



# The Klondike Gold Rush of 1898

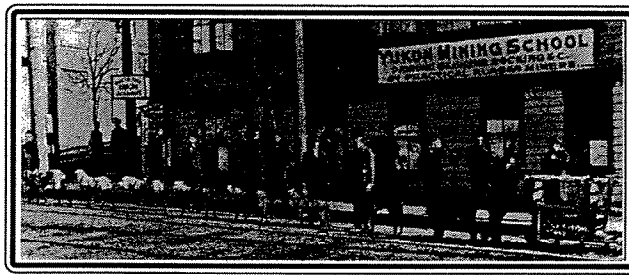
A Resource Guide  
to  
"The Last Grand  
Adventure"



Klondike Gold Rush  
National Historical Park  
Seattle, Washington

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## THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

Congress established Yellowstone National Park March 1, 1872, in the Territories of Montana and Wyoming, "...as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people..." and placed it "under the exclusive control of the Secretary of the Interior." Yellowstone was the first National Park in the world. Today there are more than 1,200 national parks or equivalent reserves in more than 100 countries.

President Woodrow Wilson signed the law establishing the United States National Park Service, August 25, 1916. In part this law states:

*"The Service thus established shall promote and regulate the use of Federal areas known as national parks, monuments and reservations by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments and reservations, which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."*

Since 1916, the National Park System has grown to include more than 375 areas and 83 million acres. These areas not only protect unique natural values and biological diversity, but also prehistoric, historic, and cultural values as well. A list of the types of areas and numbers of these areas represented in the National Park System follows:

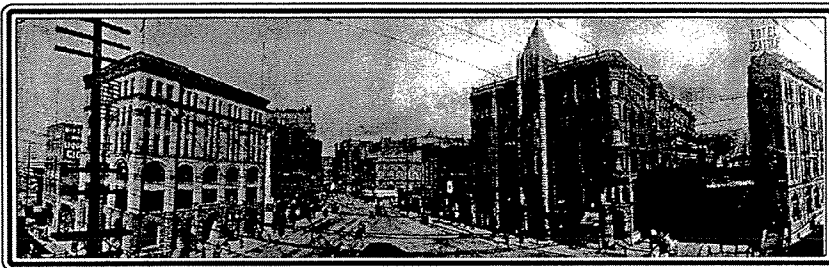
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For more information about the National Park System in general, the U. S. Government Printing Office publication The National Parks Index 1997-1999 gives a complete listing of all of the sites that are managed by the National Park Service.

The employees and volunteers of the National Park Service bring a diversity of background and skills to their work. Some park rangers perform resource and visitor protection duties; others work in resource education. Administrative staff, maintenance employees, trail crew, scientists, technicians, researchers, historians, architects, and many others work as a team to care for sites in the National Park System.



On June 30, 1976, President Gerald Ford signed the law authorizing Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park. In part the law states, *"That in order to preserve in public ownership for the benefit and inspiration of the people of the United States, historic structures and trails associated with the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898, the Secretary of the Interior is authorized to establish the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park..., consisting of a Seattle unit, a Skagway unit, the Chilkoot Trail unit, and the White Pass Trail unit...."*

For more information about the Skagway, Chilkoot and White Pass Trail units contact:

Superintendent  
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park  
P.O. Box 517  
Skagway, Alaska 99840-0517  
Telephone: (907) 983-2921.

