,357,293 | 1933 | 29,000 | 1,900 |
| 1914 | 21,450,628 | 2,852,934 | 1934 | 121,000 | 9,700 |
| 1915 | 86,509,312 | 15,139,129 | 1935 | 15,056,000 | 1,249,700 |
| 1916 | 119,654,839 | 29,484,291 | 1936 | 39,267,000 | 3,720,000 |
| 1917 | 88,793,400 | 24,240,598 | 1937 | 36,007,000 | 4,741,000 |
| 1918 | 69,224,951 | 17,098,563 | 1938 | 29,760,000 | 2,976,000 |
| 1919 | 47,220,771 | 8,783,063 | 1939 | 278,500 | 30,000 |
| 1920 | 70,435,363 | 12,960,106 | 1940 | 122,369 | 13,800 |
| | | TOTAL | | 1,373,764,701 | 227,419,199 |

## Peak and Decline

Though 1916 was Kennecott's best year, historian Melody Webb has described 1923 as the "pivotal year" for Kennecott--the year that its slow decline commenced, although production reached its highest point. Production was high in 1923 because the post-World War I slump caused by overproduction and low prices finally ended. But the high level was not maintained; it fell sharply in 1924-29 as high-grade ore sources were depleted. The Bonanza and Jumbo mines had been declining since 1918, but the Mother Lode produced well, and another ore body was discovered on the Jumbo-Erie crosscut.[23]

Superintendent William C. Douglass aggressively pursued a higher yield by mining the Glacier Mine and installing new technology. Technical innovations included the construction of a leaching plant in 1922-23. Developed at Kennecott by E. Tappan Stannard in 1915, the ammonia leaching process was a significant advance in technology. Its success led to its use elsewhere in the industry. Chemicals were used to dissolve the mineral from low-grade ore, then precipitate it into a concentrate. The

leaching process was completed in flotation tanks "when oil or grease was used to separate, through a bubbling action, the mineral from its host rock."[24] Litigation between the process patent holder and other western mining companies had delayed the construction of Kennecott's leaching plant. The process worked well at Kennecott, allowing a recovery rate of 96 percent, but the scarcity of water over the winter restricted its use.[25]

A detailed statistical breakdown for the company operation exists for the year 1924, when 550 men were employed. Of the 321 working in the mines, 146 were in the Mother Lode. Highest wages, $5.50 to $5.75 daily, went to the electricians and machinists; skilled mill men earned up to $5.50, while miners got $5.25 and laborers $4.25.[26]

Douglass, like other superintendents, was intolerant of union men. All new employees were required to swear that they were not union members and promise that they would not join a union while employed by Kennecott. Wages were pretty good for the early 1920s. A 1923 contract stipulated a $4.60 daily wage, less board of $1.45 daily and eight cents hospital dues. Employees who were hired in Seattle were advanced the $37 charged for ship fare to Cordova, which could be gradually repaid from wages. Even the railroad ride on the syndicate's railroad was only conditionally free: the $23.40 fare was advanced and deducted from wages until six months satisfactory employment was completed. At that point, any deductions were repaid and no others were taken.[27]

The 550 employees in 1924, divided between the mill (249) and the mines (321), earned a monthly total of $86,337. It cost 8.23 cents a pound to process the ore for copper (aside from the gain from the silver extracted from the ore), and reserves were dwindling. Earlier high-grade ore assayed at 75 percent; now the Bonanza-Jumbo ore was 50 percent and that of the Mother Lode about 60 percent. Copper prices averaged 14 cents a pound from 1924-28 and rose to 24 cents in 1929, but Kennecott's limited reserves did not enable the company to take full advantage of the boom. Low prices rather than low grades were the chief factor in the company's decline and end.

## Life at Kennicott

The company town of Kennicott (Kennecott) was laid out beside the Kennicott Glacier. As was mentioned, the different spellings for the glacier/river and town company is an irritating memorial of careless spelling. (Modern maps show "Kennicott" as the townsite name, but earlier maps spelled it "Kennecott.") Kennicott was the name given to glacier and the river by U.S. Army explorer Oscar Rohn to commemorate Robert Kennicott, leader of the scientific corps of the Western Union Telegraph Expedition of 1865-67. Located about 4 miles from McCarthy, the town's elevation is 2,200 feet. At its peak in 1920, Kennecott had a population of 500, including the majority of miners who lived in buildings near the mines high above the town and mill.

We have some interesting documentation on the society of Kennicott, including memories of school days in the 1920s written by Superintendent William Douglass' son. Youngsters from some 20 families of the community attended a two-room school

through the eighth grade. For secondary education they were sent to Cordova or Outside. Ice skating and hockey were the chief school recreations. The two teachers worked students hard, although a winter carnival in March provided some relief. The teachers, like the town's two nurses, were usually young, single women "who lived in the staff house--and were almost always married during that year, requiring replacements, because there were lots of single men."[28]

Most of the town's residents enjoyed socializing. Movies were shown on Wednesday and Sunday nights in the town hall. On days like New Years Eve, live music was arranged for dancing. During the summer, baseball was popular, as was fishing. Almost everyone hunted some in the fall. Summer fun also included the year's biggest celebration, Fourth of July, held in McCarthy.

The company took advantage of its isolated location to protect against contagious diseases. All new employees were required to spend several days at a camp outside of town to reduce the risk of bringing in disease.

Religious services were conducted in the schoolhouse whenever a priest or minister from Cordova appeared. Reading was popular. A lending library supplied the latest fiction, and many residents subscribed to magazines which were handed around. Shopping was easy since most of it was done through the much-studied mail order catalogues of Sears, Roebuck or Montgomery Ward. Foodstuffs, mail, and catalogue orders arrived by train although there were a few vegetable gardens in the summer and the company's dairy supplied butter and milk.

Life for the men who lived in bunkhouses was more restricted than that of families, who had small houses, but it was not unpleasant. Mining engineer Ralph McKay recalled the long winter evenings in the bunkhouse at the Bonanza Mine in the 1920s as serene. Despite the men being of mixed nationalities, "they weren't restless and arguments were few. Some played poker while others were busy at blackjack." Some studied catalogues or read newspapers while others listened to an old hand-crank phonograph. Radio signals could not be heard at Kennicott.[29]

Ernie Goulet was another miner who recorded his experiences. He walked most of the way from Cordova to Kennicott in the winter of 1930-31 because heavy snowfalls shut down the railroad. He got a job at the Jumbo Mine which was 4 miles and 4,000 feet above the Kennecott mill. Before taking the 45-minute ride by tramway he had to waive any claim against the company for accidents. The two Jumbo bunkhouses housed 80 men each in two-to-four-men rooms. A small gym and pool table were leading recreational features. He liked his fellow workers but quit when company economy measures dictated a 10 percent wage cut.[30]

Fred Hoff went to work as an assayer in 1935. He was one of the lucky bachelors there to find a bride--a company nurse. The couple moved from staff houses to an apartment above the company store. Life was not too hard but job security was a worry during the depression. The Hoffs would have liked to save money, but food costs were high. Ice, however, was free from the nearby glacier.[31]

Some miners liked working at Kennecott because unlike most mines, it provided work for the full year. Others used their employment to put away a stake to support

their own prospecting or mining. Some men spoke well of Kennecott's management, and others did not. The company did seem to provide for workers and their families, medical, recreational, and educational needs, but employees were wise to remember that its policies were dictated by self-interest. No one ever accused the company of outright benevolence to employees, but it met the standards of the day and achieved its corporate goals.

## Accidents

Individuals who recorded their impressions of Kennicott all mentioned particular accidents. Some were acts of nature, like winter snow avalanches, but more common were accidents in the mines, the mill, or in the tramway.

As a major employer in a hazardous enterprise, Kennecott frequently was sued by workers who suffered injuries. When Ernest VandeVord, a line repairman, was thrown from the moving bucket line running from mine to mill and fell 40 feet to jagged rocks below, he suffered a permanently stiff wrist and back. The company argued that workers assumed all risks in riding the buckets. VandeVord's attorney countered that a defect on the line caused the accident. Jurors awarded the 25-year old machinist (who had earned $90 a month), $750 rather than the $20,000 he asked. The company tried unsuccessfully to have the award set aside. In other respects Kennecott also showed stinginess. When VandeVord asked his foreman about wages, he was told "there is a new rule existing here. When a man gets hurt, his time stops and as soon as he gets out of the hospital, he has to pay board. In your case Mr. Emery will see you--and make some kind of settlement."[32]

Any litigation involving the company was generally tried in Cordova when the third district court, based in Valdez, convened periodically. Records indicate that in disputes with employees Cordova jurors usually favored the company. Occasionally, an employee requested a change of venue, as did Daniel S. Reeder, who was injured in a railroad tunnel cave-in in 1913. The company successfully resisted the change, arguing that the absence of other employees needed as witnesses would hamper operations.[33]

James Heney, another railroad worker injured by a tunnel cave-in while digging out a previous cave-in, asked $25,000 for the permanent crippling of his hip when timbers crushed him. His award was only $2,125.[34] A jury drawn from residents of Seward and Valdez was more generous in compensating the estate of E.A. Reed, railroad engineer. Reed died when his locomotive fell through a bridge that had been partially burned but not repaired. The award was $20,000.[35]

Cordova folks were not prudish and were consistent in favoring the company in other kinds of cases, as Matilda Snyder discovered when she sued George Hazelet in 1912. Hazelet, a company executive and town founder, owned a building that accommodated a bawdy house that offended Snyder because her laundry was located next door. Hazelet effectively resisted her claim for damages, showing that she had deliberately established her laundry next to the bawdy house "to get the business"[36]

During the railroad construction boom, the company had more options in settling litigation. J.E. Dyer, operator of a pile driver, suffered a permanently crippled leg in a construction train accident. He sued for damages then desisted when the company gave him a small settlement and permitted him to run an unlicensed saloon and gambling place at Tiekel. Unfortunately, Dyer liked his own goods too much: "He spent all his money from both sources," his lawyer said, "as rapidly as he could in drunkenness and riotous living." When his money was gone Dyer pleased everyone by "disappearing from Alaska," thus abating "a public nuisance."[37]

## Closing Down

The end of Kennecott was foreshadowed by depression events. Copper fell to five cents a pound in 1931. The company halted use of its expensive leaching process but still lost $2,000,000 that year. Further disaster occurred when a railroad bridge washed out in October 1932, causing the company to close the mines in 1933-34. Reporting on Alaska's mineral industry in 1933, Philip S. Smith of the USGS spelled out the obvious:

> It must be remembered that the mines near Kennecott, which have contributed perhaps ninety percent of the Alaska copper, have been mining a unique deposit, not comparable with any other known deposit in the world, so that inevitably their mineral wealth is being depleted and there is no justification for expecting that their loss will be offset by new discoveries of equally marvelous lodes.[38]

In terse fashion, the company's annual report for 1938 told the story:

> The Alaska property was operated until the latter part of October when all ore of commercial value was exhausted and the property closed down. Equipment having any net salvage value was removed and shipped out before abandonment of railroad properties.

The report went on to explain:

> Production from this property has averaged only 525 tons copper per month since 1928 and therefore cessation of these operations will not affect earnings as this tonnage can easily be made up from other properties [outside of Alaska].[39]

Overall, 4,626,000 tons of ore, averaging 13 percent copper, were mined. From this ore, smelting produced 591,535 tons of copper and 9,000,000 ounces of silver. According to William Douglass, the company netted $100,000,000 profit on the $200 to $300 million in ore sales. Among the great copper mines of the world, Kennecott

ranked 11th but no other surpassed or equaled it in the high mineral content of its ore.[40]

Small lots of high-grade chalcocite ore have been intermittently shipped from the Kennicott area since 1938. State records indicate that 32 tons of copper ore were shipped from there in 1965. All shipments were flown by DC-3 to Glennallen by a small operator.

The impact of Kennecott on Alaska's development cannot be measured by production statistics. Its importance in the territory's economy can not be exaggerated. Kennecott's operation commenced as placer gold production in several regions of Alaska was declining. Its large investments heralded a new era of corporate expansion and provided a much-needed payroll for many years.

## The Kotsina-Kuskulana District

The Kotsina-Kuskulana district lies in the west end of Chitina Valley on the southwest slope of the Wrangell Mountains. Though small, 16 miles long and 12½ miles wide, it was considered for many years to be rich in potential for copper and possibly gold and silver as well. As it turned out, the region is the best Alaska illustration of disappointment following long-proclaimed expectations of wealth.

What kept the focus on the region's potential for so long was its proximity to the Kennecott mines some 20 to 30 miles away and the resemblance of its mineral formations to those of the fabulously rich Kennecott group.

Government investigation of the district began with Oscar Rohn in 1899, followed by USGS surveys in 1900, 1902, 1907, 1912, 1916, 1919, and others. Traversing the mountainous terrain was difficult and treacherous. The valley floors of the Kotsina and Kuskulana are at 2,000 to 2,500 feet, and surrounding peaks rise from 5,000 to 7,395 feet. Most of the valleys tributary to the Kotsina and Kuskulana are hanging valleys, so-called because their mouths are above the level of the main valley floors and can be entered only after a steep climb of several hundred or a thousand feet.

Access to the district remained difficult even after the construction of the Copper River and Northwest Railway. Even in the 1920s prospectors still sledded in their provisions over the winter. Mail and small items could be brought in from Strelna over summer trails via Rock and Strelna creeks or by Roaring and Nugget creeks. Miners called for a wagon road down the Kotsina River to Chitina or some other point on the railroad but did not get it. Most of the claims still active in 1922, when Fred H. Moffit and J.B. Mertie, Jr. of USGS investigated the district, were on tributaries some distance from the Kotsina. Among these were the Cave, Peacock, Mountain Sheep, and Blue Bird claims on Copper Creek. Others on Amy, Rock, Lime, Roaring, and Peacock creeks, the Sunrise Creek group and the Silver Star group (considered valuable for silver rather than copper) were owned by Neil and Thomas Fennesend.

Among the Kotsina River claims those on Elliott Creek (see Chapter 2) were "more widely known than any other copper-bearing locality in Chitina alley except

Kennecott." Here as elsewhere miners had done much tunneling--some tunnels exceeded 1,000 feet--searching for valuable copper ore.[41]

## North Midas Mine and Others

Prospects on Berg Creek, a tributary of the Kuskulana River 12 miles from Strelna, were staked by the North Midas Copper Company in 1916. Earlier claims on the ground had expired for want of recent assessment work. The Midas company went to work on tunnels and was soon mining ore from two levels reached by separate adits. In winter 1918 a carload of gold ore was shipped out, and that summer a mill, crusher, and cyanide plant were installed. A Roebling cable tram 4,600 feet long and capable of carrying 5 tons an hour connected the mine to the mill. Production in 1919 was only 40 ounces of gold and 513 ounces of silver. The mill was shut down in 1925.

Geneva Pacific Corporation became interested in the North Midas and other copper claims in the 1970s. Other claims included the Nelson Mine, one that Kennecott tried to develop in the 1930s and the Binocular Prospect developed by pioneer prospector Martin Radovan.[42]

Radovan came to Alaska to work on the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad and later mined placers on Dan Creek and lode on Glacier Creek. His greatest feat was in staking a group of claims on Binocular Prospect near Glacier Creek. The existence of a large copper stain high on the face of a steep-walled recess in the mountains, had intrigued prospectors for years. No one had been able to reach the stain, but many scanned it with binoculars--hence the name.

After several unsuccessful attempts to reach the remote face, the Kennecott Copper Corporation got serious about it in 1929. It hired several expert mountain climbers, but they called it quits without succeeding after a summer's effort.

Meanwhile, Radovan climbed to a gulch just north of Binocular Prospect and put in a hazardous week cutting steps hundreds of feet along the face of the cliff until he reached a point 200 feet below the Binocular stain. From this point he scaled the wall using ropes and drill steel driven into rock crevices. Radovan staked claims and did some work before giving up working the difficult site.

Geneva Pacific purchased the claims from Radovan before he died in 1975 at the age of 92. The company hired a mountain climber who helped workmen reach the site to prepare a helicopter landing place. Investigation of the claims was then easier.

The prospect proved not to hold the mineral riches that Radovan and the company had hoped. Title to the claims was donated to the National Park Service in 1985. The 250-acre donation included 18 mining claims, six millsites, and a number of buildings.

## Hubbard-Elliott

Philip Smith of the USGS was right in his 1933 speculation that no other rich copper lodes would be found in Alaska. Efforts were made from 1900 to the 1930s,

but no other "marvelous lodes" were discovered. It is part of the Kennecott legend that the syndicate refused to develop all the copper available in the region because of a greater commitment to copper properties owned outside Alaska. As recently as 1964, Charles G. Hubbard, then in his 90s, a historian that Stephen Birch, the longtime head of Kennecott, was ruthless and unscrupulous and refused to develop claims Hubbard offered for sale. But the record of the Hubbard-Elliott holdings suggests that both Hubbard and his partner, Henry Elliott, did well with their copper claims. The prospectors had entered the Copper River country in 1897 but did not discover their significant copper prospects until 1901. They located on Elliott creek, a Kolsina tributary and, finding other prospects in 1902-1904, prepared to reap a fortune.

The partners' Hubbard-Elliot Company attracted some attention nationally. Publicity helped miners draw investors, so Hubbard and Elliott were pleased by a full page spread in the *Chicago Record-Herald*, including pictures and full acquiescence in their estimates of potential. "Fabulous Wealth Strike . . . Copper claims covering four miles of territory . . . the ore in sight, at present market prices, is $112,000,000, but it may reach a billion dollars or even more," were heads topping a grand story. The reporter described the partners of the '97 crossing of the Valdez Glacier, their travails in a scurvy-ridden winter camp, and two years of fruitless search for gold before they stumbled on a mountain of "boronite, black oxide, glance, gray and native copper . . . the richest large body of ore yet discovered." Hubbard and Elliott did confess that marketing their ore, which would "run 50 to 70 percent copper" posed a problem--"a cloud to this dazzling prospect of wealth: there are no means of transporting the ore to the coast for shipment to the mills." Yet railroad talk was in the air, and perhaps a line would be built within two years. Until then, the partners would "work their claims and get ready for the hoped-for railroad."[43]

The fortunate partners alleged that "experts" had confirmed their high estimation of Elliott Creek ores, but the first "experts" were followed by others over the years. One such, an engineer who wrote anonymously, was sent in 1904 from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, to Seattle and Valdez from whence more difficult travel commenced. From Valdez, the engineer traveled with a packhorse outfit, leaving town on July 27, following "the new railroad right of way," then the government trail through the "Lowe River Canyon" (Keystone Canyon), on a trail "narrowed down to only a few inches along the side of the mountain . . . on our left was a wall hundreds of feet, on our right, sheer precipices hundreds of feet." A magnificent waterfall 600 feet high awed him as the party moved on, reaching Camp Wortman in the evening. Out of Wortman's, the rough trail was dangerous with mud and snowdrift. One horse slid down 200 feet on its side. At Beaver Dam Roadhouse, "run by two old maids from Boston," the travelers refreshed themselves, then pushed on to Earnestine on the 30th and Tonsina on the 31st. They made 25 miles the next day to reach the Copper River, crossing on Doc Bellum's ferry.

Finally, on August 5, they reached Elliott Creek to enjoy bunks in the Hubbard-Elliott cabin and " first class grub." Next morning, the engineer visited the Albert Johnson, Guthrie, Marie Antoinette, and Elizabeth claims. Miners were using a dia-

mond drill on the Elizabeth: "we saw enough ore in sight to keep a railroad busy and of the finest quality." Another anonymous "expert" also showed up to confirm "the finest proposition he ever expected to see." The visitor gathered samples from several mines, then relaxed to hunt, fish, and read--when the weather was bad. Later in August, Stephen Birch appeared, looked at the ore samples "and said they looked good." The cut on the Elizabeth had reached 25 feet. Early in September the visitor started out to report to his employees, either Henry Champlin of Chicago or his uncle.[44]

In July 1907 Hubbard and Elliott were still boasting of their mines. Readers of the *Alaska Monthly Magazine* learned that they owned "the greatest and richest copper properties to be found anywhere in the world." It would be impossible to exaggerate the "size and richness" of their claims, according to a magazine writer, who believed that "the real truth is stronger than any fiction of the ordinary mining country." The new company, at an expense of $50,000, was completing a plant, "and will undoubtedly be shipping ore within a few weeks."[45]

All the hype between 1902 and 1907 was a little strange--whether truth or fiction. The partners did all right in selling stock but never did ship any ore--nor did anyone else. Stock sales provided support for other mining ventures carried on by the vigorous Hubbard for the next 60 years, but otherwise the Elliott-Hubbard Company affairs were only interesting because of litigation they inspired. Elliott's wife sued for divorce in 1907 and demanded a large share of the mine properties because of a grub-staking agreement. Judge James Wickersham determined that she had not been her husband's backer on the later expeditions that resulted in allegedly valuable claims. The Hubbards went to court in 1916, subsequent to a divorce, over his reneging on a mining property deed he had given her in 1906. The court refused to give the property back to him.[46]

The history of the Elliott Creek claims is richer in incident than other copper prospects in the region, but the bottom line was the same. It was far easier to announce "another jumbo" than to find one.

## Kennecott: "Octopus" or Benefactor?

In Alaska the syndicate, often called "the Guggs," was either lauded for its development of resources or condemned for monopolistic practices and political corruption. James Wickersham, a friend to Birch and Jarvis until becoming congressional delegate in 1908, described the syndicate's "attempt to control the great national resources of Alaska in 1910 [which] destroyed the last Republican administration, split the Republican party into two factions, which destroyed each other in 1912, and gave the country eight years of President Wilson and his policies." Wickersham was referring to the celebrated Ballinger-Pinchot controversy involving charges of fraud in the syndicate's interest in acquiring coal claims in Alaska and the subsequent withdrawal of coal lands to entry.[47]

The Ballinger-Pinchot dispute loomed large as an issue affecting mining in the early years of the century. It was in essence a controversy over resource development and occasioned the nation's first, widespread public debate over conservation.

In 1904, Congress permitted entry to Alaska coal lands under private survey (because public surveys were lacking) but restricted individual holdings to 160 acres. When Clarence Cunningham made a number of locations, there were allegations that the Morgan-Guggenheim syndicate was involved in a scheme to control all the territory's coal. President Theodore Roosevelt responded by withdrawing all coal lands from entry by executive order.

Gifford Pinchot, chief of the U.S. Forest Service, pitted himself against Secretary of the Interior Richard Ballinger on the conservation issue. Ballinger, appointed secretary by President William H. Taft in 1909, had been commissioner of the General Land Office when an interior department investigator exposed an apparent Cunningham-syndicate relationship. Commissioner Ballinger ignored the allegations pressed in 1909-1910 by Pinchot, an ardent conservationist. Taft fired Pinchot for suggesting that he was in cahoots with Ballinger in the syndicate's plot to control public lands. Eventually, Congress investigated the affair and exonerated Ballinger. Pinchot did not give up the battle. Roosevelt took up his cause as a campaign issue when he ran as a third-party candidate in 1912 against Taft and Woodrow Wilson.

All the heat of the national controversy focused attention on Alaska mining and development and on the territory's aspirations for home rule. Alaskans believed that having effective representations in Congress and their own elected legislature would smooth the way to economic development. Alaska got its congressional delegate in 1906, and Wickersham successfully opposed Taft's plan for a military commissioner rule in 1909-1910. In 1914 the coal lands were opened for entry, but the expectations for their value had faded. Between 1906 and 1914, the Panama Canal opened to create lower coal freight rates from the East to the West Coast. Another significant event of these years was the commencement of petroleum production in California.[48]

In the furor directed towards the syndicate during the controversy, Dan Guggenheim was dismayed by the bitterness of his opponents. He believed that other men who had helped develop the frontier had been knighted while, in contrast, his enemies cried out for an indictment. Some Alaskans agreed that the syndicate deserved credit rather than censure. C.L. Andrews, formerly a long-time customs officer at Sitka, Skagway, and Eagle, praised the company in the *Alaska-Yukon Magazine*:

> The men who are furnishing the capital for this road certainly have faith in Alaska. The United States bought the country for $7,200,000 and revolted at the price. She has put nothing into it since, beyond the revenue she has taken out; made no improvements of any moment worth mentioning; she has experimented in anomalous laws, and has prevented settlement of the accessible parts by withdrawing the coast in reservations; she has not even surveyed the land so a settler can get a farm without paying more for a survey than a pre-emption cost twenty years ago in the Western states. Yet here

> are men putting more than twice as much into developing the country as the United States paid for the whole,--for this road is estimated to cost $15,000,000 by the time it is completed.[49]

Andrews' views, expressed in 1910, were echoed decades later by Archie W. Shiels, who had been a storekeeper for Michael Heney during railroad construction. He quoted a speech made by Simon Guggenheim in 1910, directed against conservationists who argued that Alaska's riches belonged to the people. Guggenheim noted that the wealth was useless until found and developed: "men and capital must do the work, and it is risky for both. Both . . . are entitled to rewards commensurate with the risk, and if Alaska is to be developed at all, the interests of those two classes must be guarded as jealously as the interest of those who sit in comfort at home."

