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• The Plot to Steal the Yukon
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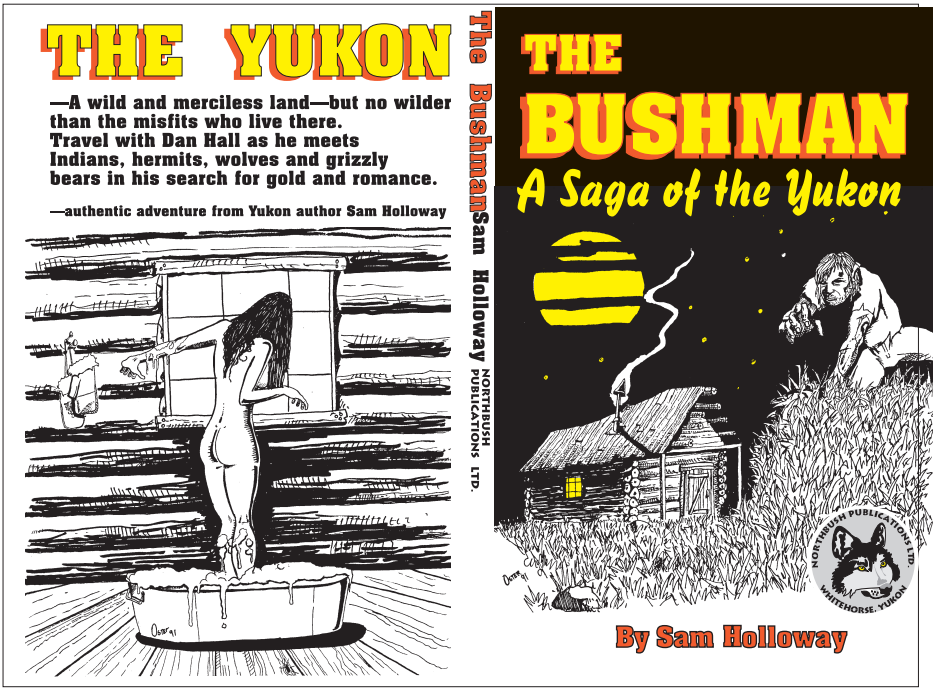
NO. 10



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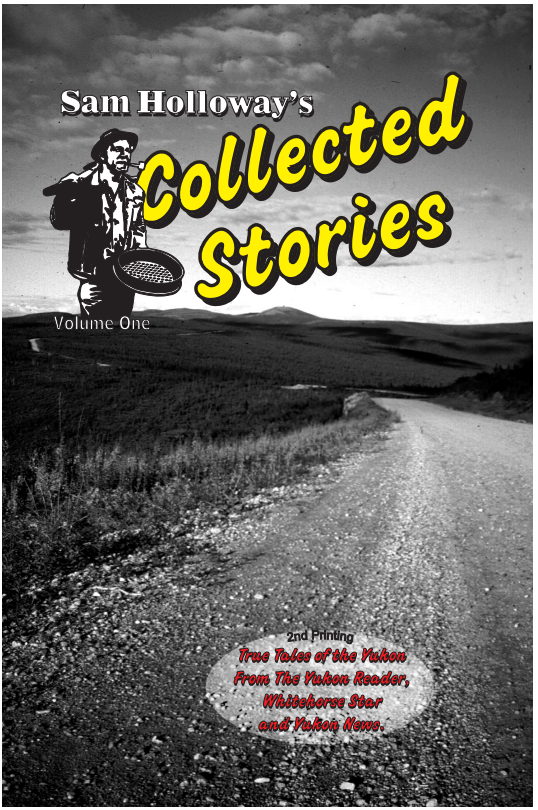

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THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

Issue No. 10
January, 1999

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Cover photo: Lorraine Marshall, photographed by John Hatch at Silver City, Yukon (a ghost town on Kluane Lake, accessible from the Alaska Highway).

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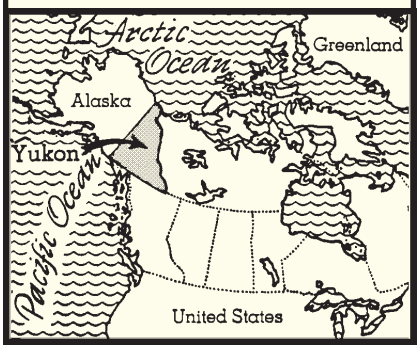


From the Editor

"What is a Yukoner? That was the subject of a radio program some time back. Many answers came in but the best, I think, is this: A Yukoner is someone who loves the Yukon. Judging by the number of subscriptions coming in from all over Canada and the U.S., there are many of you out there. Thank you very much.

In the last issue I said we were working on a biography of Everett Wasson (see Issue No. 9, The Last Rescuer). Thanks to Bob Cameron of Trans North Helicopters, I have many details on Wasson's career in the Yukon. But I still have to find out more about his later life. Most likely we'll have that story in the next issue.

Also, in the last issue, we skipped the Goldseeker story so as to fit Bill Bett's saga of explorer Robert Campbell. So this time we've published a fairly long session of the novel. Thanks to Jackie Pierce, publisher of the *Whitehorse Star*, I've been serializing that story in the newspaper twice a week, writing it as I go. It's much easier than trying to pick up the story every three months. So, many thanks to Jackie and editor Jim Butler for taking a chance on the project.

As I write this, it's about 36 below outside the cabin and the northern lights are a-dancin.' For a while there, I thought El Nino and global warming were going to spoil our beautiful Yukon winters.

The colder it gets, the better Old Dodgie runs. I suppose that's because all those worn out parts tighten up somewhat. I'm hoping to stall the awful day when I have to get a newer vehicle. They all look like suppositories to me and judging by the number of them being towed up the highway, they're not very reliable either. But that's just my opinion.

So long for now,
Sam

The Mail Run

Dear Dianne & Sam

First of all, a thank you for your enjoyable presentation of life in the Yukon, edifying and entertaining, serious and silly. A great melange!

As child growing up in Humboldt, Saskatchewan, my first introduction to the Yukon was via Canada's national voice, CBC radio. Every weekend they presented a "letter" from a lady in old Crow. Her voice told of the daily goings on in the area. eg. "Charlie... his wife Annie and their children left by dogteam last Wednesday to visit relatives in Tuktoyuktuk. Henry has gone on a caribou hunt. We'll let you know how he made out when he gets back."

Now my question is this: could you do a small write-up on this Native lady who, when she died about three years ago, left a feeling of sadness in our hearts. She epitomized what the true north strong and free was all about.

If you like, I could write to the CBC in Toronto and find out what I can. Maybe if you see the CBC people in Whitehorse they may be able to tell about her.

Thank you,
George W. Latowski
Delta, B.C.

Editor replies:

We're looking into this story. Since 1962, another lady from Old Crow, Edith Josie, has written a column for the *Whitehorse Star* that has been published in Toronto and Edmonton. I didn't know she had a forerunner that was heard all over Canada. Any readers who might have information, please write in.

Dear Folks:

I wish to congratulate you on the production of this very fine little magazine. I have subscribed to *Up Here* and *Alaska Magazine* and you very nicely fill the gap between those two. You see, I am a north country addict. I grew up as a commercial fisherman on Lake Winnipeg, also trapped by dogteam in northeastern Manitoba. After WWII, I was in on the opening of Great Slave Lake to commercial fishing. I spent 14 summers fishing there and flying here in the winter. I have been a pilot for almost 50 years. Although retired now, I still have my commercial pilot's license with Class 1 medical. I built a small airline here in the 1960s that my family now runs and are doing well.

My wife and I have visited the Yukon and Alaska three times by road,

have gone as far as Homer, Alaska, and enjoyed the Top of the World Highway and the Dempster Highway. We also flew from Inuvik to Aklavik to see the Mad Trapper's grave.

Thanks again for a fine magazine.
Sincerely,
Geiri Johnson
Arnes, Manitoba

Dear Editor:

You're crazy, Sam—or too smart for your own good! I have been reading your new story about the oldtimer you found frozen at the bottom of the mine shaft. Sure was glad you turned him over and slapped him on his back instead of doing mouth to mouth AR.

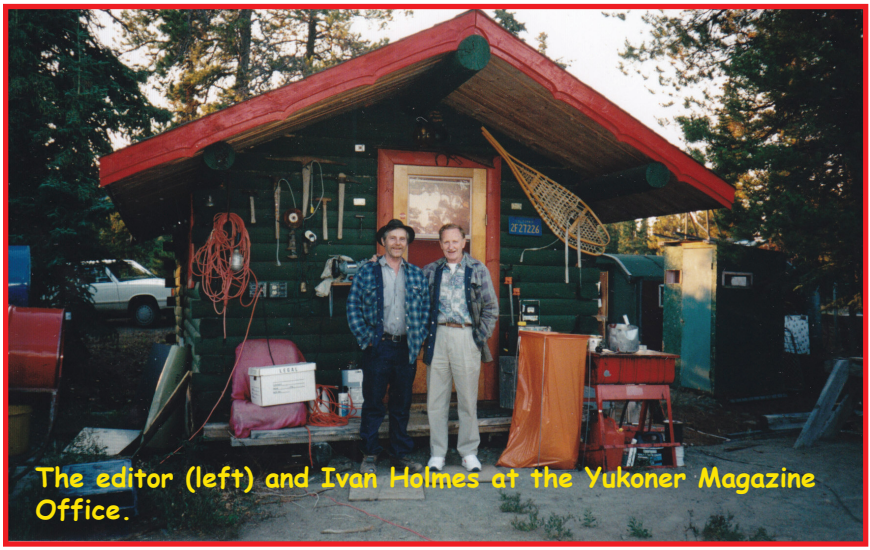
I was soaking my feet in warm water while reading your story. It's almost as weird as the one you wrote about the man who thought he'd shot someone, so dressed in a bear skin and lived in a cave for 8 years! Really, I do not know why I stuck with that story, but I did.

Keep writing, keep happy.
Lois W. Argue
Edmonton, Alberta

Dear Sam & Dianne:

Thanks so much for the enjoyable afternoon and evening in August when Marion, Maureen and I visited your home at Marsh Lake. Again, it was a "Yukon Special."

Ivan Holmes,
Burnaby, B.C.



The editor (left) and Ivan Holmes at the Yukoner Magazine Office.

The Arctic Circle War

© By Dick North

Those who encountered Albert Johnson remembered best his cold blue eyes and unsmiling face. Nobody could claim to know him. For 48 days in the winter of 1931-32 he fought a running battle with Mounties, trappers and Indians across hundreds of miles of wild, Arctic terrain. He became known as the Mad Trapper of Rat River but mad was the least accurate way to describe him. Resolute, tough and almost superhumanly resourceful, he was so wily that two trackers once met head on as they followed his trail. This epic manhunt, in which pursuers too needed infinite courage and stamina, has been called the *Arctic Circle War*.

The beginning of July 1931 was warm even in the Northwest Territories. Fort McPherson, on the banks of the shimmering Peel River, dozed in the still humidity of the short Arctic summer. The air buzzed with mosquitoes and black flies.

On July 9 a stranger came drifting down the river on a raft made of three large logs. He was about five feet, nine inches tall and 35-40 years old, with light brown hair and a snub nose. Three miles above Fort McPherson the powerful but slightly stooped figure made for shore. He had no dogs and virtually no outfit, and that evening he walked to the Northern Traders supply store at the settlement.

Apart from his withdrawn manner, the stranger was an ideal customer, owner W.W. Douglas noted later: "He knew what he wanted and appeared to have plenty of cash." Douglas also commented on the stranger's "cold blue eyes."

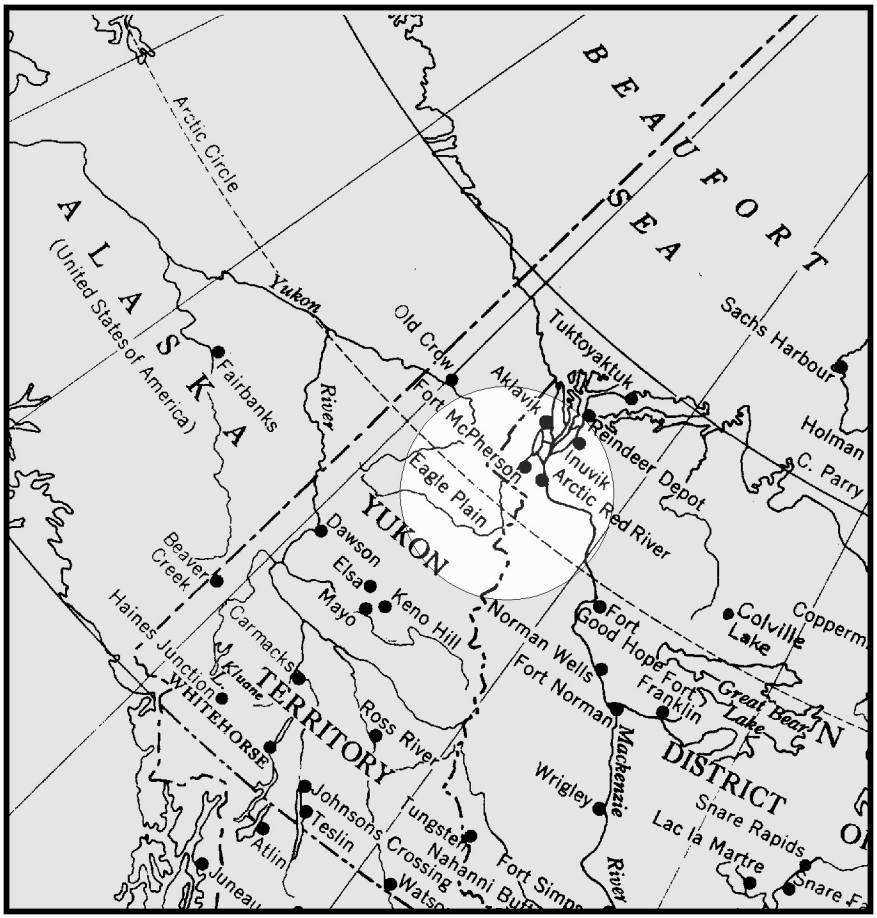
The man on the left was called Arthur Nelson. Many people thought him to be Albert Johnson. This photo was taken at Ross River, Yukon, in 1927 or '28 by Frank Slim, a well-known river pilot.

The quiet man returned upstream and set up a tent across the river from an Indian named Abe Francis. During the next three weeks he spoke several times to Francis but seemed nervous and reluctant to show his face. One day there was a storm and the stranger was offered shelter at the Hudson's Bay post in Fort McPherson. He refused.

Another day he visited the post and bought $700 worth of supplies, paid for with cash from a tobacco tin. He allowed that he planned either to establish a trapline on the Rat River, flowing into the Peel from the Richardson Mountains to the west, or to cross the mountains into the Yukon via the Rat River Pass. He also returned to the Northern Traders store, where he bought a single-barrel shotgun.

In a settlement as small as Fort McPherson such a mysterious visitor did not go unnoticed. Const. Edgar "Spike" Millen of the nearby Arctic Red River detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was ordered to interview him on his next trip to Fort McPherson.

The 30-year-old Irish-born Millen was popular in the Mackenzie Delta,



mixing easily with the local people and treating them fairly. A Mountie since 1920, he had volunteered for northern service and was famous for his abilities as a pastry cook and a step dancer.

On July 21 the two men met while the stranger was buying more supplies.

He identified himself as Albert Johnson and said he had come from the Prairies by the Mackenzie River. Millen knew he had come down the Peel River but he did not press the matter. Many men in that part of the country, especially trappers and prospectors, were reticent about their travels. Johnson told Millen he wouldn't be staying in the community because he wished to live alone. The constable reminded Johnson that he would need a license to trap in the area.

A week later Johnson bought a 12-foot canoe from Abe Francis. The same day he broke camp and went back to the Northern Traders store for some final supplies. The clerk asked if he'd like to buy a small outboard engine for his new canoe. "No," Johnson replied, flexing his arms, "these are good enough for me. I'm not crazy yet." He walked to the river, launched his canoe and paddled downstream.

Within a few days he was ascending the Rat River, a notoriously difficult route. The channel was crooked, the current increasingly rapid, and the banks were a jungle of Arctic willows: travellers normally had to haul their craft much of the way with ropes from the bank. Johnson went 15 miles upstream until he came to a promontory which afforded a good view in three directions. There he spent the rest of the summer building a cabin and hunting for his winter food supply. The eight-by-twelve-foot cabin was made of foot-thick spruce logs and had a two-foot thick sod roof.

Arctic Red River in 1920. [Public Archives of Canada photo]

Little more was heard of Johnson until Christmas Day. The holiday was a colourful one at the Arctic Red River RCMP post, Indians and whites putting on their finest clothes and joining in a series of parties and dances. But when an Indian named William Nerysoo arrived from the Rat River area he complained to Constable Millen that a man believed to be Albert Johnson had been springing his traps and hanging them on trees.

The next day Millen ordered Const. Alfred King, a rugged, five-year veteran of the Force who had volunteered for northern duty, to mush to Johnson's cabin and question him. King was to be accompanied by a peace officer, Special Const. Joe Bernard.

It was 40 below when the men set out with two dog teams. A raw wind nipped at them as they raced 30 miles west to Fort McPherson. They stayed the night with Hudson's Bay trapper John Firth, who threw the finest parties in the North and who invited them back for New Year's Eve.

Next morning King and Bernard turned their teams northward down the frozen Peel River. It was even colder than the day before, with a north wind. The men journeyed 25 miles to the mouth of the Rat before making a brush camp and rolling up in their sleeping bags with the northern lights for a ceiling.

