
THE
YUKONER
MAGAZINE
ISSUE
No.29
YUKON SOURDOUGH
RENDEZVOUS
HEADQUARTERS
$4.95
CREATIVE
HAIR DESIGN
SHAY-PER
ESTHETICS
667-7799
• THE TAYLOR & DRURY EMPIRE
• TALL TALES BY ROBBIE
• DR. AHO
• ELLY PORSILD
• STACIE'S DOGS

Judi Johnny

Born on a boat in the coastal waters of northwestern B. C., Judi Johnny is a visible and outspoken advocate for people with disabilities. A member of the Kwakiutl First Nation, Judi came to the Yukon for a visit 20 years ago and decided to stay. Even in the chilly days of winter, she can be seen navigating the snow-clogged streets of Whitehorse in her electric-powered wheelchair. When the curbs aren't cleaned off properly or when the handi-bus isn't running, she makes sure that those in charge know about it.

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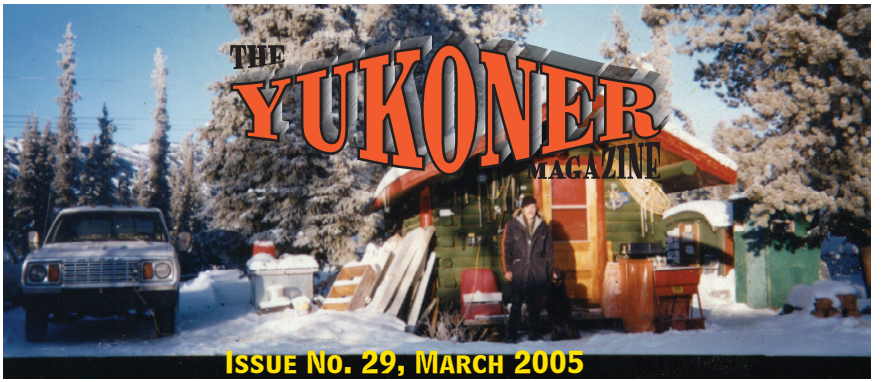

www.yukoner.com

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Cover: Amalie Young, in her Rendezvous dress, Feb. 2005. Amalie works at Mac's Fireweed Books. [S.H. photo]

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Publisher: Dianne Green Editor: Sam Holloway

From the Editor

Well here we go with the 29th issue. Wish I were 29 again. You may have noticed that the magazine is slower to come out each time. That's because it synchronizes itself with how we're doing around here.

I had come contracts in town to finish up, caught the flu, we had a plumbing break and lost all our water. That, along with a couple of good cold snaps and trouble with the chain saw just made the days slip away. Or do they just go faster because we're older?

In the meantime, our main historical writer, Dick McKenna slaved away on his Taylor & Drury piece. I visited him a few times and he had maps and photos and newspaper clippings spread out all over his house, trying hard to make sense of it all. It's not easy to sum up an empire that spanned 75 years into a few magazine pages.

My main break was a trip to visit old friends in Kluane. They're all too busy in summer for yapping, trying to make hay during that 90 day run of tourists along the Alaska Highway. I wanted to buy the chair you see pictured here but forgot all about it. Time speeds up but the memory slows down, what? Now one of you will likely scaffle that wonderful piece of furniture from the woodwacker, Don Rooney (see story, page 60). Oh well, next winter he'll have something just as inspiring.

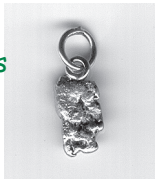
The wags have it that the Internet and computers will replace the printed word. They could be right: it costs very little to publish on the Net, with no machinery or paper required, just press buttons on a keyboard. I remember my grandfather, a champion teamster, complaining about how trucks killed off a great industry. He meant the care and feeding of horses, not to mention all the skills required to drive a big team. What did they do with all that manure in those days?

For me, nothing on a flickering screen can replace a good book beside my bed or easy chair. I can read all the latest news on the Net but I bring home newspapers every day. They're also good for wrapping fish and starting fires.

So we'll stick to the old, slower ways for a while yet. In the meantime, trucks will take this magazine around to you all.

So long for now,
Sam

The winner of our gold nugget draw for subscription renewals is:
Sam Teer
Mackenzie, B.C.



The Mail Run

Hello,

Together with my brother I spent some weeks trapping with Tensley Johnston from Ross River back in 1988/1989. Recently, being on a long holiday in Canada, I made it back to Ross River and visited that old trapper (he is 93 years old !) It was very good to see this old man still full of power, full of stories and with a memory even I (being 41) would like to have. I just wanted you to know that because in your magazine I frequently read articles written by him. Man, it was so good seeing him again!

Reinhard Zwerger
Germany

Dear Sam,

Just recently finished the Yukoner No 28 and found it interesting as usual. I worked the summers of '62 and '63 in the northern Yukon for an oil company doing surface mapping but did pass through Mayo, Whitehorse and Watson Lake on the way in and out as well as some NWT towns.

The article in No. 28 that I found particularly interesting was the one on Herschel Island. About August '63 we were camped near the Arctic coast of the Yukon and one evening we flew up to Herschel. We were there only about 15 minutes but most of the residents came out to see us. Somewhere I have a nice picture of the harbour that I took from the air.

What I found of interest in this article was the mention of the HBCo. Post at Demarcation Point. I was there for several hours waiting for a plane to return to our camp, after having been working in the area. So there was time for a little exploring. There was at that time two buildings, one the post and the other probably a small residence. There were a couple of record books from the mid '20s, which we left. There was evidence that the residence had been used at least for short periods, say within ten years of '63.

Jack Brandt
Calgary, Alberta

Hi Sam & Dianne !

I too am a nut over old Dodges. I took in the summer of 1998 my 75 dodge camper van up to Dawson, which is about 1100 miles one way from here, and never had the slightest problem. In fact, I still have the old girl. Also I am just completing a restoration on a 68 dodge coronet convertible which I have owned for 23 years. The other thing is I too purchased a Boler. I bought mine last April, the 17-foot model and I love it, There are a couple of web sites on the Boler, on its creation and clubs around Canada. Can't wait for the next issue.

Dan Hamilton
Terrace, B.C.

THE MAIL RUN

Dear Sam,

I spent quite a few years in the Yukon and know a lot of people that you write about. Some are gone to the happy hunting ground since I left there and some have moved out like I did in '79. I was up there in 1990 and spent the summer on Clear Creek, then I went back in '91 but did not stay all summer. I spent one summer on Matson Creek, that was in '76-'77. I did not get rich but made wages. Spent another summer on Brick Creek out of Atlin; that was back in 1963. I have travelled a lot of the Yukon bush on foot and seen the wild animals and birds. Had a Grizzly looking in my tent one day. I was not in the tent but standing right at the corner with a rifle in my hand. I did not want to shoot it so I just started to talk normal. I did not holler or try to scare it. I kept very still and told him if he did not bother me I would not bother him. After awhile he got down on all four feet and wandered off. There are times I wish I were still up there.

James Campbell
Rycroft, Alberta

Hi Sam and Dianne,

Really I enjoy your publication. For years I worked in the territories and the Arctic as far north as Alert, but never in the Yukon. Your magazine paints a great history right up to the present day. I look forward to a visit to the Yukon sometime in the future to take in some of your history.

In regards to your story about Herschel Island in issue No. 28, I would like to point out that Sir John Franklin's second expedition was in 1825 – 27 and the third was in 1845 (19th May). In closing, please stay with your format as it is the most enjoyable to read a magazine that is not trying to revise a way of life and history

Leo LaLonde
Onanole, Manitoba

Hi,

I am still hoping for feedback about the Hornsby Chain Track Tractor that was shipped to B. C. in 1910 to haul coal for Northern Lights Power and Coal Company. What proof is there that it got to Dawson?

Neil Brady-Browne, Sr.
Courtenay, B. C.

Publisher's Note: I did forward the note to Dave Fitchie that you sent. Hopefully you have heard from him and have received some information. Have you contacted the Yukon Archives? They can be quite helpful. The address is Yukon Archives, Box 2703, Whitehorse, YT Y1A 2C6

The Mail Run

Hi Sam,

My wife and I enjoy the Yukoner very much. We drove a 1941 Chevy from Los Angeles, California to Alaska in March of 1949. Lots of mud and flat tires. We came for one year and are still here. For years we would spend a week or two in the Yukon fishing and camping in the fall. We always had a gun or two with us but never used them inCanada. I would hunt on the way home to Alaska. We stopped going into Canada when they made the new gun laws.