Sheil's argument followed the same vein:

> When Kennecott was worked out and they quit Alaska, they were accused of taking untold millions out of the country and in return leaving nothing but a hole in the ground. No credit was given them for the millions they had put into the country in the way of taxes, wages, purchase of supplies, not to mention the purchase and operation of the Alaska Steamship Company, and just let me say that Alaska never did have a better or more satisfactory marine service than that given them while the Alaska Steamship Company was being operated by the Syndicate, all the political critics to the contrary . . . they spent over fifty million dollars in Alaska--not such a bad hole in the ground at that."[50]

Writing in the *Engineering and Mining Journal*, L.W. Storm ridiculed the assertions of the syndicate's enemies that the company had monopolistic tendencies. He argued that the Guggenheims owned only a single group of mines in a vast district and other powerful capitalistic interests including those of Anaconda, Calumet, and Hecla and James Phillips, Jr. of Nevada Consolidated were in the field before the Guggenheims. "The idea that there is any effort on the part of the Morgan-Guggenheim syndicate to control this extensive copper belt, save inasmuch as their railway is the first to penetrate it, is the subject of mirth in every prospector's cabin and in every operator's camp throughout this vast district."[51]

What miners and other Alaskans believed was not so easily summarized as Storm indicated. If numbers of them had not believed some of Wickersham's charges, it is unlikely that he would have won the biannual delegate elections from 1908-1914 when the controversy raged furiously.

The death of Dan Guggenheim in the *Titanic* disaster of 1912 had a great impact on the corporation's role in Alaska. Expansionist policies were curtailed, although the retrenchment did not change the prevailing unfavorable image of the "Guggs" among Alaskans.

The syndicate might have fared better in public regard but for its obvious determination to dominate Alaska politics. Copper River and Northwestern Railway workers, many of whom were not eligible to vote, were encouraged to vote against Wickersham at Cordova in the 1908 election for congressional delegate. This upset Wickersham who had already been annoyed by the syndicate's publication of earlier correspondence showing his interest in being retained as company counsel by the Guggs. Another exposure of letters by company officers revealed that Wickersham had not favored home rule for Alaska earlier, although he had made demands for a territorial legislature and other home-rule measures the thrust of his campaign.

After Wickersham gained office conflict with the syndicate went on, particularly over the control of political patronage. Wickersham determined to destroy the influence of the syndicate by any means at his disposal. By the time Stephen Birch got around to asking Wickersham to name his price for dropping his unrelenting attacks on the syndicate, it was far too late. Wickersham had become the champion of the people against the powers of evil--and the evil was represented by the syndicate and its supporters. But for their blunders and corruption, the syndicate might have fared much better during the storm of the Ballinger-Pinchot controversy and their support of President Taft's plan for a military government for Alaska in preference for more democratic institutions would have been less suspicious.[52]

Wickersham gained the ammunition he needed when H.J. Douglas, (not to be confused with Kennecott Superintendent William Douglass) recently fired as syndicate auditor, gave him evidence of Morrisey's role during the first Hasey trial. Douglas identified John Carson as the "bag man" who saw to it that Morrissey got money from the company's "corruption fund." A Carson letter to syndicate director David Jarvis extolled the services of Morrisey whose "acquaintances with many of the government's witnesses and control over them placed him in a position to be of the greatest service." Carson's letter was suggestive of jury tampering. Records of the actual disbursements to Morrisey were not extensive enough to be convincing of bribery but, as Wickersham pointed out, Douglas did not have all the evidence that might exist.[53]

Wickersham knew how to engage the attention of the press to the possible chicanery of the Guggs. And the syndicate men blundered further into providing him with a congressional forum for inquiry when they brought charges against U.S. Attorney John Boyce and U.S. Marshal Dan Sutherland. Boyce and Sutherland were dismissed because of alleged excessiveness in prosecuting Juneau banker C.M. Summers for assault. Summers and his good friend, Governor Walter Clark, were warm friends of the syndicate. Clark convinced the attorney general that Boyce and Sutherland prosecuted Summers merely because he was a foe of Wickersham. Whatever the truth, the dispute over the firings and replacement of the officers with John Rustgard and Herbert Faulkner was aired when a Senate subcommittee met to consider the fitness of the new appointees. Wickersham and Sutherland argued that the dismissals followed the efforts of the officers to investigate Hasey jury bribery charges. It is not clear that this was the case, but Wickersham did not neglect opportunities granted him to strike at his old enemies.[54]

The new officers were confirmed despite Wickersham's best efforts, but the attorney general could not resist Wickersham's demands for a thorough investigation of the Keystone Canyon trials, the election frauds at Cordova, and other questionable actions by the syndicate. Agents of the Justice Department went over the court records, interviewed a number of individuals, investigated the activities of suspects, and examined all the 1907-1908 telegraph communications of syndicate officers. Examiner S. McNamara reported the results of the investigation in February 1911. He concluded that "Morrisey is pre-eminently a scoundrel" and that "irregular methods" had been used by the Hasey defense. U.S. Attorney Elmer E. Todd of Seattle reviewed McNamara's report and agreed with his conclusions. "Improper methods" had been used by the defense, but the government did not have enough evidence to support a successful prosecution.[55]

It was the chicanery involved in a coal contract that eventually resulted in the prosecution of some syndicate officers. H.J. Douglas reported that the syndicate's David Jarvis had agreed with officers of another company on the price for coal to be offered for shipment to Forts Davis and Liscum in Alaska. Further investigation and much urging from Wickersham led to a federal prosecution of company officers at Tacoma, Washington.

The involvement of David Jarvis in corrupt practices of the syndicate was painful to many of his friends in Alaska and elsewhere. Jarvis had been admired by President Theodore Roosevelt, who considered him the embodiment of manly virtues--courage, decisiveness, intelligence, and integrity. Jarvis established himself as a national hero in 1898 when, as an officer in the U.S. Revenue Marine, he directed an overland reindeer expedition in relief of whalers caught in the arctic ice. Later, as Alaska's collector of customs, Jarvis enhanced his reputation. Roosevelt offered his favorite Alaskan the position of territorial governor in 1906 and, when Jarvis declined, accepted his recommendation of Wilford B. Hoggatt. Jarvis chose a more lucrative job as a director for the Alaska syndicate.

Jarvis was not among those convicted in October 1912 because he had taken his own life in June 1911, shortly after indictments were issued. Jarvis, who has been treated with great sympathy by historians of the event, left a cryptic note: "Tired and worn out." The *New York Times* story on his suicide observed his boldness "beyond the realization of people who did not know Alaska--whether lobbying for legislation, seizing railroad right-of-ways by power of Winchester, fixing jurors, or playing corrupt politics."[56]

A realistic assessment of the syndicate required the historian to weed out some of the stronger statements made by Wickersham and some glowing tributes recorded by syndicate fans. Some syndicate supporters like Margaret Harrais of Fairbanks were inclined to blame the government for policies that restricted the company's benefits to Alaska, including the failure to extend the Copper River and Northwest Railway from Chitina to Fairbanks. Harrais believed that "poison gas artists" had given financier J.P. Morgan a bad name: "He was featured as an octopus who was fastening his tentacles on Alaska's resources to suck the life-blood out of us." Harrais believed in the Morgan

quoted at her dinner table by her guest Stephen Birch while the Copper River and Northwest Railway surveys were under way. "Steve," said Morgan to Birch,

> when you go into that Tanana country, I want you to pay particular attention to the agricultural possibilities. . . . If those pioneers want to stay there after the gold is mined out, I'll build a railroad in there for them. I don't care a damn what it costs me, or whether I get a cent of the investment back! I'd like to make it possible for them to remain. John D. Rockefeller has built churches and Andrew Carnegie libraries, as their monuments--I am going to build a railroad to benefit those Alaska pioneers as my monument.[57]

This story made Harrais "gasp for a moment," but she believed it. Morgan did not fulfill his promise but, she believed, it was because the conservationists led by Gilbert Pinchot excoriated everyone who wished to develop Alaska and their nastiness dissuaded Morgan. Yet Morgan did make it possible for Birch to develop the copper mines, "give employment to thousands of men at good wages, give the prospector a chance to earn a grubstake and keep him in Alaska, and enriched the world by over $200,000,000 in new wealth."

The syndicate chose to invest its Kennecott profits elsewhere, Harrais believed, because of the ugly treatment received in Alaska.[58] Morgan's death in 1913, like that of Dan Guggenheim a year earlier, affected the corporation's expansionist policies in Alaska. It is also possible that the widespread unfavorable publicity over the Keystone Canyon shootout diminished enthusiasm for pushing the railroad into the interior.

Historians have been divided in evaluating the syndicate. Jeanette P. Nichols believed that the syndicate exploited Alaska through its control of shipping and political corruption. Robert Stearn and Lone Janson are much more favorable to the syndicate.[59] Melody Webb's summary offers a balanced view:

> The syndicate touched every facet of life--political and economic, national, and local. In part, Alaska's small population invited this impact. The company's steamships carried nearly all supplies and passengers between Alaska and Seattle. Its railroad was the longest and best constructed in the territory, with equitable rates while operating at a loss each year. Its fisheries, canneries, and merchandise outlets supplied needs to a developing territory. Its copper production stimulated other mineral development. And its large capital investment brought economic opportunity to an isolated area. Most important, the syndicate was the parent from which the giant Kennecott Copper Corporation grew, providing the foundation for the more adaptable corporation. The syndicate, however, did involve itself in a brand of both national and local politics that at best must be judged as 'misconduct.' Overall, its role in Alaskan affairs seems more positive than negative.[60]

## Notes
## Chapter 13

1. Copper River Mining Co. v. McClellan, 2 *Alaska Reports*, 134. The case was appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Published depositions of all parties involved including Major W.R. Abercrombie are part of the file for case #20006 which is in the National Archives.

2. William C. Douglass, "A History of the Kennecott Mines," typescript, NPS files, 4.

3. E.J.E. Schuster, "The Reynolds System," (*Anchorage Daily News*, "Alaska Living," July 30, 1967, 7-9), *passim*.

4. Hazelet to Hasey, September 2, 1907, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

5. Perry to Lathrop, September 16, 1907; Lathrop to Perry, September 19, 1907, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

6. McAdams to Chief Wilkie, March 18, 1908, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

7. Hoggatt to Secretary of Interior, October 26, 1907, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF. Wickersham diary, March 27, March 28, April 1, 1908, AHL. Wickersham attributed Harlan's behavior to grief caused by his son's death.

8. Roosevelt to attorney general, December 27, 1907, February 10, 1908, Bonaparte Papers, Library of Congress.

9. McAdams to Chief Wilkie, March 20, 1908, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

10. Ostrander to Tom Donohoe, March 28, 1908, Donohoe-Ostrander Collection, UAF.

11. Ostrander to Tom Donohoe, April 12, 1908, Ostrander-Donohoe Collection, UAF; the district court record is U.S. v. Hasey, case 545B, RG21, FRC.

12. Woodrow Johansen, "The Copper River and Northwestern Railroad," *Northern Engineer*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1975), 19-31.

13. Carlyle Ellis, "The Winter's Crucial Battle on Copper River," (*Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, June 1910), 27-35; Sidney D. Charles, "The Conquering of the Copper," (*Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, December, 1910), 365-70; Hawkins' report. Copy in NPS files.

14. Woodrow Johansen, "The Copper River & Northwestern Railroad," (*Northern Engineer*, Vol. 7, No. 2, Summer 1975), 25.

15. John Kinney, "Copper and the Settlement of South-Central Alaska," (*Journal of the West*, May Vol.10, No. 2, April 1971), 311.

16. May Grinnell, "Cordova,"(*Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, August 1909), 327.

17. W.K. Keller to Julia Seltenrich, December 15, 1931, McKay collection, UAF.

18. *The 49th Star*, September 21, 1946.

19. W.E. Dunkle, "Economic Geology and History of the Copper River District," (paper at Alaska Engineers Meeting, Juneau, 1954), 3-5. Mackay Collection, UAF.

20. Douglass, "A History of the Kennecott Mines," 6-7.

21. Alfred H. Brooks, *Mineral Resources of Alaska: Report on Progress of Investigation in 1919*, USGS Bulletin No. 714 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1921), 194-96.

22. John Kinney, "Copper and the Settlement of South-Central Alaska," (*Journal of the West*, Vol. 10, No 2, April 1971), 315.

23. Melody Grauman Webb, "Big Business in Alaska: The Kennecott Mines, 1898-1938," (Fairbanks: Cooperative Parks Studies Unit, 1977), 37.

24. Robert L. Spude and Sandra M. Faulkner, "Kennecott, Alaska," (Anchorage: NPS, 1987), 7.

25. Grauman Webb, "Big Business in Alaska," 38.

26. "General Points of Interest on the Kennecott Mother Lode Mines," July 15, 1924. Kennecott Collection, UAF.

27. Contract of June 7, 1923. McCracken Collection, UAF.

28. Douglass, "School Days," Douglass Collection, UAF.

29. McKay memoirs, McKay Collection, UAF.

30. Grauman, "Big Business in Alaska," 45-46.

31. Ibid., 47.

32. Ernest VandeVord v. Kennecott court record, case C-39, RG 21, FRC.

33. Daniel S. Reeder v. Katalla Co. and Copper River & Northwestern Railway, court record, case C-42, RG 21, FRC.

34. James Heney v. Copper River & Northwestern Railway, case record, case C-49, RG 21, FRC.

35. Estate of E.A. Reed v. Copper River & Northwestern Railway, court record, case C-50, RG 21, FRC.

36. Matilda A. Snyder v. Edward Kelter and George C. Hazelet, court record, case C-38, RG 21, FRC.

37. J.E. Dyer v. Copper River & Northwestern Railway, court record, case C-3, RG 21, FRC.

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39. *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Kennecott Copper Corporation*, 1938, 6, Kennecott Collection, UAF.

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43. *Chicago Record - Herald*, January 19, 1902.

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45. *Alaska Monthly Magazine*, July 1907, p.9.

46. Elliott v. Elliott, *3 Alaska Reports*, 352-76; Hubbard v. Hubbard, court record, case 669, RG 21, FRC.

47. Wickersham to President Warren Harding, January 6, 1921, NA, RG 60, Letters Received.

48. See Melody Webb Grauman, "Kennecott: Alaska Origins of a Copper Empire, 1900-1938," (*Western Historical Quarterly* v. 9 No. 2 April 1978), 197-211; Robert A. Stearns, "The Morgan-Guggenheim Syndicate and the Development of Alaska, 1906-1915," (Ph.D. dissertation, Santa Barbara: University of California, 1967), *passim*; Nichols, *Alaska*, *passim*; Hunt, *Alaska*, 135-66; U.S. Senate, *Investigation of the Department of the Interior and of the Bureau of Forestry* (Washington: GPO, 1911), *passim*.

49. Andrews, "Viewing the Copper River Spectacle," (*Alaska-Yukon Magazine*, October 1910), 237.

50. Sheils, *The Kennecott Story*, Typescript, AHL, 8.

51. Storm, "Chitina Copper Region in Southern Alaska, (*Engineering & Mining Journal*, November 19, 1910), 1011.

52. Wickersham diary, April 30, 1910, UAF.

53. Carson to Jarvis, May 6, 1908, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

54. John Boyce, Appointments file, NA, RG 60.

55. McNamara to attorney general, February 11, 1911, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF; Elmer Todd to attorney general, April 14, 1911, Keystone Canyon Collection, microfilm 140, UAF.

56. Janson, *Copper Spike*, 64; Wickersham diary, June 24, 1911, with clipping of *New York Times* story of the same date, UAF.

57. Harrais, "Alaska History Manuscript," chap.28, 3, Harrais collection, UAF.

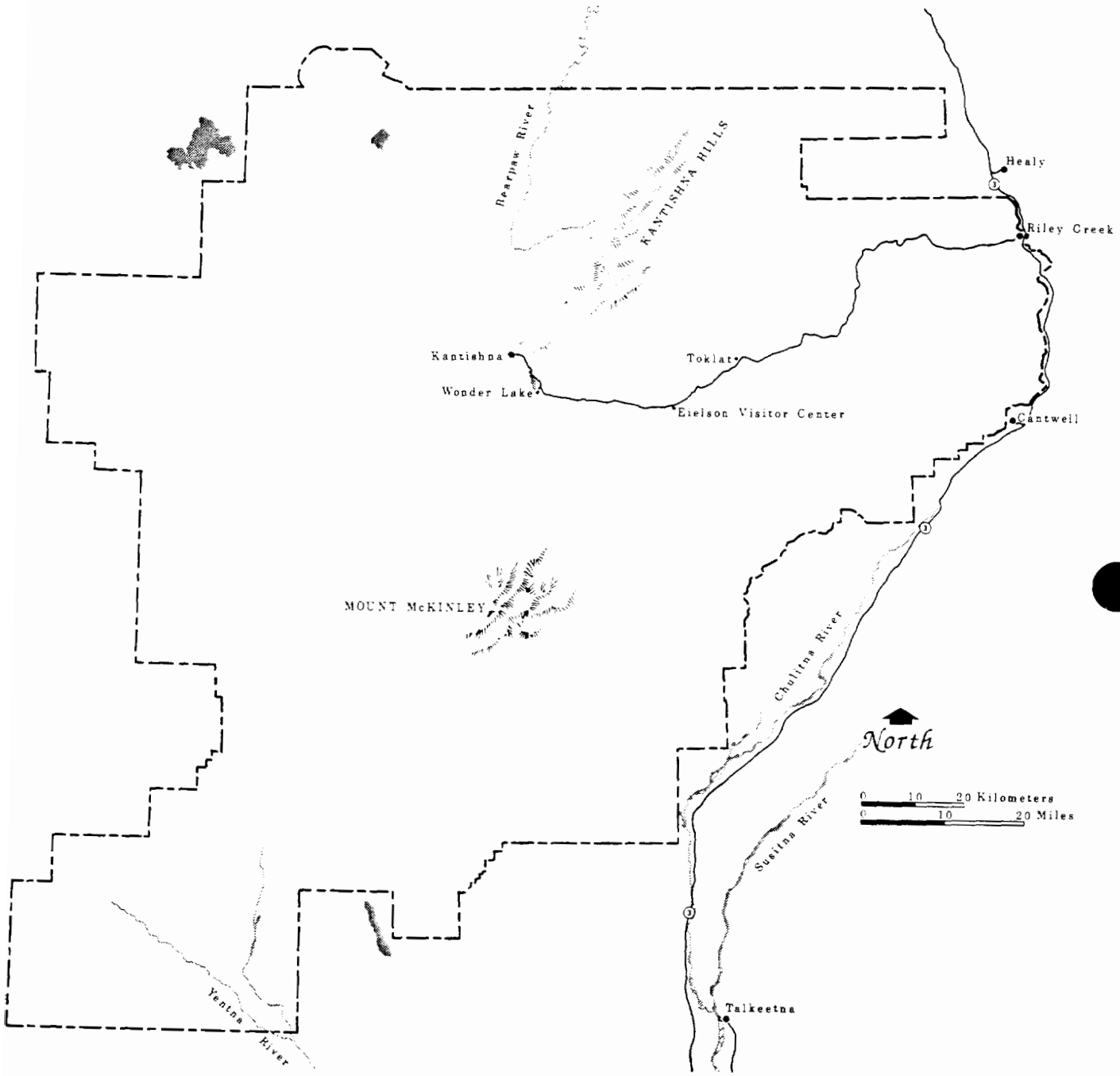
58. Ibid., 7, Harrais collection, UAF. Harrais collection.

59. Nichols, *Alaska* Stearns, "Alaska's Kennecott Copper," (*Alaska Journal* 1975), 130-139; Stearns, *Morgan-Guggenheim Syndicate and the Development of Alaska*.

60. Webb, "Kennecott: Alaskan Origins of a Copper Empire, 1900-1938," 210.

# Chapter 14
## Chronology: Denali

| | |
|---|---|
| 1889 | Frank Densmore prospected in area |
| 1896 | W.A. Dickey names Mount McKinley |
| 1898 | USGS confirms estimates of Mount McKinley's elevation |
| 1902 | USGS survey |
| 1903 | James Wickersham's report of gold prospects |
| 1904 | Joe Quigley and others prospect the country |
| 1905 | Kantishna Stampede |
| | Eureka, Roosevelt, and Diamond founded |
| 1910 | Slate Creek antimony |
| | Sourdough Expedition to Mount McKinley |
| 1915 | Silver-lead ore shipped; Mount Eielson lead-copper-zinc discovery; first antimony mined |
| 1923 | Alaska Railroad completion |
| 1923-31 | Joe Quigley ships silver-lead ore |
| 1924-65 | Crooked Creek placer operation |
| 1930 | Present park road completed |
| 1935 | Red Top mine worked |
| 1936 | Banjo mine worked |
| 1936-41 | Antimony mining at Stampede Creek |
| 1936-70 | Stampede Mine antimony output totals 3,700 tons |
| 1939-41 | Hydraulic mining on Caribou Creek |
| 1942 | Lode mine closed |
| 1947 | First ore shipments by airplane |
| 1950s-60s | Small Slate Creek revival |
| 1970s | Gold price increase sparks mining |




DENALI NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE

# Chapter 14
## Denali

### The Great Mountain

The best known and oldest park in Alaska was established as Mount McKinley National Park in 1917 and later expanded. The Alaska National Interest Lands Act of 1980 added more acreage and renamed the park Denali National Park and Preserve. Encompassing a huge area of the Alaska Range, it includes Mount McKinley at 20,300 feet, the tallest peak in North America, and its two lofty neighbors, Mount Foraker and Mount Hunter.

The Kantishna region, bordered on the south by the crest of the Alaska Range, on the north by the Tanana River, on the east by the Nenana River, and on the west by the lower Kantishna, produced most of the placer gold mined within park borders. But neither the Kantishna nor any other region of the present park attracted the early prospectors of the interior because the area was remote from established transportation routes. One prospecting party crossed from the Tanana River to the Kuskokwim River by way of Croschket and Lake Minchumina in 1889 but found no reason to linger. Frank Densmore, a member of the party, was among the first travelers to describe Mount McKinley in enthusiastic terms.

It was not until 1896 when the great mountain was named by prospector W.A. Dickey. Dickey, seeing it from the Susitna River, estimated its elevation at 20,000 feet. George Eldridge and Robert Muldrow of the USGS confirmed Dickey's guess in 1898.

Once Fairbanks was founded in 1903 as a center for interior mining, prospectors were more willing to venture into the northern foothills of the Alaska Range. Miners based in Fairbanks were only some 150 miles distant from Kantishna, which was well within the range of their wandering.

Systematic exploration of the region began in 1902 with a USGS party led by Alfred Brooks. Brooks and six companions started from Cook Inlet, moved into the interior with a 20-horse pack train, and crossed the Alaska Range through Rainy Pass. Subsequently, the party traveled east along the Alaska Range. They were impressed by the numbers of mountain sheep and other game and cheered by the opportunity for the first exploration of the continent's highest mountain.