They reached Johnson's cabin at noon the following day. King noticed snowshoes in front of the small dwelling and smoke coming from the stovepipe. In the time-accustomed manner of the North, he shouted a greeting. Receiving no acknowledgment, he snowshoed up to the four-foot-high door and knocked.

"Mr. Johnson, my name is Constable King," said the Mountie. "I have received a complaint about you interfering with a trapline and would like to ask you a few questions." He received no answer. Puzzled, King looked toward the 12-inch-square window immediately to the right of the door and observed Johnson staring at him. Johnson dropped a burlap sack over the window.

King sensed trouble. It was unnatural for an individual living in such isolation to ignore a greeting or a knock on the door. Normally a traveller could expect to be asked in for tea and to spend the night. The constable thought Johnson might be wary because he represented the law so he patiently explained his mission again. He waited almost an hour but the trapper refused to appear or say a word.

King decided he would have to go to Aklavik, 80 miles north, where he could report the incident to Insp. Alexander Eames, commander of the Mounties' Western Arctic sub-district, and get a warrant and reinforcements.

King and Bernard reached Aklavik the following day. Eames issued a warrant and assigned Const. Robert McDowell and Special Const. Lazarus Sittichinli to go back to the cabin with the other officers. The four left early on Dec. 30 and travelled fast, hoping to take care of the Johnson call and celebrate New Year's Eve at Fort McPherson. They broke camp on Dec. 31 without any breakfast.

They arrived at Johnson's about noon. King left McDowell and the other

men by the river bank and walked to within hailing distance of the cabin. Smoke was coming from the stovepipe. "Are you there, Mr. Johnson?" King shouted. There was no answer. King shouted again, explaining that he had a warrant and would have to force the door if Johnson did not open it. Johnson remained silent.

Expecting trouble, King approached the door from the left side, away from the window. He turned partially sideways, extended his left arm and knocked with the back of his left hand. Immediately a shot rang out, shattering the frigid stillness. It came through the door, hit King in the chest and knocked him to the snow. Painfully he crawled to the river bank where the other men pulled him to safety while exchanging shots with Johnson. They lashed King to a sled and started a dash for Aklavik to save his life.

The dogs were tired, having already run for half a day, and the winding trail went continuously up and down the steep banks of the Husky River, crossing and recrossing from one portage to another. King's sled had to be patiently lowered or hoisted over every brink. The exhausting work of breaking trail had to be repeated too because 20-mph winds had drifted snow over the tracks made only hours before.

The winds and 40-below cold slashed at the men's faces. King's comrades had to stop repeatedly to rub his face, to keep fluid from freezing in his nostrils and ice from forming on his eyelids. It had to be done but they fretted at the delay.

Soon darkness enveloped the trail. All night, mile after mile, the men and dogs bent their heads into the biting winds. Dawn came and finally, 20 hours after leaving Johnson's cabin, the exhausted party reached Aklavik. King was rushed to the settlement's small hospital where it was found that the bullet had missed the heart.

Inspector Eames now organized a force of nine men, including himself, to go after Johnson. He sent a message over Aklavik radio station UZK, of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, for Constable Millen to leave Arctic Red River and meet him at the mouth of the Rat. On Jan. 4, 1932, Eames left Aklavik with Constable McDowell, Special Constables Bernard and Sittichinli and trappers Karl Gardlund, Knut Lang and Ernest Sutherland.

Two days later the posse met Millen and an Indian guide named Charlie Rat. By the following night the party was camped seven miles up the Rat River. They decided to circle Johnson's cabin and approach it from upstream because they feared the trapper might ambush them in the

Inspector Eames [RCMP

tangles of willows and brush along the river. At dawn they set out on an Indian trapline trail. They carried 20 pounds of dynamite.

The posse tramped all day. When it came time to make camp, Charlie Rat assured them they were only a few miles above Johnson's cabin. Next day they found they were miles off course, and had to return to their previous day's starting point. They had wasted two days and had used up most of their supplies. It was colder than ever.

Next morning, Jan. 9, the posse advanced up the river to the bank which extended in a half-circle around the trapper's cabin. Eames shouted for Johnson to come out, explaining that King was still alive: at least Johnson would not be up on a murder charge.

Ominous silence greeted Eames' words. The inspector decided to break down the cabin door. Six men rushed it but they were met with such heavy gunfire from eight loopholes around the building that their attempts could not be sustained.

During one sortie Lang slammed the butt of his rifle against the door, jarring it open. He saw in amazement that the floor of the cabin was a pit three feet below ground level, from which Johnson was firing "two hand guns." These later proved to be a sawed-off shotgun and a .22 Winchester rifle with the stock sawed off. The cabin, reinforced with extra logs and frozen sod around the base, was a virtual fortress.

As the hours went by, the cold began to tell on the posse. The men couldn't keep moving to stay warm, but had to remain posted along the riverbank watching the cabin. Only two days' dog food was left and supplies for the men were critically low. Eames knew he would have to break through Johnson's defenses soon or retreat. He ordered the dynamite thawed, since it would not explode when frozen. The men held it next to their skin for the required five hours—avoiding sudden movements as it warmed.

The siege had begun near noon. Now it was 9 p.m. and quite dark. Eames ordered flares lit, figuring the glare might blind Johnson, and began throwing dynamite sticks at the cabin in hopes of dislodging some of the logs, the door or the roof. He had no success.

Midnight came. The flares had long since gone out. Knut Lang volunteered to propel his lanky six-foot-four-inch frame over the bank and throw dynamite onto the roof of the low cabin. The resulting explosion blew a hole in the roof and knocked off the stovepipe. Lang found himself staring at Johnson but he froze and failed to shoot. Johnson recovered quickly, ducked away, and when the smoke cleared continued firing. Lang withdrew.

It was nearly three in the morning when Eames decided on one last effort. He bound up the remaining four pounds of dynamite and heaved them across the 20-yard clearing. The resulting blast ripped the roof off the cabin and partially caved in the walls. Expecting Johnson to be stunned, Eames and Karl Gardlund charged across the clearing. When Gardlund reached the cabin he held a flashlight at arm's length and shone it through the wrecked door. The besieged trapper shot it out of his hand. Eames and Gardlund retreated to the riverbank.

Eames, realizing that Johnson could outwait the posse in the relative comfort of his cabin, decided to go back to Aklavik. One tough man had defied nine others for 15 hours

In the meantime word of Constable King's shooting and the resulting expedition had been flashed to the outside world over Station UZK. Johnson, as the underdog, was an object of some sympathy. Newspapers played up the story, and for days people stayed close to radios awaiting developments. The drama has been credited with changing radio from a curiosity to an important news medium.

Somewhere along the line the label Mad Trapper of Rat River was given to Johnson and it stuck. But Eames wrote in his official report that "on the contrary, he showed himself to be an extremely shrewd and resolute man, capable of quick thoughts and action, a tough and desperate character."

On Jan. 14, while another posse was being formed, Constable Millen and Karl Gardlund returned to the Rat hoping to keep an eye on Johnson. They found his cabin empty. Then, searching through the wreckage they could hardly believe he had survived the last dynamite blast. Later there was speculation that he might have had special police or military training or experience, possibly in the 1914-18 war. The men scoured the area for clues to the trapper's real identity but found none. His tracks had been buried by fresh snow.

On Jan. 16 Eames led the new posse out of Aklavik. It included two soldiers from the signals unit, with a radio transmitter and a receiver: Staff Sgt. Earl Hersey was a former Olympic runner and a good northern traveller; Quartermaster Sgt. R.F. Riddell was one of the great bush-men, equally adept at mechanical repairs and wilderness survival. Their radio proved nearly useless, however, because its batteries wouldn't work properly in the cold.

Johnson's cabin, demolished by dynamite. [RCMP photo]

The posse made it through a blizzard and camped nine miles east of Johnson's cabin, where the men were joined by Millen, Gardlund and 11 Indians. An intensive search over the next few days failed to turn up any trace of the fugitive.

By Jan. 21, Eames again faced the problem of diminishing supplies. He could maintain the large posse for four days or cut it to a minimum to continue the search for 10 days. He chose the latter course and selected Millen as leader, accompanied by Gardlund, Sergeant Riddell and trapper Noel Verville.

Millen and his party now had to concentrate their efforts and choose one direction in which to search. They surmised what they might have done in Johnson's position, and decided to continue up the Rat. Although they had dogs, travel was slow and wearying. Johnson had the entire wilderness to run in, and one day he might not run, choosing instead to ambush his trackers

The men combed the valley. From dawn to dusk they scanned the snow for telltale signs. They struggled through tangled brush, broke up dog fights, chopped ice for water, and lay ambushed for hours in the piercing cold.

On Jan. 28 the temperature was again bitter. The trackers had put in another long, frustrating day. They were trail-hardened men, used to long hours in temperatures where every movement was an effort, but they were becoming exhausted. Their supplies were down to a little tea, hardtack and bacon, and they were almost out of dog food. They had stopped near the Bear River to build a fire and boil tea. While they were waiting, the ever-curious Riddell circled their resting place looking for a sign of Johnson.

He spotted the faintest trace of a trail on glare ice and latched onto it like a bloodhound. He followed the trail to the top of a ridge and suddenly lost it. But a man with Riddell's years of experience is not easily discouraged. He set off in a wide circle in an attempt to pick up the trail. He found it again in a small creek, and examined it closely in the growing darkness. It was probably two days old.

Riddell straightened up to snowshoe back to the others when a sharp crack behind him split the northern silence like a thunderclap. He dived into a snowbank, then levered a shell into the chamber of his rifle. Stoically he waited for the inevitable second shot. Then he realized that the sound was nothing more than a tree snapping in the cold. He shook his head as he pulled himself erect and walked back to tell his companions of his find.

Next day the temperature dipped even lower as the men followed Riddell's trail of the previous evening. They traced it through several old camps but finally lost it completely. However, they were getting to know Johnson's habits. He never crossed a creek except on glare ice. Like a wolf, he travelled the ridges where the snow was packed and a trail was hard to find. He often made a long zigzag pattern, enabling him to watch the men pursuing him from one side of the Z as they proceeded up the other. Johnson's stamina seemed almost superhuman. On snowshoes and carrying a heavy pack, he was travelling two miles to every one by his

pursuers, who had the benefit of dog teams. To avoid detection he could build only small fires under cover of a snowbank. He had to take time out to snare squirrels and rabbits; rifle shots for bigger game would give away his position. He spent long, arduous hours climbing cliffs, trotting through spruce forests, and crawling among seemingly impenetrable clusters of willows. He expertly travelled such a maze of trails that at one point two of the trackers met head on.

The searchers now found themselves far up the Rat. They were conferring on which way to turn when an Indian came mushing upriver to tell them he had heard two shots from the vicinity of the Bear River, where Riddell had first picked up Johnson's trail. Johnson might have taken a chance on shooting a caribou to replenish his food supply, figuring that his trackers had lost the trail and the shots would not be heard. It was a slim lead but Millen decided to follow it. Then, by continued circling, they picked up the trapper's tracks and followed them out of the Bear, down the Rat and five miles up a creek which emptied into the Rat about a mile from where it joined the Barrier River. They found quarters of caribou, confirming the food theory. They climbed a ridge running parallel to the creek but lost the trail again. Then one of the men looked down into a ravine formed by the creek and spotted a wisp of smoke through the thick woods. It marked Johnson's camp.

The searchers followed the ridge until they were almost above Johnson. They could see a fire and the edge of a tarp, and although they could not see Johnson, they could hear him puttering and whistling among the trees. The trackers stayed for two hours but they never did see him. Waiting so long in the cold took its toll: frost collected inside the men's fur clothing. At dusk they headed back to their outcamp.

The temperature had moderated slightly but a blizzard was raging next morning, Jan. 30, when the four trackers set out to apprehend Johnson. Riddell and Gardlund descended unnoticed into the ravine and took up positions only 15 yards from their man, hemming him in against a steep wall. They could hear him coughing. Verville and Millen then started down the ridge to the creek bed. However, one of them slipped, making enough noise to alert Johnson, who racked a shell into the breech of his rifle. He spotted Millen, and his 30-30 Savage barked. Millen and Verville dropped to the snow and fired back. Johnson, apparently wanting better cover, leaped across his fire to an overturned tree, but Gardlund, a Swedish army veteran, was ready for him. He fired as Johnson leaped, and the trapper seemed to collapse behind the tree. Gardlund thought Johnson had been hit.

Millen yelled for Johnson to give up but there was no answer. The four men did not dare approach immediately: while the trapper might be disabled, his position in the hole left by the uprooted tree had the advantage of elevation and was almost invulnerable.

Minutes went by and nothing happened. An hour passed. No sound came from Johnson's direction. Another hour went by and darkness was approaching. If Johnson was unhurt and the men tried to outwait him he might get away in the night. Millen decided to end the stalemate.

"Git down, Spike," Verville warned, "Git down or he'll kill you." But Millen, joined by Riddell, began moving toward Johnson's hiding place. Verville and Gardlund covered them anxiously. The men had walked about five paces when Riddell suddenly shouted "Watch it!" and went headlong over a bank as a shot cracked and a bullet whistled above his head. Millen spotted the movement of the trapper's rifle, dropped to one knee and snapped off a shot. Johnson replied with his Savage, and the gunfire echoed through the ravine. Both men had missed. Millen fired again and the trapper returned two shots so quickly that they came almost as one. Millen rose, whirled and fell face down in the snow, his rifle falling beside him. He did not move. Gardlund crawled to him and, under covering fire from his companions, tied Millen's mukluk laces together and dragged him out of Johnson's range. He had been shot through the heart.

The three remaining trackers decided to send Riddell back to Aklavik with the news. Gardlund and Verville built a raised cache to keep Millen's body out of the reach of animals, then retired to their campsite. There they met Staff Sergeant Hersey, who had been sent from Aklavik with supplies.

Next morning Hersey retrieved Millen's body. Johnson had escaped by climbing the steep hill behind his camp. He had chopped handholds in the ice, and on reaching the top had cascaded snow over his escape route in an effort to hide the trail.

Riddell reached Aklavik at noon on Jan. 31. Inspector Eames took the unprecedented step of asking for an airplane to help in the search. On Feb. 5 a ski-equipped Bellanca monoplane, piloted by W.R. "Wop" May, flew into Aklavik. May, a World War 1 ace who had become one of the North's most famous bush pilots, was about to become the first pilot directly involved in an RCMP manhunt.

Scoffers doubted that a plane would help much in the adverse winter conditions, but Eames was hoping it would not only provide aerial surveillance but also solve his supply problem. Dog teams in the hunt were eating 50 pounds of food a day.

Meanwhile, on Feb. 2, Eames led a new posse back to the site of Millen's death. By the time it got there, on the same day that May flew into Aklavik, it numbered 11 men including Eames and Riddell. There was no new trace of Johnson. On Feb. 8 the party was joined by Const. Sidney May (no relation to the pilot) and several more men, who had trekked through the Rat River Pass of the imposing Richardson Mountains after hearing about the manhunt.

The previous day Wop May had landed near Eames camp with the first airborne supplies, and on Feb. 8 he ferried 700 pounds. He was a fearless pilot. Once, when heavy snow clogged his take-off path, he had the searchers tie the plane's tail to a tree. He gunned the engine and signalled for the taut rope to be cut. The plane surged ahead, cutting a swath through the snow: momentarily it threatened to bog down but at the last instant May got it into the air seemingly with his own body-English.

Now, with Riddell aboard, he quickly picked up Johnson's trail, saving

the ground party days of tracking. The trapper had spent a week working his way up the Barrier River, craftily setting up blind leads to delay and confuse his pursuers. Upstream, where the channel ran parallel to the Richardson Mountains, he made several wide circles into the foothills, backtracking to rejoin his old trail. He may have been visiting old food caches or hoping to get behind the search party, but he was so far ahead that he kept coming back to the trail before the posse had got that far.

Inspector Eames ordered Constable May and three men to scour the headwaters of the Barrier, and others to watch the passes through the mountains. And from all directions an enormous ring began to close in on the fugitive. Patrols and surveillance flights went out from Dawson, Mayo and Whitehorse, hundreds of miles to the west and south, and extended along some 600 miles of the Mackenzie River to the east.

Johnson had now been living off the land, through a series of blizzards, for a month. Breaking trail with homemade snowshoes that weighed 10 pounds each, weary, hungry and cold, he knew he had to break for freedom.

His best escape route lay west to the Yukon and Alaska, over the Richardson Mountains, and he knew that the deep, soft snow on their western slopes would slow his pursuers' dog teams. But the craggy, barren range, an Arctic extension of the Rockies, was a formidable obstacle. The mountains were swept almost continually by howling blizzards; Indians in the search party told Inspector Eames that nobody could cross them alone.

On Feb. 9 a blizzard whipped among the rocky peaks and down the Barrier and Rat rivers. All over the Mackenzie delta planes were grounded and patrols called off. Yet during this raging storm, shunning the passes which

Wop May (left) and his mechanic, Jack Brown, in front of the Bellanca. [Glenbow Archives photo]

he knew would be watched, Johnson clambered to the high ridges of the mountains and crossed into the Yukon. He descended a creek to the Bell River, carefully skirted the trading post of La Pierre House, and snowshoed on to the Eagle River and turned south on it.

But now the whole north country was on the alert. Several Indians spotted strange snowshoe tracks east of La Pierre House. A trapper mushed through the Rat River Pass with the message, and on Feb. 13 Eames, Riddell, Gardlund and a constable flew to La Pierre House in the Bellanca. Sid May, Hersey, Noel Verville's brother Joe and five more men followed on foot through the Rat River Pass.