Thought you might like this bit of information on the Mary D. Hume.
George "Larry" Kritchen
Cordova, Alaska

Publisher's Note:

Dick McKenna's article on the *Whalers of Herschel Island* appeared in issue No. 28. *The Mary D Hume* is featured prominently in the story, so readers may want to know more about her illustrious past. Thanks to George Kritchen who sent the following article, an excerpt from the January/February 1998 OREGON COAST, written by Carole Menezes. You can find the text below at http://www.lanehall.com along with a reproduction of a painting by the artist Lane Hall.

The Mary D. Hume was built in 1880 by R.D. Hume, an influential entrepreneur instrumental in the development of the towns of Wedderburn and Gold Beach (Oregon). He named the ship after his wife, Mary Duncan Hume. The keel, a single stick of hand-hewn fir, measured 10 inches by 36 inches and 140 feet long. According to accounts in a local newspaper in 1880, it was 'the longest piece of timber ever floated down the Rogue River.'

"The Mary D. Hume began life as a trader, with auxiliary rigging, to carry passengers and raw goods such as oil, lumber, and canned salmon from South coast ports to northern California coastal towns and ultimately San Francisco. She returned with dry goods, clothing, mining machinery and tools, as well as performers for a local theater. Often she carried shipments of opium for Mr. Hume's Chinese cannery workers....

"At a speed of nine knots, the trip from Gold Beach to San Francisco took about a week, costing $12 one way and $20 round trip. Any storage space needed by passengers was an extra $5.

"In the 1880's, navigating from the Pacific into the river channels was, more often than not, a treacherous and time consuming business, due to the impassable sandbars that formed after storms and high tides. R.D. Hume could be seen holding up a sign in from of his store reading 'O.K. to COME IN' or 'NOT O.K.' Many times the Mary D. Hume could be seen "lying-to" outside the harbor waiting for the swift high tide to allow her to enter "stern foremost" so as to be heading seaward when the tide shifted and the river current carried her from port to open sea.

"The Mary D. Hume's life was as varied and stormy as the seas she traversed. In her lifetime she has had many owners and even more assignments. In 1889, she was sold to the Pacific Steam Whaling Company and outfitted as a whaler. Though the smallest of the fleet, she was the most successful American whaler to date, bringing in more than $400,000 of baleen. She is known to have one of the longest whaling voyages recorded - more than six and one-half years.

"In her time the Mary D. Hume has never had a name change. Most ships changed names whenever they changed owners, some more often than that. She was run aground countless times and even sank in Alaskan waters in the ice of Nushagak River and was raised and repaired in Seattle in 1904.

"The Mary D. Hume went through her first 74 years as a steamer and was converted to diesel power in 1954. She served as cannery tender, a tugboat, fishing boat, and a log-towing vessel after her profitable whaling ventures.

"Upon her retirement as a tugboat, her owners, the Crowley Maritime corp., decided the Mary D. Hume should be returned to her home port in Gold Beach and presented as a gift to the Curry County Historical Society. In August 1978, she made her final voyage home from Puget Sound. Under her own power she crossed the bar while residents of Gold Beach and Wedderburn gathered to watch and welcome her home. A year later in

The Mary D. Hume as it looks today at Gold Beach, Oregon. Thanks to Reverend Brian Morrow for the photo. His website has more photos at www.iloveoregon.com.

1979, the Mary D. Hume was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places in Washington, D.C.

"A cradle was built in 1985 to lift the Mary D. Hume from the water so renovation could continue. The cradle was partially damaged on the first day of the move and could not bear the weight of the vessel. The remaining portion collapsed when the tide receded. The Mary D. Hume catapulted forward, smashing the rest of the rigging and sank to the bottom in about four feet of water. She was still well enough above water so that at low tide tourists and residents could board her and walk the decks. Now, however, the timbers are too rotten for anyone to board her.

"Time is running out for the Mary D. Hume. No one can guess how many more fierce winter storms she can endure. Even though she has been stripped of every adornment and piece of brass, she still is an inviting subject for artists to sketch and photographers to capture on film as a pictur-

PETE: A Story by Tensley Johnston

Many, many years ago when I was a boy my mother had a very nice garden but something was getting into it and chewing up her plants. My uncle looked it over and discovered a woodchuck hole, so he dug it out and killed a large woodchuck. It was a mother woodchuck and there were two little babies in the nest. My uncle said they were big enough to eat grass and clover so he put them in a box for me. They didn't seem a bit scared of me so I fed them and put a dish of water in with them.

All went well for about a week and I had their box setting at the edge of the barn, unfortunately at just the spot where the water came down off the eves. We got a rainstorm and those little fellows got real wet and one died.

I have no idea who named the other one Pete but he would come right to me when I called him. I was just learning to whistle and I guess he was too because when I would whistle real sharp he would set up and whistle to me. My mother allowed him into the house after the rain-

Kevin Barr of Crag Lake, Yukon, visits Army Beach with his dog Vito, who lost a leg in a wolf trap. As you can see Vito gets along fine on his artificial leg. [S.H. photo]

storm and he had the run of the house and immediately decided he would sleep with me. My mother wasn't too pleased over that but every night he would find a way to get in bed with me.

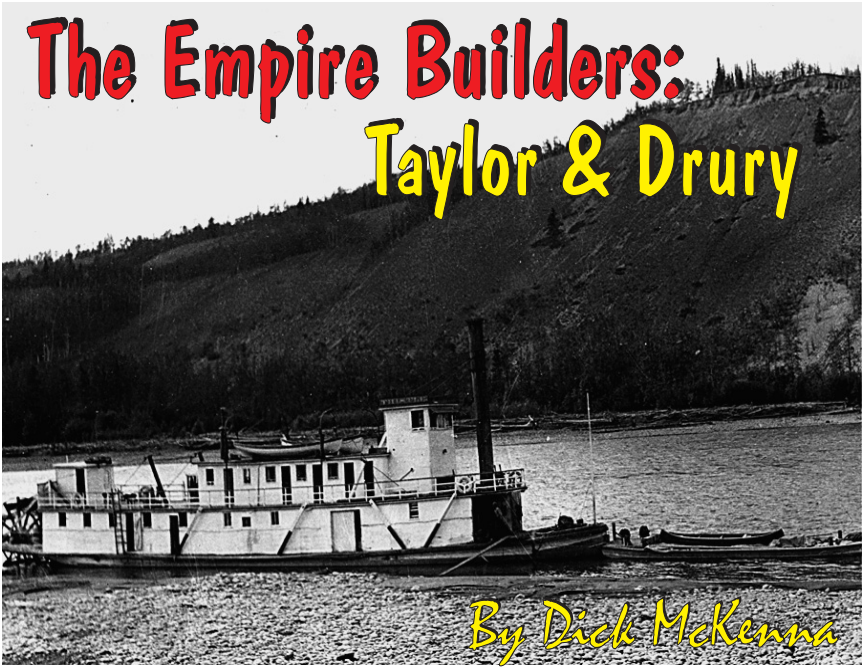
In our little town back then there was just paths to each other's houses and only a dirt road through the town. There were no cars in those days, just a few horses. There was a little store just up the path a short ways and sometimes my mother would give me a penny and I would take Pete and go get two large jawbreakers that would last a long time. Once in awhile some one's dog would come and nose around Pete but every time they got in a fight those dogs learned real quick that he had sharp teeth and knew how to use them.

I don't know if it was what we fed him but by fall he was huge. I couldn't lift him anymore and he didn't come into the house anymore. Sometimes he would be gone a day or two and Mom told me he was digging a den for winter. Sometime later we got a bit of snow and I never saw him again. I spent lots of time and found lots of den holes but where Pete went I'll never know. That was almost 90 years ago but it seems like yesterday. One of the best pals I ever had. I'll never forget him and those wonderful carefree days.

******

The editor and old Dodgie No. 2, visiting Kevin Billy at his McClintock Valley cabin. Lots of snow this winter. [S.H. photo]

The Empire Builders: Taylor & Drury



By Dick McKenna

It was July 28th 1936, when Bill Drury finally rounded the last bend in the Yukon River and brought his modern motor launch, the *Yukon Rose*, into port at Dawson. Stepping ashore, he quizzically eyed the big boarded-up hulks of buildings on Front Street and beyond as he casually made his way through all but deserted streets towards the government offices. It was a strictly enforced regulation that all stampeders who entered the Yukon during the gold rush report upon arrival at Dawson, and Drury was carrying out his civic duty. To get there, it had taken him, give or take a week, 38 years!

Now we have all heard about the difficulties encountered by some of the stampeders on the rugged wilderness routes into the Yukon, and of delays caused by adverse weather or trail conditions. But 38 years? That's a long time to be on the trail!