On August 1, Brooks made camp at the foot of a glacier flowing from Mount Foraker, which he named after Joseph S. Herron, the U.S. Army explorer, then described the grand mountain:

> Two days later (August 3) we made our nearest camp to Mount McKinley . . . The next morning (August 4, 1902) dawned clear and bright. Climbing the bluff above camp, I overlooked part of the valley, spread before me like a broad amphitheater, its sides formed by the slopes of the mountain and its spurs. Here and there glistened in the sun the white

surfaces of glaciers which found their way down from the peaks above. The great mountain rose 17,000 feet above our camp, apparently almost sheer from the flat valley floor. Its dome-shaped summit and upper slopes were white with snow, relieved here and there by black areas which marked cliffs too steep for the snow to lie upon.[1]

## Kantishna Boom

Scenery, however grand, does not bring settlers into any area. They require a means of making a living. Several years passed before good news caused a rush to the Mount McKinley region. The Kantishna stampede of 1905 to a range of hills north of Mount Mckinley opened a significant mining district. It had its origin in reports of gold finds made by Judge James Wickersham. Wickersham, after attempting to climb Mount McKinley in 1903, found promising signs after leaving the mountain and staked claims along Chitsia Creek in the northern Kantishna Hills. When he returned to Fairbanks, miners listened to his enthusiastic reports with interest. The following season Joseph Dalton and his partner, Reagan, prospected the basin of the Toklat River with success. Dalton and Stiles returned in 1905 to stake Friday and Eureka creeks. Joe Quigley and Jack Horn, acting on reports from trappers who spoke well of Glacier Creek, prospected there the same season to find paying quantities of gold. By this time Fairbanks was primed for a stampede. The Glacier Creek news inspired a number of miners from Fairbanks, who quickly staked virtually every creek in the region. Most arrived by boat up the Kantishna River and its tributaries or by dogsled after navigation closed in the fall.

Soon proud new towns--Glacier City on the Bearpaw River; Diamond on Moose Creek; and Roosevelt and Square Deal on the Kantishna River and Eureka Creek arose to provide services for the 3,000 rushers. Miners built scores of log cabins in each place, and enterprising entrepreneurs raised buildings for stores, saloons, and hotels. Some miners made good money working shallow paystreaks on Eureka and Glacier creeks, but pay dirt on other creeks--Friday, Glenn, Rainy, Moose, Caribou, Spruce, Stampede, Crooked and Little Moose--was soon exhausted.[2]

Wickersham appointed Lee Van Slyke the U.S. commissioner for the new mining district with headquarters at McKinley. By the time Van Slyke reached McKinley in September, the place had been deserted in favor of the new community of Roosevelt. Miners had relocated because "a good dry trail" extended 13 miles to the mines from Roosevelt, whereas from McKinley it was "a very wet one, a great deal of the way having to wade in water to your knees and waist." About 50 people were busy building at Roosevelt, so Van Slyke decided to stay "and find out all I can about the country."[3]

Just 10 months later things looked very discouraging. Van Slyke asked Wickersham for instructions, taking advantage of the opportunity to send his letter and get a return because a miner was preparing for a round trip to Fairbanks. "It looks as though I am up against it, although I hope not and I still have hopes for a camp here, but there are no prospectors in the field and so many have gone out this summer

discouraged that I am afraid we will see no new recruits, and if not it means I will do no business." In the previous few months Van Slyke had only "done $202.95 worth of business and have trusted out $17.50 of that which I will probably never get." He was worried about his family in Washington state. His wife was ill, and he could not afford to stay in Kantishna without a better income. He would have to go Outside where he could earn a living. The only good news was from the discovery claim on Eureka where the miners found "one 43 oz. nugget and one 11 oz. the other day . . . it seems funny that all there seems to be is discovery and #1 on Eureka but it surely will be found in time yet."[4]

Hunter-naturalist Charles Sheldon visited the Kantishna district in summer 1906. He had voyaged from Fairbanks on the small steamboat, *Dusty Diamond*. The boat left Fairbanks in the evening, arriving at the mouth of the Kantishna River by the next afternoon. In the morning the boat pushed upriver on the sluggish, meandering Kantishna through low-lying, swampy country. From the Kantishna the boat voyaged up the Bearpaw Creek 3 miles to the site of the 1905 town of Bearpaw, now deserted. Returning to the Kantishna *Dusty Diamond* reached Roosevelt the next day, "--a row of about thirty cabins, including two stores, a saloon, and a sawmill--on the southeast bank of the Kantishna thirty miles above the mouth of the Bearpaw." The population of eight residents was preparing to abandon the place. From Roosevelt Sheldon and his guide, Harry Karstens, took a pack train to Eureka over a rough 30-mile trail. The journey involved three days of tough travel, "the horses constantly bogged and lost their packs."[5]

It was a relief to reach Eureka, "consisting of about twenty tents and a few cabins," on Moose Creek at the mouth of Eureka Creek, where the original gold discovery had been made. At the time Jack Dalton had 15 men working on the few hundred feet of rich ground he had claimed. The gold was reached at three to four feet, so digging was comparatively easy. The miners shoveled the gravel into a trough where it was washed, leaving the gold in riffles at the end of the trough. Dalton paid his miners $15 a day plus board. By summer's end he had exhausted his claims.

Sheldon was curious about the social life of miners at Eureka. He could understand that distance and remoteness prevented the maintenance of the usual saloon and gambling establishment, but suspected that these pleasures would be available in some form. "And sure enough," he observed,

> it flourished in a large tent occupied by a single individual who, early in the summer, had left Fairbanks and penetrated this wilderness, to remain alone and absorb a large share of the miners' wages--the greater part of which in every mining camp in the northern country has fallen into the grasping hands of her kind.

After a day in Eureka, Sheldon and Karstens continued on up Moose Creek, enjoyed the view of Wonder Lake below them, then reached a good viewpoint of Mount McKinley. No other mountain he had seen, including those in the St. Elias

Range--"one of the most glorious masses of mountain scenery in the world," compared to Mount McKinley.

Sheldon returned to Eureka to find that all but two or three miners had left for the winter. He commented favorably on the hardy miners who had carved out several communities the year before "with the mighty force and vigor of the pioneers of our race--the men who break the wilderness." Alaska's miners, Sheldon believed, faced difficulties unknown to pioneers on earlier frontiers: "He must face and conquer more serious conditions--those of a barren country, intense cold, long winter darkness, and still more, the danger of starvation and disease."

The district declined sharply after 1906. By winter of that year Roosevelt, Square Deal, and Diamond were deserted. Glacier survived with a few miners because it was near the creeks. Production was only about $15,000 in 1907 and the same in 1908. Future profits depended upon using heavy equipment. Large amounts of money and a freight road were needed but not forthcoming. Transport on the rivers and creeks in summer was uncertain because of low water conditions. Alfred Brooks of the USGS observed that "for the present the outlook for mining does not seem hopeful." Although a recording office was established at Eureka in 1909, it did not seem necessary. Production that year was only $5,000; in 1910 it was $10,000.[6]

In 1911 only 20 miners were working in the district on Glenn, Bearpaw, Eureka, and Moose creeks. Gold production between 1910-1919 was between $15,000 and $30,000 each year. All the mining was open-cut ground sluicing when water levels were highest.

## The Sourdough Expedition

What made the 1910 season famous was one of the most celebrated sabbatical ventures in the history of mining. It came about through discussions among Kantishna miners wintering in Fairbanks in 1909-10, enjoying the amenities of Bill McPhee's saloon. As workers in the awesome shadow of Mount McKinley, they took more than a passing interest in the alleged climb of the mountain by Doctor Frederick Cook, then being denounced for claiming to have reached the North Pole. The Explorers Club of New York determined that the mountain record had also been faked. Herschel Parker and Belmore Browne, members with Cook of the 1906 expedition, had abandoned the mountain's ascent near season's end, then Cook returned with one packer to claim a successful ascent. Cook's book about the climb appeared in 1908. His packer confessed to the fraud in fall 1909 amid the North Pole clamor.

Mining prospects did not look too bright for the 1910 season, so the boys decided to show what Kantishna miners could do. Doc Cook was a fake, but they were not, and the great mountain should be conquered by sterling local men. Bill McPhee provided $500 for expedition expenses. It was not enough money for fancy mountaineering equipment, but the Sourdough Expedition, as they were called, did not need such stuff.

They decided that the Muldrow Glacier was the best approach and struggled upward for days, hacking steps and bridging crevasses. At the head of the glacier

(11,000 feet), Tom Floyd quit. Pete Anderson, Bill Taylor, and Charles McGonagall struggled on. McGonagall quit on April 10, after a storm's fury delayed their ascent. The others kept on to the summit, dragging a 14-foot spruce pole which they erected to fly an American flag. They hoped that friends in Fairbanks would be able to see the flag, but Fairbanks, of course, was not that close.

After their feat the miners went back to work. They were not literary men and did not try to capitalize on their record by placing magazine articles or giving lectures. Folks in Fairbanks knew, and that was enough for them. Some folks in Fairbanks doubted their success until Archdeacon Hudson Stuck climbed the higher south summit in 1913 and saw the sourdough's flag on the north summit.

## Conditions in 1916

In 1916 Stephen Capps of the USGS investigated the Kantishna region to report on the current mining and future prospects. He marveled at the paucity of people in the area. During a two-week period he encountered only two hunters before "moving up to the mines--if they can be so dignified." Reaching the mines on July 31, he talked to a handful of men and remarked their woes: "The men on this creek are so isolated that they had heard no news from outside since April." Capps respected the miners who were willing to work under such difficult conditions. Costs were high because of area's remoteness, and "even the mail arrives at very irregular intervals, for no mail route to the mining district has been established and mail is brought in only by courtesy of the chance traveler. Often the camp is isolated from communication with the outside world for weeks or months at a stretch."[7] Among the railroad's benefits already achieved by 1916 was the establishment of a new supply point for the region's miners. The Indian mission town of Nenana at the Nenana River's entry to the Tanana River gained prominence when selected that year as a station and transfer point for rail freight. Shipping freight to the diggings via Nenana cut 55 miles from the winter sled road supply route to the diggings.

As Capps observed in 1916 all of Kantishna's placer mining had been with open-cut methods. Miners utilized ground sluices to remove the gravel within a foot of bedrock, then, working more carefully, shoveled the remaining gravel and bedrock into the sluice boxes by hand. Most sluicing was done in the early spring to take advantage of the greatest streamflow, although miners who built dams could store water for use in the later low-water season. The obvious weakness of the system was in its general dependence on streamflow and, as elevations ran from 1,600-3,000 feet, the flowing season only extended from May to September. Miners could not always count on a four-month season because smaller streams diminished in late summer and could not provide sufficient water for sluicing. Depending upon particular local conditions, the mining season lasted from 100 to 120 days.

Miners working for wages earned $6 daily and board for a 10-hour day or $1 an hour without board, but there were few wage laborers in the district. Men who did not own stakes in claims did not hang around the area waiting for employment. And with

better opportunities in less remote districts, it was hard for owners to encourage laborers to come in for such a short working season.

After the boom of the first few years, the district could not support even a small store. A miner who miscalculated his food or equipment needs had to borrow from others or go without. Thus, although the district with its pick-and-shovel methods could be described as a poor man's one, it was not. Miners had to look ahead and invest many months in advance of any possible return. Since 1906 the district's population had stabilized at 30 to 50 persons.

Though most of the high mining costs could be attributed to Kantishna's distance from supply points, there were detrimental local conditions as well. High elevation provided easier access than was found in many low-lying mining areas, but altitude also meant that wood for fuel and mining needs was not nearby. Virtually all the placer ground lay above timberline, so wood had to be hauled from a distance of 1 to 8 miles, depending upon the particular creek being worked. In early days miners enjoyed the benefits of a sawmill, but after the decline they had to cut timber by whipsaw.

An experienced Alaska geologist like Capps could observe and understand the elements of mining technology and logistics in a district after he looked things over and talked to miners. With his experience, the knowledge gained from field interviews, and the accumulated experience of Alfred Brooks and other geologists, Capps' published report was likely to be accepted by working miners and other interested individuals as the latest and most authoritative word on the subject. On the scientific level, however, Capps could not depend much on others. He was often the only professional geologist to see a particular mining region. It was his joy and responsibility to answer the ultimate questions: Where did the precious minerals originate and how did they reach this place?

In Kantishna Capps had no trouble seeing that the underlying rock was the Birch Creek schist, "cut by relatively small bodies of intrusive rocks" of various ages. The younger rocks included "some dikes and stocks of granite porphyry and quartz porphyry that may be genetically related to the mineralized quartz veins. The schists are in places likely siliceous and include beds of quartzite schist." Throughout the schist numerous quartz veins are distributed among the rock mass, and some contain visible free gold. Mortar tests of some veins revealed that native gold was widely distributed. Since the largest, most continuous gold-bearing quartz veins were in the basins of placer-rich streams, there was conclusive proof that most of the gold derived from "the erosion of the larger quartz veins that cut the schists."[8]

Capps, like the prospectors who had led the way, was impressed by the visible evidence found in gold nuggets. Observing those gathered in a miner's cleanup he found them "rough and angular," indicating that they had traveled no great distance from the outcrop of the vein of origin. Gold taken farther downstream tended to be finer and more smoothly worn because it had been transported a greater distance.[9]

Capps' observation confirmed those of the miners who had located their ground by making the same observations. The geologist's farther and more scholarly contributions here were only useful for relating the origin of the gold to ancient ice age ac-

tivity--matters that interested practical miners only to the extent that the knowledge helped their eyes discern similar geological conditions. Miners studied Capps' words even when he entered the theoretical realm:

> To just what extent the gold-producing steams were once occupied by glaciers and their preglacial placer deposits removed by ice erosion has not been definitely determined, for the glacier evidence are inconspicuous and poorly preserved. It can be stated, however, that in those portions that were glaciated the erosion of the ice was sufficiently severe to disturb or remove the greater part of the preexisting gold placer deposits, so that any concentrated deposits of gold that are now present are due to the erosion of streams since the ice retreated. Below the edges of the glaciers stream erosion was retarded during the ice advance, for the waters were burdened with an unusually large supply of rock waste, and this they deposited as outwash gravels beyond the ice edge. The streams assorted the materials of the outwash gravels to some extent, but much less than is common in normal, lightly loaded streams.
>
> With the final shrinkage and disappearance of the glaciers from this district the steams commenced their task of readjusting their valleys to conditions of normal erosion. Less heavily loaded than when they were receiving glacial waters, they began to intrench themselves in the deposits of outwash gravels, which now appear as high benches or terraces along the lower streams, especially those on the north side of the Kantishna Hills. In cutting down through these gravels the streams in places occupied somewhat different courses from those along which they had formerly flowed, and canyons show the position of obstructions encountered in the downward cutting.[10]

Keen to report his findings scientifically and to help miners, the geologist sometimes had to deride local theories. Overturning local legend and prejudice did not make a geologist popular, and such disagreement explains some of the ambivalence in miners' attitudes toward USGS men. Kantishna miners believed that gravel taken from a prospect shaft on Glacier Creek resembled the "white channel" gravels of the Klondike. Yet panning these gravels did not confirm hopes of richness. Capps determined that the Glacier Creek gravel was, despite appearances, dissimilar to that in the Klondike. It was probably of an earlier Tertiary age and had been affected by erosion and glaciation in very different ways. The misconception of the miners, like their optimism, was intriguing but gave way before the relentlessness of scientific inquiry. In the long run miners would rather have the help of science than muddle along without it.

The total yield of Kantishna's gold from 1905-1916 was below a half million dollars. With only 35 miners in the entire Kantishna district in 1916, prospects for development were hardly blooming. Yet Capps was not ready to dismiss the region.

One foundation for his optimism--ardently shared by others in Alaska--lay in completion of the Alaska Railroad from tidewater at Seward to Fairbanks. The railroad had triggered Capps' expedition, as it seemed likely that its completion in 1923 would end the district's isolation and high mining costs.

Mining areas were off line, but Capps believed that feeder roads would undoubtedly be built. Coarse gold had been discovered in many creeks, including Rainy, Spruce, Myrtle, Moonlight, Stampede, Crooked, and Flume. Railroad survey party members had undertaken a little panning themselves, finding 10- to 30-cent nuggets on three streams that miners had not yet worked. Another prop to Capps' carefully expressed hopefulness was his appreciation of the limitation of the previous decade's mining. Miners had not yet utilized hydraulic or mechanical methods. Their pick-and-shovel work had taken the easy rocks of a few creeks, leaving deeper and less profitable ground unworked. Since other regions reworked by dredges had proved profitable. there was reason for optimism regarding Kantishna.

## Creation of Mount McKinley National Park

In 1917 Congress set aside 2,200 square miles of land south and east of the Kantishna mining district as Mount McKinley National Park. Even though the purpose of the park was the protection of the mountain environment and wildlife, the rights of miners holding claims within the park were acknowledged. Kantishna miners perceived some economic value to them in the park's creation. Roads would be built that they could utilize for hauling supplies and ore.

The negative aspect of the park's creation soon became a matter of controversy between miners and Chief Ranger Harry P. Karstens (later named superintendent). Miners had been long accustomed to killing game for food and had a hard time adjusting to hunting restrictions. Aside from that, however, miners remained free to prospect and mine within the park.

Karstens was a logical choice to head the park. He knew the region intimately and had guided Charles Sheldon in 1900, 1907, and 1908. Sheldon, a renowned naturalist and big-game hunter, had been an influential lobbyist for the park's establishment. Karstens had also climbed the south peak--the highest point of Mount McKinley--in 1913. Credit for this climb was usually given to the Rev. Hudson Stuck, who organized the party, but Stuck himself admitted that the party would not have succeeded without Karsten's leadership. Walter Harper was the third member of the summit party.

Karstens had rushed to Dawson over the Chilkoot Pass in 1897. In spring '98 he and other miners staked claims 100 miles below Dawson within Alaska and laid out the Eagle townsite. After mining for a time on Seventymile River, Karstens became a contract mail carrier. He and Charles McGonogal carried the first mail from Fairbanks to Fort Gibbon and handled the bimonthly route between Fort Gibbon and Gulkana on the Copper River. Karstens also guided Billy Mitchell, when the army officer surveyed the route for the telegraph from Eagle to Valdez in 1901-1902. Karstens was among

the original Kantishna stampeders in 1905. Subsequently, he carried mail from Fairbanks to the Kantishna.

## Placer Mining 1920-40s

The USGS estimated that only $480,000 in placer gold was taken from Kantishna from 1905 through 1921. The forecast improved when hydraulic operations were introduced in 1920 on Moore, Glacier, and Caribou creeks. One company built a ditch and flume from Wonder Lake to Moose Creek; and others drew water from the various streams. Contrary to all expectations the two large hydraulic operations did not reverse the dismal pattern of meager production. In 1923 production for the district from the efforts of 19 miners was only $13,000. Both hydraulic operations were shut down by 1928. Mining by hand methods during the depression years did not bring in much money.

A resurgence occurred in the mid-1930s when the gold price rose and with the completion of the road through McKinley National Park from the railroad to Kantishna in 1937. A third stimulant was in the development of lode mining, which made all mining in the region appear in a more promising light.

In 1939 the Caribou Mines Company and the Carrington Company utilized yard-bucket draglines on Caribou and Glacier creeks to good effect. All previous records were broken in 1940 when the district produced 4,000 ounces of placer gold worth $139,000.

This brief "golden age" occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Placer mining was curtailed during the war, and its resumption after the war did not profit most miners. Attempts to establish dragline operations and gain some of the success of pre-war years were not successful. Only one or two small placer outfits worked in the 1950s and '60s. In the mid-'70s to mid-'80s period, gold mining operations took a profitable turn. The gold production total of 55,000 ounces reported by Budtzen in 1978 reached 80,000 ounces by 1986 and good future prospects were reported.[11]

## Lode Mining

The first lode mining in 1905 was of antimony rather than gold. Joe Quigley shipped 12 tons of stiblite ore from the Last Chance mine on Caribou Creek, taking advantage of high prices offered during the Russo-Japanese war. Quigley also found gold, silver, and other mineral veins along Mineral Ridge, later renamed Quigley Ridge. Other prospectors, including Tom Floyd, made discoveries in the Glenn Creek area from 1907-09.

From 1919-24 properties on Quigley Ridge and Alpha Ridge that Quigley leased to Tom P. Aitken and Hank Sterling produced 1,435 tons of ore. The yield of $300,000 in silver, gold, lead, and zinc stirred fresh interest in the Kantishna, making it easier for prospectors to raise grubstake money.

The renewed prospects of the Kantishna district excited some Alaska journalists. The district is "one of the richest in the U.S.," alleged R.C. Morris in the *Pathfinder*: "The sum is about to shine on men like Jack Hamilton, Joe Quigley, and Billy Taylor who held claims for 17 years existing on sow-belly and beans." After 1924 the sun did not continue to shine on Quigley and Alpha ridges. Once the high-grade ore was exhausted, further production was inhibited by high transport costs.[12]

Transportation problems had always inhibited placer-mining, but the situation was far more difficult in lode mining. The silver ores from the Eureka area were sacked and hauled over the winter trail to Glacier City, then by horse-drawn sledge 22 miles to Roosevelt. With the opening of navigation a steamboat barged the ores down the Kantishna to the Tanana then down the Yukon to St. Michael and ocean transport. By the time the ores reached the Tacoma smelter, transport charges totaled $75 a ton. Only the richest ores could be shipped profitably. These were gone by 1924, and lode production ended in the southern part of the district. Geologist Thomas K. Bundtzen, the leading Kantishna historian, observed that silver would have to assay at 100 ounces a ton before this venture could profit. "Silver was worth nearly $1 an ounce in 1920. Lower-grade ores today remain on the dumps."[13]

During the same summer of 1921 that the mineral production on Quiqley and Alpah ridges made stirring news, Joe Quigley made another strike. This time it was reported that he found a vein of gold, silver, and lead which "caused a small stampede from other Kantishna sections to Copper Mountain." In fact the Copper Mountain vein was mainly lead, copper, and zinc; and it did not profit Quigley or stampeders to Copper Mountain. The Guggenheim mining interest did acquire leases from claim holders, but the vein did not prove rich enough for ore production.[14]

Copper Mountain was in the news again in 1924 when bush pilot Carl Ben Eielson landed a World War I Jenny on a gravel bar. The gravel-bar landing was much publicized because it showed the potential of light aircraft in Alaska. Five years later Eielson died in a plane crash, and Copper Mountain was renamed Mount Eielson.

The scarcity of zinc during World War II brought attention to Mount Eielson in 1943. A USGS survey indicated that zinc-lead deposits on its north slope might total 100,000 tons yielding five percent zinc and three percent lead. The USGS report, published in 1944, did not arouse commercial interest in mining Mount Eielson.

## Floyd R. Marsh

A persistent prospector still could have some luck even after the country had been pretty well prospected. Floyd R. Marsh was trapping out of Nenana in 1920 when he decided to seek gold at Kantishna. His knowledge of minerals and mining did not run deep but he had confidence in himself. In late May he and five other miners made a three-day voyage from Nenana to Kantishna on a small sternwheel steamer.

From the landing they hiked some 30 miles to the diggings on Moose Creek. Miners were working with shovel and sluice boxes on Moose, Eureka, and Eldorado

creeks, but Commissioner Herbert Wilson urged Marsh to try Yellow Creek, 8 miles distant.[16]

On his first day on Yellow Creek, Marsh panned about $100 and subsequently found a few other "hot spots" overlooked by miners earlier. Soon Marsh exhausted the small pockets. As food prices were too high for his resources--flour and sugar cost 50 cents a pound--Marsh lived on beans and groundhogs until scurvy felled him. Neighbors helped him through his illness, and Marsh went back to work. Eventually he found a quartz vein on the side of a mountain 300 feet above Yellow Creek.

Everyone was excited about the discovery, which seemed to promise long-range lode potential for the area. Marsh hiked out 80 miles to the railroad and Nenana, resolving to earn enough money for an all-out mining effort the following year. His fame had preceded him to Nenana, where his gold discovery was heralded. Entraining to Fairbanks he got his quartz assayed. It was said to be worth $500 a ton!

Marsh worked through the winter and summer, then mushed back to Yellow Creek in the fall. For some weeks he drove a tunnel and hauled out 25 tons of ore before the vein ran out. Johnnie Lake, who had a small stamp mill on Moose Creek, paid $8,000 for the ore and the claim, and Marsh returned to Nenana in December 1921.

Marsh's story of good luck was unusual. More commonly, inexperienced men fared poorly. There were several other lode discoveries in the 1920s and 1930s. Joe Quigley made a major lode find in 1931 after tunneling into his Banjo claim on Iron Gulch. The large quartz-sulfide vein yielded $15 to $18 of gold per ton.