Above and on page opposite, death photos of Albert Johnson. [RCMP

Immediately after landing Eames and his party, Wop May flew off in search of Johnson's trail. He soon found it leading up the Eagle River, then lost it at a point where Johnson had removed his snowshoes and walked in the tracks left by a herd of caribou.

Flying conditions the next day were poor but May managed to pick up Johnson's trail again 20 miles up the Eagle.

The following day fog closed in and the plane was grounded, but Eames and his party set out after Johnson on foot. Soon Sid May and his men arrived from their trip through the mountains and set out after Eames. Within a few hours the groups were united and ascending the winding Eagle River past low, scrubby hills.

Fog was bad again the next day, but on Feb. 17, as the posse started out, skies were gradually clearing.

Johnson was not far away. He had ascended the Eagle until he came across ski tracks of local trappers. Johnson knew that Gardlund had been using skis, and thought the tracks were his. Believing the posse to be upstream, he started to backtrack down the middle of the river. Suddenly, shortly before noon, he saw Earl Hersey come round a sharp bend. The men were about 200 yards apart, heading directly for each other.

Both stopped, astonished. Johnson quickly put on his snowshoes and

ran out of sight behind the steep bank. Hersey snatched a rifle and ran ahead to where he saw Johnson trying to climb the bank.

Hersey kneeled and fired. Sid May and Joe Verville came running up and also fired. Johnson whirled and snapped off a shot at Hersey, who fell wounded in the snow. The others were coming up now, and May signalled for them to break into two groups.

Johnson couldn't make the climb, and ran back toward the easier slope on the opposite bank. Then he fell or threw himself to the snow, wriggled out of his pack and settled behind it. Gardlund and three men climbed the bank, coming out above the outflanked Johnson. Riddell led four men to the other bank, and now Johnson was caught below the two groups.

The men kept up a barrage of fire, which the trapper returned. Eames joined Sid May on the river and shouted for Johnson to surrender. A shot hit ammunition in Johnson's pocket and he jerked when it exploded. Another bullet slammed into his shoulder and still another into his side but he kept on firing.

Eames called again for Johnson to surrender but his only answer was the bark of a gun and the wave of an arm.

Meanwhile, Wop May and his mechanic had been photographing the battle from their plane. It was so cold they could hear the rifle shots above the roar of the engine. Said May later: "I circled back upriver. As I flew over the fugitive's lair it seemed as though he was lying in an unnatural position. Swinging back, I nosed the Bellanca down till our skis were tickling the snow. Johnson was lying face down, his right arm outflung grasping his rifle. I knew he was dead."

May waggled the wings of his plane to indicate the news. About the same time, rifle in hand, Sid May walked up to Johnson, ready for anything. He hooked the barrel under Johnson's body and turned him over. The emaciated Mad Trapper had nine bullets in him, one through the spine.

Wop May landed the plane. Hersey, who had been hit in the left elbow, left knee and chest, was taken aboard and flown to Aklavik.

Before taking off, the pilot walked over for a look at Johnson. "As I stooped over," said May later, "I got the worst shock I've ever had. Johnson's lips were curled back from his teeth in the most awful grimace of hate I'd ever seen—the hard-boiled, bitter hate of a man who knows he's trapped at last and has determined to take as many enemies as he can with him."

Among his possessions Johnson had $2,410 in bills, three guns, five pearls worth $15, gold dental work worth $3.20, a jar containing gold worth $9.36, an axe, a pocket compass, a razor, a homemade knife with moose-skin cover, sewing materials, fish-hooks, nails and matches wrapped in tin foil, a lard can and lid used as a tea pail, a dead squirrel and a small dead bird.

Johnson's origins remain a mystery. His appearance and habits were strikingly similar to those of a trapper named Arthur Nelson who had appeared in the north country in 1926 and vanished shortly before Johnson came floating down the Peel on his raft. But Nelson too had apparently come from nowhere.

Johnson's possessions included no written clues to his identity: indeed, when the manhunt was over, his pursuers realized that during the entire episode he was never heard to utter a word.

A full-length version of this story has been in print since 1972. Look for *The Mad Trapper of Rat River* by Dick North, published by *The MacMillan Company of Canada.* Another book called *Trackdown*, published in 1990 but now out of print, details Dick North's search for the identity of the Mad Trapper.
The author is curator of the Jack London museum in Dawson City. Following up on a rumour, Dick located Jack London's cabin, part of which now rests beside the aforementioned museum at Dawson.

The effects of Albert Johnson as displayed in the RCMP museum at Regina Saskatchewan. The snowshoes weighed ten pounds each. Other effects included the .30-30 Savage rifle with which he killed Millen and wounded King and Hersey, a .22 rifle with the butt sawed off, an axe with a bullet scar on the handle, a sawed-off shotgun, compass, and a lard tin he used for making tea.

The Search for Jack London's Cabin

By Sam Holloway

In 1964, Yukon author Dick North paddled a canoe down the Yukon River. He stopped at Stewart River where the Burian family told him that Jack London might have lived in a cabin not far from there, on the left fork of Henderson Creek.

Dick checked the mining recorder's office at Dawson City and indeed, Jack London did have a claim on the same creek, staked and recorded in the fall of 1897.

Later the Burians wrote to Dick telling him of a trapper who had seen Jack London's signature on the back wall of a cabin—again on Henderson Creek. Then Jack MacKenzie of Whitehorse confirmed the story and also explained that in 1944 he had carved the signature out of the wall with an axe and had given it to the mining recorder at Mayo, Yukon. .

White Pass graciously financed an expedition. From Dawson City, with two Indian mushers—Joe Henry and son Victor—Dick travelled overland to Henderson Creek. It was a five-day trip with Dick breaking trail on snow-shoes for much of the way. After examining many cabins, they came upon one with a slash of wood missing from the back wall!

Dick then tracked down a woman named Rose Zeniuk, the widow of the mining recorder, who lived in Merritt, B.C. The slab was still in her attic at Mayo and she sent Dick a photo of the signature. After much more detective work, the signature was confirmed as being authentic.

To make sure, Dick returned to the site and got some tree rings for dating. These confirmed the cabin had been built prior to 1900. This was indeed Jack London's cabin.

In 1969, with co-operation from the Yukon government and financing from the Port Authority of Oakland, California (Jack London's home town), two cabins were built at Stewart, using logs from the original in each, and duplicating the others. One cabin is at Dawson City and the other in Jack London square at Oakland.

For the complete story on this remarkable search, look for a booklet entitled, *Jack London's Cabin,* by Dick North. ❒

Dick North, Yukon author & historian, winner of 1992 Heritage Award, curator of the Jack London museum at Dawson City. [photo by Robin Armour]

Editor's Note: Since I took the photo on the opposite page, the cabin has been restored and a museum built beside it. Also, in September of this year, 1998, White Pass closed their office in Whitehorse. Over the years, they have supported many causes, including this magazine, and they will be greatly missed.

More Mad Trappers

By Delores Smith

Runer West

The isolation and loneliness of a remote trapline, especially in earlier days when access was difficult, caused some men to become reclusive and secretive, hiding out when anyone approached their out of the way cabins. One such man was Runer West. He first came to the attention of the authorities in the early 1920s around Keno, where complaints had been filed against him for stealing supplies from people's caches.

This small, dark, wiry man, with a trace of a Scandinavian accent, had a reputation for toughness and strength on the trail, but, his reticence had made others wary of him. West had escaped custody. Convinced he was always being followed, the trapper spent more and more of his time living in the bush. One year, Ted Skonseng, a well-known prospector from around Ross River, spent a winter trapping with West north of Niddery Lake. They got into a skefuffle and West got the upper hand. He kept Skonseng tied up at night and made him pull a sleigh at gun point. Near Mayo, West freed his captive and left the badly-shaken man to make his own way in to town. There Skonseng spent a few days in the hospital recuperating.

Tom Connolly and Jack Dewhurst met up with West on the Stewart River later that year and reported his position to the Mounties, who then apprehended the trapper. West escaped again, this time without his shoes, and froze his feet before being recaptured. Over the next decade, West would often show up at wilderness camps, mostly to exchange fur for supplies. Other wilderness travellers, finding West's empty camps, would leave some grub and continue on their way without seeing him.

Runer West, holding the leg of the moose (Bill Drury, Sr. photo]

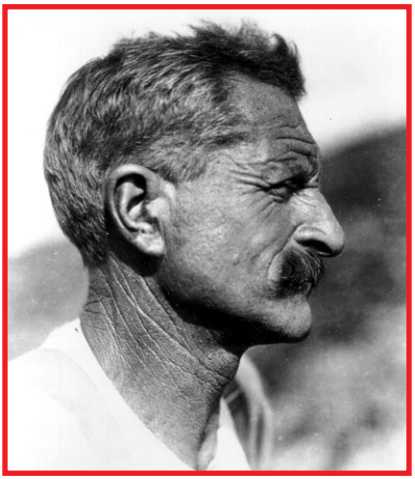
Bill Drury Sr. and three companions were freighting supplies to their stores via the South Canol Road and come upon West near Ross River. He was in pretty bad shape. They had just killed a moose and gave him most of the meat for helping them get their vehicle unstuck. The picture Drury gave me of West is the only one I've been able to find and probably was taken without his knowledge. Tom and Jean Connolly were the last to see West alive. The spring after the photo was taken, they found him huddled under a bunk in a cabin beside the intersection of the South MacMillan River and the North Canol road.

They chatted pleasantly with him, offered him some grub from their nearby cache and accepted his offer of the use of a boat to get across the river where the bridge was washed out. In her book, *Woman in the Bush*, Jean wrote that Tom told her the man in the cabin had once threatened to kill him. She expected to hear a shot as they climbed the hill towards the road. They turned when they got to the top, and saw West standing in the door watching them. He looked so alone and pathetic, grey and thin, that she felt sorry for him

George Ortell

George Ortell stampeded into the country along with other gold hungry men in 1895 and settled in around the Mayo area to trap, prospect and live off the land. Geologist Joseph Keele hired him in 1905 to help map out the upper Stewart River area. Ortell's fortunes went up and down with fur prices and over the years he became more and more reclusive and eccentric. Kind to children and generous to women, he still took on some attributes of a hermit. He would go naked while skinning a moose to avoid getting his clothes dirty or bring his own unwashed cutlery along when invited for dinner.

In spite of all that, he had many friends and as he got older people would keep an eye out for him. But luck ran out for George in February 1943 in 60 below weather. While on the trail into town, George had frozen his hands and feet an had stopped in at his good friend Joe Laska's place to warm up. On seeing his friend's condition, Joe cut a good supply of wood and told George to stay put while he went on into town to get some help. Joe figured it would take five days for the round trip. But help was delayed and George, thinking something might have happened to Joe, set out after him, even though his hands and feet were not completely mended.



George Ortell [Yukon Archives photo, Hare Collection]

Halfway there, with the tempera-

ture dropping, one of George's snowshoe harnesses gave way. With his fingers frozen again, he was unable to mend it and couldn't build a fire either. His only hope was to dig his way into a nearby snowbank and cover himself with as much snow as possible. He had to wait a day and a half until he was rescued.

Dick Kimbell and Corporal D'Easum were shocked to find George and more shocked to find that he was still alive. They rushed him to Mayo with their dog team, then he was flown to the Hospital in Dawson City where both his legs were amputated below the knees.

When he realized the plans the doctor had for him, he said, "Leave as much as you can Doc. I have to hobble around somehow. There's a fine mess of Beaver up on the McQuesten I want to go after next spring." But there would be no more going out in the bush next spring. George passed away the following year.

Jim Christie

This survival story took place in the early days on the Upper Stewart River. It involves a man named Jim Christie, who, along with Ortell, was an assistant to Joseph Keele during his survey of that country in 1907. Christie Pass at the headwaters of Ross River in the Selwyn Mountains between the NWT and Yukon and a nearby peak are both named in his honour. He discovered this pass in 1898 while stampeding along one of the all-Canadian routes to the Klondike.

It was near here, in 1909, that he had a run in with a grizzly bear. He ended up with a fractured skull and jaw, a broken arm and a punctured thigh. Alone, in sub zero weather, he somehow made the seven miles back to his camp and his friend George Crissfield. After tending his wounds with whiskey as best he could, George enlisted the aid of some native people to break trail for their dog team as they set out for Lansing Post, about 150 km away on the Stewart River.

Jim and Helen Ferrell had bought the Post in 1908 from Frank Braine who had picked that location a few years earlier because of the abundant fur in the area. The trip took four days. Upon their arrival, Mrs. Ferrell, a trained surgical nurse, tended Jim's wounds for two months until he was well enough to travel again. On New Year's Day, he was taken by dog sled to Dawson City, where he received further medical attention, before being sent to Victoria, BC to have his jaw re-set.

By late fall he was back prospecting around the mouth of the Roque River. Christie went on to distinguish himself in battle during the First World War. He continued prospecting and trapping around the area and was noted for the speed with which he could travel through the bush. He lived on to a ripe old age, retiring to the Gulf Islands in B.C. with his wife.

He apparently killed the bear that almost did him in, because Mrs. Ferrell kept the hide with her, first at Lansing, then later in Mayo where they ran a store after selling the post to Jim Mervyn in 1915. The grizzly hide was quite a show piece around town and people had their pictures taken with it. I've been told that this picture, taken in Mayo, in the 1930s by Bill

Hare, is of the Christie grizzly hide. That's Norman Niddery on the right, Nora Hare beside him, Louis Boudin on the left and Ethel Middlecoff facing forward.

Charles Wilson

There were four men on the topographical survey of 1907-08, led by Joseph Keele, of the Geologic Survey of Canada. Historian Bob Coutts claims their traverse from the Pelly River, up the Ross River, over Christie Pass and down the Gravel (or Keele) River to the MacKenzie in the dead of winter is one of the great Canadian exploration adventures of all time.

Perhaps this trip prepared these men for later hardships. Ortell froze his limbs; Christie was attacked by a bear; Keele died of throat cancer in the prime of his life; and Charles Wilson disappeared for 11 years, before walking out of the bush into Lansing Post.

Wilson hailed from Texas, prospecting his way up through B.C. towards the Klondike. It was said that he was on the run from the law for murdering a fellow miner. Reclusive and secretive, he would show up at Lansing with a pack on his back and a dog then pay for his grub with gold. Keele hired him for his survey crew because of his knowledge of the country he wanted to explore. Prospecting was Wilson's only interest and he ranged as far south as the Nahanni area looking for gold.

While there, he met another Texan by the name of Smith, who was also a fugitive, so Wilson headed back to country that wasn't so crowded. Most of his time was spent looking for the Lost McHenry Gold Mine, said to be located in the Hess River country. One time, he showed up in Lansing with 80 kilos of high grade quartz but was so secretive about his find that he refused

Jim Christie's bear hide at Mayo. [Yukon Archives photo, Tidd Collection]

the offer of a plane flight to get out there. McHenry was a miner from the Dease Lake country who travelled into the Hess area in the 1880s. He returned to Dease with 70 kilos of course gold and a map showing how to get back. After showing only a few people his map, McHenry disappeared.

The mine's location is rumoured to be on the divide between the North and South MacMillan Rivers along Husky-dog Creek. Others have looked for the McHenry mine, including the Mad trapper of Rat River. It is hard to say where Wilson was for those 11 years. People certainly tried to find him, both on the trail and in the towns.

He just reappeared one day, with his dog, as if nothing had ever happened. He took up residence near the old sawmill around Mayo, in the late 1930s, before moving back to his old haunts around Lansing. It was there, in 1939, that he was found, near death, and past saving, with only some fox meat for food. He had fed everything to his dog, which had remained healthy, while he slowly starved.

Solomon Albert

Vast stretches of wilderness and harsh winter weather were the bane of early day travelers in the north. Without dogs, survival for greenhorns and cheechakos hinged on good luck rather than skills. The man in the photo is Solomon Albert, who had been heading for Dawson City via the Tanana River in Alaska when he became ill along the route. Frostbitten and starving, he met up with two prospectors on the upper White River who carried him with the help of their two dogs to their main camp 80 miles away where they thought there was food and shelter.

Finding neither, they left Albert as comfortable as possible and headed off to find help. After 28 miles of hard travel they met up with a trader named Billy Roup who was heading up the White River trail with a team of horses. He fed the two exhausted men and send one of his workers back down the trail to alert the RCMP of Albert's condition. When the trio reached Albert they were surprised to find him alive beside a fire.

A typical miner's cabin.

He thanked them for leaving fire wood and matches close at hand and then told them that he had eaten his pet dog to save his own life. They were met by an RCMP officer with a four-dog team at the mouth of the White River. One hundred miles and 18 continuous hours later they pulled into Dawson City. Solomon Albert pulled through but lost all the toes on both feet. Undaunted, he continued to live in the wilderness of the upper White River. To get around, he sewed the feet of a grizzly bear onto his make-shift moccasins. ❑

Solomon Albert with his bear feet and his best friend. It's been said that two hunters thought they were tracking a grizzly bear, wondering why it was walking on its hind legs, when they came upon Solomon sitting on a log, waiting for his tea to boil. [Yukon Archives, Clayton Betts Collection]

The Plot to Steal the Yukon

By Darrell Hookey

"It's unthinkable that 4,000 residents of the Yukon should have the final say as to the disposal of that immense and magnificent territory."

British Columbia Premier Dufferin Pattullo was trying to woo votes from an Atlin, BC crowd on May 15, 1937. He was pushing his plan to annex the Yukon to plunder its mineral wealth. He believed Yukoners weren't doing this fast enough and British Columbia's economy wasn't benefiting near enough.