Upon Mr. Drury's arrival Commissioner Black graciously bestowed the late arrival with the dubious honour of being "the last of the stampeders to check in."

White Horse Star reporter Archie Gillespie humorously heralded the event:

Above photo: T&D's 225-ton sternwheeler, the "Thistle" pushing a barge on the Stewart River, ca 1920s. The two men on the barge are probably prospectors hitching a ride upriver. T&D's riverboats enabled many a prospector to reach "virgin ground," especially along the Hootalinqua, Pelly, Stewart and White Rivers. [photo by Claude Tidd of the RCMP. Yukon Archives photo, Tidd collection]

"Now it can be told. The last ninety-eighter has hit Dawson. The last stampeder has made the home port. The last member of that colourful band of gold seekers who crossed the Chilkoot Trail of '98 headed for the Klondike has checked in. A few weeks before Dawson celebrates its 40th anniversary of the finding of gold on Bonanza, along comes "Big Bill" Drury to claim the startling, unique distinction of being the last of the stampeders to arrive. He didn't arrive wild-eyed, uninitiated, broke and looking for that pot of gold at rainbow's end. He arrived with 38 years of Yukon experience behind him and with $38,000 dollars in his wallet for all we know, but the point is he has finally arrived!"

So what took him so long? Turns out that Mr Drury was just plain too busy to bother to hit old Dawson after all. Too busy establishing general stores and fur trading posts in practically every far-flung corner of the Yukon Territory except Dawson. By this time "Big Bill" Drury was known far and wide as "the greatest fur buyer in the entire north. Bar none". And it would also be very safe to say that Bill had probably travelled more of the Yukon Territory, trail, mountain or stream, than any other man alive.

Bill Drury was a big man, standing six-foot-four in his socks, broad of shoulders and of healthy English farm stock. He was fast moving, slow spoken and always grinning. Bill had good reason for grinning. He had many friends. He was well respected, admired and successful and, for a man who had wasted no time searching for gold, he seemed to have the Midis touch. One successful business venture followed another and another again. But Bill's prosperity can not be attributed to fate, nor was it received as a gift from above. This pioneer Yukoner's dream was built on nothing short of sheer hard work, acute business sense, unwavering faith, determination, and the ability to roll with the Yukon's up and down economy.

Bill was not acting alone, however, nor does he deserve full credit for

Same photo as on previous page, showing the barge.

his success. Bill's business partner and fellow Englishman, Isaac Taylor, deserves more than a bit of the credit. Together they turned a 10-by-12 foot wall tent, a few miners supplies, and $200 legal tender, into a million dollar merchandising and fur trading empire that lasted 75 years, employed hundreds of people, and carried out millions of dollars worth of business yearly.

For three-quarters of a century Taylor and Drury were known in nearly every home and cabin in the entire Yukon Territory. The Klondike Kings may have gained a certain amount of material wealth and even lasting fame for their short parts in the play. But Isaac Taylor and Bill Drury dedicated their entire lives as well as their every penny to the Yukon and its commercial development.

The story of Taylor & Drury Ltd. is a story of two busy, hard -working businessmen and their equally hard-working children who carried the business forward into the second half of the 20th Century. During the company's 75 years (1899-1974), there were amalgamations and shareholder companies and expansions and contractions. T & D's, as the company came to be known, had trading posts at one time or another in at least 20 locations throughout the Yukon and northwestern B.C. These included: Atlin, Bennett, Carmacks, Champagne, Coffee Creek, Fort Selkirk, Hootalinqua, Keno, Kluane, Little Salmon, Livingstone Creek, Mayo, Minto, Pelly Banks, Pelly Lakes, Ross River, Sheldon Lake, Stewart Island, Teslin, and Whitehorse.

As new opportunities arose, T & D's continued to widen the scope of its operations. It pioneered fox farming in the Yukon and operated several

Bill S. Drury and family aboard the Thistle in 1927. L-R: Lucy, Bill L., Bill S., Mary and Thomas. [Yukon Archives photo, Tidd collection]

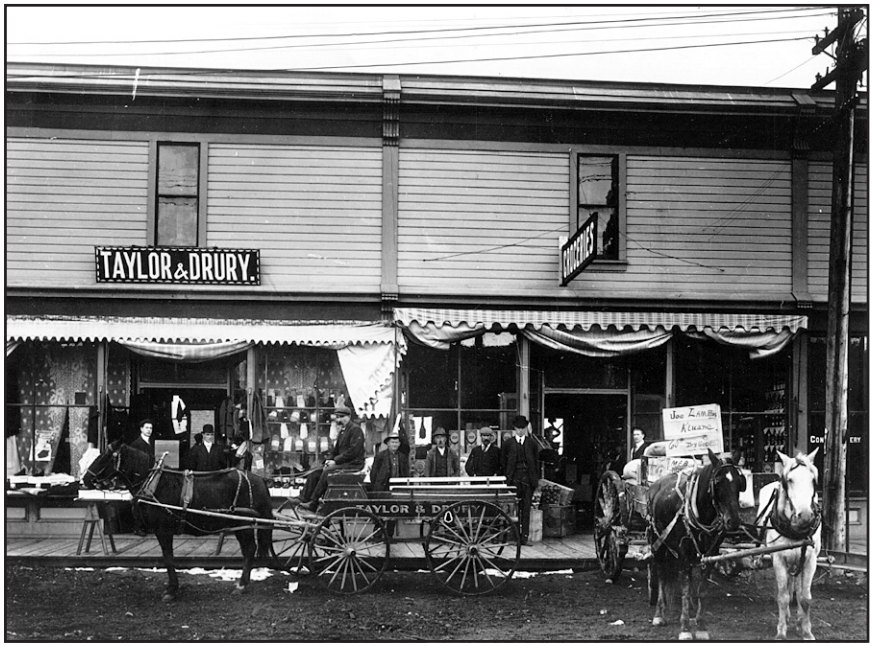
highly successful black and silver fox farms in the Whitehorse and Kluane areas. Then came the automotive dealerships. First was Taylor and Drury Motors and later Taylor Chev-Olds and Yukon Motors.

In order to keep its vast network of trading posts in steady supply, Taylor & Drury owned and operated, over the years three different riverboats: the *Kluahne*, the *Thistle* and the *Yukon Rose* in that order.

For close to half a century these boats plied the Teslin, the Pelly, the Stewart and the White rivers carrying supplies out to the posts and shuttling prospectors, trappers, and miners out to their claims, lines and mines.

As these smaller feeder branches of the main Yukon river were greatly, if not completely, ignored by the company's larger competitor, the British Yukon Navigation Company (BYNCo.), Taylor and Drury played an essential role in the supply and development of the Yukon south of Dawson.

Both Bill Drury and Isaac Taylor lived very long and productive lives, and continued to remain active in the company until the early 1950s when they were well into their eighties. Many Whitehorse residents today can still remember seeing and meeting with these fine old chaps at the big department store at the end of Main Street. There was Big Bill with his smile and casual, easygoing style, and Isaac, smaller in stature and of a more serious disposition, shuffling around with a hand full of invoices, often making repeated trips to the men's wear department to rearrange things so



A view of T&D's Whitehorse department store, c 1910, the town's "meeting place." Out front are two T&D tow horse delivery wagons. [Yukon Archives photo, Vancouver Public Library collection]

that they were just right, sometimes bringing the female clerks close to tears!

But Isaac had a gentler side too. One particular time he returned from a vacation in Hawaii, toting a picture of his new girlfriend, which he proudly showed off to all in the store, customer and employee alike. He was 90 years old!

The Beginnings of a Merchandising Empire

Isaac Taylor was born in Yorkshire where he worked as a bookkeeper and haberdasher (dealer of gents' furnishings) before the spirit of adventure tugged. In 1897, he found himself on a ship bound for Australia a half a world away. Shortly after his arrival there, word of the Klondike strike had broken the news and Isaac quickly boarded another ship bound for the golden north, another half a world away.

Taylor & Drury's Carmacks trading post, complete with post office and attached barroom, c 1918. [Yukon Archives photo, Cecil Swanson collection]

Bill Drury was born and raised on a farm at Lincolnshire County, England and as a young man entered the trade of shoemaking in the township of Kyme. In 1896,at the age of 25, Bill immigrated to Canada and worked in the shoe factories of southern Ontario. Upon hearing about the Klondike, Drury proceeded westward and in 1898 found himself struggling against the perils of the Ashcroft route into the Yukon. It was on the trail at Glenora that Drury first met up with Taylor who was coming into the Yukon over the Stikine route. The encounter was brief, however, and they soon parted.