## Technical Help

Prospectors in Alaska got some help from the University of Alaska, founded in 1922 as the Alaska Agricultural College and School of Mines. The college, while struggling for its existence in early years, provided short courses in mining technology taught by Earl Pilgrim and geology taught by Ernest N. Patty. Patty, who later supervised dredging on Coal Creek in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, utilized the active mining operations in the region for instruction, taking students into mines at Ester Dome. They rode down a mining shaft in a hoisting bucket to examine the drift mining 30 to 100 feet below the ground. Miners thawed the frozen ground with hand-driven steam points, following the paystreak at bedrock by slow digging. "This drift mining in low tunnels," Patty said, "was the most killing work I had ever seen."[17]

Both Patty and Pilgrim advised miners at Kantishna. By the 1920s aircraft had made getting to the mines much easier. Pilots sometimes landed on Wonder Lake's ice in preference to the rough-cut airstrip. From Wonder Lake there was a trail to Moose Creek, then on to the Quigley mine. On his first visit Patty met a living legend, Fannie Quigley, who provided good food and local gossip for countless visitors over many years.

In 1933 A.D. McRae, anticipating the increase in the gold price, hired Ernest Patty to help find properties of potential value. With mining geologist Ira B. Joralemon

the men looked over the famous old Cliff mine near Valdez. The Cliff mine had produced a million dollars in quartz from a vein that extended 365 feet below ground and under the sea bottom. Mining stopped when blasting under the sea flooded the works. McRae spent two months trying to pump the mine dry, then abandoned the effort.

After this failure McRae tried to mine at Nuka Bay on the Alaska Peninsula. Miners reopened an abandoned mine and drove a 200-foot tunnel. Once again the effort failed to benefit the owner. Patty then recommended the Quigley properties at Kantishna. The Quigleys sold to McRae, who spent $40,000 on 1,000 feet of underground work. Including the purchase price, McRae expended a total of $70,000 but did not find any marketable ore, so he closed down after a season.

## Antimony

The Kantishna district's Stampede Creek area developed as the major antimony-producing region in Alaska. Antimony (or *stibium*) is a silvery-white, brittle, metallic chemical element of crystalline structure, found only in combination and chiefly useful in alloys with other metals to harden them and increase their resistance to chemical action. One of antimony's uses is in combination with lead in the manufacture of storage batteries. Another big use was to make fireproof paint.

Large reserves were rare in Alaska as everywhere else. Antimony occurs as high or low grade in veins, in lenses, and in veinlets in shear zones related to the Stampede fault. Low grade ranges from 10 to 20 percent antimony, and high grade exceeds 50 percent. Antimony had been produced on the Seward Peninsula and near Fairbanks but had been ignored in more remote districts. No one knows when antimony was first discovered in Alaska, but the first mining was in 1915 in response to price jumps during the war. As early as February 1908 James Wickersham sent two ore samples taken by a prospector with whom he was associated to W.R. Rust of the Tacoma Smelter. "These pieces," Wickersham wrote, "are from heavy veins in the vicinity of supposedly very rich antimony bodies." The miner had already secured an assay from a New York concern that indicated an antimony content of 56 1/2 percent. The vein was large but transportation difficulties were immense, so the miner was continuing his search for other deposits. Rust did not find enough value in the ore samples to encourage mining. "If the mine would produce antimony running from thirty to forty percent, it would pay to ship it east to antimony smelters, but this is too low grade."[18]

Wickersham planned a trip to Kantishna in 1908 to investigate his gold placer properties but also intended to bring out more antimony ore samples to send to Rust. Rust's smelter charged nothing for doing the assays. "We are glad," Rust told Wickersham, "to contribute this much to the development of the country and hope to get our money back by ore shipments should the mines amount to anything." Rust did not get much, if any, Kantishna ore before he sold the smelter to the Alaska Syndicate which was at the time developing the Copper River copper mines.[19]

Wickersham, Bill Taylor, and others had interests in several gold claims. It is not apparent that the judge made any money out of Kantishna from 1905-1908, and in September 1908 he was forced to tell Taylor to avoid hiring help or otherwise contracting debts: "Some of the people interested with us have a bad case of cold feet, and refuse to raise more money at this time for prospecting." Taylor would have to "pay as you go or don't go." There were enough supplies on hand for Taylor and the Quigleys to do some prospecting and the current year's assessment work.[20]

Wickersham's partners included the Quigleys, Joe and Fannie, who gained a fame of sorts as long-time Kantishna residents. Joe Quigley crossed the Chilkoot Pass originally in 1891 and prospected throughout Alaska and the Yukon. At Kantishna he teamed in marriage with Fannie who operated a tent restaurant. Over the years the Quigleys because famous for their hospitality as well as unrelenting prospecting and mining. Fannie, an excellent hunter, cook, and baker, always had something on the stove for hungry visitors.

Tom Floyd and others developed antimony deposits on Slate Creek, producing 125 tons of high-grade ore in 1916. Some developmental work was also done at Stampede that year and in 1926, but sustained work awaited Earl Pilgrim's arrival in 1936. He was attracted by a 26-foot wide vein of nearly pure stibnite, a find that had been known since the original Kantishna rush but awaited favorable economic conditions for exploitation.

In 1921 a geologist estimated a possible 70 tons of high grade at Stampede Creek.[21] Earl R. Pilgrim required considerable persistence to transport the antimony ore from Stampede. Beginning in 1936, for 10 years he hauled the ore 50 miles to the Alaska Railroad by tractor and sled, taking 40 tons on each trip. Transport could only be undertaken during the coldest months because the haulers required a firm frozen surface over the land and five river crossings. Things would have been much easier with a road tie-in. The mine was only 21 miles from the McKinley road, but neither the Alaska Road Commission nor the park service favored the road he wanted.

In 1947, at a cost of $25,000, Pilgrim constructed an airfield and a 2-mile road to the mine. Air freight rates were high, so he could only mine during the years that antimony prices were high. He paid $30 a ton in 1951 to fly ore to Nenana, then $20 a ton for the rail and sea transport to Seattle or Portland. The final destination, whether California, Indiana, or overseas would determine what further rail or maritime freight charges would be.[22] When Pilgrim was offered from $6.00 to $7.50 for 20 pounds, he could stand the freight rates, but when the price dropped to $4.00, as it did in 1952, he did not mine. In 1960 $250,000 was appropriated for a road to Stampede, but for lack of further funding the first year's construction was not followed up.

## Recent Mining

Antimony commanded high prices during the years 1970-72, and shipments from Slate Creek, Last Chance Creek, and Stampede rose.

Increases in gold prices in the 1970s caused a revival in placer mining by individual miners. Much of the work was done with bulldozers and front-end loaders on old, previous mined gravels.

Interest in lode deposits accelerated, too, with high gold and silver prices. At the Red Top Mine a 35-ton-a-day flotation mill was installed. That season the first 100 tons of ore were shipped outside to a smelter. Unfortunately, results did not justify further work.

The Kantishna chapter of Alaska's mining history has special interest. As a gold-mining district it ranked in 27th place among Alaska's districts. A summary of total mineral production follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Gold: | 99,307 ounces |
| Silver: | 308,716 ounces |
| Antimony: | 4.75 million pounds |
| Lead and zinc: | 1.5 million pounds |

Antimony production established Kantishna as the richest section of the state for that mineral. Overall 44 percent of Alaska's total output of antimony came from Kantishna. The area's mining include diversity of yield, considerable lead and zinc production, and the unusual balance between placer and lode mining. Lode mining was not prominent in the Yukon basin, but in the late 1930s the Red Top Mine ranked fourth among 20 Yukon lodes. The location of mining areas has also contributed to its interest. Mount McKinley is the best known geographic feature of Alaska and a much-visited place. Finally, the region gained interest from associations with mountain climbing and early big game hunting expeditions and, most particularly, because of James Wickersham's activities there. As the interior's first judge and long-term territorial delegate, Wickersham has been long the best-known Alaska historical figure.

A study published by the Bureau of Mines in 1986 confirms earlier reports of large gold reserves in the Kantishna district. In 1983 it was estimated that there were 688,000 ounces of recoverable gold, of which 288,000 ounces are covered by existing claims. "At 1983 mining rates," the Bureau of Mines asserts, "approximately 35 years would be required to process the indicated reserves on existing claims."[23]

## Other Mining Areas in the Denali Region: Yentna

The Yentna district includes the area drained by the western tributaries of the Susitna River between Alexander and Sunshine creeks and by its eastern tributaries between Sunshine and Talkeetna. It first attracted miners in 1905, mostly from places on Cook Inlet. An early newspaper account said that "Eleven men have been working all summer on Hahiltna Creek and taking out an average $10 a day in coarse gold. Seven of them came down the other day to the trading posts on the inlet to get outfits for the winter." The original strike had been made in November 1904, according to the

*Seward Gateway*, but the secret was kept for almost a year. Among the discoverers was R.C. Richardson, a Klondike veteran, who was made deputy recorder for the district.[24]

By late September a stream of miners from Sunrise, Hope, and Seward were going to Yentna. The location, according to the *Gateway*, was "100 miles above Susitna Station which is 20 miles from the mouth of the Susitna River." Stampeders were using boats, and there was a small freighting operation on the Susitna.

When the first stampeders did not return in late fall or early winter, others on Cook Inlet were encouraged to try the Yentna. In February the *Gateway* predicted "a big rush" before breakup. By May roadhouses had been established along the trail. In August Seward's Chamber of Commerce asked the U.S. War Department to build a railroad from Seward to Nome "branching from the main line of the Alaska Central Railroad and the Susitna valley and extending northwesterly through the Yentna valley."[25]

Yentna miners used the Tokositna River as a route to the Chulitna and Susitna rivers to Cook Inlet. By the late 1920s the placers had been worked out. Among Alaska's gold placer districts the Yentna ranked seventeenth until 1930 with production of $2,443,500. In the 1970s and 1980s mining revived in the region just as with the Kantishna Placer region.

## Valdez Creek

The river called Susitna ("Sandy") by the Tanaina Indians flows southwest 260 miles from the Susitna Glacier to the head of Cook Inlet. In 1903 a strike was reported on the upper river which attracted a party of five men who set out from Valdez in February. The miners found gold on Galina Creek, which they renamed Valdez Creek, and took out 100 ounces of gold in only two weeks before returning to Valdez. In 1904 some 150 miners worked the creek. By 1909 miners had taken $300,000 from Valdez Creek. Subsequently, production dropped off, and few miners remained. Total production for the district by 1930 was $475,700, ranking it 30th among placer districts in Alaska.

Valdez Creek, a tributary of the Susitna River, is far from the port town of Valdez but was best reached from Valdez. The area was cut off from Cook Inlet and the lower Susitna River by Devils Canyon. Travelers in the Copper River basin, however, could cross easy grades to the upper Susitna and Valdez Creek. The first mines used the Valdez Glacier route or the Valdez Trail, and soon established a well-used trail between the upper Copper and upper Susitna rivers.

In 1904 an Indian guide showed the Gulkana Trail to Valdez Creek miners who were leaving the diggings at season's end. Subsequently, the Valdez Glacier route was abandoned and a freighter offered winter shipping at 30 cents a pound. It was 250 miles from Valdez to Valdez Creek via the Valdez Trail, the west fork of the Gulkana, and across a low divide to Maclaren River and Valdez Creek. From Gulkana most of the travel was over river ice. Except in very special circumstances freight was not shipped in during summer as the rate soared to more than three times the winter cost.[26]

Recent production on Valdez Creek has been very high. Some 50,000 ounces of gold was mined in 1988, making the mine have the "largest onshore placer mine in the entire state and perhaps in North America."[27]

## Chulitna

After the success of mining on Valdez Creek prospectors looked hard at other parts of the upper Susitna. Some placer claims were located in 1907 on Bryn Mawr Creek, a tributary of the West Fork of the Chulitna River. Lode claims were made nearby in 1905 (the Golden Zone) and others from 1911-1915. During this period the Dunkle coal deposit on Costello Creek was discovered, and some coal was produced for local use.

When gold prices went up in 1934, interest in the Golden Zone mine--the original lode discovery--was aroused. Work from 1936-42 opened 1,900 feet of underground workings. In 1941-42 some 869 tons of ore were mined, yielding 1,581 ounces of gold, 8,617 ounces of silver, 21 tons of copper, and 3,000 pounds of lead. Some 5,000 tons of coal was shipped from the Dunkle Mine. Gold mining was not resumed after the World War II closure, but 59,000 tons of coal were shipped from the Dunkle Mine from 1952-54.[28]

Prospects look good for the future. In 1988 the Bureau of Land Management made a significant discovery on an Ohio Creek tributary lying just outside park boundaries.

Notes
Chapter 14

1. Quoted in Grant Pearson, *History of Mount McKinley National Park* (Mount McKinley: National Park Service, 1953), 20.

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3. Van Slyke to Wickersham, September 11, 1905, Wickersham Collection, AHL.

4. Van Slyke to Wickersham, July 16, 1906, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

5. Charles Sheldon, *Wilderness of Denali* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 6-8, 88, for this and following quotes.

6. Alfred H. Brooks, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1907*, USGS Bulletin No. 345, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1908), 45; Rolfe Buzzell, "Overview of Kantishna Mining History," (NPS files), 3.

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8. Capps, "Kantishna," in Brooks, *Mineral Resources of Alaska 1916*, 295.

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10. Ibid., 297.

11. Buzzell, *Overview*, 7-11, 13-16, 18-20; Budtzen, "A History of Mining in the Kantishna Hills," 160; Steven A. Fechner and Robert B. Hoekzema, "Distribution, Analysis, and Reovery of Gold from Kantishna Placers, Alaska," Report 11-86, Bureau of Mines, 1986) 5; Tom Bundtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

12. R.C. Morris, "The Kantishna Mining District," (*Pathfinder*, June 1921), 6.

13. Bundtzen, "A History of Mining in the Kantishna Hills," 156.

14. "Kantishna," *The Pathfinder*, (September 1921), 6.

15. News Release, Dept. of the Interior, June 15, 1944, NPS files.

16. Floyd R. Marsh, *20 Years a Soldier of Fortune* (Portland: Binfords and Mort, 1976), 32.

17. Ernest H. Patty, *North Country Challenge* (New York: David McKay & Co., 1969), 32.

18. White, "Antimony Deposits," 331.

19. Wickersham to Rust, February 6, 1908 ASL; Rust to Wickersham, March 4, 1908, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

20. Wickersham to Rust, April 2, 1908; Rust to Wickersham, May 11, 1908, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

21. Wickersham to R.W. Taylor, September 12, 1908, Wickersham Collection, ASL.

22. *Fairbanks News-Miner*, May 27, 1952.

23. Steven A. Fechner and Robert B. Hoekzema, "Distribution, Analysis, and Recovery of Gold from Kantishna Placers, Alaska", 3.

24. *Seward Gateway*, August 26, 1905.

25. Ibid., May 19 and August 1, 1906.

26. Terrence Cole, "History of the Use of the Upper Susitna River," (Anchorage: Dept. of Natural Resources, 1979) 1-12.

27. Statement from James Halloran, Mining Evaluation Div., NPS, ARO, June 1989.

28. Harlan D. Unrau, "Historical Overview, Draft Mining EIS, (October, 1986, NPS files).

# Chapter 15
## Chronology: Yukon-Charley

| | |
|---|---|
| 1898 | Klondike stampede overflow to Fourth of July Creek. |
| 1899-1904 | Stampedes to Nome and Fairbanks draw miners away from upper Yukon. |
| 1906 | Mining rivers on several creeks. |
| 1930 | Nation has two residents. |
| 1934 | Gold price rises to $35 an ounce. |
| 1935 | A.D. McRae and Ernest Patty commence dredging on Coal and Woodchopper creeks. |
| 1942-1945 | War years shutdown, although Woodchopper dredge worked in 1943 and Coal Creek in 1945. |
| 1946 | Coal and Woodchopper creek dredging resumes as before the war. |
| 1952 | Coal Creek dredge did not operate. |
| 1954 | White Pass and Yukon Railway ends river steamboat service. |
| 1956 | Taylor Highway constructed to Eagle. |
| 1957 | Company shuts down Coal Creek dredge. |
| 1961 | Ted C. Matthews leased Gold Placers, Inc. claims on Coal and Woodchopper creeks. |
| 1964 | Woodchopper Creek dredge is shut down. |
| 1971 | Joe Vogler buys Woodchopper claims. |
| 1972 | Price of gold deregulated. |
| 1972-1976 | Ernest Wolff, et al., work Coal Creek. |
| 1976-1977 | Au. Placers, Inc., works Coal Creek. |
| 1977-1985 | Lowerson, Ltd., works Coal Creek. |
| 1985-1986 | Coal Creek Properties works Coal Creek; donates properties to NPS in 1986. |

# Chapter 15
## Yukon-Charley

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve encompasses 2.52 million acres of virtual wilderness and major portions of the mighty Yukon River and a southern tributary, the Charley. When it crosses the Canadian border, the Yukon River has completed a third of its 1,875-mile traverse to the Bering Sea from its headwaters in the Yukon Territory. Between Eagle and Circle the river courses sinuously but generally northwesterly. From Eagle the river flows through what is called the Upper Rampart, a 155-mile section that skirts the Ogilvie Mountains, descending gradually at a speed of 6 to 8 miles an hour. As the waters flow farther into Alaska, small islands increasingly dot the channel, and streams draining the Ogilvie Mountains--the Tatonkuk, Kaondik, and Nation--join the great river from the northeast. The Seventymile and Charley rivers, which head in the Yukon-Tanana Upland, join from the west and south. The additional waters of these tributaries broaden the Yukon from the half-mile width at the border to 2 miles at Circle.

The Yukon River section from the Canadian border to near Circle that is within the preserve was a much-traveled route during pre-Klondike and Klondike gold eras as well as into more recent times. Major activity areas, like the important mining towns of Eagle and Circle, and the most productive placer regions of Birch Creek and Fortymile River, lie outside present preserve boundaries. This portion of the Yukon River ties into earlier interior mining history, but few mining sites are within the preserve. Though production from Yukon-Charley was meager, some mining has been carried out continuously since 1898. Though mining has been limited to a few creeks, notably Fourth of July, Coal, Woodchopper, Sam, and Washington, operations on them exhibit some singularities, particularly in the development of dredging from 1935. Precise production figures are vague because the region's output was always included with other districts: Woodchopper and Coal Creek were reported by the USGS with the Birch Creek district, and Fourth of July Creek was reported within the Eagle District.

### Fourth of July Creek

Thanks to the letters of Alfred McMichael, a '98 stampeder, we have some vivid impressions of early mining on Fourth of July Creek. McMichael was one of many stampeders who reached Dawson after all of the ground had long since been claimed by other prospectors. He was not rich enough to buy a claim, so either he returned home in defeat or looked elsewhere for gold prospects. With a couple of partners he determined to look around. He wrote to his wife from Dawson: "We have come many thousands of miles, and spent over four months getting here. It certainly would be extraordinary good luck if we fell into a good claim so soon. Also, we are prepared to face failure for this country has been awfully boomed and vastly lied about."[1]

On June 25 the McMichael party left Dawson in a small boat and rowed 60 miles up the Fortymile. That legendary river also was blanketed with mining claims, so the prospectors returned to the Yukon and headed downriver for Circle. By July 10 they reached a likely looking southern tributary about 40 miles from the Canadian border. With stout resolve, despite the dismal rain, they packed over an old Indian trail. Whenever they left the trail to prospect, they encountered the difficult terrain characteristic of much of the interior:

> We tramped through great patches of deep moss, as hard to walk over as deep snow, and the tangled undergrowth of trees along the bank made the going very difficult. But the worst of all were the great bogs of a kind of bunch grass which grows like a cabbage, large at the tip and small at the roots . . . six inches to a foot and a half high. It is almost impossible to step between them and it takes a gymnast to step from one to the other without falling . . . below the grass is soft muck and often water.[2]

Slogging over the tussocks was miserable, as were the plagues of mosquitoes. At night the men wore nets for protection, yet the roar of insects kept them awake. After three days they had traveled 16 miles, discovered color, found other miners at work, and staked a claim. Miners from Circle had already staked a number of claims on the "Glorious Fourth," hence the stream's name. But for local regulations made by the discoverers at their first miners meeting, McMichael would not have been able to claim his tract, which he called the 10 Below Discovery. The original miners on the ground, fed up with claim abuses elsewhere, had decreed that only one claim could be taken by an individual, and power of attorney claims were prohibited. As a result, less land had been claimed then elsewhere.

The Fourth of July Creek miners founded two camps on the Yukon, Ivy and Nation. Ivy did not last but Nation, located opposite the mouth of Nation River not far from Fourth of July Creek, developed a little. As with claim restrictions, a miners meeting laid down the rules for the new town. Each person could stake one 50-by-100-foot lot by paying a $2.50 recording fee, clearing one half of the street, and making a few improvements.

Fourth of July Creek, which heads only 12 miles from the Yukon, runs through a valley 200 to 400 feet wide 2,000 feet below surrounding ridges. With a small drainage area and low precipitation, the volume of water available is generally insufficient for mining. Much of the rock is limestone and bedrock averages nine feet.

Most miners left Fourth of July Creek for the winter, and McMichael was no exception. No one thought they had much to protect. Some seven or eight cabins were built the first season, and a couple more were added later. At its peak, Nation boasted only a dozen cabins, a small store, and a roadhouse. Its decline from 1899 was never arrested, although a few miners and trappers continued to use the cabins.

Over the years, the creek yielded only minor amounts of gold. That men persisted to mine the area for half a century speaks volumes about the nature of mining

and the men who persevered. Through 1905 the stream produced $30,000. In 1906 a dozen miners made $6,000 through drift and open-cut mining. In 1911 miners brought advanced mining technology into the area. An 86-horsepower Bagley steam scraper finally was put into service, after being removed from the Yukon barge and taking 20 days to plow through 10 miles of brush under its own power.

Even with such limited success, willing investors came forward sometime after 1916 to support a hydraulic operation. Production went on sporadically through the 1930s. In 1929 the July Creek Mining Co. on Fourth of July Creek was the largest of some 10 camps within the district but, in all, only 25 men labored in the district. The July Creek Placer Co. was organized in 1919 by James M. Taylor of Nation with backing from B.D. Vanderveer and Paul Rhodius of Sedro-Wooley, Washington. The company's capitalization was at $100,000, most of which represented the claims themselves. It was a typical small mining operation but more successful than most others. Taylor left after a year and was replaced as resident manager by A.D. Reynolds. Reynolds lasted two years before giving way to George Matlock.[3]

Shifts in management and ownership were common in mining. In 1925 the company optioned the property to Casper Ellington, stipulating that a dredge be installed. When the operator failed to bring in a dredge, the company sold out to Richard Bauer in 1929. Bauer worked for the next seven years with a crew of four to five men. He built a 2.5-mile ditch along the eastern side of the valley to produce 165 feet of pressure. The crew operated three giants to seep gravel into sluice boxes. Water shortages often forced shutdowns.

Bauer's operation was the largest in the district but he sold out in 1936 after production declined. Work continued by the new owners until the war. Yukon Placers bought the claims after the war, built a road from the Yukon, and installed new hydraulic equipment. Work started up again in 1948. Production in 1949 was 1,372 ounces of gold. Work continued until 1951. A bulldozer operation started in 1949, producing $50,000 before closing in 1951.

## Charley River

The Charley River courses northward 107 miles from its origin to join the Yukon at river mile 1,179. Despite tributary names suggestive of mineral wealth, including Bonanza and Copper, no minerals have been mined along its reaches. About 60 prospectors tried their luck along the Charley in 1898-99. They founded the camp of Independence on the Yukon River at the mouth of the Charley and built eight or 10 cabins, but it quickly faded when no gold was found.

## Coal and Woodchopper Creeks

Prospectors located claims on both of these streams in 1898, but their potential created little excitement. A handful of miners worked placers sporadically in the early years of the century along 5-mile stretches upstream. Some mining was also done on

Boulder and Rose creeks, tributaries of Woodchopper and Mineral creeks (a tributary of Woodchopper), respectively. Production statistics for the region do not usually detail particular creek yields, but Mineral Creek's output was $18,000 in 1906 when 18 men labored for the season. Activity had begun to pick up on the several creeks in 1905, but the gain was small. Only $15,000 was taken that year from Woodchopper, Coal, Washington, and Fourth of July creeks.