Yukoners were outraged when Pattullo had announced his plans three weeks earlier. They believed if BC could not manage its own affairs (the province was running up debts and unable to curb unemployment) then it should not be trusted with the Yukon. Under BC rule, Yukoners' taxes would double and triple, thus subsidizing a province they had no wish to belong to.

The manner in which the announcement was made also upset many Yukoners. Pattullo chose to announce the annexation plans at a time when the federal premier, Mackenzie King, was onboard the SS Empress on his way to the coronation of King George VI. BC was in the midst of an election and its legislature was dissolved leaving no forum for debate of the annexation plans.

Yukon's Member of Parliament, Martha Black, wired a message to Mackenzie King asking for verification of the edict. He responded from the ship via "marconigram" saying negotiations were in progress and would be dealt with during the fall session of parliament.

Such an announcement should have come from the federal government, but everyone understood Pattullo was looking for an edge in a close election race. He told Vancouver voters that millions of dollars would be added to the economy as the Yukon bought more and more equipment for the burst of mining activity BC would help spark.

What many people at the time did not realize, was that Pattullo likely announced the annexation when Mackenzie King was out of the country to keep him from botching the deal.

Pattullo had a history of being disappointed by federal Liberal governments making uninformed decisions from afar, thereby spoiling his plans.

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As a good Liberal from an old, powerful Liberal family, it was no surprise Pattullo was named to a team of federal administrators sent to the Yukon in 1897 to govern from the gold rush boom town of Dawson City. His father had arranged the position to get his son out of debt and into a lifestyle that offered few chances to spend money.

The younger Patullo would serve as secretary to Major James Morrow Walsh, a close friend of Clifford Sifton, the Minister of the Interior and benefactor of the government expedition.

The patronage appointees traveled to Vancouver by train, to Dyea by steamboat and then over the Chilkoot Trail to Lake Bennett. The trip was grueling as weather stranded them at the base of the Golden Stairs, then ice threatened to trap them on the Yukon River. They lost equipment when their voyageur canoes capsized and a member of their party drowned when he fell through mush ice. Finally, the men were stranded for the winter at Big Salmon River.

At their winter camp, they met many stampeders who had decided to head back to Skagway rather than risk starvation in Dawson City. In letters to his father, Pattullo said if there was reliable transportation to the Klondike then "development will go forward in this country which would astonish the world." It is an opinion that would stay with him a lifetime.

In Dawson City, Patullo filled various clerical duties. In August he and Major Walsh went to Ottawa to prepare a report. Major Walsh stayed in Ottawa having filled the role as the Yukon's first Commissioner for just one summer, but Pattullo returned to his new position as the abstracts clerk in the Gold Commissioner's Office.

But the new commissioner, William Ogilvie, who had accompanied the government expedition, overrode Sifton's appointment of Pattullo.

Duff Patullo speaking at Vancouver's Golden Jubilee in 1936. [Vancouver City Archives photo]

Ogilvie believed the embattled Gold Commissioner's Office needed someone beyond reproach to earn the respect of the miners. Pattullo's drinking, gambling and youthful arrogance made him more suitable to be assistant to the timber agent in Fort Selkirk.

At the urging of Patullo's father, Sifton ordered Ogilvie to reinstatethe young man to the Gold Commissioner's Office. It would prove to be Patullo's last trip to the patronage trough.

Although Pattullo's performance was outstanding, he lost out to another patronage appointee on a promotion to Assistant Gold Commissioner. When the new assistant was fired after fraud charges were laid, Pattullo became the Acting Assistant Gold Commissioner until another patronage appointee took over the job.

Tired of going without the recognition and pay he deserved for his many months as Acting Assistant Gold Commissioner, Pattullo resigned and entered business and politics. Both ventures failed to turn out as Patullo hoped so, in 1908, Pattullo took his new wife and daughter to Prince Rupert. There he entered the political arena again and successfully worked his way to the premiership, a position that once again gave him a measure of influence over the Yukon's affairs.

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Influence that 4,000 Yukoners wished he did not have.

"...callous and humiliating proposal to hand over Yukon to British Columbia without giving the territory a voice in the matter..." —Ernest J. Corp., Territorial Council's Mayo district representative.

"...opposed to this entailing double income tax, wiping out federal mining laws and all Yukon Council ordinances..." —George Black, former Yukon member of parliament.

"...a bombshell here and has aroused violent and universal indignation among all classes (and the) feeling is Yukon and its people (are) being handed over like a chattel in a nefarious political deal..." —Andrew T. Taddle, speaker of the Yukon Council.

"...notorious fact that British Columbia cannot manage its own financial affairs which leaves us a gloomy outlook if it is to handle ours..." —Charles T. Atherton, Yukon Council's Whitehorse representative.

Martha Black, meanwhile, was mostly upset with the manner in which the announcement was made—the federal parliament being in recess, the BC government dissolved and the fact discussions had been ongoing for years without the Yukon's involvement.

Black had always suspected the Yukon would become part of British Columbia one day. She believed, as many people did in those days, that the provinces would eventually extend upwards to include the territories. She told a group of reporters she only wanted to "stave off the evil day as long as I can."

While Yukoners tried to top one another with cries of betrayal and theft of their beloved home, British Columbians were giddy with the idea of gaining a new backyard—a backyard that was out of sight and full of buried treasure.

Talking to an audience on a campaign swing through Vancouver, Pattullo said, "We will add an immensely valuable territory that has hardly been scratched in its potential resources to this province."

He asked the audience, many of whom were left without a job in the weak economy, if they realized how much business Vancouver does with the Yukon. He said Vancouver sold $2 million worth of goods to the Yukon in 1936. "Would you like to see that doubled and trebled and quadrupled as it can be?"

Pattullo also saw the Yukon as a tourist destination. He would build a highway to the Alaskan border which would pass through as many BC communities that could be arranged. This $14 million highway would get the young, unemployed men out of the cities and into the northern bush to build their financial outlook and their characters . . . just as Pattullo had done 40 years earlier.

The *Vancouver Sun* (a Liberal newspaper with an employee paid by Pattullo's party to ensure positive stories) gushed over the menu of minerals and resources now available to British Columbians. It listed untold millions of ounces of gold, "fair-sized timber," successful crops and a variety of fish.

Boosters of the annexation plan argued it was a good deal for Canada. In 1935, the Yukon cost the Dominion $537,406 and it received only $228,726 in revenue. The annexation deal called for a $125,000 subsidy to be paid to British Columbia for five years for taking responsibility of the Yukon. The deal would actually save the federal government $184,000 in each of the first five years and $125,000 more each year thereafter.

Black finally had a chance to respond to the annexation plans in parliament in February of 1938—nine months after the plan became public—and it was the "cost" of the Yukon to the Dominion she debated. She said all customs revenue on goods destined for the Yukon is collected in Vancouver and credited to British Columbia. As well, the telegraph system set up for northern British Columbia was charged to the Yukon. Besides, other charges for postal service, unemployment programs and defense are paid for by the federal government regardless of who administers the territory. As for health, policing and education, the 4,000 residents would need these services in Vancouver just as they would in Dawson City.

"I am sick and tired of hearing about the great expense to the federal government," said Black in parliament in a response to the speech from the throne. "If the truth were known, the Yukon for years has fed the federal treasury."

She also wondered if Pattullo was worried that a prosperous Yukon would take over as the gateway to the Orient.

Black's speech endeared her to her Yukon constituency. But, just as the plans for annexation were formulated without her knowledge, the unraveling of the plans had begun months earlier without her involvement.

The Liberal prime minister, Mackenzie King, saw the Liberal premier of British Columbia, Duff Pattullo, as his western opposition. King saw Pattullo's ongoing campaign to build a highway to Alaska as a naive and expensive solution to British Columbia's unemployment problems.

No doubt King saw the annexation plans as a means to force the "Alaska Highway" through, but it still served as a way to rid the federal government of its responsibilities to the Yukon.

But sometime in late 1937, a decision was made in the back rooms of Ottawa: the annexation would not take place. Negotiations were becoming more complex, especially with the Yukon's opposition finally being taken into account, and Ottawa was preoccupied with the imminent war with Nazi Germany.

History has decided King's favoured response to adversity was to do nothing. This is what he had decided to do with the Yukon question. He announced in October of 1937 that he would allow the upcoming Rowell-Sirois Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations to decide the question of annexation.

Politically astute, and accustomed to ill-considered decrees from out-of-touch federal Liberal governments, Pattullo had already launched his back-up plan. He visited the American president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and secured a $15 million loan to build the northern highway.

Ottawa was furious when it found out a provincial premier went to the Americans looking for a handout. Federal officials warned Pattullo the U S was only interested in seeing a road built to bolster its war preparations (probably true, since the Americans built the road themselves three years later after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour).

In April of 1938, the Rowell-Sirois Commission announced that the question of boundary lines between provinces and territories was not in its jurisdiction. Annexation was now officially dead.

The announcement coincided with King's displeasure at Pattullo's behaviour . . . a coincidence easily explained when the Rowell-Sirois Commission rubber stamped all of the government's wishes three years later.

But King was to deliver one more disappointment. Pattullo had won the next election in 1941 with a minority government, but he soon resigned as the leader of the party when it was decided to form a coalition government with the Conservatives.

Pattullo, therefore, expected an appointment to the Senate. But it was a patronage appointment King refused to make, thus stranding Pattullo in the back benches of a coalition government for which he had no respect.

A cartoon in the Vancouver Sun, April 28,

The Vanishing Breed

By Sam Holloway

Glacier Creek, Sixtymile District, July 1985. Bill McMillan tending box, Jim Osterwalker running the backhoe. [S.H. photo]

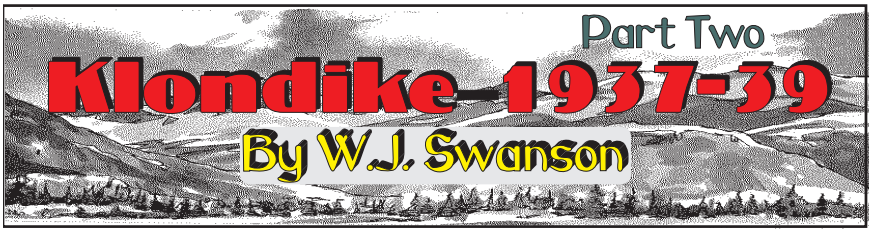
In July of 1985, I came upon two placer miners on Glacier Creek, which has been continually mined since before the Klondike Gold Rush.. They had equipment, fuel, a camp—but no food. I was on my way to my own ground on the same creek, further upstream. I stopped to give them a hand till my grub was completely gone. We cleaned up the sluice box, they paid me in gold for the grub and assistance, and I went my own way.

One of those fellows was Bill McMillan. He had been prospecting and mining the SixtyMile area since the 1940s. He never carried a gun, and could survive in the bush for days with just a few sandwiches and water from the creeks. He died just after Christmas in 1986. His good friend Al Downes and Bill's brother from Alaska set Bill's ashes in a cairn on Moose Creek and erected a cross.

Every year the environmentalists (most of whom are well-paid government employees) and bureaucrats from four levels of government make it tougher for miners and prospectors.. A new regime of regulations is about to be passed here that could sabotage all mining and exploration in the Yukon.

I can't imagine old Bill working in a government office. For that matter, I can't see myself there either.

So here's to the Yukon miner, a vanishing breed, soon to be found only on our license plates and in this magazine.❐



Within a couple of weeks of my arrival I obtained work with The Company. The Assistant Employment Manager, Sid Church, met me at the hotel, signed me on and informed me that I would be leaving next morning to work on the thawing crew at Arlington camp. There, the following morning, I settled into camp life not far from where Hunker Creek joins the Klondike River.

The one and only well-patronized facility at Arlington, not owned by the Company, was a roadhouse operated by Mr. and Mrs. Skistadt where one could get a beer or two, or more. Being a minor who'd never tasted beer, I never did visit the place. But I can now appreciate that, after working 12 hours a day for seven days each week in hot weather, to many workmen a cold beer would be very welcome.

On the job I soon learned what was required of a member of the thawing crew. Being in a permafrost area, the ground was permanently frozen from just below the surface to a depth of several hundred feet. The gold recovery process was done in several steps: First the area was "drilled," which was a means of testing all areas to assess the amount of gold that could be recovered; the area to be dredged was then "stripped", which involved the removal of all vegetation and muck down to gravel; "thawed, which involved thawing the gravel paydirt from the stripped surface to bedrock; and dredged so the gold could be recovered.

Drilling was done with Keystone percussion drills; holes, about four inches in diameter, were drilled in a rectangular pattern, at about 30-foot centres, from the surface to bedrock. A complete log of each drillhole was kept and, when drilling in paydirt, all drilled material was recovered and panned to assess the quantity of gold. Engineers could then estimate the amount of overburden to be removed, the amount of material to be dredged and the amount of gold that could be recovered.

The first step in stripping was the removal of all trees and brush - usually let out on contract and done during the winter season. The next step, the removal of all overburden from the surface to the gravel layer below, was done by washing the surface with high pressure water jets. Each jet was three to four inches in diameter, and the pressure was usually between 80 and 125 psi (pounds per square inch).

The stream was directed where the operator wanted it by the use of a "monitor" mounted on a rotating flange on top of the supply pipe. The monitor could be turned through a full horizontal circle and it could be raised or lowered, the movement being effected by turning the nozzle slightly so the

reaction of the water being deflected would move the unit. The stripping process, which utilized the summer's heat to thaw the surface, was rather slow. The operator would turn on one monitor and wash off all the thawed material within range before moving on to the next machine.

About a day later he would get back to the same machine; by that time another four to five inches of material would have thawed. It would be washed away and the process repeated. Stumps and roots were piled and burned while muck and silt were washed down the stream.

After each area had been stripped, there remained a layer of frozen gravel extending from the surface to bedrock. Although that gravel was all considered pay dirt, most of the gold was found on, or very close to, bedrock. In order to dredge that material it had to be thawed and that was done by the use of water: At a temperature of 10 to 20 degrees above freezing, water was delivered through large pipes, up to three feet or more in diameter, which were installed along the edge of the area to be thawed (known as the mud flats). About every 30 feet a small branch line ran from the main pipe out across the mud flats and, at about 15-foot intervals along that cross pipe, were outlets with two hose connections each. Each hose was connected to a one-inch pipe (called a point) the bottom of which had a chisel-shaped end with outlets on both sides. Generally, each member of the thawing crew had one line, consisting of 40 to 60 points, to look after. He would connect the hoses and pipe, turn the water on and push the point into the gravel, vertically, as far as it would go. When the point hit frost, which one got to recognize by feel, one left the point running so it would thaw the ground below and allow the point to be pushed deeper. If the point hung up on a boulder, one put a clamp around the pipe and twisted the pipe back and forth to try to work the chisel point between the boulders. If that didn't work, a hammer, which fitted around and would slide up and down the pipe, could be used to pound on the clamp. By hammering and twisting, it was usually possible to advance the point. If it still hung up, one had to remove the point, move it slightly in a horizontal direction and start again. The job was dirty and aggravating. We worked in mud all day wearing hip-rubber-boots. Dirty water caused the points to plug and they continually hung up on boulders - their main purpose, it seemed, was to make life difficult.

On the next line to mine worked a Russian fellow, known to me only as Andy, who became extremely exasperated one day over hung up and plugged points. After patiently working through several of those problem points, he went to the next one and, finding it also plugged, he threw his hat on the ground, grabbed the pipe with both hands, as if he were trying to strangle it, twisted it back and forth, bent it so it was lying parallel to the ground and jumped on it several times with both feet - then he sat down and had a smoke while he cooled off.

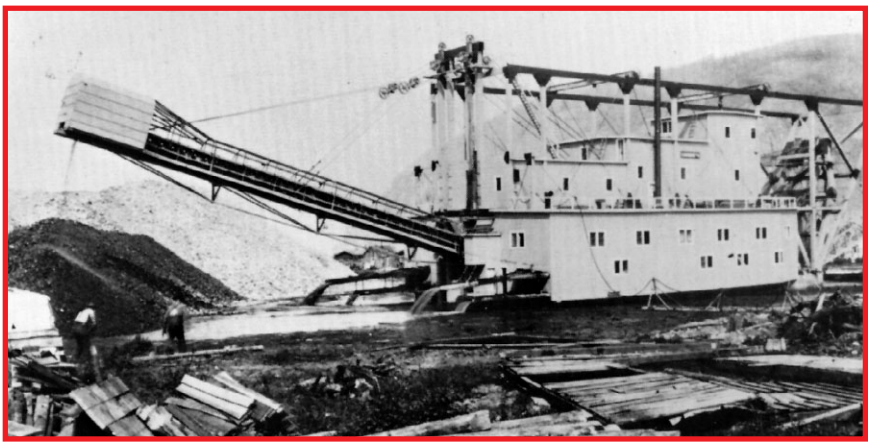
The thawing crew at Arlington was quite a varied group: We had one medical doctor (whose name I have forgotten) looking for a break from his practice; a pharmacist, Don Saunders who, I understand, later purchased a drugstore in Washington State; Tom Stokes who rose to a senior

position in the Vancouver Police Force; Jim Hall, a printer; Nick Kerluk from the Victoria area; Dinty Dines who, I believe, still spends much of his time in the Yukon, and the late Les Millen, a good friend of mine who lived much of his remaining life around Dawson City. Our foreman on the thawing crew was the late Walter Troberg, a long time resident of Dawson. I worked with the thawing crew at Arlington until early September when the points began freezing at night and the operation had to be shut down.