Continuing north, Drury and others heard about the Atlin strike located to the east. They decided to ditch the trail and walk the 160 miles overland to Teslin at the south end of Teslin Lake and from there, a further 100 miles to Atlin via Gladys and Surprise lakes. Once the party arrived at Atlin, its members found that the whole country was already staked up tight. Drury quickly fell back on his shoemaking experience as a means of support.

In the buzzing little boomtown of Discovery near the diggings, Bill set up a small tent to use as a shop and soon held a brisk little business repairing the miners' worn out footwear. As cash was short, Drury began taking on tools and other supplies as payment for his services and he soon accumulated a growing stock.

An early 1900s view of T&D's Whitehorse department store. Ladies's apparel on the right, canned goods at left, fox pelts hanging from the balcony... T&D was known to sell everything from anvils to zucchini. [Yukon Archives photo, Vancouver Public Library collection]

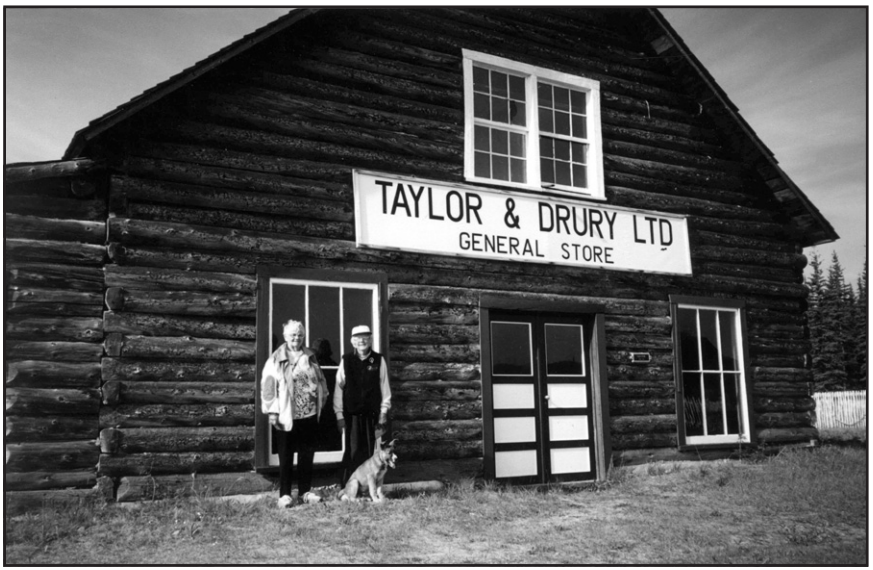
In the spring of 1899, Bill was at Fritz Miller's discovery claim when he again bumped into Isaac Taylor who was working as a miner for wages. Their friendship was rekindled and shortly thereafter Isaac quit the mine, took his pay of some $200 and put in with Bill.

The two new partners relocated to the larger town of Atlin where they found a beehive of activity. Many newcomers with visions of grandeur were still arriving and hustling around trying to get word on a good claim and the likes. At the same time just as many disgruntled ones were quitting the country for good and were looking for the quickest way out.

Seizing the opportunity, Taylor and Drury began buying outfits and other supplies from the disgruntled and re-selling them to the new arrivals at a profit. During this time they also accumulated a sizeable quantity of quicksilver which Drury sold to big time operator, Frank McClaren of Discovery for a substantial sum. This sale provided them with their first "real" working capital.

Shortly afterwards, Isaac Taylor went to Vancouver where he bought all the supplies he could get, at wholesale prices. In June of 1899, he returned on the train to Bennett, the temporary end of steel for the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad, which was under construction. Here the men spent the winter. Putting his stitching experience to work, Drury sewed sails, which he sold to the many stampeders who planned to head down the lake come break-up.

Following the completion of the railway to Whitehorse in July of 1900, Taylor and Drury along with their merchandise hopped the first train into the new town where they built their first permanent structure in the busy commercial district on First Avenue.



Babe Richards and Betty Taylor at the T&D store in Fort Selkirk, 1998. See Issue No. 28 for a story on Babe and Issue No. 3 for Betty Taylor.

Whitehorse at the time was booming and T & D's found no shortage of customers seeking groceries, provisions and miners' outfits for its various northern adventures. Within a year the business had expanded to include a men's wear store (Bon Marche Men's Wear), adjacent to the main "outfitters" store.

Realising that the boom times of the gold rush would last only so long, Taylor & Drury concentrated on supplying natives, prospectors, trappers, and miners in other developing centres of the southern Yukon. In 1901 they established a trading post in the busy mining town of Livingstone in the Big Salmon country and the same year they established another post at the Tutchone First Nation village of Little Salmon.

Then, in 1905, T & D's bought trader Tom Smith's Post at the Teslin Tlingit village and they established another post up the Pelly River at Pelly Banks near the lucrative trapping grounds of the Kaska First Nations people.

During the early 1900s Bill travelled thousands of miles through the south and central Yukon either upon foot, snowshoe, dog sled or river raft meeting with and developing sound relationships with the First Nations people of the area. Bill spent the first year (1901-02) managing the Little Salmon post himself and during this time the native people taught him how to grade, handle and store furs.

For thousands of years, the First Nations people had been trapping wolf, fox, rabbit, beaver, muskrat, and even wolverine and moose using sinew and deadfalls made with logs. They used the furs to clothe themselves and to trade, primarily with the Coastal Chilkat Natives at the ancient trading centre of Fort Selkirk.

After the Chilkats destroyed the Hudson's Bay Company trading post at Fort Selkirk in the 1850's, the market for trapping in the Yukon was wide open. Taking advantage of the lack of competition, Taylor & Drury

built its fur trading business into a million-dollar industry that provided monetary sustenance for hundreds of natives and their families for decades. And it was the trapping industry that also financially sustained T &D's. For five decades, from 1900 to 1950, furs provided the majority of the company's revenues.

In their dealings with the First Nations people, Taylor & Drury developed a trusting and lasting relationship. They always gave a generous extension of credit, or "jawbone", during lean periods of trapping, and it was a company policy to mark up furs collected by only 10 per cent, and only to cover shipping or losses. As a result, Taylor & Drury were able to generate an industry that would provide them with a substantial customer base for their trading posts. The theory was that if natives received a fair price for their furs, they and their families would become regular customers at the posts.

As few natives spoke English in those days, Drury learned their language, including several dialects. It was said that "if Bill Drury is out buying fur he'll be sitting around some campfire smoking a pipe of peace with an Indian Chief and speaking to him in his own language. That's how Bill Drury buys fur, he does it at their level. "

The natives would have nothing to do with the "Queen's" money and refused to trade their valuable furs for pieces of paper. To solve the problem, T & D's had nice shiny brass and aluminium trade tokens minted in Ottawa; these the natives took to quite nicely. When a cache of these coins was unearthed in the 1980s, collectors and museums snapped them up. Recently a set of three sold on E-Bay for USD $60.

In 1912 Taylor & Drury amalgamated with their chief competitor, Whitney & Pedlar Ltd. of Whitehorse. J. P. Whitney and W. C. Pedlar were two other merchants who, like Taylor and Drury, followed the wave of stampeders north during the gold rush, first establishing stores at Juneau in 1895, Dyea in '98, Bennett in '99, and finally setting up at Whitehorse in 1900.

During the merger the company was known as Taylor, Drury & Pedlar Ltd. This amalgamation would last until 1922 when Whitney withdrew from the company to devote his time to fox farming, a venture in which Taylor and Drury also held stock. One of these farms was the J. P. Whitney Black Silverfox Farm (1916-1950) located across the river from the old Canol refinery at Whitehorse. Foxes from the farm were world-renowned for being the finest on the market. Even today J. P.'s large two-storey log house stands on the site, and is occupied quite comfortably

One good reason for T&D's survival as a company, was its ability to adapt to changing market conditions. When activity declined in certain areas, they closed down posts there and established new ones where activity and population were higher. By 1915 both the Livingstone and the Hootalinqua posts had closed. When a flu epidemic wiped out close to the entire population of Little Salmon in 1918 -1920 the village and trading post there were abandoned.