Life was not easy for Abe Fisher, Frank Slaven, and the few other miners who independently worked the creeks. A man suffering accident or illness had few options. Abe Fisher of Woodchopper wrote to the mission hospital at Fort Yukon in distress over his health. Dr. Grafton Burke was solicitous but cautious: "By this mail we are sending your medicine with full instructions for your ailment, as we best understand it from the rather uncertain account given. You must remember, however, that a catarrhal affliction is surprisingly rebellious to all treatment and more often responds in many types to a change of atmosphere." The doctor was not, however, hinting that Fisher leave the country and extended an invitation: "This hospital of the Episcopal Church is for the purpose of serving humanity whether or not they can meet their business obligations. If, therefore, you are in need of medical or surgical care, you may be admitted for the same, regardless of cost."[4]

Fisher lived at the Woodchopper roadhouse. Other roadhouses were spaced along the Yukon to serve travelers. Some achieved local fame because of the peculiarities of their operators, as with the Washington Creek roadhouse. A determined woman ran this two-room hotel until declining winter Yukon trail traffic closed it sometime after 1910. The Rev. Hudson Stuck reported that the roadhouse's proprietor, eager to stay in business, used to grab her rifle and fire warning shots at travelers who by-passed her place.[5]

Judge James Wickersham, who traveled often between his base at Eagle to Circle and Rampart for court sessions, had plenty to say about roadhouses in his memoir, *Old Yukon*. Webber's Roadhouse, located about 15 miles northwest of the Coal Creek mouth, was not one of his favorite stops because old Webber was cantankerous and a slovenly housekeeper. Wickersham's description of the roadhouse is detailed and probably fit a number of the hostelries available to miners and others:

> The one-room log-tavern stood at the edge of a dense forest of tall straight evergreens that covered an island on the left limit of the river. The side walls of the cabin, built of small round logs, were head high, and the central roof-log was just above the outstretched finger tips. The roof was constructed of small round poles laid from the ridge pole to the top logs on the side walls, then covered a foot deep with moss and weighted down with sod and gravel. The tavern was about ten by sixteen feet square inside. It was finished with one clapboard door hung on wooden pins, and one window sash. The dining table consisted of rough boards nailed to poles, about three feet long, driven into auger-holes about four feet apart just below the window. Two pole bunks of similar design adorned the back wall. The dirt

> floor was spattered with grease from the stove. There was one chair of riven slab set on three pole legs. The two other chairs were boxes, one marked in large letters 'Hunter's Old Rye,' and the other, 'Eagle Brand Milk.' A dog stable, much smaller than the tavern stood alongside.[6]

Frank Slaven was a Coal Creek miner who hung on in the area for many years. Like Alfred McMichael and others, he had been drawn to the region in 1898. For several years he made a living working several claims with pick and shovel and living off the land. Finally, in 1905, his efforts were rewarded with a promising strike on Coal Creek. This discovery was enough to keep him from wandering away in the manner of most miners. His placer yield, however, was not rich enough to make him independent of other work. He trapped, cut wood for steamboats, and ran a roadhouse which he built where Coal Creek entered the Yukon. Slaven consolidated a number of claims and sold them to A.D. McRae and Ernest Patty in 1934.

Frank Slaven on Coal Creek, Abe Fisher on Woodchopper, and other men dwelling elsewhere along the Yukon and its tributaries were part of a special society. Many of the men were bachelors or, like George Pilcher of Marshall, once married men who, for varying reasons, could neither return outside nor induce their wives to join them.

Their lives were neither very adventurous nor particularly romantic. They were small-scale miners who worked hard just to keep going. Whether their lot, viewed objectively, was superior to that of most workers Outside at the time or not is questionable. But those who lingered in the North certainly believed that their independent, self-reliant existence was a better course--and that kept them going.

After 1906 most mining was carried on by a few pick-and-shovel men. USGS geologist L.M. Prindle and J.B. Mertie, Jr., investigated gold placers between Woodchopper and Fourth of July creeks in 1911 and reported what they found. The region was known to contain auriferous gravel and had relatively easy access from the Yukon River. The nearest settlements were Eagle and Circle "and a few buildings" at Nation and at the mouth of Woodchopper Creek. Virtually all developments in the district had occurred since 1905. Despite the flurry of activity over the previous few years, however, Prindle estimated that "the total gold production of the region to date is less than $150,000, the greater part of which has come from Mineral Gulch, a tributary of Woodchopper, and from Fourth of July Creek."[7]

The most promising discoveries made on Coal Creek by the time of Prindle's visit were 15 miles from the mouth. In 1910, miners reached bedrock at 7 feet and found some nuggets valued up to $14. Miners were also working on Woodchopper Creek, a small stream only 12 miles long in a floodplain half a mile wide, and at Mineral Creek, a promising tributary of the Woodchopper. At some places the overburden was very deep, up to 30 feet.

Ten mines employing 25 men operated in the summer of 1914, and several of them on Coal Creek worked over the winter. Work began that season on a hydraulic plant to carry water from Iron Creek to the mouth of Mineral Creek for an operation on Woodchopper Creek.

## Post Offices and Census

Nation had a post office from 1908 to 1924. Roadhouse owner William E. Noyes was postmaster from 1908-1919, succeeded by Frank Young. Woodchopper's post office operated from 1919 to 1936 when the Coal Creek office opened to replace it. The Coal Creek post office closed in 1961. The post office at Circle opened in 1896 and that at Eagle in 1898.

Census figures for the Circle district, which included the town of Circle as well as residents of areas now a part of the Yukon-Charley preserve, show the paucity of the population:

| | |
|---|---|
| 1880 | 111 |
| 1890 | 143 |
| 1900 | 291 |
| 1910 | 799 |
| 1920 | 594 |
| 1930 | 621 |
| 1940 | 768 |
| 1950 | 680 |

The 1960, 1970, and 1980 census gave populations for the town of Circle but not for the district.

## Production Totals

Statistics of gold and silver production in the Circle district from 1894-1918 show a remarkable constancy over the period. Of course, only a small part of the yield can be attributed to Coal, Woodchopper, Fourth of July, or other creeks within Yukon-Charley. See the following page for a breakdown of gold and silver production in the Circle District from 1894 to 1918.

Conditions changed in the 1930s when a dredge was brought to Coal Creek. This dredge operation distinguishes the mining history of Yukon-Charley from that in other park regions. Dredging became commonplace from early in the twentieth century in the interior, on the Seward Peninsula, and elsewhere, but employment of the great mechanical diggers was not deemed feasible on any sections now within Alaska park boundaries save for Coal and Woodchopper creeks. Dredging, introduced by Gold Placer, Inc. and a sister company, Alluvial Golds, Inc., was directed by Ernest Patty, a mining engineer who later became president of the University of Alaska.

In the years before dredging, the country serviced by the towns of Eagle and Circle was mostly uninhabited. Eagle, well situated on a terrace above the high-water level, had long been recognized as "the best town site of the upper Yukon," because it could not be flooded yet was located alongside a deep channel of the river, which

**Circle District Gold and Silver Production 1894-1918[9]**

| | GOLD | | SILVER | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Quantity (fine ounces) | Value | Quantity (fine ounces) | Value |
| 1894 | 483.75 | $ 10,000 | 123 | $ 77 |
| 1895 | 7,256.25 | 150,000 | 1,886 | 1,226 |
| 1896 | 33,862.50 | 700,000 | 8,794 | 6,080 |
| 1897 | 24,187.50 | 500,000 | 6,289 | 3,773 |
| 1898 | 19,350.00 | 400,000 | 5,031 | 2,968 |
| 1899 | 12,093.75 | 250,000 | 3,144 | 1,886 |
| 1900 | 12,093.75 | 250,000 | 3,144 | 1,886 |
| 1901 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 2,512 | 1,507 |
| 1902 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 2,512 | 1,331 |
| 1903 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 3,144 | 1,698 |
| 1904 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 3,144 | 1,823 |
| 1905 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 3,144 | 1,918 |
| 1906 | 14,512.50 | 300,000 | 3,773 | 2,565 |
| 1907 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 3,144 | 2,075 |
| 1908 | 8,465.63 | 175,000 | 2,212 | 1,166 |
| 1909 | 10,881.37 | 225,000 | 2,830 | 1,472 |
| 1910 | 10,884.37 | 225,000 | 2,830 | 1,528 |
| 1911 | 16,931.25 | 350,000 | 4,402 | 2,333 |
| 1912 | 15,721.87 | 325,000 | 2,439 | 1,500 |
| 1913 | 8,465.63 | 175,000 | 1,314 | 794 |
| 1914 | 10,884.37 | 225,000 | 1,689 | 934 |
| 1915 | 14,126.25 | 230,000 | 1,727 | 875 |
| 1916 | 14,512.50 | 300,000 | 2,252 | 1,182 |
| 1917 | 9,675.00 | 200,000 | 1,561 | 1,285 |
| 1918 | 8,165.63 | 175,000 | 1,798 | 1,798 |
| | 307,906.87 | $6,365,000 | 74,838 | $45,980 |

Note: From 1918 to 1988 further production has been documented by state geologist Tom Bundtzen. His figures show a total gold production from discovery of 917,455 ounces and 145,774 ounces of silver.

helped steamboat landings.[9] Despite these advantages, the mining economy supported a permanent white population of only 40 people in the summer of 1930, a population that increased a little in the winter when miners moved in from their claims.

Circle was closer to most of the mining areas of Yukon-Charley and was also the supply point for the Birch Creek mining district. Even so, its summer population was only 20 with a few additions in the winter.

Nation and Woodchopper continued to lose population, and by 1930 Nation had only two residents. Eight to 10 miners lived near the Fourth of July Creek diggings. Woodchopper was livelier with 15 to 20 men. The white population between Eagle and Circle, including trappers, was estimated by the USGS in 1930 as "probably less than 100."[10]

The Yukon River was still the major highway of the region in the 1930s. There were a few short wagon roads from Circle to the Birch Creek district and from Eagle to American Creek. In 1925 a short road was built from Nation up Fourth of July Creek. Most freight in the region was moved during the winter by horse and dogsleds.

Even after completion of the Alaska Railroad, freight rates from Outside remained high. The railroad did not offer any connecting freight service to the upper Yukon. The Canadian route remained the important one. Freight was carried by rail from Skagway to Whitehorse, thence by steamboat down the Yukon. In the late 1920s a summer road was built from Fairbanks to Chatanika and Circle, which was some help to district mines, but freight continued to come in over the Canadian route.

## Patty's Dredge

Ernest Patty recommended Coal Creek to his Canadian employer, A.D. McRae, putting his faith in mechanical mining. McRae optioned several miles of ground from claim owners, who had been trying to make a living on pick-and-shovel mining. Patty put down churn drill holes every 100 feet across the Coal Creek Valley and also sank prospect shafts. The test results were favorable, but even before the testing was completed the miners were cheered by news that gold prices had risen from $20.67 to $35 an ounce. Thus encouraged, McRae put Patty in charge of the operation and gave him an interest in the mine.

In 1935 Patty built an 8-mile road from the Yukon, portable camp buildings that could be moved at need, and a 2-mile ditch along the hillside to bring gravity water above the mining area for stripping and thawing. Water was essential in preparing the ground for a dredging operation. At Coal Creek the frozen overburden, or "muck," varied in depth from 6 to 26 feet. Removing this was the first task before the frozen, gold-bearing gravel could be thawed and dug by the dredge. To remove the muck, Patty's crew spaced hydraulic nozzles or giants around the area. Water piped from the hills provided pressure heavy enough to sweep the muck away in stages as it thawed at the rate of about 4 inches a day.

After a few weeks of work, the miners reached bedrock. No dredge could dig into this frozen ground, so miners had to drive points--10-foot lengths of extra-heavy

steel pipe, seven-eighths of an inch in diameter, topped with a chisel bit. Water was carried through a network of connecting pipes under pressure to spurt out from the chisel bit. Eventually the water worked downward to thaw the gravel. It required lots of water and several weeks before the ground was ready for the dredge.

Charles Janin, the leading dredge designer of the time, had been commissioned by McRae to design the Coal Creek dredge. Janin, assisted by engineer Ira Joraleman, designed a 4-cubic-foot bucket system with an iron pontoon hull that was constructed by the Walter W. Johnson Co. of Oakland, California. Once built, the dredge was taken apart and shipped by sea, the White Pass and Yukon Railroad, and barge to Coal Creek. The parts weighed 400 tons, and their removal from a barge at the camp with no loading equipment was a monumental task.

It was a big day for Patty when the dredge was bolted together and moved from its recently flooded construction pit:

> Its two diesel engines began coughing; the winchman moved the dredge out of the construction pit and the bucket line started to revolve and bit into the gravel. It was a great moment to hear the thump of the first gravel falling into the hopper. As it cascaded from the hopper into a big revolving screen, I could see the finer gravel, which would be sand and gold, dropping through slots in the screen and onto gold-saving sluices. To catch the fine gold that might be swept over the riffles, we added mercury each day to the sluices. Mercury unites with gold to form a silvery amalgam.[11]

The dredge worked around the clock, gouging out its own pond as it advanced, sealing it at its lower end with discarded sand and gravel. Heavier gravel that would not pass through the screen was carried by a conveyor belt or stacker to form piles behind the dredges. Such mounds of tailings remain conspicuous sights wherever dredge mining has been practiced.

After two weeks, Patty shut the dredge down for the first cleanup. This was an anxious time. His reputation and the continued employment of the workforce hung in the balance:

> The crew started pulling the gold-saving riffles from the sluices. Nobody said a word. We were all too keyed up . . . When water was turned into the sluices, men with wooden paddles began separating the fine gravel and sand from the amalgam. Little by little, a mound of amalgam built up at the head of the sluice.[12]

Patty thought the amalgam looked good but could not know its value until the mass was taken to the gold room, cleaned, cooked, to distill the mercury, then cooled. A large sponge of gold was the happy result. After melting in a furnace and slagging off impurities the gold was poured into steel molds to be cast into bars. The yield totaled $27,000--an excellent start to the season. McRae was persuaded to follow

Patty's suggestion that claims on Woodchopper Creek, just across the mountain ridge, also be purchased.

Services to the area were improved as Coal Creek was developed. The Woodchopper post office was closed in 1936 and moved to the mouth of Coal Creek. An automobile road was built in 1936 from the mouth of Coal Creek upstream 6-miles to the mines. From the camp the road continued westward across the ridge into the valley of Woodchopper Creek.

When geologist J.B. Mertie, Jr. visited the operations in 1936 he described the dredge:

> The dredge on Coal Creek is of the pontoon type, with a covered-belt stacker and a hull consisting of 15 sections. It is operated from one spud, two bow lines, and two stern lines. A seven-drum winch is used. The digging ladder consists of 62 buckets of 4 cubic feet capacity, but it is handling about 3,000 cubic yards to the 24-hour day. With this ladder the dredge can dig 14 feet below the surface of the water, and hence for handling some of the deeper ground on Coal Creek an extension to the present ladder may be needed. The trommel screen is 20 feet long and 5 feet wide, with holes grading from half an inch to 1½ inches, and the gravel is washed by water from two nozzles at the head of the screen and five nozzles at the lower end of the screen. A grizzly is also used, with two small tables below it, dumping into the well. Under the trommel is a Holmes distributor, feeding into six tables and two flumes on the port side. The power plant consists of two Atlas Imperial four-cylinder Diesel engines, of 135 and 90 horsepower, and fuel consumption ranges from 100 to 130 gallons a day, depending upon the speed at which the engines are operated. The larger engine is used to supply power for the main belt drive, which operates the digging ladder and the trommel screen. The smaller engine drives the belt stacker and two water pumps, which are operated by a chain drive. One of the pumps provides water at high pressure for the seven nozzles, and the other provides sluice water. A small auxiliary gasoline engine is used to operate a small centrifugal pump, which is used in the process of cleaning up. A 5-kilowatt direct-current generator, which is used for lighting the dredge, is ordinarily run off the main belt drive, but during the clean-ups it is run by the auxiliary gasoline engine. A 40-horsepower boiler is used in the fall, for thawing the pond.[13]

Patty bought Frank Bennett's claims on Woodchopper after sinking a number of test shafts. Bennett, a veteran miner since 1890, had mined in the Fortymile country for years. The ground was good enough to support a second dredge for more than 25 years.

Ernest Patty's memoirs are of interest historically because he had much to say about his development of Coal Creek. Since his family customarily joined him at the

camp for the season, he was perhaps stimulated to create a more pleasant environment than that in most mining camps.

> We wanted our mining camp to look as though someone loved it. The frame buildings that lined our airstrip--mess hall, recreation room, watchman's log cabin, office and radio room, machine shop, repair shop, and warehouse--were all painted yellow trimmed with white. The mess hall sported window boxes full of flowers.[14]

The four-man bunkhouses stood separate from these buildings so that night-shift workers could have quiet when they slept.

When the operation closed in October the men dispersed. The Indians of Eagle would return to there, and most miners wintered Outside or in Fairbanks. Phil Berail, the hydraulic foreman, always left with his dog team for the headwaters of the Charley River, where he prospected and trapped until spring. Patty had a home in Fairbanks and close connections with the University of Alaska. Many of the Coal Creek jobs were filled by students, and all of the company's engineers were college men Patty had trained.

As elsewhere, the dredge operations on Coal and Woodchopper creeks were closed during World War II. After the war, Patty tried to carry on despite rising costs of operations. He stopped using hydraulics for stripping off the overburden of muck and relied on ground sluicing using the creek water to erode the muck. By exposing the gravel a year or two before dredging the summer heat thawed it and saved the expense of point driving. This economy saved about 10 cents a cubic yard, a considerable amount since the yield was only 60 cents in gold per cubic yard (about a ton-and-a-half of earth). It took a lot of dirt handling to produce enough gold to justify the operation. Most days the men mined 3,000 yards.

## Mertie and the USGS

In 1937 the U.S. Geological Survey published Bulletin 872, The *Yukon-Tanana Region Alaska*, a compendium of the government geologists' investigations over many years. Its principal author, J.B. Mertie, considered it his opus as it encompassed his field work in 1911, 1921, 1922, 1925, 1928, 1929, 1931, and 1936 and summarized work done by others: "The present report may be said to terminate the era of reconnaissance surveys begun by Brooks and Prindle in 1903." At least 25 geologists had worked in the huge region bound by the Yukon and Tanana rivers but it was Mertie's task to summarize the effort. Production figures compiled by the USGS are the best index to the ups and downs of the region's mining activity. Speculators and miners studied each year's statistics and sometimes shaped their plans by what the numbers revealed. Mertie acknowledged the other USGS men and Alaskans who contributed: "The writer has never experienced any treatment other than hospitality among the prospectors, miners, and traders in this country."[15]

Understanding the importance of work done by USGS includes appreciation of the personal endeavors of individuals compiling research under trying conditions. Bulletin #872, Mertie's personal reminiscences, provides a sense of change and the passage of time on the mining frontier. Mertie and Louis Prindle started their 1911 field season at Woodchopper. He was familiar with the twin nemeses of field workers: "moskitoes were thick and the swampy ground made transport of the men and pack-horses difficult." He learned some coping tricks, like cutting slits in the sides of his boots to let the water out as fast as it seeped in. His unforgettable experiences included a unique view from atop a mountain: "The ridges were covered with caribou in every direction as far as the eye could see. There must have been 100,000."[16]

Near the end of the season, Mertie got lost near Nation and Fourth-of-July creeks. Fortunately, he stumbled onto a cabin, a winter roadhouse, where he met the first Alaskans he had seen since leaving Eagle early in the summer. From there he finished his field work at a Seventymile River mining camp. "I had never seen a placer mine but being a geologist I was supposed to be an expert, so I bluffed my way pretending a knowledge I didn't possess."[17] From this uncertain start in the Yukon-Charley country, Mertie became a familiar summer Alaskan, one of the corps of specialists who studied the northern environment.

## District Production

Overall gold production of Coal and Woodchopper creeks has been considerable, with most mined during the early dredging years.[18] Precise figures for Coal Creek from 1936-57 were 92,385 ounces of gold and 9,514 ounces of silver. The Circle district, which included Coal and Woodchopper creeks and Deadwood and Mammoth creeks (outside park boundaries), represented a gold-mining boom in the late 1930s. Thanks to the new dredges operated by Patty, USGS reported that "of all the districts in the Yukon region, the Circle district showed the greatest percentage of increase in placer-gold output in 1936 over that of 1935." The 1935 yield was $346,000; in 1936 it was $124,000. This gain moved the Circle district to third place among the Yukon districts, which were always led by Fairbanks and Iditarod. Other districts included Innoko, Ruby, Tolovana, Hot Springs, Tanana, Fortymile, Koyukuk and Chandalar, Marshall, Kantishna, Bonnifield, Rampart, Eagle, and Chisana.[19]

The 1937 USGS reported figures similar with a production of $937,000, which moved the Circle district to second place among Yukon districts just below Fairbanks and ahead of Iditarod.[20]

In 1938 the Circle district gained again, showing a 50 percent increase some $540,000 more than in the previous year. Half of the total production came from the four dredges on Coal, Woodchopper, Deadwood, and Mammoth creeks, while the balance came from Mastolon, Eagle, Independence, and other creeks.[21]

USGS reported the same trend in 1941 and 1942, although the reduction compared to the 1938 total in 1939 and only a small increase over the 1938 peak in 1940. Philip Smith of the USGS, noting the decline, then the rebound, was mildly optimistic:

"This gain, while extremely gratifying as indicating the excellent condition of the placer industry, can hardly be considered to mark a definite trend, but seems rather to represent a fluctuation such as naturally may be expected from season to season."[22]

The war disrupted everything. Recordkeeping became sporadic. USGS specialists received too few reports from operators to make any estimate of the gravel handled by dredges in 1941 and 1942. Operations continued until 1942 when wartime restrictions on mining went into effect. Some work continued even during the war as the War Production Board permitted the Woodchopper dredge to continue during the 1943 season and approved operation of the Coal Creek dredge in summer 1945. In 1946 both dredges resumed their normal pre-war schedule. By 1949 gold volume declined, and the company began working the two creeks on alternate years.

Suspension of steamboat service on the Yukon River by the White Pass and Yukon Railway in 1954 was a severe blow to the dredging company. The consequent rise in freight rates discouraged operations, as profits had been falling steadily for several years. After the 1957 season the company shut down the Coal Creek dredge. Subsequent operators tried dredging for brief intervals, but high costs could not be overcome.

## Coal Creek: Recent Mining

Ted C. Matthews leased the Coal Creek dredge and mining properties in 1961 and operated from 1962-1964. He took 6,350 ounces of gold and 570 ounces of silver but could not make a profit because of high costs.

There was no mining from 1965-1972. In 1972, following the de-regulation of gold prices, Ernest Wolff, D. Cobin, and W. Sothen bought the Coal Creek claims. Initially, they worked with bulldozers and sluice boxes, but in 1973 they ran the dredge. They did not operate the dredge in 1974-1975 and in 1976 used it for only a short time.

In 1977 Lomerson, Ltd. (AU Placer, Inc.) purchased the property for open-cut mining with two bulldozers feeding elevated sluices. Stack tailings were removed with a front-end loader. Twenty-five employees worked the first season.

In July 1985 a joint venture, the Coal Creek Mining Properties, acquired the properties. A crew of 12 to 25 stripped gravels and fed the recovery sluices. In October 1986 the company quit and donated the land to the National Park Service.

## Woodchopper Creek: Recent Mining

Alluvial Gold, Inc., the McRae-Patty Company established on Woodchopper Creek, operated for 16 seasons, recovering 83,841 ounces of gold and 6,080 ounces of silver. The company shut down after the 1960 season and leased the claims and dredge to Ted Matthews. Matthews worked the dredge in 1962, recovering 3,375 ounces of gold and 308 ounces of silver, mining downstream from the end of the airstrip for a quarter of a mile.

In 1971 Joe Vogler purchased the claims and added others he staked in 1973 and 1976. Most of Vogler's mining has been on Mineral Creek, a tributary of the Woodchopper.

## Other Creeks

Miners worked Washington Creek from 1898-1906 but gained only a few thousand dollars. Sandy Johnson was an earlier prospector on Sam and Ben creeks. Johnson did hydraulic mining in the 1920s. Arthur Reynolds worked a ground sluicing operation on Ben Creek from 1927. He built a ditch and dam for ground sluicing and mined until the war years. Johnson sold his claims to Barney Hansen in 1944. Hansen used a Cat for a couple of years and built an airstrip 3,200 feet long on the ridge between Coal and Ben creeks. Hansen sold to J.R. Layman in 1961. Layman worked summers until the mid-1960s.[23]

## Lode

The Circle district, including the area drained by the Charley, Birch Creek above Circle, and most of Preacher Creek, is an upland area containing many ridges and isolated domes. Prospectors did not neglect exploration for gold, copper, and lead lodes, but no discoveries of lode metals have been made.

## Notes
## Chapter 15

1. Juliette C. Reinicker, *Klondike Letters*, (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publ. Co., 1984), 47.

2. Ibid.

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4. Burke to Fisher, December 1, 1921, ASA, Eagle Collection, File 21.