Dredge No. 4 was a monstrous machine, operated entirely by electrical power. The unit was mounted on a floating hull and, in order to move, it had to excavate the front of the dredge pond while the excavated material, after passing through the dredge, was dumped at the rear; thus the dredge actually dug its way through the surface of the ground.

Digging was done by an endless bucket line which rotated around a boom extending out the front of the hull. The boom could be raised or lowered depending on the depth of digging required. A few details of Dredge No. 4 as I recall them:- There were 66 buckets in the line, each bucket weighed 5600 pounds and held 33 cubic feet of material. The pins that held the buckets together weighed 190 pounds each. Much of the equipment, including the rotary screen inside the dredge, was so large that it could not be shipped over the White Pass and Yukon Railway. Rather, it was shipped to a port near the mouth of the Yukon River, transferred to river boats and freighted about 2000 miles up the river to Dawson.

In preparation for dredging, the stripping and thawing was completed for one to two years operation ahead of the dredge. The dredge crew consisted of the Dredgemaster (Ed Juneau), who didn't actually take a shift but had overall responsibility for the dredge's maintenance and operation; three Winchmen, who each worked an eight-hour shift and were in charge of the unit when operating; three Oilers, also worked shifts and were responsible to see that all the machinery was lubricated and operating prop-



Dredge #4, the largest in the Klondike, was built in 1912.
[University of Washington photo, Cantwell collection]

erly; two Deck-Hands on each shift (one front and one rear) who watched all cables and other lines as well as the general running of machinery in their area; and a Bull-Gang, consisting of a foreman and about six men, who worked only days and who were responsible for all the shore-work, such as placing dead-man anchors and doing the heavy work during maintenance. (The foreman of the bull-gang while I was at Arlington was Mike Comedena who, a few years later, was elected Mayor of Dawson City.)

When clean-up time came around a dozen or more men were borrowed, usually from the thawing crew, to assist in lifting the riffles, shovelling out the collected black sand and gold, and bagging it for transfer to the gold-room in Bear Creek. There the gold was removed from the black sand and formed into bars or bricks.

When operating, one of the two vertical spuds, situated near the rear of the main housing on either side of the stacker, was kept in a lowered position so the dredge could swing, back and forth, around that spud by using winches and lines on the front deck. When that swath had been dug to bedrock, the boom would be raised and the dredge swung in the direction of the lowered spud. When in position, the other spud would be lowered to pin the dredge in position just a few feet ahead, the previously used spud raised and the dredge would thus move one step ahead and begin digging the next swath.

All material dug by the bucket line was dumped into the rotary screen. There, all particles more than about three inches diameter went

Cookhouse and living quarters at Black Mike's wood camp on Rock Creek. December 1937. [W.J. Swanson photo. See "Black Mike as I Knew Him," in Yukoner Magazine, Issue No. 8.

right through the screen and were dumped from the stacker at the rear, while all smaller particles were washed over a large area of riffles which was cleaned at periodically. During the clean up, if one kept his eyes peeled, other things than gold could be recovered from the riffles: Small, thumb-nail-size, black stones were often found that could be polished to a black mirror-like finish; we referred to them as black diamonds, but they were a type of obsidian, sometimes referred to as volcanic glass. I carried several of those black diamonds around for years and, about 1942, called into a jewellers shop in London to ask if they could polish them for setting into rings. I left them there to get an estimate for the work but I never received the estimate and I never got back to retrieve the stones. And we frequently recovered bones and tusks from prehistoric animals; I toted around part of a mammoth tusk and a tooth, about four inches square and ten inches long, for more than two years before donating them to the Vancouver Museum in late 1939.

The contrast between mining by dredges, as done in the mid-1930s and mining as done by individual miners in the early days of the gold rush, must be understood to be appreciated. The following was told to me by a Norwegian seaman who "jumped ship" to join the gold rush. His name was Martin Larsen Hale, but he was commonly known as Martin Larsen or sometimes just Martin.

After staking and recording his claim, and arranging for a tent or cabin to live in, the early miner would proceed to sink a shaft to bedrock. Preparatory work was done during the summer when there was too much surface water around to sink a shaft. All necessary accessories, such as shovels, picks, ropes, buckets, a windlass, ladders, lots of dry firewood, and winter food supply would be obtained and brought to the site. When the ground surface was well frozen so there would be no surface water, the sinking of the shaft would begin. Because two men could work more efficiently than one, the common practice was that two miners on adjoining claims would work together and sink both their shafts at the same time.

When all was ready, each miner would dig a hole about four feet in diameter and as deep as he could go by the use of a pick and a shovel. On reaching frozen clay or coarse gravel that could not be excavated by pick and shovel, they would build a fire in the bottom of one hole, letting it burn and smoulder while they worked on the other shaft. A few hours later, or the next day, they would come back, remove all the thawed material and build another fire. Each cycle would lower the shaft about six to 12 inches. As the shaft got deeper, the dirt was hoisted by a windlass so one man worked in the shaft while the other remained on the surface and did the hoisting. On reaching pay dirt, they would pan some of it to check for colours (fine flakes of gold) and, as long as there were colors, they would continue the shaft to bedrock. All gravel containing colors would be put into a separate pile called "the dump." On reaching bedrock, if the gold content looked good, they would dig as much of the gravel as they could from around the base of the shaft. Often the gravel layer (or pay dirt) was only a foot or so

thick; that would mean the miner would have to lie down on his side, pick away the gravel, scrape it over under the shaft, shovel it into the bucket and hoist it to the surface. In order to thaw the ground around the bottom, firewood was laid all around the perimeter of the gravel face and a closing shield of tin, or other metal, was erected outside the firewood leaving only the ends open. A fire was then started at one end and, by means of blowing and coaxing, the fire would burn all around the perimeter and thaw the ground. When it was cool enough and the smoke had cleared, the miner would return, lie down in the mud, remove the shield and proceed to pick out the thawed gravel. This process would carry on all through the long northern winter.

With the onset of spring and the movement of surface water, mining was stopped and a sluice was built with riffles in the bottom to collect the gold particles. A water supply was arranged and, as water flowed through the sluice, the miners shovelled the gravel from the dump into the top end of the sluice. They would stop every so often, depending on the amount of gold being recovered, and clean out the heavier material caught by the riffles. This material, called the "clean-up," consisted, principally of black sand and gold. It told the story of whether they had worked all winter for nothing or had made a fortune. By using mercury to make an amalgam with the gold, it was separated from the black sand.

A couple of fellows who would probably rate as eccentric worked in Arlington camp that summer. One elderly man, whose name I have forgot-

Old railroad coaches (stored at Lousetown) of the old Dawson to North Fork railway. February, 1938. [W;J. Swanson photo]

ten but whose appearance is still firmly imprinted on my mind, had a full-time job caulking the dredge hull. As far as I know he never washed - his face and neck were caked with dirt and his hair was like a big mop although he was bald on top. Each morning he would crawl down into the bilge section of the dredge and work all day in the mud, grime and grease that had collected over many years. I was told, by a member of the dredge crew, that each morning he would remove his leather boots, put on high rubber boots, remove his false teeth and put them in his leather boots for safekeeping. I never knew of him to change his clothes and was once told that he never took his clothes off - when a shirt, or some other article of clothing, began to wear out, he would put another over the top of the worn one and eventually the underneath one would turn into dust and disappear.

When the elderly fellow first arrived in camp, he made claim to a cot on the second floor of our two-storey bunkhouse and soon became very unpopular because of his looks, habits and odor. I believe it was his first evening in camp, while lying on his bunk chewing tobacco, he leaned over the side of the bunk and spit a great wad of tobacco juice towards the floor. There resulted a number of immediate and loud complaints about his spitting on the floor, but he shouted down all complainers, saying he was not spitting on the floor but between the planks. Several of us on the lower floor had been listening to that exchange and, on hearing him say he spit between the planks, we came roaring up the stairs, adding our demands to the others that there would be no spitting in the bunkhouse. The old fellow looked at the group facing him for about ten seconds, got up, made some comment about it being "too stuffy in here anyway", picked up his gear and walked out of the bunkhouse. He then set up a small canvas shelter in the bush, about 100 feet from the bunkhouse, and camped there for as long as I was around Arlington.

The other character was known as Dutch Albert - I don't recall ever hearing his proper name. Albert seemed always to be working. He worked for the Company during the summer season and he spent the rest of the year doing odd jobs around Dawson City. He did many miserable jobs that most men didn't care to do. He could be seen crawling under buildings to do foundation repairs, down in muddy holes replacing rotten timbers and cleaning sticks and roots out of drainage ditches.

But, Albert rarely spent any money. His clothes were always old and torn, and he grew a long bushy beard - possibly so he wouldn't have to buy razor blades. While we were at the Arlington camp, Albert would always sit at the dining room table until everyone else left, then he would go down the table, collect all the left over pancakes, toast, cake, bacon, etc, take them to his cabin and dry them for his winter's grubstake. There was no doubt that Albert had money because he never spent any, but just how much only he knew. He was said to have been a Catholic and it was rumored around camp that, during the previous winter, when the local Priest was making a trip to Rome, Albert donated $50,000 as a gift to the Pope. No doubt, at the time of this writing Albert would have been dead for many years. If he did give such a gift, I hope it paid dividends in his afterlife.

Les Millen and I became close friends and often went wandering around the hills under the late night sun. One evening we walked a few miles up along a small creek that flowed into Hunker Creek from the southwest. Far back in those woods we came across an old log cabin and, approaching it, we saw through the window, a man's head covered by a mop of long grey hair and a long grey beard. Not wanting him to think we were spying, we retreated a ways and began making a bit of noise to announce our presence. The old fellow left his chair and came out of his cabin. He didn't seem to want to talk much so we returned to the camp. But I made a point of going back to see the old man a couple of times. He was a loner and didn't have much to say, but he did tell me that it had been three years since he'd been to Arlington and it had been seven years since he'd been to Dawson City. He said the police called on him about once a year and brought his grub and supplies out. He had a mining claim and he took out just enough gold to pay for any supplies he needed. I never knew his name, nor did I ever see him again.

A mile or so upstream from the camp, gouged out of the top of a large hill on the southwest side of Hunker Creek, was a huge pit, known as Dago Gulch, which had been excavated by hydraulic means. The story of the Gulch, as told to me, was both interesting and amusing: During the early days of the gold rush on Hunker Creek, claims had been staked all along the valley bottom which, it was then believed, was the only place gold could be found. An Italian fellow, new in the country and with no experience in mining, came out to the creek to stake a claim, but found the valley bottom completely staked. He talked to one of the local miners and asked his advice about where he should stake a claim. The miner, thinking he would have some fun with this Dago and believing there was no gold on the hills, pointed to the top of one of the higher hills and told him to stake a claim up there. The miner then passed the word to others along the creek, so everyone the Italian talked to told him the same thing - "Stake your claim on the top of that hill!" Finally, the Italian climbed to the top of the hill and staked a claim. He hit pay dirt, took over a million dollars out of the hill and then sold the claim. By that time, of course, he realized what the miners had tried to do to him so, before leaving the country, he called on each of the miners who had given him advice and gave each of them five dollars, "to buy some rope to hang himself with."

When the thawing operations at Arlington closed, I was transferred to the stripping crew at Lower Sulphur where I worked until it got so cold the monitors began freezing up and stripping operations had to cease. From there I was transferred to a dredge-construction crew at Middle Sulphur where I remained until the latter part of October.

On arrival back in town that year, 1937, I found that the southward migration of caribou was under way and that at least one herd, of several hundred caribou, were migrating right through the streets of Dawson City. The animals weren't scared or flighty, they walked along the streets within a few feet of bystanders and they seemed to be as interested in looking at people

as the people were in looking at them - an amazing sight. Over the next few days, small groups of caribou could be seen drifting downstream, stuck in the soft slush ice of the Yukon River. They were still alive as they drifted past the town, but they wouldn't be alive for long and there was no way they could get out of that ice.

While talking to Martin Larsen one day in the Occidental Hotel, I asked him if he had ever known a fellow by the name of Mickey Munsen. To my surprise, he said he had served overseas with Mickey in World War 1. They had both served with the Motor Machine Gunners. Also, he and Mickey had both been members of the "Ways and Means Committee" which, he explained, investigated ways and means to get a drink. I wrote to Mickey, told him whom I had met and I believe there was some correspondence between them after almost 20 years.

Shortly after landing back in town that fall, I began working for Black Mike in his wood-camp at Rock Creek. I quit that job several weeks later and spent the remainder of the winter in town, at the Occidental Hotel. That period was described in *"Black Mike as I Knew Him"* in Issue # 8 of this magazine.

While I was staying at the Occidental Hotel, I believe in February or early March, the owner of the hotel, Tommy Doyle, died. He was an old timer and a member of YOOP (Yukon Order of Pioneers), so they got a number of his old friends, Martin Larsen among them, to act as pall bearers. On the day of the funeral the hotel bar was closed in respect to Tommy Doyle's passing; however, the group of pall bearers arranged that they would go into the bar (via the back door) for a drink or two in memory of Tommy. When the horse drawn hearse bearing the coffin left for the graveyard, it was followed by six staggering pall bearers; the procession wound its way up the hill, back of the town, to the graveyard. A short time later the same procession came back down the hill with the coffin still in place - no one had thought about digging a grave so Tommy had a second ride up the hill a few days later.

With the approach of longer daylight hours I began to get a bit more active: I took walks to Lousetown, to west Dawson and to Bear Creek; I climbed the dome behind Dawson to get a few pictures from the top; and I walked over the ice to Moosehide. Then, sometime about the latter half of February, the sun began to peek through between two hills to the south - just a few minutes a day at first, but a little longer each day. The town was coming alive again.

Later that spring, some of the more enterprising, young fellows around town got the idea of panning the ground from under the floors of the old saloons. Gold dust had been used as currency in the old days; gold dust got spilled. The floors were generally made of rough lumber and there were cracks between the boards. The idea was quite successful - some groups were taking out more than an ounce of gold a day.

I stood and watched one group working the underfloor area of one of the old saloons on Front Street; they were using a wash tub in place of a

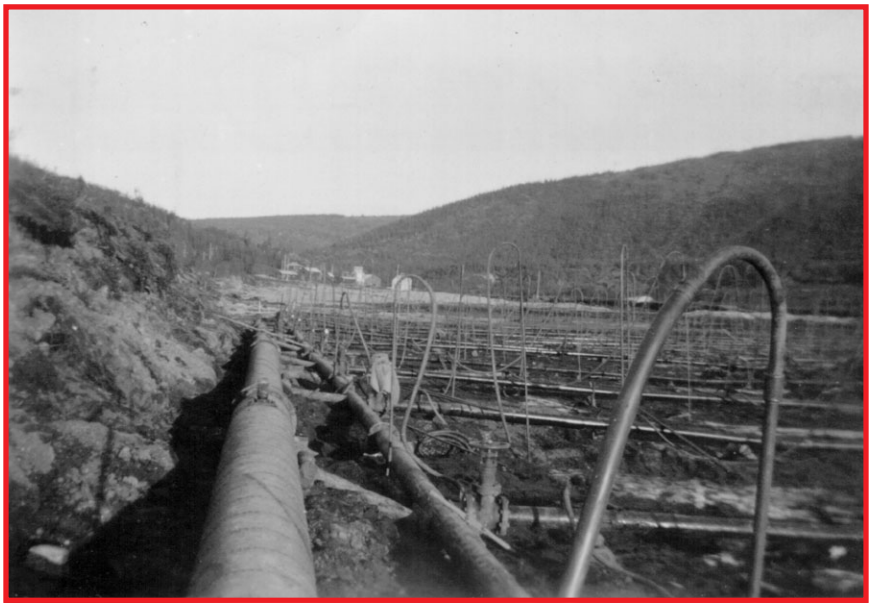
gold pan so they could handle more material in each washing. While sluicing off the water and muck there could be seen, coming to the surface every so often, a large yellowish blob that created considerable interest. The workers thought they'd found a large nugget, but on recovering it they found someone had melted down a piece of brazing rod and dumped a blob of yellow brass into the tub.

While waiting to go to work that spring I had received letters from several friends and relatives asking about work prospects around Dawson; I had written to them stating I thought prospects would be good; however, as spring approached workers began arriving in increasing numbers until I began to doubt the advice I had given so, being concerned they might not find work, I wrote again to each of them pointing out my concerns and suggesting it would probably not be a good time to come north.

In time I heard from all but one of those to whom I had written, each saying they had decided not to come. From one person I'd written; however, I'd had no reply and was becoming concerned that my letter might have gone astray. Then, just a day or so before I was scheduled to return to work, I was walking along Third Avenue when I came face to face with Graham Mitchell, the school chum I'd been concerned about.

Following an initial greeting and a couple of thumps to his chest, I asked, "Didn't you get my letter?"

He replied, "Oh sure, I got your letter but I decided to come anyway."



The mud flats (or thawing operation) at Arlington Camp near the mouth of Hunker Creek. Camp can be seen in the background. About July, 1937. [W.J. Swanson photo]

Although I felt rather like I was deserting him, I had to get back to work - I believe it was the following day that I returned to work at Lower Sulphur. But Graham did quite well on his own; he found odd jobs around town to keep him occupied and about three weeks later he began work on the stripping-crew at Middle Sulphur - about six miles from Lower Sulphur.

I also met several fellows from the Chilliwack area, some of whom I'd known previously; among them Ike and Julie Hendrix from the Chilliwack Valley Motorcycle Club and John Storey from the East Chilliwack area.