However, new posts were being established at a faster rate than the closures. Between 1910 and 1918, T&D's opened posts at Carmacks, Coffee Creek, and Fort Selkirk. When the rich silver strikes were made at Keno Hill in 1919, the company promptly established a store at Mayo Landing, followed by a subsidiary branch at Keno City a few years later. Then, in 1929, another post was established at the ore transferring station of Stewart Island. The Mayo store would soon become the second largest, in terms of

Right: Charlie Taylor and helpers cranking up the old delivery wagon during the Mayo flood of 1936. That year the Stewart River burst its banks with such speed and force, the entire commercial district, including T&D's store, was under five feet of water within an hour.
Both T&D and their competitor, N.C.C., told the populace to help themselves to the canned goods. Nearly all the other items were completely ruined. Who said the life of a grocer was boring?
[Yukon Archives photo, Bill Hare collection]

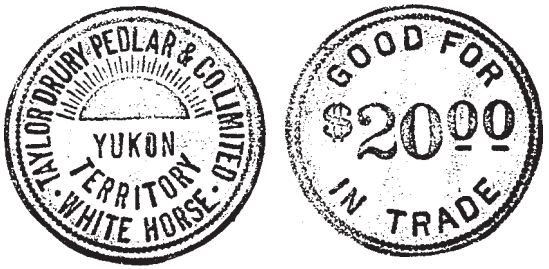
gross sales, after Whitehorse, and throughout five decades of silver mining, the Mayo branch would provide a significant source of the company's revenues.

Taylor & Drury made an early entry into the automobile business when they opened the Chevy car and truck dealership, Taylor & Drury Motors, in Whitehorse in 1928. The premises included a garage, a filling station and the Yukon's first indoor auto showroom. A smaller branch was also established at Mayo with a garage and filling station. At that time, a Chevy Roadster sold for $625, a Coupe for $740, and a one-ton truck for.$635. Shipping was extra.

T & D's were not the first in town to enter into the car business, however. W. A. Puckett had been selling Fords in front of his hardware store since around 1914. Puckett was an early Whitehorse pioneer whose interests included roadhouses and copper mines. T&D's gave old Puckett some stiff, but friendly competition. Whitehorse was no longer a one horse town. People now had a choice, either Ford or Chevrolet.

One of T & D's first automobile customers was the very resourceful Teslin native, George Johnson. After a particularly successful trapping season, Johnson was chatting with Isaac in front of the Whitehorse store when a shipment of the new "contraptions" arrived on the train. Johnson was intrigued and, following a demonstration by Taylor, he plucked down the full price, about $1000, for a four-door model and had it shipped by steamboat to his home village of Teslin. As there were no roads upon which to drive his new jalopy, he hired a crew to slash a three-mile swath through the bush and started a booming business giving automobile rides at 50 cents each.

In winter Johnson found a new use for his automobile: hunting and running his trap line along the lake. To rig up for the affair, Johnson chained up the rear tires, attached a fine set of birch wood skis to the front tires, and brushed on a generous application of white paint covering everything, tires included! This camouflage worked perfectly. If he approached from down wind in his stealth, 1928 model Chevy Ski-Doo, he was absolutely invisible to the many game animals that crossed and travelled along the frozen lake's 100-mile length. He kept half the village supplied with moose meat for years and held the record for trapping the most wolf pelts.



In summertime, when the white paint no longer matched the landscape, George painted the vehicle brown or green to fit in with the summertime

scene. After a few decades of this, the paint job was two inches thick and its weight caused a considerable power drain on the four-cylinder engine! A visit to the George Johnson Museum in Teslin where the old beater still resides will prove the truth of this tale.

Taylor & Drury Company Riverboats

At first the small steamer, the *Quick*, owned by Tom Smith, was contracted to ship supplies out to the T & D trading posts, however, the partners replaced this vessel in 1909 with their own steamer, the *Kluahne*. The *Kluahne's* small size, shallow draft and sturdy double-plank hull construction suited it perfectly to the shallower tributary streams of the main river

Left - Bill Drury, Jr., far right - Charlie Taylor, 2nd from right - Bill Taylor inside the Taylor & Drury Motors showroom in Whiteorse, autumn 1948. They are promoting the new Rocket 88 Oldsmobile, the car that inspired the first #1 rock and roll song, "Rocket 88," released in 1951 by Jackie Brenston and the Delta Cats.
[Yukon Archives photo, William L. Drury collection]

where most of their posts were located. It was said that the *Kluahne* would float on a thick morning dew. The vessel earned this reputation and its name on its maiden voyage—a daring journey up the White, Donjek, and Kluane rivers.

Apparently to encourage interest in the silver-rich area, the Canadian government offered a generous bonus to the owners of the first vessel to successfully reach Kluane Lake by this "all water route". The trip required ascending the rapid and braided White River for some 100 miles to the mouth of the Donjek, a river of similar character, then proceeding up the Donjek another 100 miles to the mouth of the Kluane River and, finally, travelling up this rapid and even shallower stream for another 40 miles to the lake.

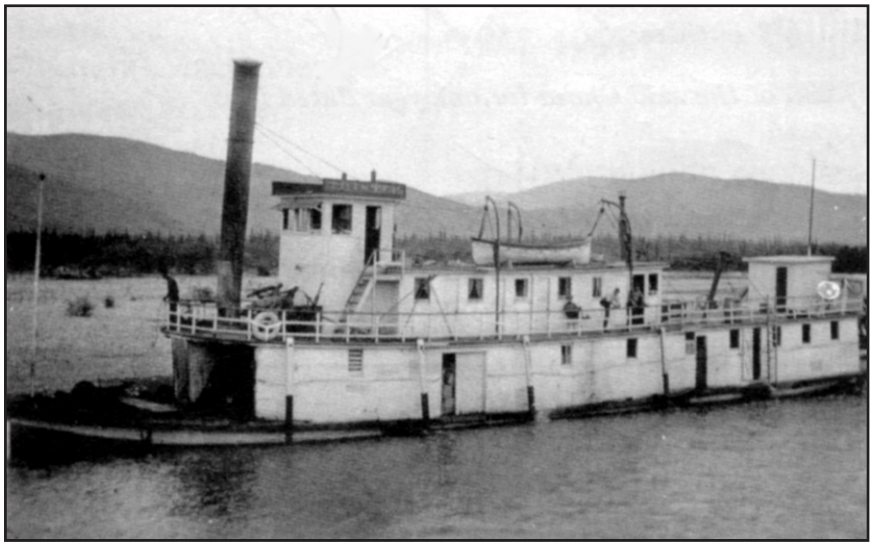
Amazingly, the *Kluahne* made it to the mouth of the Kluane River where "famous" native pilot Jimmie Jackson and first mate "Buffalo Pitts" off loaded everything that wasn't nailed down, plus some things that were, in a desperate attempt to gain precious board. Then, up the Kluane they skimmed for some 15 or 20 miles only to be met by an impassable series of cascading rapids. Needless to say, there was no government prize waiting at the end of the journey.

Due to the increased amount of supplies and provisions destined for the Mayo camp, T & D's retired the *Kluahne* and purchased the 225 ton *S.S. Thistle* from

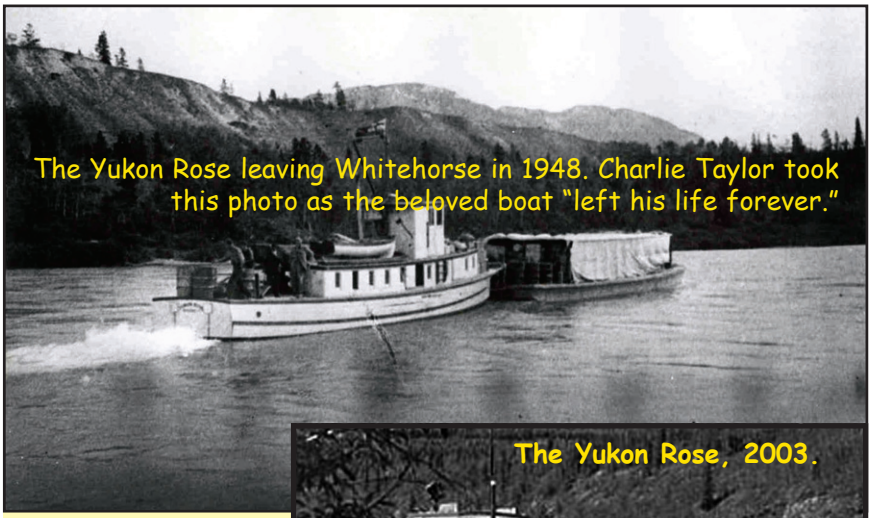
the its transportation competitor, BYNCo. in 1919. Fully loaded and pushing barges loaded with an additional 80 to 85 tons of supplies, the *Thistle* often made three or four trips per season up to the busy silver camp. Unfortunately, in late August of 1928, the Thistle sank in a gale in Lake Laberge. The ship and its contents, both un-insured, were a total loss. Luckily, all passengers were saved, having apparently been transferred to the accompanying barge just as the *Thistle* bubbled below the surface in a reported 500 feet of water.