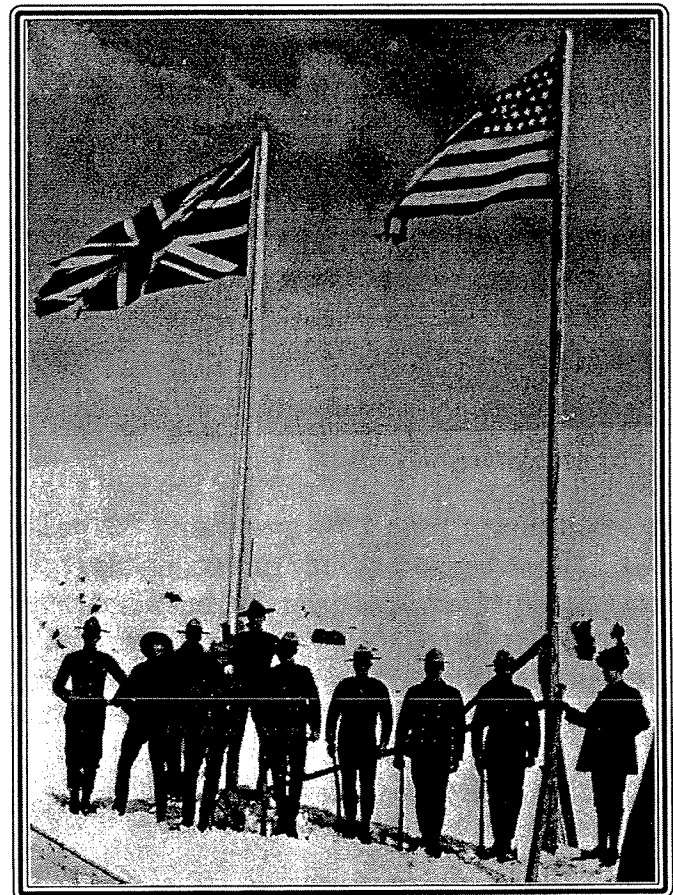
The law authorizing the National Historical Park also stated, *"...within the Pioneer Square Historic District in Seattle...the Secretary may select a suitable site for the Seattle unit...."* Today, true to the spirit of the legislation, the Seattle unit of the park is located in the heart of the historic Pioneer Square neighborhood at 117 South Main Street. In the park brochure for the Seattle unit is a map depicting the boundaries of the Pioneer Square Historic District.

For Information on the Seattle unit and the Pioneer Square Historic District, please contact:

Superintendent  
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park  
117 South Main Street  
Seattle, Washington 98032  
Telephone: (206) 553-7220

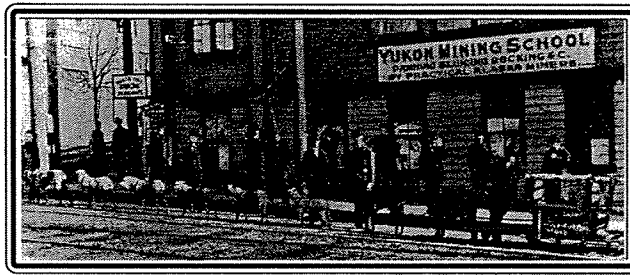
Parks Canada, Canada's National Park Service, recognizes the Klondike Gold Rush natural and cultural values by managing Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site in British Columbia and the Klondike National Historic Sites in Dawson City, Yukon Territory. For more information contact:

Parks Canada  
Area Superintendent  
Yukon National Historic Sites  
205 - 300 Main Street  
Whitehorse, Yukon Territory Y1A 2B5  
Canada  
Telephone (867) 667-3910



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## THE ERA OF THE GOLD RUSH

In western North America during the mid-Nineteenth Century, prospectors had been seeking their fortunes. In the United States the California Gold Rush set in motion a migration of people across the continent and around the world. The name "Forty-niner" became synonymous with these avid prospectors. Other mineral strikes resulted from miners exploring in the mountain ranges of North America.

By the latter third of the nineteenth century similar explorations were occurring in the mining districts of British Columbia. By the mid 1880s prospectors were exploring the Yukon River drainage. Fortymile, located forty miles down stream from Ft. Reliance in northwestern Canada, experienced three rushes, also known as stampedes, during 1887. Ten years later, members of this community initiated the first stampede to the Klondike.

### DISCOVERY IN THE KLONDIKE

Robert Henderson, of Nova Scotia, had been prospecting for gold along the tributaries of the Yukon River. In August of 1896, George Washington Carmack his Tagish Indian wife Kate (Shaaw Tláa); her brother "Skookum Jim," James Mason (Keish); and their nephew, Dawson Charlie (Káa Goox) struck up a conversation with Henderson as he passed through the Carmacks camp.

As they talked, Henderson invited Carmack to work his claim on Hunker creek, but insisted Kate, Jim, and Charlie stay behind. Henderson did not care for the natives who lived along the Yukon river. Henderson may have also suggested to Carmack that he look up Rabbit Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River, for gold deposits. On August 16, 1896, Carmack and Jim searched along Rabbit Creek and when Skookum Jim saw "gold, shining like cheese in a sandwich." Carmack and Dawson Charlie

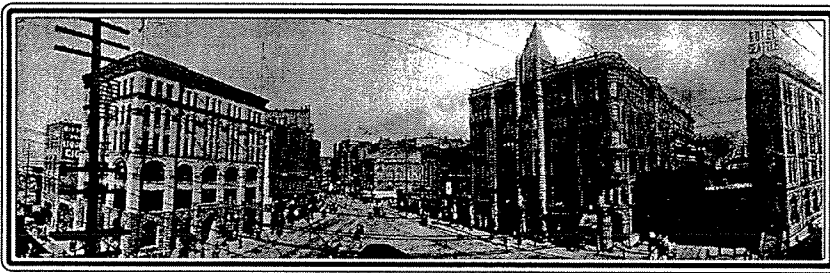
rushed over and Carmack dipped a gold pan into the gravel. The discovery pan yielded more than a 1/4 ounce! This was outstanding! A good "pan" was considered one that yielded much less.