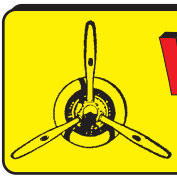
It was early April when I got began work that year - what a relief to get back to work. I'd also learned that we were getting a pay increase; if my memory serves me correctly, in 1937 the labour crews worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week, and we were paid $0.55 per hour straight time. In 1938, probably because of the arrival of an overabundance of work-seekers in Dawson City that spring, the working hours were reduced to nine hours a day for seven days a week. We were then paid $0.55 for up to 48 hours each week and $0.60 per hour for anything over 48 hours. When the water started to flow that spring I was again given the job of operating a monitor on the stripping gang and, because monitor men worked 12-hour shifts for seven days each week, my total pay increased somewhat.

I enjoyed working on the monitors, particularly right after start-up in the spring and those last weeks before shut-down in the fall. During those periods, with several hours of darkness each night, I viewed some of the most fantastic displays of Northern Lights I've ever seen or hope to see. Some nights I'd block the monitor in position, sit down and just watch the display for half an hour or so. There were continually moving patterns of those lights, greens, blues, reds, yellows and all colors between - to watch them created an almost-hypnotic sensation. Martin Larsen often spoke about the Northern Lights and he would say, "Sometimes I felt they were trying to talk to me." - a beautiful, unforgettable sight.

While on one of my trips to Granville Camp, I met a couple of interesting people: One was a tall, lean, red-haired fellow of about my own age. We rode in the back of a truck from Dawson, over the Summit and down along Dominion Creek. There were several of us on the truck and, although we talked much of the way, I don't recall any names being mentioned. The red-haired fellow, as I recall, got off at Upper Dominion camp; his name, I'm now sure, was Pierre Berton.

Another, John Hayden, was a welder working at Granville Camp - an Indian and a real outdoorsman. A few years previously John had been guide and dog team driver for an expedition into the St Elias Mountains, in the southwest corner of the Territory, which was sponsored by the National Geographic Society. Another winter he had spent trapping in the Blackstone River country northeast of Dawson and in late 1938 he chartered an aircraft to fly him, and his dogs, into the headwaters of the Macmillan River. He spent the winter there trapping, then mushed back to Dawson before the spring thaw.

To be continued in the next issue.



Winged Venus

By Fr. Andrew Cuschieri

The temperature was 50 below zero that day in March, 1949, when Tok Junction, Alaska, had a surprise visit from an English woman on her way to England, her home.

Marlo T., a woman in her late 30s or early 40s, set out from England in a single engine airplane to be the first woman in history to fly solo around the globe. She had hoped to fly over Alaska before the Arctic blizzards swept the land. Mechanical trouble encountered in India caused her to fall behind schedule.

What she had anticipated and dreaded, occurred. Flying over Fairbanks, Alaska, she ran into a severe snow storm and was forced to make an emergency landing near Tok. The plane came tumbling down and upon hitting the ground it was reduced to a pitiful state. Out of the wreckage came Mrs. Marlo T., a woman of stark beauty, with a flaming mane of hair down to her waist.

Marlo turned out to be a questionable personality. Her favourite pastime was partying, hitting the bottle, and having a liaison with any young, good-looking male available.

She soon wound a U.S. Army officer around her little finger. He immediately ordered a crew to dismantle the plane so it could be shipped to Edmonton for repair. It was cold and the crew was not in the mood for being obliging either to this highly sophisticated English lady or to the pompous officer.. A G.I. was inpired with an idea for finishing the job with utmost expediency. He took an axe and chopped the wings off.

My friend, Jim Murnion, was driving out of the yard in Fairbanks when he received orders to stop at Tok, drop the 40-foot trailer he was hauling and proceed instead with a flat bed loaded with Marlo's plane to Edmonton.

As Jim was pulling into the U.S. Army yard in Dawson Creek, the flying lady was waiting for him with a great, seductive smile. The minute he stepped out of the truck she threw herself over him, hugged him and flabbergasted him with a passionate kiss in appreciation for transporting her plane down the Alaska Highway in that blizzard.

"Gee, you are a handsome young man. I want to see more of you. How long are you going to be around?" she asked.

Jim, stupefied at such behaviour from a member of high British bourgeoisie, sheepishly answered: "We only stay long enough to get our rig serviced and get the air compressor of the truck in order."

"Oh, good," exclaimed la femme fatale, "let's go to my room."

This was utterly contrary to the moral values Jim was brought up with.

Besides, he had been happily married less than a year. By no means was he going to betray his young wife.

He jumped back into the cabin and called Louis Clark, his driving partner, who was still lying in the sleeper.

"Here is a rich and gorgeous gal who badly needs a date, Louis," whispered Jim.

"Oh, yeah," murmured Louis, "I am a millionaire too. Are you back again with your usual jokes ? Who do you think you are kidding ?"

"If you think it's a joke, just peep out of the window," Jim assured him.

Louis was still a bachelor and bragged about his amorous exploits. He peeped out of the window. He took one look at la femme Anglaise, his eyes popped out of their sockets, his heart burst in sparks of passion, and he jettisoned himself out of the truck. The sparks of their chemistry was instantaneous and mercurial.

The repairs on the truck delayed the trip for a day. The man in charge of the shop invited Jim, Louis and Marlo to his house for supper. And what a supper it was! Marlo and Louis made the best of it. At cocktail time, before dinner, after gurgling several drinks, they turned on the music and danced cheek to cheek. When alcohol and movement got hold of them, they settled down on their chairs side by side. It was then that Louis noticed something sticky hanging loose from Marlo's hair. Louis, out of curiosity, pulled it out, and off came the long, dazzling hair of Venus. An almost bald head was exposed. Everyone felt embarrassed but Marlo. "Oh, hell," she said, "I am tired wearing it, anyhow."

That was the first and last time Jim and Louis saw the flying lady. Jim read later in the paper that her plane was beyond repair and that a company in Edmonton had furnished her with a new plane. She managed to land safely in England a few months later amidst a cheering ovation by her countrymen. ❐

Caribou on the Alaska Highway, followed by a wolf pack (which I missed). SH photo.

The Goldseeker

Part Four of Ten

The first three parts of this story were published in Yukoner Magazines No. 6, 7 and 8. For those who missed those issues, here is a synopsis of the story so far:

At St. Stephen, New Brunswick, a young fellow named Henry Carlsbad is growing up on a farm with his mother and sisters. One afternoon he falls down an abandoned well. A mysterious power enables him to escape drowning and after that he becomes a misfit in the county. At the same time, he has begun courting an incredibly beautiful girl, Elizabeth, who lives with her English father. Hank (Henry) catches the father beating Elizabeth and he and the father have a fight in which the father tries to kill him. He injures Beth's father and extracts a promise from him that he would never again abuse his daughter.

Hank leaves his homeland for the Klondike. Elizabeth (Beth) and Hank have sworn to marry and she makes him promise to forsake all violence. He has heard about the gold discoveries in the Yukon and decides to make his way up there.

Intending to ride a train to the Canadian west coast, he instead finds a job on a ship bound for San Franscisco, which takes three months to sail around South America and up the west coast. Hank gets into a conflict with the captain and is put off the ship onto a tiny island. He has already broken his vow not to fight anyone because he punched the cook who had been abusing a black galley helper. The ship is caught by a storm as it leaves Hank behind, and part of the cargo—many kegs of rum—are washed up on shore.

Hank is picked up a couple of months later. He has survived on a fewvegetables and lots of rum. Delerious, he is dumped into an insane asylum in 'Frisco. There he meets a huge epileptic by the name of Fauntleroy. Together they escape the asylum and are about to take part in the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. None of Hank's letters have reached his fiance in New Brunswick.

I slouched in a big armchair in the front parlour of the brothel. Faunt had gone upstairs with a dark-haired lady who was perhaps 30 years old,

with a tired smile and huge breasts that glowed whitely through her gauze nightgown. I had Faunt's roll of money in my pocket, less the 20 dollars we had given the older woman who let us in.

Ten, fifteen minutes went by. I heard a scream from the upper floor. It didn't sound like a cry of pleasure. Then, a pounding on the stairs and from the back of the house, female voices arguing.

The madam strode into the parlour, her chalky face glaring at me. She gestured for me to follow and we clumped up the narrow stairway to the tiny room where Fauntleroy lay. He slept peacefully on the brass bed and I bounced him up and down but his eyes never fluttered. I gave the madam another twenty dollars and and tried to explain about epilepsy and how this was a test for the Klondike. Again, her powdered face squeezed into a hideous scowl and she clumped down the stairs. I followed her and went out onto the veranda to wait.

Two hours later I could feel the old house tremble under his weight as Fauntleroy tottered down the stairs. I gave him his roll of money and we walked slowly down the street.

"Let's find a saloon, Faunt."

"Okay."

We came to a very ornate hotel, four stories high, and walked into the crowded saloon on the ground floor. Men's voices blended into a meaningless roar, broken only by the clinking of glasses. Yet, I could hear the words "gold" and "Klondike" jumping above the pool of sound, like fish breaking the surface of a lake.

We ordered rum for me and whisky for Faunt. I gulped down the rum and ordered another.

I looked at my partner. I could tell by the defeated look in his eyes that he knew what I had to say.

"You can't go to the Klondike, Faunt. You would get us killed. You've heard what it's like on the trail. What if we were shooting the rapids and you took one of your spells? You know what I mean, don't you, Faunt?"

We sat there, neither looking at the other. Faunt played with his drink while I ordered a third for myself. I was sorry I ordered the rum. For me it was just like the old saw: 'a man takes a drink, the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes the man.' As my head started spinning round and round, Faunt wandered over to another table where a little fellow in a top hat was lecturing about something. I could tell he was talking about gold and the Klondike.

So what else is new, I thought. And then I noticed, this little fellow with the booming voice was dressed just like my partner, all in black. They could have been brothers, except for the tremendous difference in size. Then, as I tipped the fourth double shot of rum to my lips, I could see Faunt and the little guy in the top hat sitting at a table by themselves.

A waiter brought me another drink, which I didn't want but I swallowed it anyway. Then, the same person, wearing a hotel uniform, guided me up many flights of stairs to a room where I fell into a deep sleep.

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"Hank! Hank! Wake up!"

I opened one eye to see Faunt sitting on the other bed, which bowed under his weight. He clapped his hands as he yelled again, "Wake up!"

"Faunt! You take it easy! What's going on?"

"We're going to the Yukon. All of us."

"We are? When?"

"Soon. And we don't have to worry about the rapids. We're going with the best riverboat man in the country. We're going with Swiftwater Bill. And the rest of his ah, crew."

I swung my feet over the side of the bed. Sledgehammers of pain jarred my head and I couldn't focus my eyes. All I could see was Faunt hulking blackly on the other bed. 'Never again,' I thought. 'No more rum for me. This is it."

"All right, Faunt. Tell me the story."

"Well, Hank," he said, "Our luck has really changed. We are now shareholders in a gold mine and dancehall in Dawson City. We're partners with Swiftwater Bill. He's got everything arranged: a ship will take us up the coast to Skagway and then a wagon train will haul us over the White Pass. No climbing, no hassles. I can handle it easy, Hank. We're being paid, too."

"For what?" I asked.

His huge mouth opened into a grin, showing his perfectly white teeth with the fangs at the corners of his mouth. "We're the guards for the whole trip. All we have to do is watch everything."

He grinned again. I knew something was wrong here.

"Tell me, Faunt. What's the cargo?"

"We're taking 60 cases of rum, 75 cases of whiskey, and 25 women. It's all for the Monte Carlo Dancehall in Dawson. Of which we are part owners."

"Faunt, this is crazy. You expect me to sit on 25 cases of rum—for 2000 miles? And you can't handle women. We've already proven that. We're not going to do it, Faunt. We'll find some other way to the Klondike. I'll take you with me after all. Let's go and buy and outfit and be on our way."

"Can't do, Hank."

"Why in hell not?"

"Because Swiftwater Bill has all our money."

I leaped from the bed and headed for the door, with Faunt tramping along behind me. We entered the saloon where Swiftwater entertained a small group of women at a table near the door. He saw us coming and stood up, waving his arms grandlly in the air.

"Ladies! Look who's here! My partners in the Monte Carlo, Henry Carlsbad and Lord Fauntleroy!" I knew then that in my drunkenness of the day before, I had called Faunt by his nickname. Now everyone thought he was an English lord. The trouble was, Faunt had no accent. He spoke with perfect diction as though reading from a book. Well, maybe that would fool everybody. He seemed very proud of the title. The women cooed as all heads turned to look at us. Their eyes quickly shifted from me to concentrate on

Lord Fauntleroy. He had surely came up in the world since we had escaped the asylum. As I looked around the room, at the shouting, gesturing people, all vying for attention, I could tell no difference between them and the people we had left behind at Bedlam.

Faunt sat down amongst the women. I sat by Swiftwater and cupped my hands over his ear and told him we had to talk, alone. He shoved back his chair and we went over to another table.

"Where's all the money, Swiftwater?" I asked, using my sternest voice. He looked at me with the shining, wicked eyes of a cornered rat.

"Invested. Fauntleroy's brother has put up another $5000 so you guys can take the 'rich man's route' into the Klondike. That means you go by boat the whole way. No climbing, no packing, no rapids to run. The brother says you are the only person in the world who can handle Faunt so he has paid your way too."

So I started to think. We would reach the goldfields without any hardship and none of it was my money anyhow. Swiftwater reached inside his black coat and for a second I thought he would pull a gun. Between his forefinger and thumb he held a gold nugget, about the size of an acorn. He let me handle it and I gazed at the nugget, hypotized. It looked dull yet it glowed, like the yellow of a woman's hair. It did something to me, deep inside.

"Yep. Gold. That's what we're going for," he said, his black little eyes watching my face. "Gold. It'll buy you anything in the world. Except for one certain lady."

"And who is that?"

"She's the Queen of the Klondike. Also known as the Frozen Queen. She hates men, so they say, but takes all their gold anyway."

Swiftwater's eyes softened as he spoke of this lady. She came from somewhere in Canada, claiming to be 21 years old, although she looked younger. She had arrived in the Yukon that spring of 1898. Among all the dancehall girls, actresses, and those just looking for a rich gold miner, the Frozen Queen outshone them all, like the brightest light in a universe of stars.

He dropped the nugget into his pocket again. "Well, I must be going. I'll be in Dawson City ahead of you and I'll meet you there. Take good care of my girls and whiskey."

I never saw Swiftwater again, although in the years to come, I would hear every detail of his exploits. I thought about his description of Queen Beth of the Klondike. A shiver went through me before I could think more about this information. My Beth wouldn't parade herself before throngs of love-starved men, would she? And besides, she had no way of getting out of New Brunswick. There were thousands of women in Canada with that name. I resolved to send off another letter. I had no way of knowing if any of my letters had ever reached her. I would mail one from 'Frisco and another from Vancouver just to be sure. I had been gone from her for a year and half.

At the other table, Faunt grinned fiercely at the ladies. To my mind, he

would frighten any creature on earth, but the women smiled at him and paid me no attention whatsoever. Perhaps I ought to get a black suit, I thought. Leaving the ladies behind, we went to our room for a night's sleep. At midnight, I heard Faunt thrashing on his bed and I knew he had taken another bad spell. I knelt by him placed my hand on his head, trying to clear my brain of worldly thoughts so the healing could happen. This time no hot currents flowed from anywhere and at length I gave up and went back to my own bed. Perhaps on the ship I can heal him, I thought, once we're out of these crazy cities and on water. Water, where I always found myself no matter what other plans I made...

Faunt and I rode a train to Seattle where we located the steamship agency who, sure enough, had everything arranged. It would be a 3000-mile sail on a coastal steamer to St. Michael in Alaska. Then we would board a sternwheeler for another 1700-mile journey up the Yukon River to Dawson City. The agent couldn't say how long all this would take: it depended on the speed of the vessels, on weather, on sandbars... sandbars? Yes, he said, the sternwheelers sometimes got caught on river bars.

Everybody knows the story of the Klondike Gold Rush, how Seattle was the main jumping off place, and how 100 thousand people set out for the goldfields. Only 30 or 40 thousand of them made into the Klondike after much hardship climbing the Chilkoot Trail or trudging through the White Pass. Then, when they got there, they found out all the good claims were staked. Most of them turned around and went home.

It wasn't that way with us. At Seattle we boarded a first-class ship with cabins for all of our party, and the liquor was stowed under decks. Swiftwater Bill swindled a lot of people out of their money—but he wasn't cheap with it. A lot of people got off the ship at Juneau, Alaska. We lost over half the dancehall girls: some hooked up with returning gold miners; some decided to go with the crowds of goldseekers at Skagway and Dyea.

It didn't matter to me. I had made my vow of chastity to Beth and Faunt wasn't taking any chances. As we sailed further up the coast, his spells got closer and closer together until he started disappearing to his cabin during the day. One night I tried the old powers on him but nothing seemed to work any more.

I told Faunt to dig through all his philosophy and religious books and see if he could discover what we were doing wrong. We had to find out or he would never survive the trip up the Yukon River. I worried about him falling overboard on the big ship as he walked to the galley or along the decks. On a sternwheeler everyone would be crowded into much smaller quarters and anything might happen.

At last we anchored at the island of St. Michael far up the coast of Alaska. A small packet came to unload the ship and it took dozens of trips for all the freight and passengers to be landed in the settlement.

St. Michael had been built by the Russians before the U.S. government bought the whole territory from them. Now the Alaska Commercial Com-

pany had a big warehouse here from which they supplied the settlements along the Yukon River. It was a forlorn, grey, treeless place and some of the women were wishing they had stayed on the brightly lit ship that had already departed for the south.