Despite this setback, Taylor and Drury somehow managed to absorb the loss and Isaac Taylor quickly made plans to have another boat constructed. Foreseeing the end of the steamboat era, Isaac had the 60-foot, gas-powered launch, the "Yukon Rose," built at the Askew yards in Vancouver and launched at Whitehorse in June of 1929.

The *Yukon Rose* was the last boat owned by T&D's and it continued to serve the company's transportation needs into the 1940s, when she played her part in the war effort by shuttling troops and building supplies down Lake Marsh and Lake Teslin for the U.S. army highway crews. (Ione Chistensen, Yukon's senator, who was around at the time, suggests that its primary use was most probably an officers' party boat). Another former passenger of the *Yukon Rose*, and a notorious one, was the Mad Trapper. Albert Johnson was said to have travelled aboard her up to Ross River in 1929.



The "Thistle:, purchased from White Pass in 1921. It sank during a gale on Lake Laberge in 1928, while carrying a full load for the town of Mayo. In this photo it looks very overloaded. [Yukon Archives photo, Whitney collection]



The Yukon Rose leaving Whitehorse in 1948. Charlie Taylor took this photo as the beloved boat "left his life forever."

The Yukon Rose, 2003.

The "Yukon Rose," commissioned in 1929 by Taylor & Drury, was an experimental design, designated as "tunnel boat," with the driveshaft down along the keel driving a small propellor. Having a draft of only 14 inches, it could go where other paddlewheelers could not, including the smaller rivers and some creeks.

Better roads and trucks reduced the need for this boat and it was sold tothe riverboat division of White Pass (British Yukon Navigation Company) in 1948. They refitted it with a newer engine, and hauled freight in the Dawson-Mayo district until 1958. Drydocked, the Rose came under several owners until Yvonne and Rudy Burian of Stewart City bought it in 1962. Parked in the slough behind, protected by the island, the Rose became a derelict until Greg Caple and Alan Dennis floated it down to Dawson City with plans to rebuild it.

Parked beside the McCready house on 3rd Avenue, the Rose literally grew into the ground for the next 30 years. Many transients slept in there and some great parties happened on board. Then, in 2001, Marc Johnson moved it out to a mining claim, had it retrofitted again and turned it into a popular tour boat on the Yukon River.

You can get information on these tours by calling The High Country Inn in Whitehorse or look at www.yukonadventures.com on the Internet. S.H.

Merchandising Magnates

"Then I turned once more to the city.
With its streets like canyons aroar;
And the lights of Taylor & Drury's
Colossal department store."
—*Bob Smart's Dream*, by Robert Service

Not only was Robert Service a fine poet, but he was also an extraordinarily accurate prophet. In his 1904 poem, *Bob Smart's Dream,* Service foresaw the future of Whitehorse, predicting flying machines, automobiles, the big copper mine, the Whitehorse dam, the "big steel bridge", the downtown trolley, the "smiling suburbs", and, T & D's "colossal department store". Service hit the nail right on the head and he no doubt bought both hammer and nail at T&D's.

The diversity of "general merchandise" that T&D's had available at their stores and in particular, at the big T &D's Whitehorse Department store was quite amazing. A newspaper ad for the grocery department from Christmas of 1926 proudly announced the arrival of a selection of delicacies from all over the world. Among the mouth-watering delights were: almonds from Jordan, Turkish figs, Arabian dates, ginger from China, fine teas from Ceylon, preserves from France, Australian carrots and peaches, "fresh fruit" and walnuts from California, west coast pickled herring, fine English toffees and Ontario candied honey.

In the clothing department one could buy anything from ladies' silk hose to men's overalls, moccasins to mackinaws, and a fine Stetson hat to top it all off. The sporting goods department carried Winchester cigarettes and Winchester rifles, fishing rods, flies and tackle, fishing licences, baseball gloves, bats and balls, hockey sticks, tennis rackets, curling brooms, tents, sleeping bags, guns, knives, traps, gold pans, picks, shovels, a Coleman stove or two, a boat, and an "Elto" brand outboard motor to go with it.

By the 1950's Taylor & Drury sold virtually everything: Along with a complete and extensive line of groceries, clothing, toys and sporting goods, one could buy everything needed to build an entire house, including all electrical, plumbing, construction, roofing and flooring materials, plus all the tools needed to build it. One could also find the appliances and furniture needed to furnish it, and all the latest entertainment gadgets including phonographs, radios and televisions. The wood or oil heater needed to heat the house could be bought at T & D's, as well as the pots and pans needed to cook all the food bought at the same store, and so on…

A new generation of Taylors and Drurys

Rather early on, while all the business was taking place, Isaac Taylor and Bill Drury became brothers-in-law as well as partners. When Isaac returned from a buying trip to England in 1910, he brought back Bill's sister, Sarah, on his arm. Meanwhile, Bill's life was not without romance either and, in 1917, he married Lucy Evans a woman he knew from his early days

back in Ontario. Thus, a whole new generation of Taylor & Drury's was in the making.

Isaac and Sarah had three boys, Bill, Albert and Charlie. All would later hold prominent positions within the company, learning the business from the ground up as they started as stock and delivery boys at the Whitehorse store. Then, following in their fathers' footsteps, all three travelled outside to attend college where they received a thorough training in accounting.

Bill, the eldest, managed the Mayo store from 1930 to 1932 and the Champagne post from 1933 to 1937. Then he worked as accountant for the Whitehorse store where he remained throughout the 1940s.

Albert worked at a few of T & D posts including Mayo in the 1930's, then Whitehorse. In 1951 he moved to Vancouver to act as the company expediter.

In 1932 at the age of 19, Charlie moved to Mayo where he lived and managed the Mayo store for ten years. In 1942 Charlie was transferred back to Whitehorse to assist with escalated sales due to the Alaska Highway construction boom. Shortly thereafter, Charlie became the general manager of T & D's when Isaac handed over the reins to his youngest son. Charlie retained the position of general manager until the business closed in 1974.

The three Bills, Isaac and Charlie all at one place at one time, Christmas, 1950. L-R: Bill Drury, Jr., Bill Taylor, Isaac Taylor, Charlie Taylor, and "Big Bill" Drury. [photo courtesy Rolf Hougen]

Bill and Lucy Drury had three children, Thomas, Mary and Bill Jr. Thomas accidentally drowned at Ft. Selkirk at a young age and Mary married and had little to do with the company. However, Bill Jr. turned out to be a "chip off the old block."

After filling the standard positions of delivery boy and grocery clerk, Bill Jr. began learning the fur business under his father. During the late '30s and early '40s Bill Jr. and his father kept very active with the fur business. They built two new posts at Sheldon Lake and Pelly Lakes near the Mackenzie Mountains. Now in his seventies, Bill Sr. welcomed the invention of the float plane which he saw as a big improvement over travelling by dog sled.

In 1946, at the age of 76, Bill Drury Sr. retired, at least that was his intention, and Bill Jr. took over as supervising manager of the trading posts. But the years following would see the fur business decline. During the 1945-46 season, Yukon trappers harvested over $650,000 worth of pelts. Two years later, despite an additional 30,000 pelts being brought into Yukon trading posts, returns were only $230,000. The trapping industry hit rock bottom and, consequently, T&D's closed all their remote fur trading posts.

By 1950 the Whitehorse, Carmacks, Teslin and Mayo stores were the only ones that remained open. In 1955 the company closed its Teslin store after 50 years of service in the community.

By the late 1940s it is said that the Taylor and Drury kids were more interested in cars and things to do with the modern world than manning remote fur trading posts. Bill and Charlie Taylor as well as Bill Drury worked

Taylor & Drury expanded into auto sales during the 1920s. [Yukon Archives photo, Warner collection]

in the sales and management departments of Taylor & Drury Motors during the early 1950s.

In 1953 Taylor & Drury Motors was split in two when Bill Drury Jr. took on the GMC truck, Pontiac and Buick portion of the franchise and established Yukon Motors on Fourth Avenue. At the same time, Bill Taylor took the Chevrolet Oldsmobile portion forming Taylor Chev-Olds on the original T&D lot on Second Avenue.

Both Charlie Taylor and Bill Drury Jr. became active in politics. Charlie was an elected member of territorial council from 1959 to 1961, and Bill sat on Whitehorse's first City Council, serving both as councillor and deputy mayor from 1950 to 1956. In 1986, Charlie and his wife Betty, whom he married 50 years previous at Mayo, were crowned Mr. and Mrs. Yukon in honour of their lifelong community service and spirit. Charlie received the order of Canada in 1990.