5. Hudson Stuck, *Voyages on the Yukon* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), 82.

6. James Wickersham, *Old Yukon* (Washington: Washington Law Book Co., 1938), 140.

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12. Ibid.

13. J.B. Mertie, Jr., *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1936*, Bulletin No. 897-C, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1938), 253-54.

14. Ibid., 102.

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16. Evelyn Mertie, *Thirty Summers and a Winter*, (Fairbanks: MIRL, University of Alaska, 1982), 6.

17. Ibid., 7.

18. James Ducker, "Navigability Study for the Upper Yukon Region, Alaska," (Anchorage: Bureau of Land Management, 1983) Vol. 1, 128.

19. P.S. Smith, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1936*, USGS Bulletin No. 897, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1938), 49.

20. P.S. Smith, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1937*, USGS Bulletin No. 910, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1939), 49.

21. P.S. Smith, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1938*, USGS Bulletin No. 917, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1940), 47.

22. P.S. Smith, *Mineral Resources of Alaska*, USGS Bulletin No. 23. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1942), 40.

23. Ibid., 125-26.

# Chapter 16
## Other Parks

Many Alaska parks have had no mining activity, including Katmai National Park and Preserve, Kenai Fjords National Park, Aniakchak National Monument and Preserve, Sitka National Historical Park, and Cape Krusenstern National Monument. For purposes of this study the Noatak National Preserve and Kobuk Valley National Park have been treated as part of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. History that is properly part of the Klondike Gold Rush National Park is covered in chapters of this study covering the Klondike Gold Rush, particularly Chapters two through five.

### Glacier Bay

Gold mining in Glacier Bay National Park differed from that in most other regions of Alaska. The Lituya Bay area, like Nome and Yakutat, yielded placer gold from its beach sands. The first verified interest in the ruby sand diggings was an expedition led by James Hollywood in 1880. Hollywood had located in Sitka in the 1870s and married the daughter of the Tlingit Chief Katlian. Gold fever following discoveries at Silver Bay near Sitka induced him to prospect with three other men along the coast northwest to Yakutat. An attempted landing at Lituya Bay ended in the drowning of one man, and later two members of the party were killed by Yakutat Indians.[1]

These disasters discouraged further prospecting at Lituya Bay until 1888, when Samuel O. Wheelock led an expedition from Juneau. After Capt. John J. Healy landed the party from his schooner *Charlie*, its seven members staked placer claims of 20 acres each, organized the Fairweather mining district, and consolidated these claims to form a company. Lituya's ruby sands, as distinguished from the black sands of Yakutat, yielded a very fine gold that was not easily recovered. Water scarcity was one problem. To gain sufficient water for sluicing, long flumes had to be constructed to convey water to the flat beach area. The Lituya company did not show any production in 1889, and in 1890 the yield was 135.5 ounces valued at $2,300. Wheelock sold some of his claims in 1892 to Jeff Talbot and John Ellis. Other active miners in the 1890s included Harry Spence, Dave Spurgeon, O.M. Cole, Morris Orton, Tom Ashby, and George Mason. Wheelock's wife accompanied him to Lituya Bay in 1895 to be the first non-native woman to live there.

Some excitement occurred in Juneau in 1892 when Lituya Bay miners did not arrive as expected to winter in town. The U.S. Navy gunboat *Pinta* was dispatched to Lituya to investigate their fate, but the captain, not wanting to risk his ship, did not try to land a search party. He figured that his ship's whistle would rouse any stranded miners to make a signal, but no one did. Later it was learned that the miners had wintered over at Yakutat.

In May 1892 A.R. McConnahay, Jeff Talbot, and Ira Spencer reached Juneau by canoe. They had worked the Lituya sand all winter and "did very well."[2]

A shipwreck at Lituya Bay was reported in October 1892. The schooner *Salmo* crashed on the rocks, and the Jeff Talbot party lost all its gear. Another party, wrecked the same season in the schooner *Albatross*, performed an epic journey by foot. They intended to walk down the coast to Yakutat and started August 23 with six days' provisions. Finding considerable obstacles in their path--immense glaciers and unfordable streams"--came as a surprise. The barrier of four wide streams coming from Plateau Glacier forced them to climb "the frozen cataract until the highest plane to circumvent" the rivers. Descending the glacier they had to cut steps in a 100-foot wall, until they reached Canoe Harbor and encountered a party of Hoonah Indians hunting sea otter at their summer camp. With the Indians' help the miners finally got to Yakutat after 18 days on the trail, subsisting on river salmon and ducks shot along the way.

Over the years there were other mishaps. In 1895 a Captain Jensen of Sitka lost his schooner, *Winnifred*, in a severe storm while anchored inside Lituya Bay. The schooner *Dora B* was lost in April 1900. Four men died when the schooner, which was being towed by the steamer *Excelsior*, broke free off Lituya Bay.

Lituya Bay miners persisted in efforts to produce more gold. In 1895 W.M. Brook, R.G. Johnson, M.F. Shook, and D.L. Farnham brought a technological advance to Lituya Bay mining, the "Gold King"--a machine designed to expedite the recovery process. Unfortunately, the machine did not perform as well as the sluice box method, but enough gold was recovered to encourage efforts with sluice boxes. O.M. Cole took $3,000 for the season, while Wheelock gained $8,000.

Various estimates were given of the number of active miners in 1896--from a low of 75 to a high of 200 men. Probably the lower figure was more accurate. W.M. Brook, after buying properties from Cole and Wheelock, organized the Ruby Sand Gold Mining Company in 1896. He built 2,000 feet of flume 12 inches wide and 8 inches deep and a string of sluice boxes for round-the-clock shoveling by his 14-man crew. Production was $12,000 in 1896. A higher than usual recovery was attributed to the use of silver amalgamation plates with the customary loose quicksilver in sluice boxes. The miners reached pay dirt lying on clay at a depth of 8 feet. Over the 135-day season a miner could recover about $1,000 in gold and earn wages of $270.

The Klondike discovery slowed activity in 1897 because labor was in short supply, but Brooks made a major effort the following year. The company hired 21 men and invested in a 10-horse power engine, a 12-horsepower engine, and 12-horsepower boiler and a 4-inch pump. Another large operation entered the field in '98 when C.L. Blakemore, O.S. Savage, W.S. Gardner, Lewis Meyer, and others formed the Lituya Bay Gold Placer Mining Company Co., offering 100,000 shares of stock at $100 each. Another outfit that season, formed by D.L. Farnham, S. Fourtner, C. Eagle, C.C. Berg, and Sam Brown, reported a gain of $3,000.

Some Lituya Bay miners developed a distinct affection for the region. Edith Burchard Thornton, who worked with her husband in 1898-99, decided to winter over in

1898-99. She described her experiences in a letter to the *Alaska Miner.* "Disregarding the tales of extreme cold and suffering to be endured here, an old friend, my husband and myself cheerily watched the departure of all humanity on October 4, 1898." The winter passed pleasantly. Temperatures never fell lower than six degrees F. below zero; the bay did not freeze; most days were bright with little snowfall. Geese, ducks, trout, and salmon abounded for fresh food needs. Mrs. Thornton was sure that Lituya Bay was as beautiful as any place in the world; anyone who viewed the scene on a winter night under a full moon would agree. She was inspired to offer a poetic tribute:

> Hail, oh, Lituya, with sunshine and rain.
> Free from all frivolous fashion so vain;
> Where strawberries sweet, and the wild flower grown
> In view of the mountain, the glacier, and snow.[3]

As Mrs. Thornton knew, readers of the *Alaska Miner* were more interested in the region's mineral wealth. They wanted to know if the prospects justified the relatively heavy expense of chartering transport and worries about resupplying. Mrs. Thornton had good news for miners unless "they are of the class who insist that 'less than one hundred thousand dollars will be insufficient.'" Such needy fortune hunters would face disappointment as would folks expecting to arrive in July and leave in September with a load of treasure. But miners with reasonable expectations would be welcomed by the pioneers and could make some money, especially if they brought along "not a theoretical, but a practical device that will separate, and save the fine gold from the ruby sands."[4]

## Mineral Prospects

From 1894 to 1917 gold valued at $75,000 was taken from the beach sands of Lituya Bay. After 1917 little more gold was recovered. Prospectors and scientists continued to investigate areas in and around the monument for gold and other minerals. In 1917 the needs of World War I motivated the USGS to examine a possible nickel deposit surrounding Lituya Bay. Geologist J.B. Mertie knew all about the treacherous entry to the bay where La Perouse had met disaster in 1786 and made careful plans. To enter the bay, only some 50 yards wide and beset with rocks and shoals, a ship waited for the few minutes of slack water at either high or low tide. To determine low-water slack the party consulted the Sitka tidal table, but it proved misleading. The geologists' small boat came close to wrecking on a rock. Another try was more successful. After Mertie landed he located the deposit 2,000 feet above sea level at the head of the bay.

Park personnel asked Joe Williams, superintendent of the Alaska-Juneau Gold Mining Co., to investigate mineral prospects on the ground and from the air in 1940. Williams observed "clear indications of mineral values great enough to keep prospectors and small mine operators interested in Glacier Bay for many years," but considered

the veins he observed too small for large operations. In the 1930s the small lode gold mines on Reid Inlet within Glacier Bay produced 7,000 ounces of gold.[5]

USGS examined the area on several occasions, including a recent extensive survey made in 1965 at the request of the National Park Service. Virtually the entire area of the monument was examined, and a number of substantial deposits were discovered. Promising deposits included nickle-copper on Brady Glacier; ilmanite (titanium) near Mount Fairweather; the Alaska Chief Copper Prospect near the entry to Glacier Bay; the Lituya Bay beach sands; the Margerie Copper Prospect at the head of Tarr Inlet; and gold lodes on Reid Inlet and Sandy Cove. USGS concluded that there were "a few mineral deposits that are likely to be minable in the near future; some that may be minable in the more distant future, but which are not well enough known to be evaluated; some that probably would be minable with economic or technologic changes; and many that are insignificant."[6]

## Jack London's Lynching

Of all the mining companies the most famed will always be the Lituya Bay Gold Placer Mining Co. because of its singular literary yield. During the winter of 1899-1900 the company left manager Hans Nelson and his wife, Hannah, and three other men, Martin Severts, Sam Christianson, and Fragnalia Stefano to carry on the work. The dramatic events of that year were reported in the *San Francisco Examiner* on October 14, 1900, and read with keen interest by Jack London. The *Examiner* story was headlined "WOMAN HANGS A MAN AND THE LAW UPHOLDS HER." Illustrated with dramatic sketches, including a picture of a fashionably dressed woman holding a hangman's noose, the newspaper described a murder and lynching.

Six years after he read about the tragedy in the *Examiner*, the murder and lynching in Lituya Bay became the basis for one of London's most famous Alaska short stories. When his fictionalized version of the story,--"The Unexpected,"--appeared in *McClure's Magazine* in August 1906 with a footnote that said it was based on a real incident in 1899, some readers claimed that the entire episode was a figment of the author's imagination. But the murder and lynching actually had occurred much as the novelist described them. Though conflicting versions abound, the story behind Jack London's lynching tale ranks with the most astounding chapters in the history of frontier justice in Alaska.

As usual, Hannah Nelson had cooked the evening meal on October 6 for the four men of her party. After the meal, everyone remained seated at the table talking and laughing except Martin Severts, who left the cabin and went outside. "In a short time he returned," survivor Sam Christianson said later, "and opening the door, leveled a 45 Colt's revolver at Stefano and shot him dead."[7]

Severts then took a bead on Christianson. He fired and missed, but the bullet ricocheted off a stone jar and hit him in the back of the neck. "I was so stunned that I fell to the floor," Christianson said. He watched as Severts then aimed at Hannah, but before he could fire, Hans Nelson jumped the killer and knocked him to the ground.

In the struggle the gun went off with "the ball tearing an ugly wound in Severts' leg." Hannah Nelson threw a dish towel around Severt's neck and choked him until Hans was able to tie him up.

After recovering from the shock, the Nelson's treated Sam Christianson's wound. The bullet had only grazed his neck and was not so serious as Severts' wound in the leg. The Nelsons dragged the body of the murdered man, Stefano, outside and buried him the next day in a shallow grave. The survivors bandaged Severts, but they resolved at once to keep him tied up at all times and keep close watch until they could deliver him to the authorities.

The mining camp in Lituya Bay, however, was cut off from regular contact with the outside world. Hans Nelson tried to signal passing steamers, but none would stop. Mounting a night- and-day guard was hard on their nerves. "I would sit by the hour with a rifle across my lap," Hannah said, "opposite the bunk where he was tied and sew or knit, jumping at every move he made." The Nelsons hired local Indians to hold Severts at a small cabin 4 miles away, but after a few weeks they refused to watch over him any longer.

The prospect of spending an entire winter with a madman seemed intolerable. The Nelsons finally gave up all hope of help from the outside, and they decided their only options were to turn Severts loose in the wilderness or execute him.

The Nelsons hanged Severts early on the morning of October 26, 1899. "The execution was a very serious matter," Hannah Nelson said, "and was carried out as though it were under the order of a court by a deputized officer."[8]

## Valley of Thunder

In considering the literature set in national park areas Glacier Bay holds pride of place. Mining activity, confined for the most part to Lituya Bay, also inspired Rex Beach. Beach's effort, a novel entitled *Valley of Thunder*, was also based in part on actual events and is all the more remarkable--considering the origin of *Golden Places*--in focusing on a conflict between miners and the National Park Service.

*Valley of Thunder*, published in 1939, did not enjoy the success of *The Spoilers*, Beach's earlier novel depicting the Nome gold rush and the nefarious schemes of Alexander McKenzie to grab the rich Seward Peninsula claims under cover of law. Perhaps Beach hoped to work the *Spoilers'* magic once more by featuring a romance between David Glenister, son of Roy Glenister (the hero of the *Spoilers*) and Natalie McNamara, granddaughter of Alex McNamara (the character based on Alexander McKenzie). Another conflict evolves when David, who is much loved by reformed labor agitator Karel Brosnick, receives a map of a secret gold lode from Karel, whose father discovered it. This arouses the leading villain, Nick Pavlicek, a fishtrap robber and all-around no-good, who is also mad because Karel jilted him. Karel, David, and Gus Brown, miner and fox farmer, find and locate the mine after harrowing adventures. Subsequently the National Park Service includes the mine within the Glacier Bay National Monument, but the good guys--Karel, David, and Gus--surreptitiously continue

to mine. It would not do to disclose more of the plot and spoil another's reading pleasure--but in the end everything works out pretty well.[9]

Perhaps more interesting than the novel are the circumstances that compelled Beach to write it. Beach was a good friend of prospector Joe Ibach (Gus Brown in the novel) who located lode claims on a hillside above Reid Glacier in 1924. Beach met Ibach in 1905 and admired him: "He was indeed the nearest to a free soul of anybody I ever knew and anything less than complete independence irked him like a shirt of nettles. Venturesome, self-reliant, restless and solitary in his habits as a rogue elephant he had covered that part of Alaska like a dew."[10]

Beach renewed his friendship in 1935, visiting Ibach's home at Willoughby Cove, and heard about the miner's troubles. Mining had been prohibited since the monument was established but Ibach had located his claim a few months before, his rights seemed secure. Nevertheless, federal official warned him against any work on his claim until the matter was resolved. If Ibach obeyed he would be unable to do the required annual assessment work to maintain his title. Ibach stated his case to the Department of the Interior and to Alaska's congressional delegate, Tony Dimond, yet nothing was done. In desperation he brought a small stamp mill and worked the ore with his wife's help: "Muz and I steal up there when we can and bootleg the ore out like a couple of burglars," he told Beach.[11]

Ibach continued to mine for several years. Frank Been of the National Park Service reported that Ibach and a partner installed a new stamp mill in 1939. They hauled 30 tons of ore from the Reid Glacier mine to Ibach's residence on Lemesurier Island where the mill was installed. Over the winter the miners managed to extract only $1,800 in gold "but twice that much should have been extracted," according to Been. Lack of knowledge regarding their new mill caused Ibach and his partner to lose half their summer work."[12] Ibach had already mined more than 30 tons of ore by July 1940 and hoped to double that before the season closed. He shipped the ore to the Tacoma smelter for refining.

Frank Been sent Washington what information he had gathered on mining prospects and its environmental impact. He interviewed Joe Williams, superintendent of the Alaska Juneau Gold Mining Co., who had inspected Ibach's claims. Williams tried to convince Been that prospecting and small-scale mining in Glacier Bay would not cause too much environmental damage. Been considered Williams' opinion of gold resources reliable because he "is in charge of one of the largest gold mines in the world." Williams was not successful, however, in convincing Been that any small mines developed on Glacier Bay would be inconspicuous. "Small operations . . . " Been observed, "have conspicuous buildings. Particularly when a stamp mill is part of the plant. A dock or wharf is also inevitable."[13]

## John Muir

Another literary light associated with Glacier Bay is John Muir. Muir is credited with the discovery of Glacier Bay in 1879. His *Travels in Alaska* is a classic sojurner's description that also includes observations on mining made in 1879 during Cassiar stampede from Wrangell and in 1897 during the Klondike stampede.

Muir was primarily a naturalist. Though unenthusiastic about mining and miners, he did agree to report his gold-stampede observations for the *San Francisco Chronicle.* Staying within the confines of his true obsession, Muir described the movements of men in nature's terms: they are "jumping and grinding against one another, like boulders in flood time, swirling in a pot hole." Muir noted that the rushers exhibited great energy and praised nature for inducing human activity: "Nature scatters grains of gold in gravel beds and so the laziest crowds rotting in cities spring to life and are scattered over the furthest wilderness to make way for civilization." Although he conceded that folks needed money and that seeking gold provided a motivation, he feared that greed would obscure life's true values.[14]

Muir would undoubtedly be pleased to learn that Glacier Bay is still being "discovered" by visitors who are primarily interested in natural beauty. It also seems fitting that the mining of literary gold, particularly by London and Beach, has been more significant than the production of the actual mineral.

## Lake Clark

The region between Cook Inlet and Bristol Bay, where the Lake Clark National Park and Preserve is located, held little of value to prospectors. There is no record of miners in the region before the early 1900s, when sporadic word occurred along Portage Creek's 5-mile length from its mouth near the northern part of Lake Clark. From 1910 to 1912 the effort yielded no more than a few thousand dollars.

Some documentation of this operation exists in a letter written by J.W. Walker in 1911 about Mulchatna, a district near the present park that lured most miners. "Mulchatna is still at a standstill. It seems everybody wants the other fellow to do the digging." Walker went on to describe his operation: "We are going to run a drain on Portage Creek next spring. Brown and Gleason took out some good money last year. I had a drill sent from home and we intend to put it on Bonanza Creek next year. A short time will determine how far it is to bedrock."[14] Other details of Walker's correspondence deal with hunting and trapping because Lake Clark miners always had to depend on regional resources that were less scarce than gold. Though miners in most regions hunted and trapped on occasion, the few miners who persisted at Lake Clark counted on their winter yield of fur to support their mining.

From time to time a prospector would report a promising discovery. In 1929 one such argonaut advised the USGS that he had found a potentially valuable quartz vein. The government geologists did not encourage his optimism: "The gold content is reported to be sufficiently high to make mining profitable, but the great expense neces-

sary for opening a property at this place will probably prevent active development in the near future." This appraisal could be used as an epitaph for the region because it was the typical and appropriate response to "discoveries."

Despite its obvious drawbacks, the government did not entirely neglect the region. In 1929 a USGS party landed at Iliamna Bay to complete earlier surveys of the Lake Clark-Mulchatna region made in 1912, 1914, 1926, and 1928. Of the area north of Lake Clark to the Stony River Stephen R. Capps reported that "so few white men have visited the region . . . that there are no established routes of travel in it. The geologists found no active mining between Lake Clark and Stony River.[16]

Few miners lingered long enough to leave a record of activity. Charlie Denison settled at Tanalian Point on Lake Clark in the 1930s and prospected in the region, particularly at Bonanza Creek. A better-known miner of the time was Fred Bowman, who acquired the Portage Creek claims in 1936. Bowman managed to make some money--although the amount is not known--until the mine closed down during World War II. After the war Bowman started mining again and his son, Howard Bowman, still does occasional work.[17]

## Early History of the Adjacent Region

Though the Mulchatna River diggings are not within the present borders of the park, work there represents most of the region's mining activity and is included here because it did bring prospectors into the park region. An unconfirmed report of mining in the Mulchatna basin in 1887-1888 by a party of Yukon prospectors who crossed over to the Kuskokwim, coasted Bering Strait and Bristol Bay, and ascended the Nushagak and Mulchatna rivers. Percy Walker, after whom Fortymile's Walker Fork was named, was supposedly a member of this group.

Details of the mining seem more probable than the early date. The pioneers built a water wheel to convey water to wash their sandbar diggings. Fine gold existed in the black sands, but shoveling by four men quickly buried the riffles, making it almost impossible to amalgamate the gold. The heavy black sand prevented the gold from reaching the quicksilver in the riffles.

There are only a few other reports of activity in the region. Trail-making commenced in 1901 when Deputy Surveyor Webster Brown led the Trans-Alaska Co. exploration and trail-building party into the area. By December 5 the party reached the Mulchatna River, where prospectors W.D. Keefer and L.E. Bonham provided much needed provisions.

A Valdez newspaper of April 1902 reported on a voyage of *Excelsior* to Iliamna Bay to land a party bound for the Mulchatna. Despite the optimistic prospects announced earlier for the Iliamna-St .Michael route, results had been disappointing. Of six attempts during the 1901-02 winter to carry mail only one delivery reached St. Michael. Of course, backers of the Iliamna-Nome railroad expressed undiminished hopes. They put two small steamers into service on Lake Iliamna and had men out cutting ties. By next winter they expected to have an all-weather trail open year-round,

one that would allow travelers to reach St. Michael from Iliamna in six days. They reported good gold prospects, some nuggets running to pea size, and that there were promising quartz samples.[18]

In 1910 John Kinney reported pans of gold on Bonanza Creek, washing at an average of 40 cents. The bench was 85 feet high and steep enough to facilitate conveying gravel to the creek by carloads. Approximately 125 yards of gravel produced 13 ounces of gold. The bench's size did not warrant bringing water up from the creek.

What impeded the mining of Kinney and his predecessors were the region's conditions. It was difficult to find placers rich enough to make pick-and-shovel mining pay, yet prospects did not justify capital expenditures for machinery. Even with pumps the flow of water through the gravel prevented miners from digging 10 to 15 feet. Modern, expensive drill rigs were needed to reach bedrock. This left only the bars available for hand miners. Yet optimists contended that the lower Mulchatna region would justify dredge operations while the upper reaches would yield pay to hydraulic operations. Aside from gold, sands also showed platinum prospects.[19]

Prospectors examined the Mulchatna River, Bonanza Creek, Portage Creek, and other streams. Six men found some gold near the Kijik in 1902 but not enough to justify extensive work. Copper locations were made in 1906 by Charles Brooks and C. Von Hardenburgh also of Kasna Creek.

## Bering Land Bridge National Preserve

Incidental to the great gold rush to Nome in 1899-1900, prospectors spilled over into other areas of the Seward Peninsula looking for gold. At scattered places within the region of 20,000 square miles other mineral discoveries were made. The best prospects in areas near the present Bering Land Bridge Preserve boundaries were on tributaries of the Inmachuk River. Discoveries on Old Glory and Hannum creeks provoked a stampede of some 400 men in July 1901. Miners examined all likely prospects including gravel bars along the Goodhope River and Placer, Little Daisy, and Humboldt creeks--all of which are within the preserve.[20]

Another stampede to the northern part of the Seward Peninsula, that to Candle Creek in 1901, also brought miners into the preserve region. By 1908 almost $3 million had been taken out of the area, most of it from the Candle Creek district. Gold was found on Esperanza Creek, a tributary of the Goodhope River, in 1907-1908 and encouraged an influx of prospectors, most of them from the surrounding Fairhaven district.

Though miners did not prosper on any workings within the preserve they did enjoy an amenity developed there, Serpentine Hot Springs, which has remained a popular resort.

## The Fairhaven Ditch

Getting sufficient water to mining sites has been one of the biggest problems in most Alaska mining districts. The mines of the Seward Peninsula are no exception, but conditions there did favor construction of ditches. The Fairhaven Ditch was one of many such ditches and is the longest on the peninsula. The course of its 38-mile run north from Imuruk Lake to the Inmachuk River drainage takes it across the eastern corner of the preserve.