Skookum Jim remained to guard the area while the others rushed to Forty Mile to register the claims. Carmack named himself as the discoverer, entitling him to two claims and registered one claim each for Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie. He then renamed Rabbit Creek "Bonanza."

After filing the claim, George Carmack went to Bill McPhee's Saloon, a popular spot for Yukon prospectors. Calling for attention, he paused dramatically and announced, "Boys, there's been a strike on Rabbit Creek." Carmack's nickname in Fortymile had been "Lyn' George," but this time, he was telling the truth.

Within a matter of days, Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks were staked from end to end. The unwritten "miners code" said that Carmack was to send word to Robert Henderson so that Henderson could stake a claim on the creek that he had suggested. Carmack, still angry over the slight to his native Yukon family, did not. By the time Henderson arrived on the scene, there was no land left to stake.

Although the gold was first discovered in August 1896, it took almost a year for the word to get out to the rest of the world. For the next eleven months, those first prospectors mined the gravel of the Klondike and its tributaries, accumulating a tremendous amount of gold. Known as the "Klondike Kings," many of these prospectors decided to return to the United States after a year in the goldfields.



## THE UNITED STATES IN 1897

Why would someone leave their home to travel to the Klondike goldfields? The answer cannot be found in bank accounts or photo albums. Instead, consider the human spirit of the late 1890s. A severe depression called the "Panic of '93" rocked the American economy, putting prosperous businesses into bankruptcy and sending the nation's morale into a downward spiral. There was no end in sight to the desperation felt by the thousands unemployed.

In the 1890 the Census Bureau declared that the western frontier had closed. The information that the census collected indicated that every region of the contiguous United States had experienced settlement. For the wanderers, the adventurers, and the explorers, this was the end of an era. The only place left to them was the great north - Alaska and northwest Canada. The Last Frontier.

The rumors of a big strike on the Yukon River in Canada were proven to be true with the arrival of the *SS Excelsior* in San Francisco on July 14, 1897. The \$750,000 of gold on board caught the attention of people across the country, especially those in Seattle. The miners arriving in San Francisco let it be known that the *SS Portland* bound for Seattle, was carrying even more gold than the *SS Excelsior*.

The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* sent a group of reporters out on a chartered tug to intercept the *SS Portland* as it neared Seattle. After meeting the *SS Portland* and interviewing its passengers, the tug steamed back to Seattle. The news of the arrival of the *SS Portland* and the gold she carried had already hit the streets as the ship prepared to dock. What had been a rumor was now known to be a fact.

In an article written by Beriah Brown were the words that would trigger the great stampede: "At 3 o'clock

**"GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!  
STACKS OF YELLOW METAL."**

this morning the steamship *SS Portland* from St. Michael for Seattle, passed up [Puget] Sound with more than a ton of solid gold on board. . . . A ton of gold and 68 passengers." The *SS Portland* actually carried at least *two* tons of gold.

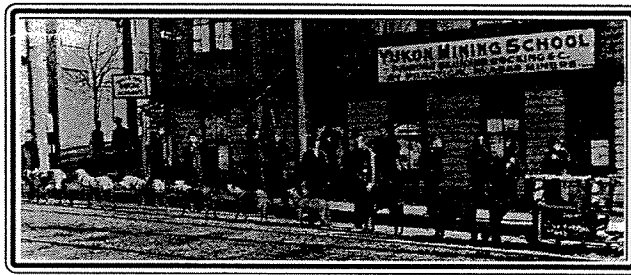
The initial stampede was not to the Klondike but rather to Schwabacher's Dock (near the present Seattle Aquarium). As the *SS Portland* arrived at 6:00 a.m. on July 17, 1897, 5,000 people flooded the waterfront. They were eager to see the gold and to hear firsthand stories of the sixty-eight miners on board. It was almost as if just hearing the miners stories would bestow the touch of Midas—or so many hoped!