Our sternwheeler, called the Flora, didn't seem big enough to take us all. A large scow had been lashed to the front of her, piled high with freight, so that none of us would see the waters ahead. Only the skipper or pilot could see over the barge from the wheelhouse. But we scrambled aboard in the morning and were on our way across sixty miles of open sea before we would reach the Yukon River.

With St. Michael still in sight behind us, the sea began a gentle swell, so that we rolled over little hills of water in our flat-bottomed vessel. I had been enough other swatted mosquitos.

His experience in 'Frisco had made Fauntleroy quite leery of getting close to a woman. I had my vows to keep. But in these close quarters we couldn't help but get to know our female companions. I began to note their various personalities and different physical attributes. We learned each others' names and where everyone came from. Whenever we stopped to take on more wood for the boiler, I noticed which women looked at the men on shore.

Then, from time to time, I felt a pair of eyes looking my way. It was always the same lady, small in stature, quieter than the others. In spite of myself I looked at her often and sometimes our eyes met. When that happened it was as though a telegraph wire connected us, sending a electric message that tingled somewhere down in my solar plexus.

"You know, Faunt, these women on board, they are starting to look like people. You know what I mean?"

We were lying under the tarp on the afterdeck, scarcely able to breathe so tightly did we bind it to the deck to keep out the mosquitos.

"I know, Hank. I always thought women to be creatures rather than real persons like you and I. Transplanted by the gods from some other world, put here to keep us from reverting to our animal state."

"Faunt, you're talking from one of your books again. I'm trying to say that these ladies just seem to be trying to survive in this world, like men do. You know what I mean?"

We lay back on our blankets, listening to the sternwheel churning the water behind us. For the first time since we escaped the asylum, I could think about the mysteries of life and wonder why we were here. Especially here, on the deck of this boat heading into a great unknown.

"You notice, Faunt, how completely different every human being is from every other human being? We're all different and we're all the same. Since the world began, there's been nobody exactly like us. And nobody ever born in the future will be the same as us. And yet, we've all had good times and terrible times and everyone has a dream of how things will be someday. How many people's dreams come true do you think?"

I stopped talking because Faunt had begun to snore. I reached over

and touched his shoulder. I felt a gentle, loving warmth go through my chest and down my arm. Faunt's snores ceased, his breathing stopped for a second or two and then resumed. He sighed in his sleep and all was quiet again except for the throbbing of the steam engine and the whirring of the paddlewheel. Then, a scream from the galley. Some of the women were fighting again.

We stopped in the morning to take on firewood. Faunt and I helped to load it on the sternwheeler. The shore crew had all left, presumably for the Klondike. We had not stopped at the little settlements of Nulato, Tanana, and the others because the skipper feared they would want our supplies. That night, our eighth night on the river, we passed Fort Yukon. It looked totally deserted.

Now the river spread out. We floated in the middle of it and could see nothing but shallow water and islands for ten miles on either side of us. The current had slowed and so we made better time against this lazier current. The country around us was flat and devoid of human life. We saw thousands of geese and then a moose floundering near an island.

Our Indian pilot seemed to know where to go among the maze of channels. Since we were approaching the middle of July, the sun began to disappear for two to three hours at night. The captain always anchored near an island and we spent the short nights flailing at mosquitos.

One morning, I felt our speed slacken even though the steam engine laboured with the same rythm as always. I looked back and saw that the paddlewheel was churning a soupy mixture of mud and water. Then we ceased moving altogether. The engine stopped and started again, with the paddlewheel in reverse. No movement of the boat. Skipper tried again to go forward. Nothing.

The nearest island appeared to be a hundred yards away. I grabbed a sounding pole and thrust it into the water on the port side. It stuck just a few feet down and I had to yank hard to get it back. The captain kept trying to move us. With the paddlewheel reversed, I could see we were only sweeping more mud under the boat. In forward, we were wedging ourselves further into the bottom of the river.

Skipper came down to the galley. "We have to wait for the river to rise," he said. "You folks can see how cloudy it is. It should rain today and that'll bring the river up enough to get us out of this slough. In the meantime, just relax."

We had been relaxing for ten days already. Nobody could get off the boat unless they were prepared to wade to one of the little mud patches that passed for islands. The captain had gone out onto the barge with the deckhands. They had closed the flaps of their little tent and from the sound of their voices, they seemed to be playing cards. For Faunt and myself, and the dozen women, nobody showed any concern whatsoever.

I stuck the sounding pole back into the water and marked the river level by scratching the pole with my knife. I did this every day for five days. In that time the river level had dropped a few inches. I told Faunt about it and again he roared, "Goddamm that Swiftwater Bill!"

Screams again from the galley. This time accompanied by slaps and thuds. We had decided to stay away from the women completely. Up to now we hadn't even learned all their names. The screams and slaps continued and I started for the galley to check on them. What if they started injuring each other seriously? What would we do then?

A big woman with a jutting chin and wide, wide hips had another girl down on the floor. The girl on her back was the same little one, the pretty, dark-eyed one who had been glancing my way for most of the trip. I yelled for the big one to stop. Nobody paid any attention. I grasped her shoulder and pulled her back and onto her feet. The other girl jumped up only to be knocked down again by her adversary.

The other women stood back against one wall of the galley, watching the fracas, brought out of their boredom for a few moments. I could tell they would do nothing even if their smallest member should be beaten to death. I stood between the big lady and her victim and reached down to pull the little one up. She threw her arms around my neck and wouldn't let go. I felt her tears on my neck.

I enclosed her with my arms and carried her out onto the deck. Faunt looked at us, slack-jawed, every fang in his mouth showing. I set her down near our makeshift tent and she sat there crying. Already I could hear a commotion in the galley—another fight starting.

"Faunt," I said. "We're in charge of this cargo, right? That's how you got us into this situation."

"Yes," he said. "But I didn't think it would turn out like this, Hank."

"Never mind. You go out on the barge and break into those cases of whisky and rum. I want a bottle for everyone. And hurry, before we have all those dancehall girls wind up in our tent."

Faunt grinned at the idea but clambered over the bow and disappeared among the piles of cargo on the barge.

Faunt came back carrying two wooden boxes of liquor. He took them into the galley and I heard him roar: "Drink, ladies! Drink, for heaven's sake, and don't stop till all this is gone!"

I could hear coos of delight and glasses clinking. Faunt came out of there carrying two bottles for us. I grabbed one from his hand and tipped it up till I felt the fire in my stomach and the rest of my muscles relaxing for the first time since we pulled out of 'Frisco. The lady I had rescued went back to her group while Faunt and I stretched out on the afterdeck.

Within the hour we heard female voices singing, their songs carrying out over the river in a beautiful melody. Then, laughter. All was well on our little ship. And we had plenty of liquor, enough to last till the rains came to raise us from our prison here on the mud flats of the Yukon River.

I guzzled the better part of my bottle of rum and crawled under our tarp to sleep. All was silent on the river: the engine shut down, the women asleep, even the waterfowl were glad to rest. I had been gone from my home for more than two years. I thought of my mother and sisters, of Beth, of many things from the past. The future I left to the gods with one small hope—that my way would be smoother than it had been on this trek to the Klondike.

I dreamed I held a woman in my arms there on the river, under the greasy tarp, with Faunt snoring loudly a few feet away. I tried to wake from it, to push her away and get up. She had her arms around my neck with her fingers clasped and she wouldn't let go. I felt her breath on my face and all sorts of instincts stirring inside me. Again I tried to rise but her arms clasped me more tightly.

In the darkness of the short night I couldn't see who she was. She murmured my name and I came fully awake, slipping out from her arms. I found the lantern and struck a match. The light from the match showed her face. I felt relief because it was she, the one I had rescued the day before. Then I felt horrified. What had we done? What about the vows to my betrothed in New Brunswick?

I lit the lantern and then I tried to wake her but she only sighed in her sleep and reached for me again. Her clothes lay in a heap between us and Fauntleroy. I would dress her and carry her back to the galley. I sorted through the clothes and couldn't figure what went first or second, inside or outside. I had never touched a woman's clothes before.

I could see that the plan would never work. Except for one small nagging doubt, I was convinced that nothing had happened. I covered the woman with a blanket and then shook Fauntleroy. He sat up right away, looking at me and the woman under the blanket. The lantern shone directly in his face and I could see his eyes grow bigger and bigger.

"Not now, Faunt. Not now!"

He settled down and then I gave him the news: we were getting out of here.

"How?"

"We're taking the lifeboat. The captain and crew were drinking all day today. They'll be asleep. You go into the galley and get some food. Whatever you can find. I'll unlash the lifeboat and get things ready out here."

"Hank! Her name is Clementine. Clemmy for short. She's no dancehall girl. She's from a farm. She's only on this trip to make some money for her folks. She had no money to get to the Yukon so she lied and said said she could dance and sing. Swiftwater gave her a job and paid her fare. She's not like the others, Hank."

"And how do you know all this, Faunt?"

"We talked, Hank. While you were asleep. She's in love with you, Hank. Oh, l how I wish it was me."

"Well, we're going anyway. C'mon."

"Hank, if we leave her, the other woman will beat on her again. They all hate Clemmy because she's nice. You know what I mean, Hank?"

"No."

"Well, you go, Hank. I'll stay here with Clem. Or else we have to take her with us."

I had been sitting on the bare deck with my hands by my sides. I lifted my right hand. It felt wet. We stopped talking to listen. What was that? That drumming sound?

Rain. Rain beating on the tarp and leaking under it. I crawled outside to look at the sky. Dawn was trying to break against the dark clouds over us and the rain kept spattering down onto the deck. I could see the big drops splashing onto the river. The sky everywhere looked dark and cloudy and then I saw a flash of lightning on the north side of the river. The river carried the sound of the thunder clap until if felt like the boat had been struck.

Clementine stirred in her sleep. I could see how pretty she was, even with her matted hair and skin oiled from the lack of washing over the past weeks.

"The river's gonna rise, Faunt. I'm going for the skipper."

I left them there in the tent and ran for the captain's cabin. He had fallen from his tiny bed and lay on the floor beside it, snoring. I retreated to the galley and stepped over all the ladies to light the stove. I set the coffee pot on it and left it to boil. I fetched the sounding pole and stuck it over the side. Aha. The river had come up three or four inches overnight. I kept busy, trying not to think about the woman in the tent.

I jumped out onto the barge and tried to rouse the deckhands. They too had drank themselves into oblivion. Was there no such thing as a normal drinker on this boat? Only one person left to try: the engineer. I found him sitting on his cot, smoking his pipe and pouring another drink into his glass. I snatched the bottle from his hand.

"The river is rising! Let's fire up and get us out of here!" I cried. I helped him off his bunk and out onto the deck. We stumbled down to the engine room where I left him to fire up the boiler. It would take at least two hours to build a head of steam and I could see the rain had stopped falling. We had to move, now. I tried again to wake the captain then ran down below to help the engineer.

"When we're ready to move, I'll let you know," he said.

Reluctantly, I opened our tent and went in. Fauntleroy and Clem were sitting together on his bedroll. He had a book open and I could see it was about dancing. Faunt was teaching her how to dance out of a book! He had a book on everything a human being could possibly do.

"Why don't you just show her how to dance, Faunt?"

"We're both learning, Hank. Neither of us has ever danced before."

"If this boat doesn't move, we're leaving, Faunt. Without the lady here."

Clem had yet to look at me, nor had we spoken a word to each other. She began to cry, her small shoulders heaving. Faunt placed a huge arm around her and pulled her close so she practically disappeared under his arm.

"You wouldn't go without us, would you, Hank?"

"No, I suppose not."

With Faunt comforting Clem, I left them there in the tent. In the galley, all the women were asleep on the floor. I stepped over them and grabbed a can of beans from the cupboard. I stood there eating, gazing down at the human beings lying side by side. Big ones, small ones, fat ones, thin ones.

Some with pug noses, some with huge Roman noses, some were beautiful, most were plain. Black hair, brown hair, no two were alike except for this: all were misfits running from their former lives. Through Clemmy (who told Faunt) I had learned that all of the dancehall girls had had abusive husbands, fathers or uncles who molested them, or else they had been orphaned or abandoned at an early age. All of them loved alcohol in any form.

Then I thought about Faunt and myself. We too had escaped a nightmarish existence. Perhaps Clementine was the only normal person on the boat. She was here to help her family. Perhaps I had better pay more attention to her; she might be the only sane person I would meet in the Yukon.

I heard the boiler hissing and the big steam engine began to rumble. Again I went to wake the skipper but he was gone from his cabin. I found him at the wheel, ready to steer. I stood there by him. He had already pulled the control lever to full reverse, waiting for the engineer to give him some power. The boat shuddered as the paddlewheel began to turn.

We backed up for half a mile. The pilot showed up in the wheelhouse and when the engine kicked into forward, we went up another channel. I could tell the pilot was guessing where to go among the hundreds of islands but at least we were travelling upstream again.

The three of us stood there on the foredeck looking at an amazing sight. Dozens of small boats were passing us on either side. Each boat seemed loaded to the gunnels with people and their goods.

"Looks like a stampede," said the captain later.

"Do you suppose there's an epidemic in Dawson City?"

"I don't know," said the skipper. "I just hope we don't run into one of those boats."

We chugged along through the Yukon River flats. We saw another boat headed downstream. The water began to clear a bit and after two days, we could see it narrow into a much smaller, faster river, hemmed in on the sides by hills and cliffs. Now we could pull fresh water from over the side. Everyone was able to bathe again. I had forbade anyone to touch the whiskey and rum, although we had drank a third of it during our days and nights on the sandbar.

Clem and Faunt sat in the tent most of the time, talking, reading, only coming out of their private world when I interrupted. Clem always went silent when I was near and looked down at the deck. One evening while she slept, Faunt and I strolled out to the bowdeck and he talked about Clementine.

First and foremost, he said, Clem was in love with me and would have no other for the rest of her life. We would marry and leave the Yukon with a fortune.

"Did you tell her I already have a fiance?" I asked him.

"Yes. But I also told her you haven't seen her for two years. That this fiance of yours might not even know if you're alive, Hank."

"Well, I am alive. You tell Clemmy to get someone else."

"That'll just make it worse, Hank. She'll be more determined than ever."

I went back to the tent to get my bedroll only to find Clemmy curled up on it. Quietly, so as not to awaken her, I took some of Faunt's bedding and crept out to the barge. There I made myself a sleeping arrangement beside a crate of rum. We would be in Dawson City in a few days.

Somehow I had become responsible for two people besides myself. And I had yet to save a penny toward my real dream of marrying Beth and creating a life for us somewhere. I had to find gold in the Klondike—fast.

On both sides of the river, mountains loomed into the sky. In some places the cliffs came right down to the water's edge and we passed through an immense canyon that the river had cut out of solid rock. Other, smaller rivers came into the Yukon River through small, wooded valleys. It was at these places that we loaded up with firewood.

At one of these wood stops, a small boat carrying two men pulled in for repairs. I asked one of them why they were heading away from the goldfields.

"There are no gold claims left. Everything is staked for a hundred miles around Dawson. And without gold, nobody can afford to live there. We're getting out before winter. My God, man, a candle costs a dollar! Can you imagine sitting all winter in the dark? Freezing? With no candles and maybe no firewood. Dawson is a hellhole, full of swamp fever. Lineups everywhere."

They went back to patching their boat. I would say nothing to Faunt about this depressing news. The gods had brought me from New Brunswick, across the two oceans of the world, had rescued me from the worst that humanity could deliver—and they would not abandon me now. I had no choice but to believe in them.

That night we made our last stop before the Klondike. I lay in my blankets on the barge, looking up at the northern lights flashing their colours all over the sky. I could see my breath on the frosty air. Tomorrow would be the last day of August. We would have perhaps a month, maybe more, maybe less to establish ourselves for the winter.

Ourselves? I thought. Yes. I had accepted that Clemmy would be part of our lives. She was very sweet, after all. So shy I knew she wouldn't bother me out here on the scow. She couldn't read or write except what Fauntleroy had already taught her. She couldn't dance or sing. She seemed terrified of men except for Faunt and myself although I hadn't seen her in other situations. Yet she lent a comfort to our group that no extra man ever could. We would provide for her somehow.

About four o'clock the next day we passed the big slide known as Moosehide Mountain and skipper swung the boat into shore. This was Dawson City.

In everyone's life there are special moments, special happenings that seem to be a natural progression of events. We take these moments for granted. So intent was I on how the captain was maneuvering in the very swift current that I only glanced at the scene on the riverbank. Hundreds of tents and small boats lined the shore. Small log jams that had been floated from somewhere upstream jutted out into the current, with FOR SALE signs

perched on them. The street behind the shoreline seemed to consist mostly of saloons in front of which hundreds, perhaps thousands of people shuffled back and forth.

Even above the noise of our engine, I could hear the howling and baying and barking of dogs. A sawmill's blade screeched intermittently, temporarily overpowering the howling of the dogs and as we nudged the riverbank and the engineer stopped the paddlewheel, I could also hear another muted, screeching: fiddles playing in the saloons.

This was the scene in the land of Eldorado in the fall of 1898. I still feel a thrill as I remember it now. I was witness to a flash of history that no one will ever see again and my only regret is that I didn't stop to savour it, to take in every detail so I could re-live it all in later years. But we had no time for that. Skipper wanted us off his boat so he could head downstream to beat the pack ice and low water levels that come before winter.

A man holding a sign—MONTE CARLO SALOON—stood in the watching crowd. I made for him and asked if he was working for Swiftwater Bill.

"No!" he roared. "Swiftwater Bill doesn't own anything around here. This is my cargo and these women belong to me. Where are the rest of them?"