C.L. Morris started work on the Fairhaven Ditch in 1906 with construction of a dam on the outlet of Imuruk Lake. Crews labored over the summer seasons of 1906 and 1907, working through lava formations and permafrost. The ditch, 11 feet wide at the bottom, functioned until around World War I. Long stretches of the banks remain in good condition today.

## Conclusion

Although little mining was done in large areas of the parks, there was no region too remote for consideration of prospectors. Much prospecting activity has never been recorded, but we know that men investigated virtually every streambed in every corner of the territory. In many regions mineral prospects were the only reason for economic development. Where the mineral resources did not encourage development and no other resources attracted attention, the wilderness was very little affected by the fleeting presence of prospectors.

## Notes
## Chapter 16

1. Francis E. Caldwell, *Land of the Ocean Mists* (Edmonds: Alaska Northwest Publ. Co., 1986), 112, 145.

2. *Alaskan*, May 27, 1892.

3. *Alaskan Miner*, June 17, 1899.

4. Ibid.

5. Frank Been memo, September 5, 1940, NPS files; Tom Bundtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

6. E.M. MacKevett, Jr., et al., *Mineral Resources of Glacier Bay National Monument, Alaska*. USGS Professional Paper No. 632, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1971), 5.

7. *Sitka Alaskan*, October 13, 1906, for this and following quotes.

8. Jack London, *Love of Life* (New York: MacMillan Publ. Co., 1907), 165.

9. Melvin Ricks, *Alaskan Literature* (Juneau: Alaska Historical Library, 1960), 37-38; Rex Beach, *Valley of Thunder,* (New York: Farror & Rinehart, 1939), *passim*.

10. Dave Bohn, *Glacier Bay* (Gustavus: Alaska National Parks & Monuments Association, 1967), 85.

11. Ibid., 86.

12. Been to Director, September 5, 1940. Copy in NPS, Anchorage, files.

13. Ibid.

14. *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 24, 1897.

15. Walker to A.S. Tulloch, November 25, 1911, ASL.

16. Stephen Capps, "Lake Clark-Mulchatna Region," in P.S. Smith, *Mineral Resources of Alaska, 1929*, USGS Bulletin No. 824, (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1932), 125.

17. Alison K. Hoagland, "A Survey of the Historic Architectural Resources in Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Historic American Buildings Survey, 1982," 9-11, Copy in NPS file.

18. *Valdez Prospector*, April 17, 1902.

19. *Pathfinder*, September, 1921, 2.

20. G. Frank Willis, "It Is a Hard Country Though: Historic Resource Study, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve," (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, n.d.), 131-43.

# Chapter 17
## Modern Mining

### World War II

Wartime restrictions curtailed mining at a time of peak dollar yields. From 1938 to 1941 the industry averaged more than $24 million annually, about three times the production value during the 1900 Nome gold rush. Although the peak of gold production in volume was in 1906, the 1934 price rise caused the value peak of the late 1930s. Most of the gold mined during the peak years was dredged at Fairbanks and Nome.

Except for coastal communities largely occupied with the fisheries, nearly every town in Alaska depended on gold mining. The response of Alaskans to the 1942 closedown order was predictably critical. Anchorage banker E.A. Rasmuson considered the government's action as inconceivably short-sighted, "a scorched earth policy" which would destroy the leading industry of the interior without appreciably helping in the war effort. "The government," Rasmuson argued, "might as well have closed all fishing in and around the coastal towns in the Territory, or closed the saw mills in places where that pay roll is the only one that supports the community."[1]

The ire of Alaskans can be understood, but the reasons for the closure made perfect sense from the government's point of view. Laborers were urgently need in defense occupations, and even mining equipment like tractors, draglines, and bulldozers were needed for the many defense construction projects in Alaska.

In response to protests the War Production Board provided some relief to miners and businesses dependent upon mining. In 1943 a few of the territory's 47 dredges and 38 active lode mines were allowed to operate if they could show that much desired "strategic metals" were mined with the gold. An exception was also made for small placer operations employing seven or fewer men. Such outfits could mine with employees who were overage, handicapped, or otherwise unqualified for essential war activities.

The restrictions were hard on communities like Fairbanks, Nome, and Juneau. In 1944 the Alaska Juneau Mine, the largest lode mine in Alaska, closed permanently. One measure of the low point in gold production that year was in its comparison with coal. Coal production had never been big in Alaska, yet its value, $2.3 million, exceeded gold's output of $1.7 million.

Asbestos mining was not prohibited under wartime measures, and its production during 1944 reminded gold miners that better days were ahead. The Arctic Exploration Company's mine, near Shungnak, produced 50 tons. Asbestos was conveyed by dog sled 3 miles from the mine to the Shungnak airfield, then air freighted to Fairbanks for transshipment Outside. Cost of shipment, $500 per ton for the Shungnak-Fairbanks flight alone, was no object because the asbestos was needed as a filtering agent for blood plasma.[2]

## Looking to Revival

Old dreams revived as the war's end seemed near. At Seward active planning for a smelter got under way in April 1945. Boosters argued that such a smelter "would draw business from all over the railroad belt and western Alaska generally, besides arousing interest in removal of hard rock mining throughout Kenai peninsula because of the elimination of shipping difficulties and traffic expense." Some wondered why forecasts were so glowing since investment in a smelter had not been feasible before the war--but such optimism was general in mining circles.[4]

In late June 1945 the government announced the end of the ban on gold mining. Miners could start operations in July but were still under serious restrictions on labor and equipment purchasing and only $500 could be expended for supplies for each operation. Operators were quick to point out that nothing really had been altered by such a tentative lifting of the ban, but, obviously, the removal of all restrictions could soon be expected. By late July the Fairbanks Exploration Company did get one dredge moving, but only "redigging residue left from previous mining."[5]

When all the wartime restrictions were finally lifted, investors, miners, and other interested Alaskans had to face a new reality. It became clear that no renewal of the "golden age" would immediately follow from the war's end. Furthermore, it appeared that miners could not blame the traditional scapegoats--timid investors and a negligent government. Now the principal impediment to profitable production was high costs. Though high costs had always been a problem to mining development, it had been possible before the war to calculate costs and probable gains with thorough research on a particular property. The new element was an unrelenting inflationary spiral that made long-range forecasts uncertain and undermined the confidence of potential investors. Miners came to believe that the negligence of government experienced earlier was a lesser detriment to them than its modern position: the federal government, they concluded, was positively hostile to mining.

The industry was in sad shape in 1945. Most dredges were intact, but other kinds of heavy and hand equipment had been scattered during the three years of inactivity. Abundant capital for expensive retooling was the first necessity, and the assurance of a sustained yield high enough to pay vastly inflated wages was the second. How could the moribund industry be revived while the gold price was still fixed at its old pre-war value? As was soon obvious, it could not be revived under existing conditions. Miners cried for relief and gained some help from territorial, state, and federal governments but nothing like the huge subsidies needed for revival.

In 1949 Alaska newspapers eagerly recalled earlier days of glory in gold mining to herald a stampede. The rumored find of nuggets at Fishwheel, on the Yukon River 20 miles southeast of Fort Yukon, drew 150 people, most of whom flew in from Fairbanks and Fort Yukon. Skeptics quickly voiced doubts, focusing on the alleged appearance of nuggets in the salmon trap of a fishwheel. Perhaps, they suggested sarcastically, the "nuggets" were petrified salmon eggs. B.D. Stewart, Alaska's Commissioner of Mines, warned against disappointed expectations and waste of money: "The futility of attempt-

ing to sink by hand prospect holes in the deep water-filled alluvium adjacent to a channel of a river the size of the Yukon," must be considered. In fact, Stewart concluded, the announced discovery "is regarded as fantastic by experienced mining men." And, soon, it was established that fantasy rather than actual gold had caused the excitement.[6]

In 1952 Phil R. Holdsworth, the territory's commissioner of mines, observed that prospecting for gold and other metals was essential to development but would need government's stimulus. Few of the old-time Alaska prospectors were active any more, and the few still working had eyes only for gold. To promote prospecting, Holdsworth called for subsidized technical education, free passenger and freight transport to the field, analysis of samples, and advice on mining plans. The program available to miners in Saskatchewan was the model Holdsworth proposed.[7]

## Post-war: The 1950s

Gold production reached a post-war peak of $10 million in 1950 (the previous high was $26.5 million in 1940) before beginning a gradual decline. By comparison, the spending on military and civilian construction was about $250 million per year from 1949 to 1954. Mining suffered from the boom in construction because mining operators could not compete with the high wages offered by contractors. Mining of sand and gravel for construction did accelerate, but that industry is not part of this study.

The federal government encouraged mineral exploration and development in the 1950s with loans and contracts administered by the Defense Minerals Exploration Administration, Defense Minerals Procurement Agency, and the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Additionally, the General Services Administration was willing to guarantee commercial loans. Particular activities accelerated by federal programs included production of antimony in the Kantishna; mercury from the Kuskokwim; tin and tungsten from the new lode mine at Lost River on the Seward Peninsula; tungsten from the Fairbanks district; and chromite from Red Mountain on the Kenai Peninsula.[8] But miners considered these programs as mere token efforts that scarcely kept an ailing industry alive.

In 1954 the Atomic Energy Commission offered bonuses for the production of uranium. In response to the federal lure, uranium was discovered at Bokan Mountain on Prince of Wales Island in 1955. Two years later uranium production commenced and production went on intermittently until 1971. The area is Alaska's largest reserve of rare earth elements.

High market prices for copper and iron in the 1950s stimulated exploration for these metals. Miners found a copper deposit on the Maclaren River south of the Alaska Range in 1953. Some road construction, such as the Denali Highway in 1953, also encouraged exploration. That year the Kennecott Copper Corporation proved they had not abandoned Alaska entirely. Kennecott's subsidiary, Bear Creek Mining Co., explored a porphyry copper deposit at Orange Hill near Nabesna. This work did not result in any production, but the Bear Creek company continued to explore in other

areas and discovered copper-polymetal deposits on Ruby Creek in the Kobuk River Valley.

Southeastern Alaska appeared particularly attractive to seekers of iron. Pilot mill tests on the Klukwan deposits northwest of Haines carried out by American and Canadian steel companies and the U.S. Bureau of Mines appeared favorable in some respects. It was estimated that some 15 billion tons of magnetite ore could yield 15 to 20 percent iron and 3 to 4 percent titanium oxide. The ore could be mined and taken over the Haines Highway to tidewater. Prospects for production were tied development of the Yukon-Taiya hydroelectric project that ALCOA proposed to create enough power for smelting aluminum. When Canada refused ALCOA's request for water rights, the Klukwan mineral schemes died.

Historically, miners had demanded that the federal government provide more roads. Annual budgets of the Alaska Road Commission always seemed paltry to miners despite the agency's accomplishing a great deal. It took defense needs to dramatically loosen the federal purse strings for road building. During World War II the Alaska Highway and other roads serving military installations and a railroad extension from Portage to Whittier were built. During the war period and subsequently Alaska also gained the Haines Cut-off, Richardson Highway, Glenn Highway, Tok Cut-off, and the Anchorage-Seward road. One statistic alone shows the intensity of building: $135 million authorized for a six-year period in 1948 represented more than three times the funding of the previous 43 years.[9] Though miners appreciated the new roads, they recognized that the government's expenditure had not been directed to their needs and resented any suggestion that they were more than incidental beneficiaries.

## The 1960s Stagnation

In 1960 the Bureau of Mines noted that the number of dredges working in the Fairbanks district had dropped from six in 1959 to four in 1960. This occurrence "foreshadowed the end of an industry which contributed importantly to the opening and development of Alaska." Within three to four years the FE Company shut down its prosperous dredge operation. Other dredges still operated at Nome, Chicken, the Hogatza in the Hughes district, the Yukon, and in the Kukokwim--some 22 in all.[10]

Production of gold and silver from placer and lode operations had been $5.8 million in 1960, with about half of this coming from the Fairbanks dredges. The total number of mines included six lodes and 92 placer mines.

Production figures dropped through the 1960s, particularly after the Fairbanks dredges stopped work in 1963-64. The decline had started in 1955 with production of 249,300 ounces valued at $8.7 million. In 1964 the numbers were 58,400 ounces at $2 million. Virtually all 1964 production, indeed most of the mining since World War II, had been from placer mines.[11]

A particular low point in gold mining was reached in 1966 when 55 mines did not manage even to produce $1 million. Only $928,620 was earned that year.[12]

## Government's Role

The federal government continued its modest encouragement of mining after statehood. In 1961 the Federal Field Committee for Development Planning in Alaska was established to coordinate plans for federal programs promoting resource development. The Federal Field Committee studied the mining industry's needs and published its findings in a series of reports.

The new state legislature at Juneau also wanted to encourage mining. Legislators were forthright in their declarations: "Alaska's progress is directly connected with the development of its mineral resources."[13] The legislature wanted to purchase mineral ores to insure miners a market, but funds were not available. In 1963 the legislature created an assistance grant program for purchasing mining-related equipment and transportation (limited to $2,000 for individuals or $4,000 for parties). In 1967 the state offered a $10,000 bonus for the discovery and production of $100,000 worth of ore or concentrates from a previously undisclosed lode or placer with metals eligible under federal aid programs.

Tax incentive programs established by the territory were continued by the state. A 3½-year exemption from mining license taxes was extended to new metal processing operations. Other legislation allowed tax credits under certain conditions. With passage of the Alaska Industrial Development Act of 1967, Alaska created a public development corporation to help fund industrial plants.

Yet, for all the new state's efforts at encouragement, mining declined to an insignificant level in the 1960s. Gold mining was particularly hard hit by the disparity between high costs and low prices. Gold production was only $803,000 in 1967. Mercury production in the Kuskokwim virtually stopped in 1963, although it revived in 1969. Uranium production at Bokan Mountain stopped in 1964. Gold prospects looked brighter in 1968 after the fixed government price of $35 per ounce was removed. Earlier, the low gold price had been considered a chief impediment to prosperity but, as gold prices rose, other adversities were to arise.

## 1970s: Good News

Exploration for mineral resources accelerated in the 1970s because of a decline of U.S. production of several metals; the nationalization of mining abroad; Japanese interest in Alaska's resources; Canada's reduction of its tax incentives; settlement of land selections in Alaska; native investment in exploration; and big increases in prices for gold and other metals (except copper). Mining prospects emerged in the 1970s for southeast Alaska. In 1971 nickel-copper-cobalt deposits on Yakobi Island were examined and declared valuable. The Brady Glacier copper-nickel-cobalt deposit in Glacier Bay National Park seemed headed for development until environmental protection legislation in 1976 restricted mining in national parks.

The best prospects in southeast Alaska were a molybdenite deposit at Quartz Hill in the Tongass National Forest east of Ketchikan and the polymetallic massive sulphide

deposit at Greens Creek southeast of Juneau. In 1977 U.S. Borax requested an access road permit from the Forest Service that was strongly opposed by environmental groups. Since the establishment of Misty Fjords National Monument, which includes Quartz Hill, by presidential decree in 1978, the molybdenite development was been slowed. Greens Creek, however, is expected to start producing in spring 1989.

Other good news came from the southern Brooks Range when the Arctic, Sun, and Smucker deposits of copper, lead, zinc, and other metals were located. The Red Dog zinc-lead-silver deposit was discovered in the DeLong Mountains and is scheduled for production by 1990.

The following table shows expenditures on exploration from 1959-1979 (oil and gas not included):

**Mineral Exploration Expenditures in Alaska**
**(excluding oil and gas)**
**1959-1979**
**($ million)**

| Year | Expenditure | Year | Expenditure |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1959 | 1.0 | 1974 | 6.0 |
| 1960 | 2.0 | 1975 | 15.0 |
| 1961 | 1.5 | 1976 | 35.0 |
| 1962 | 1.0 | 1977 | 63.0 |
| 1963 | 1.0 | 1978 | 76.5 |
| 1964 | 1.5 | 1979 | 65.0 |
| 1965 | 3.0 | 1980 | 65.2 |
| 1966 | 2.0 | 1981 | 76.3 |
| 1967 | 4.0 | 1982 | 45.6 |
| 1968 | 5.0 | 1983 | 34.1 |
| 1970 | 7.5 | 1984 | 22.3 |
| 1971 | 10.0 | 1985 | 9.2 |
| 1972 | 7.5 | 1986 | 8.9 |
| 1973 | 7.0 | 1987 | 15.7 |
| | | 1988 | 45.5 |

## The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act

In 1980 Congress, after nine years of study and controversy, established huge new parks and expanded other federal areas in Alaska. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act was heralded as a magnificent achievement by conservationists, who grasped the opportunity created by pressure from various factions for the settlement of critical land issues. "Statehood, Native land claims, and oil combined to impose a new

land tenure system on one-fifth of the nation in record time," observed National Park Service historian William Brown. "At some point in this gigantic land disposition the national interest must be served." When President Jimmy Carter signed ANILCA he noted that "never before have we seized the opportunity to preserve so much of America's natural and cultural heritage."[15]

ANILCA required the national park system to extend protection to 10 new areas and to expand three existing preserves. Overall the park service became responsible for 43,600,000 acres of land. With this huge expansion of its responsibilities came new problems of park management. One issue that had generated a good deal of debate from 1971-80 concerned mining in park boundaries. Alaska miners, given the history of their industry and its decline since World War II, were particularly sensitive to any restrictions on their activities. Consideration of mining practices was not an issue that could be negotiated between the park service and the miners. It was one that involved other interested segments of the public who had standing to bring particular mining activities before the courts.

## Mining and the Environment

National environmental groups--particularly the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, and the Wilderness Society--have focused on Alaska since the 1960s when the proposed Rampart Dam and the Project Chariot atom bomb tests were major issues. With the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act and other protective legislation from the late 1960s into the '80s, environmentalists gained the means of bringing particular abuses to court. In the early 1970s the construction of the petroleum pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez was delayed until oil companies complied with studies of the environment required by NEPA and myriad design modifications.

The typical Alaska miner uses heavy machinery to move huge quantities of earth. On Crooked Creek near Central, Paul Manuel has invested $600,000 in machinery. His bulldozers push dirt and gravel into his wash plant at a great rate: every two minutes 30,000 pounds of pay dirt hits the conveyor belts. The yield to Manuel seems ludicrously meager--perhaps $18 in gold from every 15 tons of ground washed.

Whether the yield is large or small the water returned to the creek is full of clay and silt, and its diminished quality has aroused environmentalists. Miners can clean the water they use by allowing debris to settle in storage ponds before returning it to the river. Most court decisions that have recently affected mining in Alaska on public lands have evolved from suits brought to protect water quality. Installing settling ponds takes time and money, so miners must determine individually whether the added costs will still permit profits.

Many miners argue that the mining industry will be destroyed by environmental protection. "I'd have to say that the jury is still out on that question," says Jerry Gallagher, state director of mining. "When you cut through everything else, that's the question: Is there a spot for the placer mining industry in today's society?" While Gallagher's gloom can be understood, state geologist Tom Budtzen expects placer gold

production to continue its historic domination of gold output. Overall placers have produced 75 percent while lode has only accounted for 29 percent.[16]

Expansion of Denali National Park included the historic Kantishna mining district within its new boundaries. Kantishna miners were happy to be within the park, but the handful of active miners was left to carry on in the old, careless, water-dirtying ways for several years. Confrontation occurred after a coalition of environmental societies sued the National Park Service in May 1985, alleging that the service had ignored environmental damage resulting from placer mining in Alaska's parks, preserves, and monuments. In July U.S. District Judge James von der Heydt shut down mining in the parks pending assessment of environmental impact by the park service. The order affected 30 mines of the approximately 400 active mines in the state.

Environmentalists sued the Bureau of Land Management in February 1986, calling for environmental impact studies on several rivers. They charged that silty discharges from placer mines fouled drinking water and reduced fish populations. In May 1987, U.S. District Judge James Van der Heydt ordered the Bureau of Land Management to study the cumulative impacts of placer miners of Birch and Beaver creeks, Fortymile River, and rivers draining into the Minto Flats. Placer mines that disturbed more than 5 acres of BLM land were to be shut down after the summer 1987 season until environmental studies were completed.[17]

Jack Hession of the Sierra Club was pleased with the court's decision: "Now nearly every important drainage in the state is subject to an injunction. Finally, we can hope that BLM will begin to regulate placer mining and to control its impact." Though 30 of the 45 mines on BLM land exceeded the 5-acre limit set by the court, what encouraged environmentals most about the restriction was the court's acceptance of their argument that cumulative impacts on the environment must be studied. A year earlier, the court had accepted the cumulative impact study necessity for national park lands and this ruling extended it to the rest of Alaska's public lands.[18]

The resolution of many environmental issues remains in the future. Restrictions could increase. Miners sometimes dream of a perceived national emergency that would induce the government to virtually beg them to mine much needed metals--using traditional methods or any others.

## Mining Prospects Today

Meanwhile, mining goes on in areas unaffected by recent restrictions and where operators have met legal requirements. During the summers of 1987 and 1988 the huge, 14-story *Bima*, a gold dredge, worked the bottom of Norton Sound off Nome. *Bima* employs 137 giant steel buckets to scoop up gravel and silt, delivering 11,000 tons daily into vast hoppers. After washing and sifting, the material is returned to the sea leaving flecks of gold in a wire mesh for gathering. *Bima* shuts down at freeze-up, but the yield for 1987 was estimated at $14 million from 30,000 ounces of gold. Even with *Bima's* costs, the payroll of 48 men, and other expenses, the Inspiration Gold Company expects to make a profit during a projected seven-year operation period.[19]

*Bima* represents a familiar gold recovery technique although its telemetry technology for finding gold is modern. The great dredge's presence off Nome is a reminder of the dreams of some miners of 1899-1900. Miners who had not been able to locate any rich ground figured that the gold found in the beach sands at Nome had been washed in from Norton Sound. Tons of gold appeared to await miners clever enough to reach the sea bottom. All kinds of machinery designed to work the shore front was shipped to Nome, but none of the mechanical monsters performed successfully, even though some cost as much as $75,000 to construct. The fruitless effort ended abruptly in 1900 when a three-day gale smashed across the beaches and scattered the shattered machines far and wide. Today *Bima* is accomplishing what the pioneers failed to do.

Miners elsewhere in the state face changing calculations of the costs of mining and are pleased that the state has renewed its support. In 1981 the legislature appropriated $10 million for a mining loan fund and established the Office of Mineral Development as an advocacy group for the development of an industry willing to meet environmental standards. The Office of Mineral Development provides information, coordinates government task forces, helps provide environmental impact statement information, and advises the legislature.

Exploration has continued during the eighties, although monies spent have fallen off sharply because of world market conditions.

Among promising recent prospects has been the discovery in 1983 of a copper-lead-zinc-silver-gold deposit at Johnson River southwest of Anchorage. Houston Oil and Minerals discovered and worked tin deposits on Coal Creek near Talkeetna. Anaconda and the Cook Inlet Regional Corporation worked together at Johnson Creek and at Coal Creek. By 1988-89 expectations faded, and most activity has stopped.

The state's willingness to assist development was made clear in 1984 when the Red Dog developers (Cominco and the NANA Corporation) asked for assistance for a 57-mile road from the mine to the port. Alaska's legislature agreed to loan $150 million for construction through the Alaska Industrial Development Authority because of the promise of 400 jobs for the Northwest region.

## Optimism and Drift Mining

Mining geologist and historian Tom Bundtzen has kept his eye on the persistence of traditional mining methods with underground drift miners. In small mines at Wiseman, Innoko, and Fairbanks, independent miners are trying to make a living with low-cost methods. Wally and Bonnie Gordon of Wiseman chose drift mining because they "get to work all the time, to put supper on the table--beans if nothing else--and to become intimately involved with mining."[20]

The Gordons' methods are the same as those used by hundreds of miners in the early years of the century. They thawed the ground with wood fires, hoisting the dirt with a hand-turned windlass using 5-gallon cans as buckets, and broke large rocks with a sledge hammer. Underground they used kerosene lamps for lighting. Digging went on from October to mid-January, when they reached bedrock at 39 feet and started

their drift (tunnels). By May they were ready to wash down their mound of pay dirt. Modestly, the Gordons did not tell Bundtzen how much they made, but they "were able to put beans on the table."

With some refinements the Gordons have continued their operation year round. Though small, their mine held the distinction in 1984 of being "the only year-round operational metal mine in the 49th state."[21] It would not do to call the Gordons "successful" miners yet. They hope to get some expansion capital to develop open-pit mining.