By 9:30 that same morning, people were resigning from their jobs. The promise of a pay check, no matter how large or small, was no match for the "certain" wealth to be made in the Klondike. Street-car-operators, salesmen, policemen, ministers, even the Mayor of Seattle, W.D. Wood, left their jobs. In ten days, more than 1,500 people had left for the Klondike, and many more were waiting to join them.

From 1897 to 1898 thousands of stampeders came through Seattle on their way to the Klondike Goldfields. As men, women and families began passing through the city their impact was felt immediately, revitalizing the city's struggling economy.

Merchants, who for four years had been feeling the effects of the Panic of 1893, were suddenly set upon by frenzied miners preparing for the journey north. Businessmen such as Isaac Cooper and Louis Levy, the proprietors of **Cooper and Levy**;

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Edward Nordoff, the owner of the **Bon Marche**; and D.E. Frederick and Nels Nelson, the two partners of **Frederick and Nelson**, were all doing well. On average, an outfit for two people cost \$250 to \$500. In the first eight months of the rush, millions of dollars worth of goods were sold to stampedeers heading north, making Seattle the prominent retail center in the Pacific Northwest.

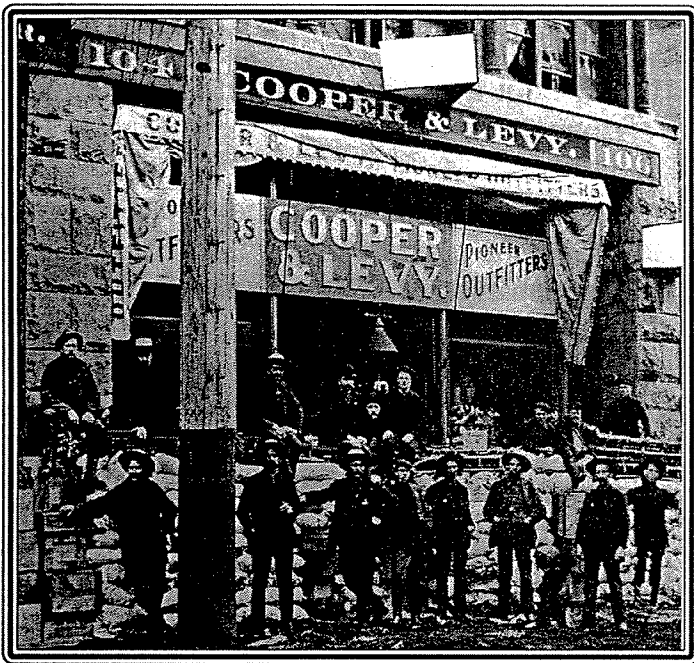
Pioneer Square, then Seattle's downtown, offered many diversions to those who had time and money to spare. Hungry stampedeers could purchase a meal at the **Merchant's Cafe** or one of the many restaurants, cafes, and eateries that were spread throughout the business district. Abundant gambling halls, variety theaters, saloons, and brothels also catered to the whims of many a gold rusher. Adding to the neighborhood's already rough-and-tumble reputation, petty thieves and confidence men preyed upon unsuspecting stampedeers.

### **A KLONDIKE LEGACY**

Seattle did not have a U.S. Assay Office to purchase and process the miners raw gold. In order to prevent the loss of this potential revenue to the assay office in San Francisco, local merchants and banks purchased the miners raw gold. Prominent Seattleites also vigorously lobbied Congress for the establishment of an assay office in the city. Such an office opened in 1898. In its first year alone, the new Seattle office received and processed \$1.5 million in gold.

Most of the stampedeers who went through Seattle never reached the goldfields. Many made Seattle their permanent home. Between 1897 and 1898 more than 7,000 people settled in Seattle raising the population from 56,800 to over 64,000.

The city offered many incentives to those who decided to stay, but the primary allure was job availability for the unemployed. The ranks of the jobless shrank rapidly as business improved. Merchants hired clerks and stockers to keep up with rising demand for goods. Local manufacturers of equipment and clothing, food processors and shipyards all needed workers as well. The City of



**COOPER & LEVY**

Because so many prospective miners flocked to Seattle to purchase supplies and secure transportation to the north, thousands made Seattle a temporary home. Merchants welcomed this floodtide of customers to the city, but hotel rooms and boarding houses were scarce. Whether arriving by boat or train, newcomers swarmed to downtown Seattle to find a "flop," or bed. Spare rooms, basements, and attics were converted into living quarters for stampedeers awaiting transportation to Skagway and other points north.