Bill Jr. was also very active in placer mining. Between 1953 and 1970 he formed various placer mining companies including: Spruce Creek Placers of Atlin B.C., P and G Placers Ltd. on Burwash Creek in the Kluane, and Waddco Placers on Haggart Creek, which was for about six years the third largest gold producer in the Territory.

In later years Bill Jr. became interested in farming and in 1964 bought a hobby farm 20 miles west of town on the Alaska Highway. Operating in partnership with his son, also Bill Drury Jr., the farm eventually turned into a full time business that the third and youngest Bill Drury is still carrying on today.

Both the Taylor and Drury families are known for their community work. A list of some organizations that these two families became involved with

In 1969, Taylor & Drury bought out the Northern Commercial Co., property next door and joined the two buildings. [Yukon Archives photo, Warner collection]

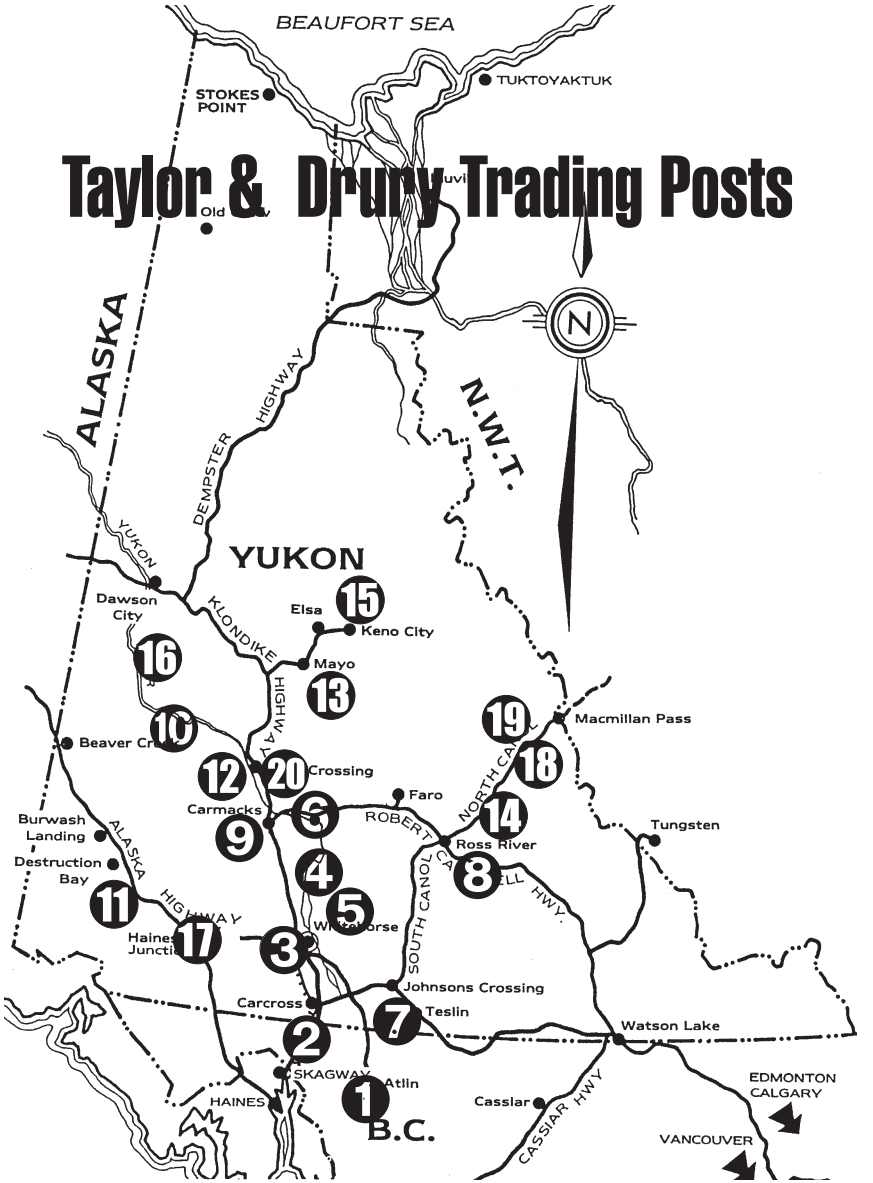
includes: the Whitehorse Board of Trade, the Chamber of Commerce, Masonic Lodge, the Kiwanis Club, The Yukon Order of Pioneers, the Royal Canadian Legion, Elks Lodge, the Whitehorse tourist committee, and the Boy Scouts of Canada.

No, there are no books or movies written about these great Yukoners, but a mountain in central Yukon, Drury Spire, is named in honour of "Big Bill" Drury, the greatest fur buyer in the north. Tadru Lake in central Yukon is a contraction of "Taylor" and "Drury" and Drury Lake rests at the foot of Drury Spire. Two streets in Whitehorse's downtown core bear the names of the company founders: Taylor Street and Drury Street. Other downtown streets are named for government officials, White Pass executives, or law enforcement officers.

Among the surviving members of the Taylor and Drury clans are Betty Taylor, who lives in Whitehorse (see Yukoner Magazine No. 3). Her daughter, Verna also lives in Whitehorse and daughter Barbara is in Prince George, B. C. Bill Drury Jr. moved to Sechelt, B. C. in 2001. His daughter, Shirley, lives in Fairbanks, Alaska, and Bill Jr., (Bill the third) lives with his family at the Drury farm on the Alaska Highway. And yes, there is now a fourth Bill. The youngest and third Bill Drury, Jr. is the great grandson of "Big Bill" Drury. The writer wishes to extend a hearty "thank you" to Bill Jr. of Drury farm for his contribution to this story.

Woman and child at Whisky Flats, going home with supplies (after shopping at Taylor & Dury's?) [Rolf Hougen collection]

Taylor & Drury Trading Posts



1. Atlin
2. Bennett
3. Whitehorse
4. Hootalinqua
5. Livingstone
6. Little Salmon
7. Teslin
8. Pelly Banks (Hoole Canyon)
9. Carmacks
10. Coffee Creek
11. Kluahne
12. Ft. Selkirk
13. Mayo
14. Ross River
15. Keno City
16. Stewart Island
17. Champagen
18. Pelly Lakes
19. Sheldon Lake
20. Minto

The End of an Era

In the summer of 1974, the *Whitehorse Star* ran a photo of Charlie Taylor exiting the T & D department store on First Avenue for the last time. After serving the Yukon for 75 years, the company was closing its last store. When the big neon sign that had hung for decades, proudly and brightly on the corner of First and Main was unceremoniously cut free and lowered from its perch, it was the end of an era. For many Whitehorse residents it also seemed like the end of "the good old days".

No longer could one go downtown and buy all that was needed at the one-stop store. In the rapidly expanding city, shoppers often had to get into their vehicles and drive to a half dozen locations to find everything on their lists.

More importantly, Whitehorse lost the "meeting place" where everyone and their dog could be found chatting it up in front of the store's big bay windows. That was where the sourdoughs and characters hung out to see who could cast the farthest yarn. Over the years there were people like "Old man" Whitney, Captain Jimmy Jackson, "Wigwam Harry", "Buzz Saw Jimmy", "Stampede John", "Buffalo Pitts", Robert Service, the "Hootalinqua Shaman", Teslin Chief George Johnson, Sam McGee, and "Stroller White" and, lest we forget, Isaac Taylor and "Big Bill" Drury.

In his later years, Bill used to love to hold court at the store where he told stories of the old days of '98, and all the famous old sourdoughs that he met "on the trail". The one story that he was never too tired to brag about was how he was the slowest man ever at getting to the Klondike.

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The T&D block has been used as retail space since 1903. It is now called Horwood's Mall. [S.H. photo, Feb. 26, 2005.]

New Tales of the Klondike

By Robbie Benoit

Yukon Women

We Yukon men have always held, you girls in high regard
For rising early on a cold winter day, going out to start the car

For steady jobs you've always held, while we were unemployed
For shacking up from fall to spring, as we have all enjoyed

Our dogs that shed so badly, you claimed were homes for bugs
Our chainsaw parts on the kitchen table, or in pieces on the rug

But it's not that we're ungrateful, and your efforts aren't in vain
So here's that wrench you asked for, while you fix that frozen drain

We take you girls for granted, which is indeed a crime
While you help us fill out pogey cards, to get them in on time

It's not that we don't love you, for you take good care of us
Sorry about that broken plate, have you got a couple of bucks?