By 1988 there were some reasons for optimism in the mineral industry. As Tim Bradner reported in the *Anchorage Daily News*, "placer miners and government environmental agencies are getting along better . . . It's not all hugs and kisses yet, but miners are making important progress in meeting strict federal and state water-quality standards, and regulating agencies are demonstrating a pragmatic flexibility in enforcing those standards."[22] Four months later, Bradner attended the Alaska Miners Association convention to see "lots of happy faces . . . Times are good, and getting better, for Alaska's miners, particularly those involved in exploration."[23]

Prospects are brightest in southeast and northwest Alaska, particularly for large mining companies. Near Juneau the $106 million Greens Creek Mine, expected to be the nation's most productive silver mine, was scheduled for operation in spring 1989. Some 250 miners would be employed at Greens Creek, and eventually this number could double. Owners of this underground mine on Admiralty Island expect production of 6.37 million ounces of silver annually. In addition, the annual yield will include 36,000 ounces of gold, 25,000 tons of zinc, and 9,000 tons of lead. The mine was specifically exempted from wilderness designation in the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act despite its location on the edge of the 17,000-acre Admiralty Island National Monument. Particular attention has been paid to land and water environmental protection. Also, a major exploration program could bring the historic Alaska-Juneau Mine and the Old Kensington Mine north of Juneau into production. In northwest Alaska work is going forward on the big Red Dog lead mine, scheduled to begin production in 1991.

These few developments have sparked exploration elsewhere, including surveys of the Golden Zone Mine south of Denali National Park and The Big Hurrah near Nome. The days of fixed gold prices are long gone. Now wide fluctuations are the rule but not of special concern to miners. Prices have remained $200 an ounce, and miners believe that some prospects under consideration can prosper with prices at approximately $200.

Since Alaska mining development owes much to the Klondike experience, Alaskans show lively interest in developments in the Yukon Territory. In summer 1988 miners were working on Gold Bottom and many of the other famed creeks of 1897-98 gold-rush excitement in the Dawson area. Some 200 small mining ventures are scattered along the creeks of the Yukon--two-thirds of them within 50 miles of Dawson City. In 1987 the Yukon miners produced 106,237 ounces of gold valued at $64 million,

the highest amount since 1917, and production for 1988 was expected to be 50 percent higher.[24]

Miners in late 1988 were more optimistic about future prospects than they had been in several years. One reason for optimism, of course, was the continued acceleration in the price of gold--to more than $400 an ounce. With gold inflation the estimated value of Alaska's gold resource increased by a third between 1986 and 1988. The optimism is reflected by extensive exploration activity.

In 1987 Alaska's mines produced 229,700 ounces of gold valued at $104.5 million. Small quantities of tin, silver, tungsten, and platinum were also produced. The gain in southeast Alaska was particularly dramatic--from 150 ounces in 1986 to 3,400 ounces in 1987.[25]

Numbers of claims filed have accelerated rapidly in recent months. A ninefold increase in the third quarter of 1988 over the same period a year earlier is dramatic evidence of optimism. There were 16,132 new claims filed stateside in the third quarter of 1988, 3,000 of them in the Fairbanks district, and most of them on gold lode deposits. Larger mining companies were responsible for most of the claims. They have been motivated by advances in technology as well as price incentive. Technology at issue involves the use of chemicals to separate, or leach, microscopic gold particles from low-grade ore deposits. The geological formation of the Fairbanks area lends itself to use of the leaching technology.

State mining director Jerry Gallagher noted a difference between current locations of claims and those filed in the early 1970s when gold prices started their rise. Earlier claimants staked "in the middle of nowhere. This time the interest is in precious metal deposits along side existing roads and rivers. I'd say it's a little smarter."[26]

## Rare-earth Elements

Rare-earth materials are certain oxides of metals needed in the manufacture of crystals, alloys, magnets, and solid-state devices. The state of Alaska has been encouraging miners to consider the long-range prospects of rare-earth mining. According to state mining director Jerry Gallagher miners must look to the future: "It takes a long time to develop these things, but this is what the mining industry needs. We need to develop new technologies, instead of having everyone running out into the hills every time the price of gold hits $400 an ounce, and shutting down every time the price drops again."[27]

## Conclusion

A review of the efforts by national and state governments to revive mining over the last 40 years indicates that the industry's potential has not been neglected. Some miners have complained that the government programs have accomplished little because they did not really provide substantial aid. Some miners want more government help to get the industry on its feet. No government program offered anything like the

assistance most miners believed they needed. Some miners argue that they do not need aid but do need the removal of government restrictions. "Get off our backs," is their cry. Given the importance of mining in Alaska's past and the potential defense needs of the nation, miners have been unhappy with governments' stinginess. And they have felt particularly uncomfortable about government policies and supposed official hostility to mining, particularly by the National Park Service, since ANILCA passed in 1980.

Mining can no longer operate with the freedom of earlier days. But, despite environmental restrictions, a mining revival is under way. Miners note that the high prices of gold and other metals have much more to do with the revival than do any government programs. How much mineral production will increase in the years to come cannot be known. It seems unlikely that mining will ever be as important as it was during the early years of the century but neither does it seem likely to fade away--as it did to some gloomy observers in the 1960s and 1970s.

## Notes
## Chapter 17

1. Terrence Cole, "History of the National Bank of Alaska" (draft manuscript, author's file), Chapter 5, 32.

2. *Jessen's Weekly*, December 15, 1944; *Alaska Weekly*, May 18, 1945.

3. *Alaska Weekly*, March 9, April 6, and May 4, 1945.

4. *Alaska Weekly*, April 20, 1945.

5. *Alaska Weekly*, June 29, July 27, 1945.

6. *Alaska Mining Record*, October 24, 25, 30, 1949.

7. Philip Holdsworth, "Present and Projected Outlook for Developing Alaska's Mineral Resources" Governors' Papers, 1934-1953, roll 251.

8. Edwin Roads, "Mining Frontier and Transportation in the North," (Dissertation. University of Alaska Fairbanks, 1986), 182.

9. Claus Naske, *Paving Alaska's Trails* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 227; Roads, *Mining*, 184.

10. *Minerals Yearbook 1960*, 81.

11. Ibid., *1964*, 95.

12. Ibid., *1966*, 81.

13. Roads, *Mining*, 195.

14. Ibid., 20; Tom Bundtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

15. Willis, "Do Things Right the First Time," iii, 237.

16. Ibid., June 28, 1987; Tom Bundtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

17. Ibid., May 31, 1987.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid., September 27, 1987.

20. Thomas Bundtzen, "Drift Miners - Alaska's Incurable Optimists," *Alaska Mines and Geology*, (Juneau: Department of Natural Resources, January 1984, v.xxxii, no. 1), 2.

21. Ibid., 3.

22. *Anchorage Daily News*, June 5, 1988.

23. Ibid., October 22, 1988.

24. *New York Times*, July 28, 1988.

25. *Anchorage Daily News*, August 19, September 29, 1988.

26. Ibid., September 13, 1988.

27. Ibid., August 19, 1988.

# Chapter 18
## Significance of Mining in Alaska's Past

### Number Games

Showing the value of Alaska's mineral resources to the nation used to be a popular political tool for Alaskans. James Wickersham and other Alaska representatives to Congress loved to compare the modest purchase price of the territory and the total government's expenditures on improvements to the value of Alaska's product. With gold, salmon, and other products, Wickersham figured in 1932 that Alaska had contributed $2.5 billion more to the nation than the government had spent in the territory. Philip Smith of the USGS calculated that by the end of 1936, the total value of all minerals produced in the territory was $720,000,000 "or one hundred times the purchase price of the Territory." In January 1941 the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* crowed about Alaska's record gold production of $25,375,000 in 1940. The editor reminded readers that Alaska's total gold production mounted to $561 million, "a wonderful return on an investment of the $7.2 million purchase price."[1]

Many general claims made by the Seattle editor were true enough: "The Yukon and Alaska discoveries of the Klondike era strikingly altered worldwide financial conditions, completely changed the trend of monetary theory over a large part of the United States--and incidentally made Seattle as a modern city."[2] Pacific coast cities had prospered at least partly because of the gold rush, particularly Seattle, Tacoma, Portland, Victoria, Vancouver, and San Francisco. Seattle gained most because the business community established the port as the best outfitting, shipping, and trading center for the North. Merchants, whose total pre-Klondike sale of goods was some $300,000, were selling $10 million worth in 1899.

The nation as a whole benefitted as well. Economic depression, which had dogged the 1890s, gave way to much better times with the gold boom.

### Alaska's Development

Altering worldwide financial conditions was less important from a national and regional standpoint than was the impact of gold production on Alaska's development. Great wealth was produced in a region that had formerly produced little. The wealth was bountiful, widely distributed throughout the territory, and capable of supporting communities for decades.

An assessment of the importance of mining cannot be measured solely in terms of production. Alaska's development owes more to mining than perhaps any other region in America. But for gold discoveries on the Yukon and Seward Peninsula, the interior might have remained a scarcely known, sparsely populated region into the present. Thanks to the Klondike and Nome gold strikes the population of Alaska doubled between 1890 and 1900 to reach 63,592 persons. The native population remained

stable at some 30,000, so the gold rushes were responsible for bringing in some 30,000 new residents.

Gold excitement helped to interest and educate the nation to the value of Alaska. It fostered progress in exploration, transportation, land administration, and law-making by government; and it greatly increased capital investment by private individuals. The general movement of the American population from east to west was stimulated by related economic activity in Pacific Coast cities.

The mining industry greatly influenced and largely directed the course of Alaska's development. By 1912 the total gold output exceeded $225.5 million. Copper production had been only $16 million by that early date, but Kennecott's operation had scarcely begun. In addition to the great wealth of gold and copper produced, there had also been more than $2 million in silver. It was significant in fostering development that the mineral production had been so widely dispersed from Juneau, Unga Island, Kenai, Prince William Sound, Seward Peninsula, and the subarctic and arctic interior. It was also important that the several major discoveries occurred over a number of years, thus allowing a more orderly development of transportation and other support services.

Exaggeration of mining's effects on development would be difficult. In several regions the first permanent communities were established as a direct result of mineral discovery. Tens of thousands of people first settled in Alaska because of the mineral discoveries and at times up to 60 percent of the population was supported directly or indirectly by mining activities. From 1885 to 1964 gold production totaled $750 million.

The peak year of Alaska's gold production was 1906, when the territory ranked second to Colorado in output. Overall, for production in this century, Alaska ranks fifth after California, Colorado, Nevada, and South Dakota. These states are generally referred to as "the big 5" and account for 80 percent of gold mined in the United States. Among the nation's individual mining districts, Alaska's leaders--Fairbanks, Juneau, and Nome, rank seventh, eighth, and 13th nationally. Fairbanks leads all placer districts, however, with a production of 7.2 million ounces. Nome's output totaled 3.5 million ounces. By comparison, Canada's Klondike district leads all those in North America with 11 million ounces.[3]

Alaska's contribution to the nation's total gold production has been substantial too. In 1908 Alaska's share was 8.8 percent rising to 16.9 in 1910, 16.7 in 1915, 17.1 in 1920, and peaking at 20.1 in 1933. From that time the decline was sharp, yet remained about 10 percent in the early 1960s.[4]

It was not until 1938 that commercial fishing superseded gold as the most valuable export from Alaska, but mining continued to be significant for several more years.

## Employment

Mining supported nearly 40 percent of the territory's white population--an estimated 15,400 people--until World War II. Some 600 natives also depended upon mining as did most white families in the interior. Some statistics of the governor's office for 1940 follow:

1. Number of people directly engaged in gold mining in Alaska:
   (a) By type of operation

| | |
|---|---|
| Gold placer mines | 4,200 |
| Gold lode mines | 2,000 |
| Total | 6,200 |

   (b) By race

| | |
|---|---|
| White | 5,800 |
| Native | 400 |

2. Estimated number of additional people directly or indirectly dependent on these mines (by divisions):

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| First Division | Whites | 4,500 |
| | No Natives | |
| Second Division | Whites | 1,900 |
| | Natives | 300 |
| Third Division | Whites | 3,000 |
| | Natives | 100 |
| Fourth Division | Whites | 6,000 |
| | Natives | 200 |
| | Total | 16,000 |

By race:

| | |
|---|---|
| Whites | 15,400 |
| Natives | 600 |

Total white and foreign-born population of Alaska (ref. Sixteenth Census 1940) . . . . . 40,000

3. Names and population of communities entirely dependent on gold mine operations:

| | | | Type of Camp |
|---|---|---|---|
| First Division | | | |
| | Hyder | 72 | Lode |
| | Thane | 69 | " |
| | Chichagof | 62 | " |
| | Kimshan Cove | 102 | " |
| Second Division | | | |
| | Council | 48 | Gold Placer |
| | Nome | 1,550 | " " |
| | Candle | 119 | " " |
| | Haycock | 81 | " " |
| | Fortune Ledge (Marshall) | 91 | " " |
| Third Division | | | |
| | Nabesna | 23 | Lode |
| | Kennecott | 5 | " |
| | McCarthy | 49 | " |
| | Denali | 63 | Gold Placer |
| | Talkeetna | 132 | " " |
| | Golden Zone Mine | 43 | Lode |
| | Valdez | 524 | " |
| | Ellamar | 23 | " |
| | Wasilla | 96 | " |
| | Fern Mine | 31 | " |
| | Lucky Shot Mine | 45 | " |
| | Independence Mine | 156 | " |
| Fourth Division | | | |
| | Nyac | 33 | Gold Placer |
| | Circle | 98 | " " |
| | Circle Hot Springs | 14 | " " |
| | Eagle | 73 | " " |
| | Chatanika | 118 | " " |
| | Ester (Berry) | 219 | " " |
| | Fairbanks | 3,442 | " " |
| | Fox | 25 | " " |
| | Hughes | 32 | " " |
| | Chicken | 41 | " " |
| | Franklin | 5 | " " |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fourth Division (cont.) | | |
| Jack Wade | 17 | " " |
| Hot Springs | 39 | " " |
| Cripple | 9 | " " |
| Ophir | 84 | " " |
| Bettles | 12 | " " |
| Wiseman | 53 | " " |
| Takotna | 70 | " " |
| Ruby | 132 | |
| Flat | 141 | " " |
| Rampart | 106 | " " |
| Livengood | 75 | " " |
| Total Number Communities | 43 | |
| Combined Population (ref. Sixteenth Census 1940) | 8,222 | |

Mineral Production of Alaska - 1940[5]

| | |
|---|---|
| From gold placers | $18,852,000 |
| From gold lodes | 7,326,000 |
| From all other mines | 2,292,000 |
| Total | $28,470,000 |

Other employment statistics for the 1900-1940 period show the rapid increase of population and employed miners from 1900 to 1910. Alaska's population decline in 1920 and 1930 was not reflected in numbers of miners employed.

**Alaska Mining Employment, 1900-1930[6]**

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population of Alaska | 63,592 | 64,356 | 55,036 | 59,278 |
| Population of Alaska Copper Mining | 812 | 2,397 | 3,920 | 4,071 |
| Persons gainfully employed in Alaska | 33,335 | 40,037 | 26,797 | 27,552 |
| Persons engaged in mining in Alaska | n.a. | 11,372 | 5,287 | 4,787 |
| Persons engaged in copper mining | n.a. | 271 | 746 | n.a. |
| Persons engaged in gold & silver mining | n.a. | 10,633 | 4,051 | n.a. |

## How Much Gold?

Production figures to 1979 for the many camps provide a sense of how widespread gold mining was and the disparity between great fields like Fairbanks and Nome and lesser ones.

| Rating | | Gold Production (ounces) | Discovery Date |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Fairbanks | 7,464,200 | 1902 |
| 2. | Juneau (Gold Belt) | 7,107,000 | 1880 |
| 3. | Nome | 3,606,000 | 1898 |
| 4. | Iditarod | 1,320,000 | 1908 |
| 5. | Chichagof | 770,000 | 1871 |
| 6. | Circle | 730,000 | 1893 |
| 7. | Willow Creek | 652,000 | 1897 |
| 8. | Council | 588,000 | 1898 |
| 9. | Hot Springs (Yukon, south of Rampart) | 447,900 | 1898 |
| 10. | Fortymile | 400,000 | 1886 |
| 11. | Ruby | 389,100 | 1907 |
| 12. | Tolovana | 375,000 | 1914 |
| 13. | Innoko | 350,000 | 1906 |
| 14. | Koyukuk (Nolan) | 290,000 | 1893 |
| 15. | Fairhaven (Inmachuck) | 277,000 | 1900 |
| 16. | Solomon | 251,000 | 1899 |
| 17. | Kuskokwim (Aniak) | 230,600 | 1901 |
| 18. | Koyukuk (Hughes) | 201,000 | 1910 |
| 19. | Fairhaven (Candle) | 179,000 | 1901 |
| 20. | Kuskokwim (McKinley) | 173,500 | 1910 |
| 21. | Kougarok | 150,400 | 1900 |
| 22. | Nizina | 143,500 | 1901 |
| 23. | Chistochina-Chisna | 141,000 | 1898 |
| 24. | Prince William Sound | 137,900 | 1894 |
| 25. | Girdwood | 125,000 | 1895 |
| 26. | Marshall (Anvik) | 120,000 | 1913 |
| 27. | Yentna (Cache Creek) | 115,200 | 1905 |
| 28. | Unga Island | 108,900 | 1891 |
| 29. | Richardson | 95,000 | 1905 |
| 30. | Bluff | 90,200 | 1898 |
| 31. | Tolstoi | 87,200 | |
| 32. | Rampart | 86,800 | 1882 |
| 33. | Nabesna | 63,300 | 1899 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 34. | Ketchikan Hyder | 62,000 | 1898 |
| 35. | Porcupine | 61,000 | 1898 |
| 36. | Kantishna | 55,000 | 1903 |
| 37. | Koyuk | 52,000 | 1915 |
| 38. | Bonnifield | 45,000 | 1903 |
| 39. | Chisana | 44,800 | 1910 |
| 40. | Eagle | 40,200 | 1895 |
| 41. | Valdez Creek | 37,000 | 1903 |
| 42. | Chandalar | 30,700 | 1905 |
| 43. | Goodnews Bay | 29,700 | 1900 |
| 44. | Port Clarence | 28.000 | 1898 |
| 45. | Yakataga | 25,700 | 1893 |
| 46. | Kobuk (Shungnak) | 15,000 | 1898 |
| 47. | Sumdum | 15,000 | 1869 |
| 48. | Kuskokwim (Georgetown) | 14,500 | |
| 49. | Glacier Bay | 11,000 | |
| 50. | Noatak | 9,000 | 1898 |
| 51. | Kobuk (Squirrel River) | 7,000 | 1909 |
| 52. | Kodiak | 4,800 | 1895 |
| 53. | Nelchina | 2,900 | 1895 |
| 54. | Yakutat | 2,500 | 1880 |
| 55. | Delta | 2,500 | |
| 56. | Iliamna (Lake Clark) | 1,500 | 1902 |
| 57. | Gold Hill | 1,200 | 1907 |
| 58. | Lituya Bay | 1,200 | 1894 |

Production for the following districts was reported with that of larger districts:

| District | Reported With |
|---|---|
| Skwentna | Yentna |
| Chena | Fairbanks |
| Woodchopper-Coal Creek | Circle |
| Seventymile | Fortymile |
| Hope | Girdwood |

Production during the last decade is not reflected in the figures listed above, which break down the production by districts, but current total figures are available. From 1880 to 1988 Alaska produced 31,966,112 ounces of gold and 20,017,685 ounces of silver from lode and placer sources.

## Cultural Significance

Any gain to individuals, communities, or the nation must be considered a significant value and be worth inclusion in an assessment of mining history. The perceived value of the experience in character building upon participants has been discussed (see Chapter 5). Though such intangibles are impossible to measure, it does relate to a well-known overall interpretation of the frontier experience. The Turner thesis, a contribution to American thought made by the 19th century historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, holds a number of elements. Of application here is Turner's view that Americans' westwarding tendencies stamped the national character with qualities of initiative, resourcefulness, courage, and other virtues. In substance, Americans became better people because they forced themselves out of settled molds into novel and unsettled conditions on the frontier.

Whether derived from Turner or not the same theory has been presented by Alfred H. Brooks, chief of the USGS in Alaska. Brooks, whose fieldwork dated from the Klondike era, liked to generalize about 50,000 stampeders to Alaska. They were "thrown entirely" on their own resources, Brooks argued.

> Life on the Klondike Trail was a great winnowing process. A man stood on his own feet. If he had the basal character, he won; if not, he became a derelict. A small percentage failed through lack of moral stamina . . . On the other hand, many a man who had not developed beyond mediocracy in his own community, tightly bound by tradition and customs, found in Alaska his opportunity and rose to his true level. This last of our frontiers, therefore, has played a part in developing breath of view and character among our people.[8]

Brooks may have overstated his case, but his position has some validity.

## Colonial Mentality

The attitudes of miners to the government reflect a negative cultural heritage. Miners long resisted the fact that investing in mining was a risky venture for both private capital and the government. Territorial mineral resources could not be exploited profitably unless transportation difficulties were reduced and the quantity of placer or ore was great enough to justify expenditures on equipment and other costs. Investors had to make the same calculations on a mining investment anywhere, of course, but particular considerations of distance, costs, length of working season, and other matters were required in Alaska.

Similarly, the government had to balance the demands of Alaskans for improvements against other national needs and in terms of long-range gains to the territory. But Alaskans also had a difficult time in assessing government's efforts in fostering mining and other development. Rather early in territorial history the tradition of blaming the

government for everything but the weather became established. As mining opened up the country, it somehow seemed reasonable to praise the initiative and other fine qualities of involved individuals and to censure the government when conditions went sour. Government officials, on the other hand, thought that they deserved some credit for Alaska's progress.

This peculiar tendency of Alaskans was a familiar attitude on other western frontiers as well. Home-rule measures, including territorial representatives in Washington, elected officials, and a legislature were long in coming to Alaska so the "colonial" attitude persisted longer than elsewhere. Even when some elements of home rule were established, the critical attitude of Alaskans towards the national government persisted strongly until statehood. After statehood, Alaskans had control of many matters, but Uncle Sam remained the major landowner so the occasions for complaining did not vanish entirely.

## Cultural Influence

Cultural influences expressed in mining literature and legend have been treated elsewhere (see Chapters 5 and 6), but some general characteristics are worth noting. Few Alaskans today have anything directly to do with mining, but a general understanding of methods and historic activities forms part of the popular culture. Alaskans commonly use mining terminology and metaphor. This was even truer in earlier decades, of course, particularly in areas where mining was common. Even with the decline of mining in recent times, interest in historic activity has flourished.

The efforts of state, federal, and private landholders to preserve remnants of mining industry have been valuable. The state park preservation of Independence Mine at Hatcher Pass; the National Park Service's care at Skagway and along the Chilkoot Trail; and the restoration of buildings in the old mining camp at Crow Creek near Alyeska are examples.

Still another explanation of the modern public's ease of identification with the mining tradition is in its relationship to other activities. Alaska's hunters, trappers, dog mushers, and hikers have a certain respect for those early miners. It required travel skills and a spirit of adaptation that is generally admired by Alaskans who have a particular sensitivity to their natural environment.

## Conclusion

Emphasizing the great significance of mining in Alaska's economic history is easier than predicting what might occur in the future. The "boom or bust" cycle of Alaska's economy has been prominent throughout territorial and statehood history. The ups and downs of mining have contributed to this characteristic cycle. Whether those who in recent years have forecast the end of Alaska's metal mining have read the future accurately cannot be known. Interestingly enough, the latest statistics of 1988 show gold production of 265,500 ounces--a 16 percent increase over 1987.[9]

Many observers of the industry argue that other contemporary trends point to a gloomy future. The number of mines has fallen sharply over the last five years. Most of the production increase can be traced to the mines at Valdez Creek and *Bima's* work off Nome. Many placer miners have relocated in the Yukon Territory, where the government's policies favor mining and where support efforts far exceed any that Alaska miners have ever received.

## Notes
## Chapter 18

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2. Ibid.

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6. John Kinney, "Copper and the Settlement of South-Central Alaska," (*Journal of the West*, Vol. 10, No. 2, April, 1971), 314.

7. *Mining in Alaska's Past, Conference Proceedings* (Anchorage: Alaska Division of Parks, Publ. No. 27, 1980), 26; Tom Bundtzen to author, July 20, 1989.

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