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Seattle was even hiring. Municipal workers and police officers were needed to replace those who had left in search of gold.

The reason was simple: Erastus Brainerd.

Mr. Brainerd was hired by the Chamber of Commerce to head the "Bureau of Information," a committee organized by city officials expressly to draw the world's eyes to Seattle as a developing port and commercial center. Brainerd, a Harvard educated journalist, was also an extraordinary salesman. His plans were ambitious:



**ERASTUS BRAINERD**

- He took out advertisements in hundreds of newspapers throughout the United States.
- He prepared a fact sheet on the goldfields and Seattle for the mayor of every U.S. community with a population of 5,000 or more.
- He sent a personal letter of invitation to the rulers of many foreign governments.
- He wrote newspaper articles on the gold rush and Seattle that were written as advertisements thinly disguised as "news stories."

The overall effect was a complete metamorphosis for Seattle. Booms in business, population and national recognition, secured Seattle's viability as a major Northwest city. To be sure, the foundations for the Seattle that we know today were laid during this period.

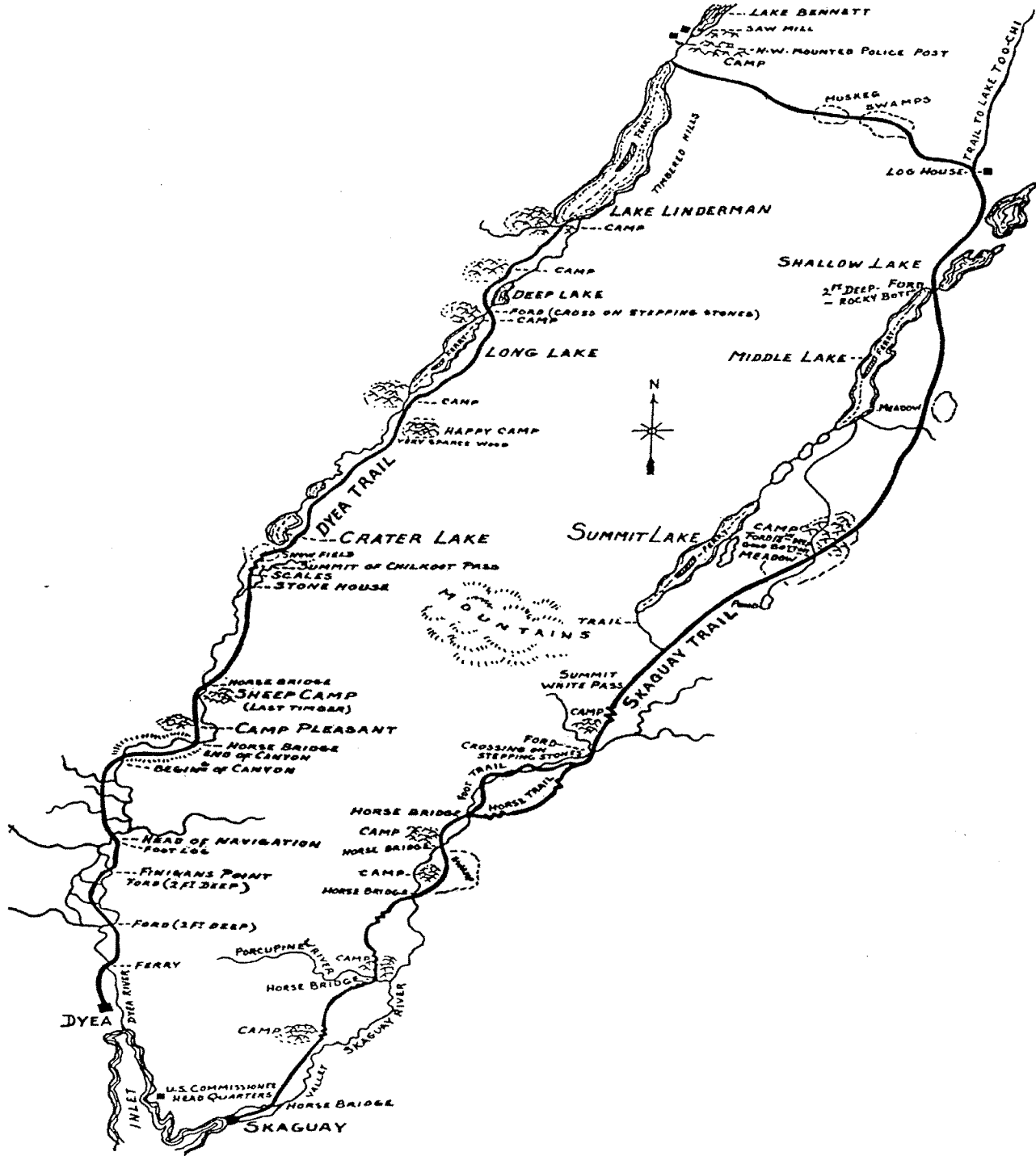
Brainerd's advertising campaign established Seattle's reputation as the best source of supplies and transportation to the north. Although there were many other cities the stampedeers could have chosen to depart from, a vast majority of the stampedeers chose Seattle simply because Erastus Brainerd told them to!