I told him about our trip. His name was Jack Smith, and he was the real owner of the dancehall. Swiftwater had almost bankrupted him, he said, and if any of this cargo was short, he would be after Faunt and I to pay.

I turned back to where Clemmy and Faunt stood, looking bewildered and fearful. Jack Smith followed me. He had no trouble picking out the ladies who belonged to his company.

"And who is this woman?" he said, pointing to Clemmy. "She doesn't look like part of the group. But if she is, she has to work off what she owes for travel expenses."

"I'm with him," she said, pointing at me. Faunt stood beside her, his arm around her shoulders. Her head came to about the level of his shirt pocket.

"And who is that big gazooney there all in black?" said Jack Smith.

"That's Fauntleroy," I answered. "He put up the money for this trip."

And then Clemmy added, quietly, "Lord Fauntleroy."

"Oh no,! That's just a nickname!" Faunt had a bitter look about him. I knew Clemmy's remark about being my woman had stung him. His huge head quivered around on his neck and his lips pursed shut except for his wolf-like fangs that always showed whether he smiled or sulked. The crowd stepped back from him as if they sensed he might explode. I heard them talking among themselves and the word "lord" popped out from the murmur of their voices, once, twice, and again.

So we stood there on the Dawson waterfront, penniless, three misfits being examined by the crowd. I knew Faunt was about to lose it any second now. Jack Smith stared at Clemmy. I could tell he was wondering why the prettiest woman off the boat would be with Faunt and I.

"Ladies and gentlemen! This boat leaves in the morning. Line up here

for your tickets. First come, first served. No freight allowed. Just yourselves and enough food for a week."

It was the captain blaring though his megaphone. The crowd all turned toward the sternwheeler where he stood on the wheelhouse deck. I gestured to Faunt and he followed me up the grade onto the muddy street above. He had Clemmy by the hand and at last we cleared the throngs of people. I could see Jack Smith herding his group of dancehall girls down the street toward the Monte Carlo Dancehall & Saloon.

"You two wait here," I said. "I'm going after Jack Smith to see what happened to all those shares we bought in his company."

I trudged up the street, my boots growing heavy with mud. I knew my chances of getting money from Jack Smith were zero but I had to have time to think. As I got to the dancehall I saw a poster on the door proclaiming the "Queen of the Klondike" would be performing tonight. Her face, sketched roughly by an artist, looked familiar and I felt a vague discomfort when I saw the description beneath: Queen Beth, age 21, dazzling beauty, imported from the East, recites new poetry nightly,

I looked around inside. Gamblers sat playing poker at tables set out all over the floor. It was too early for the nightly shows that would be performed on the big stage at the back of the saloon. The building was smaller than the big clubs I had seen in 'Frisco and Seattle but every bit as fancy. I tapped a waiter on the shoulder and asked for Jack Smith.

"He's in his office, sir. Can I tell him who's asking?"

"Yes. Tell him one his partners is here."

I sat at an empty table to wait. I waved another waiter off. He probably suspected I had no money. An hour later Jack Smith came down the little stairs beside the stage. Behind him clumped two big men and they stopped in front of my table. Jack Smith stepped back from between the bouncers and they grinned at each other before they looked again at me. The leer on their faces changed when I straightened up, my chair crashing to the floor behind me.

Their nostrils flared as they sniffed for fear. They hesitated, judging whether to attack or wait. They waited. I looked them in the eye, from one to the other, then turned and left the saloon. I had my answer from Jack Smith.

Again I slithered through the mud of Front Street to where I had left Faunt and Clemmy. I saw her running up from the riverbank, smiling, bouncing as she ran. She caught my hand and pulled me toward the river. I shook her hand away and followed her. We came to Fauntleroy seated on a huge mound that was covered with a brown tarp. He too had a big grin on his face.

"Hank. Where have you been? Look, Hank, all this is ours."

"What's ours?"

"This pile of supplies. I bought it from three men leaving on the boat tomorrow. They couldn't take it with them and they wanted out of here. We have everything: food, mining equipment, blankets—everything we can possibly need."

"And how did you pay for all this, Faunt?"

"Actually, I haven't paid yet. I sent a note with them addressed to my brother. He either pays them for the goods or we come back to 'Frisco. I'm sure he'll pay, Hank. And those fellows didn't seem to care that much. They said coming here was the biggest mistake of their lives."

We pulled out two tents from under the mound of equipment and rigged one for Clemmy, the other for Faunt and myself. Exhausted by the day's events, we slept through our first night in the Klondike. In the morning I headed uptown. My feet broke through a thin, frozen layer of muck to sink to my ankles. Even at that time of day, thousands of goldseekers churned the muddy streets of Dawson. Narrow boardwalks snaked along in front of the permanent buildings; they too were covered with people going back and forth. Hundreds arrived every day; more were leaving, hoping to get out before freeze-up.

Every kind of enterprise you can imagine had a sign or banner advertising their services. I stepped into a tent selling maps and compasses and the owner asked straight away if I was interested in buying his business. I told him I had no money. He chewed on that for a moment but he had no customers so he decided to talk.

"You won't need any of this stuff. There's a beaten down trail going everywhere in the Yukon. All you have to do is get onto one and follow it."

"Which way to the gold diggings?" I asked.

He waved his hand to the south. "Cross the Klondike River and go up Bonanza Creek. You might get a job with one of the miners. Pay is pretty good," he said.

Again I left Faunt and Clemmy behind. I crossed the bridge and walked up the valley of Bonanza Creek. I stopped at every mining claim to ask for a job. Finally one owner said he had no work for me, but he sure could use a woman around his operation.

"Somebody that can bake, wash clothes, and brighten up the place."

"What would you pay?" I asked.

"Whatever she wants to charge. She can take it out in gold."

He pointed to a table where a glass jar full of gleaming nuggets sat as if it would burst.

I arrived back in Dawson late that night. Clemmy agreed instantly to take the job. She grinned at us and our faces reddened. We needed her. As we sifted through our gear deciding what to take, she hummed the same little tune over and over.

We had no way to transport all our new possessions to Bonanza—except on our backs—so we didn't take much of it with us. By noon the next day we had moved into a cabin made of unpeeled logs. The only light came through a greased flour sack tacked over an opening in the wall. I had already taken Clemmy to meet the owner of the gold claim. Some of his men stood around him and they leered at her as if they had never seen a woman in their lives.

"Is she with you?" he asked.

Before I could answer, Clemmy spoke up. "Of course I'm with him."

"Married?"

"Not yet," she said.

They turned from Clemmy to me. All of them had gold; I had none. I could tell they felt vastly superior to me. They looked at me closely, trying to fathom what the deal was here.

"Yes," I said. "She's with me. And another fellow."

I could see the claim owner hesitate. Was she fair game or not?

"All right," he said. "She's got the job. You and your... partner... just stay out of her way."

Clemmy and I walked to the cabin that was set into the hillside above the gold claim. I looked back to see the owner and his men watching us, wondering.

"One of us has to stay here with Clemmy, all the time," I said. "Faunt, did you ever tell her about your problem?"

"What problem?" she asked, staring up at Faunt. He stood there, his hair brushing against the main rafter of the cabin.

"He's got epilepsy," I said. "He takes spells when things get too hectic for him."

Faunt sank onto the cot, holding his head in his hands. He glanced at me, his black eyebrows furrowed, then he looked at Clemmy. The pain in his eyes was more than I could bear. I stepped outside to smoke my pipe. I heard them talking as I stood by the door and finally I went back in.

She sat beside him on the bed—the only bed in the cabin—and he had his big arm draped over her. Their faces glistening with tears, they didn't look up as I dropped into one of the two chairs by the table.

"I'm heading back to Dawson," I said. "To bring back more of our gear. Then, I'm going prospecting. I might be gone a couple of days."

Clemmy got up and set a pot on the stove to boil. I sensed a peacefulness here and Fauntleroy's face had relaxed into his normal ugliness. Then she looked straight at me, into my face, and very calmly spoke her mind.

"The trouble with you, Hank, is that you don't need anybody. You have your so-called powers and can keep everyone out of your life. You rescued Fauntleroy, you rescued me, but no one can ever do anything for you, can they? You have no heart, Mr. Hank whatever-your-name-is. So go ahead, leave us behind."

I ate some bacon and beans and drank a cup of Clemmy's tea then got up to leave. They looked at me, looking for sadness at my leaving them, but I felt none and they knew it. I headed back down the trail to Dawson. A full moon lit my way. I passed one cabin after another. Smoke trailed from the pipes sticking out at every angle from their tiny roofs and in most I could see candlelight glowing through whatever they had for windows.

I felt very alone yet very unburdened on the trail as I trudged along, hour after hour. I walked into Dawson long after midnight. Fiddles screeched from within the saloons and I could hear the thumping of feet as they danced the night away. Tomorrow I would get as much information as I could in these saloons. I would start with the Monte Carlo. Besides, I just had to have a look at this queen they had advertised on their door and whom I had heard so much about.

I spent the rest of the night sleeping under the big tarpaulin covering our supplies down by the river. A layer of frost covered the few open spaces of ground. Most of the food was in cans and would have to be stored somewhere warm. I would worry about that tomorrow. I swallowed some beans from a can and then set off to wander the streets of Dawson.

It was plain that all the groups of men walking about were newcomers like me. Probably any oldtimers were out on their claims or asleep in the arms of a dancehall girl. I found the mapseller's tent and walked in there to find him standing by the stove, holding his hands out over it. His big tent was packed with gear he had bought from departing stampeders, with some of it piled up outside. He had a new sign: JORDY'S GENERAL STORE.

I told him how I'd found a job for Clemmy and a cabin for her and Fauntleroy—but nothing for myself as yet. Jordy offered me a job for the day, helping him sort through all the stuff he'd bought and setting it up inside the tent. If he could keep all the foodstuffs from freezing, he would make a fortune during the coming winter.

We took a break for tea partway through the day and sat on two wooden nail kegs by the stove. Just then the flap parted and a tiny head sprouting white hair in all directions protruded into the tent. He came in the rest of the way and stepped over to the stove. He walked so stiffly it was as if he was wearing a cast over his entire body, except for his feet. He peered at Jordy and then at me. He wore a greasy brown miner's hat on the back of his head and he smelled of sweat, woodsmoke and damp earth. He held out a grey, bony hand that once had been white, unsure who the proprietor was here. I could see his hand trembling.

"I've got the richest ground in the Klondike. And I'm looking for a partner... and a grubstake."

"Where are you located?" asked Jordy.

"On the top end of Eldorado. On a pup called Golden Gulch."

"Have you got any samples?" asked Jordy.

"Haven't hit bedrock yet."

"Then I'm not interested," said Jordy.

The head of hair turned toward me and I found myself locked into his gaze. His eyes, bright blue and feverish, had an innocence I had only seen in madmen or babies. A strange feeling came over me there in the heat of the tent, and I looked at Jordy.

"He's not faking. This man is for real. I'll go with him, if you grubstake us. I already have my own gear. You just have to help him out and pay to transport everything. I'll see to it you get your share of the gold. If there's any there."

"If there's any there! I'm telling you fellows, it's a-lying on bedrock like cheese. We just have to claw our way down to it. But we can't do it till the ground is frozen. And that'll be mighty soon, you fellows. By the way, my name is Jim Hall. Also known as Goldfever Jim."

Goldfever Jim and I stared at Jordy. We could see him shake his head. Jim still held his hand out and I grasped Jordy's hand and pulled it toward Jim.

"But I haven't seen a speck of gold," said Jordy. "This is insane."

But he shook hands with the oldtimer and the three of us grinned, standing there by the stove while outside the tent, throngs of goldseekers slithered back and forth through the mud. They had nothing and we had it all.

"And then, and then of course, there'll be a spree. Don't forget that," said Goldfever Jim.

"A spree?" said Jordy.

"A night on the town," said Jim. "We can't go back to the creeks without a night on the town. This is the Klondike. Are you grubstaking this deal or not?"

The words sounded so good that I spoke them out loud. "Eldorado Creek. Golden Gulch. In the Klondike. How can we miss, Jordy? Isn't this the reason we are all here?"

"And we can't go digging without a spree first. That's standard procedure," said Jim.

"So how much do you need for this 'spree?'"

"Just give us lots," said Jim. "And we'll bring back the change."

Jordy gave us twenty dollars each. According to Jim, only one place had any class and one woman was worth seeing. We would go to the Monte Carlo. I mentioned to Jim something about having a bath first.

"Well, I had one this summer. I suppose another wouldn't hurt. Grubstaker! We need money for a bath. Everything costs money in this town."

Jordy gave us each another five dollars. We found a tent by the river serving hot baths. I put on my other set of clothes while Jim pulled the same ones back on. He had no others.

"God!" he said. "I'm so clean I scare myself."

That evening we strolled down Front Street to the Monte Carlo, going early to make sure we could get in. The place was already packed, including the three balconies above us. These balconies had been divided into boxes where a miner could sit with a dancehall girl and watch the show. He would then start to drink champagne with her at $50 a bottle. The woman got a percentage on the drinks and so would encourage him to order plenty. Jim told me most men never remembered much after ten o'clock but they would wake up in the box, minus a good part of their poke—and the girl would be down below sitting with someone else.

We ordered rum but I left mine in the glass, unwilling to surrender to it for now. I longed for the deck of a ship or a grassy field, anything to be away from this room full of unwashed, sweating men smoking their pipes and arguing, whiskey and rum soaking into the sawdust spread all over the floor, and the smell of beans clinging to every molecule of air... beans after they have been eaten for months on end until every human in the Klondike had the potential to burst into a gaseous ball of flame.

I recognized some of the girls off the riverboat. They called me by name and smiled and asked for Clemmy. Old Jim peered at me through the smoke, his wild eyes speculating on his new partner. Then the first act of the evening started.

A woman clumped across the stage and whirled to face the crowd. A huge cheer went up; the miners stopped talking to each other and all faced the front. She showed plenty of flesh—and I mean plenty. Her legs, encased in skin-coloured tights were as straight and solid as stovepipes. Her upper arms jiggled as she waved them around, then she began to sing. She sounded about like sleigh runners when they hit a stretch of exposed gravel. She had no musicians with her and her heavily-shod feet boomed around on the platform as she jiggled and screeched. Even though her voice carried strongly above the roar of the crowd, I couldn't make out the words of her song.

Gold nuggets clattered onto the stage and her eyes flicked down from time to time to how big was her take. Then, as suddenly as her entrance, she was gone, replaced by an olive-skinned woman draped in silky veils who swung herself around and around quite gracefully. She neither spoke nor sang but when some of her veils started fluttering to the floor, the gold nuggets appeared like magic, bouncing around her feet, some of them rolling to the back wall. She stepped on one in her slippered feet but smiled bewitchingly through her pain. Then, she too was gone, as the men roared in appreciation. The curtains closed and I saw them fluttering as she picked up her treasures off the stage.

There was a pause of half an hour before the main act, to give everyone time to order more drinks and look over the girls who would dance with them later—at a dollar a dance. And then, for the first time since we came in, silence—except I heard one miner say he was saving his big nuggets for the real queen of the Klondike.

A woman dressed in a sparkling gown glided to the centre of the stage. The skin of her bared arms and shoulders glowed whitely; her coal-black hair was coiled like a crown on her head. Instead of yelling and whistling, the miners sighed and their voices blended into a loud whisper that died away into complete silence. The woman before their hungry, unblinking eyes was more beautiful than a blazing sunset glowing behind a south sea island, more desirable than a thousand gold nuggets lying under a clear mountain stream, more wondrous than all the soft, dancing colours of the northern lights in a Yukon sky: she was God come to earth as a woman to proclaim the glory of the universe...

"Beth!" I shouted. "Beth, it's me!"

My chair clattered backward into another table as I leaped to my feet. All eyes in the crowd stared at me in amazement then turned toward the stage—but she didn't answer. Again I cried her name; the eyes flitted back to me and then to Beth.

"Hank! Is that really you?" She was trying to see through all the glaring lights of the stage and the smoke drifting over the floor.

"Yes! I'm here!"

"Come to my room upstairs." She turned then and disappeared into the curtains at the side of the stage.

To be continued in the next issue.

From the Publisher

When Yukoners get together for the holidays, we like to remember the days when most folks drove old pickup trucks and wore real wool shirts instead of synchilla and every Yukon morning brought a new adventure.

Sam and I spent a picture-perfect, log cabin Christmas at the home of Doug and Judy Beaumont who live on the other side of Mt. Lorne on the Carcross Road. Judy, a woodworker, is also known as Mrs. Chips. The entrance to her home was flanked by Santa's reindeer and sleigh, all crafted of wood by the artisan herself.

Caught up in the holiday spirit, we were able to forget for a few hours how the Yukon's ailing resource industries and a plethora of new regulations are eroding the traditional Yukon lifestyle and making our territory more like the places we came from... Montreal, Ottawa and Vancouver.

We agreed that we can't go back to those places, not happily anyway. We're hooked on the big Yukon sky, the wide open spaces and the comfort that comes from knowing the person standing next to you in the grocery store lineup.

So we do the best we can. We sell cars, take up a trade, get a government job, start a publishing company... anything to support our addiction to living in the Yukon. Also, we cultivate friendships with people who share our old-fashioned values.

Through this magazine, Sam and I are able to reach out to other like-minded souls, our readers... be they in Watson Lake, Esterhazy or Carrot Creek. Thanks to you all for the letters, photographs and stories you have sent us this past year. Your words of encouragement will inspire us to keep bringing you tales of the Yukon's glory days—past and present.

Dianne and old Sweat out for a Sunday drive on Army Beach.