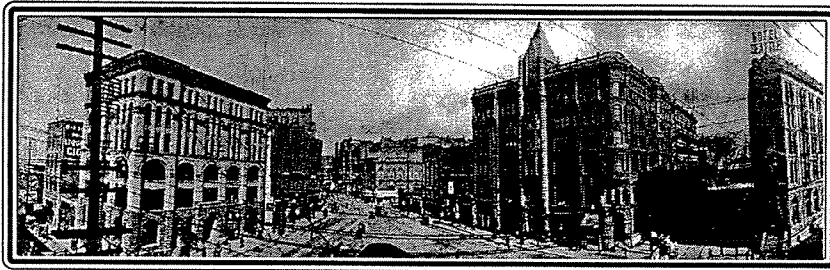
Despite the fact that gold was discovered on Canadian soil, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce began a campaign to sell Seattle's services to the Klondike-bound stampedeers. While Vancouver and Victoria, in British Columbia, Tacoma, Washington and Portland, Oregon all attracted crowds of stampedeers, Seattle dominated the marketplace.

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# THE CHILKOOT AND WHITE PASS TRAILS





## THE JOURNEY NORTH

Three main routes were commonly used to reach the Klondike goldfields, located near the junction of the Yukon and Klondike rivers.

The all water route, referred to as the Rich Man's Route, involved taking a ship from Seattle or San Francisco to St. Michael, Alaska. At that point, travelers transferred to a river boat that steamed up the Yukon River approximately 1,700 miles to Dawson City. This route was advertised by the Alaska Commercial Company to cost \$150 and take approximately one month to complete. However, this proved to be an optimistic estimate. Due to frequent storms and problems encountered in navigating the Yukon River, this voyage commonly took over two months. Many stampedeers spent more than a year reaching the Klondike because their vessels became trapped in the frozen river. The rates also jumped higher than the advertised price. A \$2,000 fare was not uncommon at the height of the rush. This translates into \$54,000 in 1996 dollars. Approximately 10% of the stampedeers used this route.

The most successful route was the sea/land route up the Inside Passage. Leaving from Seattle, or one of the other seaports on the west coast of the US and Canada, stampedeers would take a ship to Skagway or Dyea, twin ports at the head of the Lynn Canal in Alaska. They then traveled by foot over the Chilkoot or White Pass trails to Lake Bennett in Canada. It was here that they built boats to carry themselves and their supplies down the Yukon River to Dawson City.

The demand for steamships to carry passengers to the Klondike was high and ships were pulled off of other routes to fill the need. Many ships that had been out-of-service were quickly renovated and placed back into service. Literally anything that could float was used. Many old sailing ships had their masts removed and were converted into barges that were then towed by tug boats. Ships of all sizes and types were used from the small *SS Dora*, just over 100 feet, to the *SS Athena*, a passenger steamer over 365 feet in length. Propeller driven steam ships were the most common, but anything thought to be seaworthy - and some that were not - were used.

Overcrowding on ships headed to the Klondike was common. Small steamers, such as the *SS Amur*,

designed to carry 160 passengers, were outfitted with temporary quarters, and carried as many as 500 passengers. These temporary quarters, usually consisted of a bunk bed, commonly placed in the holds, next to the temporary animal stalls. As the demand for berths increased, the price went up; from ten to twenty dollars prior to the stampede, to as much as fifty dollars for a



**BOSTONIANS ON THE S.S. PORTLAND**

one-way ticket from Seattle to Skagway, Alaska.

The waterfront of Seattle became a mass of confusion as stampedeers, well-wishers, and tons of freight lined the docks waiting to be loaded. Over 9,000 people and 36,000 tons of supplies left Seattle in the first six weeks of the gold rush.