Them Yukon women, they're the best! And that, dear friends is fact
I'd ask whasshername to vouch for that, but she's splitting wood out back

They claim they're more efficient, if we just stay out of the way
A woman's work is never done, and we men keep it that way

So life here in the Yukon, is as good as it can get
I'm glad them fellers way down south, just haven't caught on yet

Cause we love those Yukon women, and I'm sure that you'll agree
That those Yukon women, as I say, are a very special breed

The Bear and One-Eyed Bill

It was late one night, in Dawson City
back not too long ago
That I staggered drunk, past the bat-wing doors
of the Hotel Eldorado

One coat pocket, held a bottle of Scotch
and the other one held Rye
Down the boardwalk I weaved, a drunken trail
with the whiskey's fog in my eye

I've only one, good eye you see
and it screws up my depth perception
So good liquor I pour, down my throat so sore
to improve the other's reception

I shuffled along, deserted streets
past dumpsters and stray dogs
Past campgrounds flashing, "No Vacancy" signs
and cabins built out of logs

I passed long rows, of Airstream trailers
and a couple of them mountain cycles
And I marvelled at what, they can do down south
with a beer can once recycled

I found the place, on the riverbank
where the ferry does come ashore
So I sat myself down, on the gravel there
and waited ten minutes or more

I just see the lights, of the flat bottomed scow
parked over the other side
Perfect! I thought, I've got time for a drink
so I pulled out my bottle of rye

I was sitting back there, in the cool morning air
in the middle of taking a swig
When to my surprise, with my one good eye
I spotted the hairy thing

I knew it was, a grizzly bear
by the hump that straddled his back
He had a thick coat of hair, with silvery tips
and with giant paws he tracked

I got to my feet, real slow and quiet
I was wishing that I was more sober
But the brute turned round, with his ears perked up
and I knew it was all over

I made a run for a car, fifty feet away
 Iwas praying the doors weren't locked
But at the rate of speed, that thing could run
 it may as well have been fifty blocks

He let loose a great, blood curdling roar
 that turned my legs to wood
Then he passed me before, I'd gotten half-way
 then he spun around and stood

My life depended on my next move
 I didn't have time to think
So I pulled a bottle from my pocket and said
 Hey Fish-Breath! Want a drink?

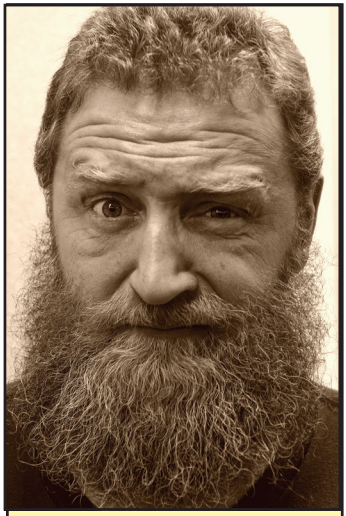
The growling stopped, and the beast bent down
 then he grabbed my bottle of rye
Then he stood up straight, and guzzled it down
 until the bottom was dry

'Twas the strangest thing, I'd ever seen
 An alcoholic bear
So I took sip, from my bottle of scotch
 and asked if he'd like a share

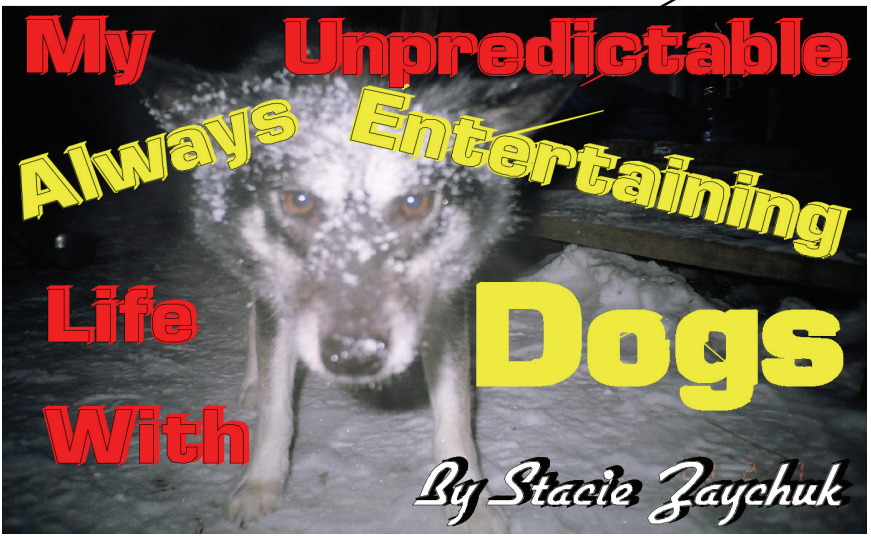
When we both woke up, on the riverbank
 with the bright sun way up high
I was growling at him, he was snarling at me
 and some tourists happened by

So the rest of the summer we hammed it up
We gave them a hell of a show
We charged two drinks, for each picture they took
 and double for video

But it's winter-time now, and the varmit's out back
 he's busy hibernating
And I'm sitting here sober, trying to figure out
 how to get him to an A-A meeting



Robbie Benoit, veteran miner and champion dog groomer, lives in Whitehorse. He quit mining after falling down a mineshaft at Ketza River, and began a new career working with dogs— and writing. (sadly, Robbie died not long after these poems were published.)



My first ride on a dogsled was unforgettable. The huge dogyard was incredibly loud with screeching, whining dogs, all of whom wanted to go out on this run. My adrenalin level shot up immediately and increased with every second as I waited until we departed. One dog at a time was brought to the line to be hooked up, each adding to the growing intensity of the situation. I really started to doubt my sanity, since I had just moved to the Yukon and signed up for a winter of this madness. However, the second we tore off down the trail, the transformation was amazing. Everything grew quiet and peaceful as the dogs ran in unison, content to be on the trail. I then realized that I wanted to keep experiencing this beautiful feeling and knew that day that dogs would be in my life forever.

I worked for a couple of years as a handler for a large kennel. Handlers, also known as "enthusiastic slaves", do a variety of chores for hours on end, for little or no money. "It's all about the experience" they tell you when you sign up. The first few weeks into it, deprived of sleep, working 18 hour days, being outside all day in cold temperatures, scooping and knowing more about dog poop than you ever wanted to, really starts to make you wonder if this "experience" is worth it. I have to admit, after a couple years of guiding clients on dogsled trips, participating in races, following races, meeting people from all over the world, traveling to the smallest and some of the most isolated towns in Alaska and the Yukon, I have a few tales to tell. It was most definitely worth it!

Sled dogs can be quirky characters. I realized quickly that they could often act like students with a substitute teacher. They will *play* with you to see how much they can get away with. They somehow know who the "rookies" are and will often go out of their way to test the newbies. Every new handler gets put to the test with certain dogs.

One of the most memorable moments in my early mushing career was when I took out a team of 8 dogs while working as a handler. That's a good-sized team, with a lot of power. Having dependable leaders who *listen* to you is important. I *thought* I was taking out a dependable leader one day, but she really had me wondering about five minutes into the run. Maude knew the trail and all we had to do was cross the river to get to the main trail. Well, she decided that day to NOT cross the river, but to crisscross and zigzag all over the river. It must be noted that the trail was a very clearly marked trail! And we never went another way on the river. However, Maude decided that day we were going to explore that river. After what seemed like *HOURS* of us bouncing around in circles on the river, I was sweating from head to toe (fully dressed for the -25C, not man-handling a bunch of dogs on the trail), and exhausted. This year there was little snow on the river, so getting a snow hook to set (which would normally hold the team in place) was nearly impossible. The last thing you want to do is lose your team. It can be dangerous for you left out alone, and for them running down the trail alone.

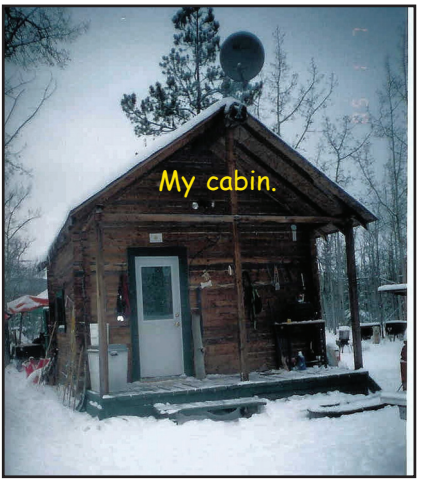
At one point I tried turning them the right way and somehow ended up in *between* the sled and the last set of dogs (wheel dogs). I was wound up in the lines, being dragged along, shouting myself hoarse to dogs who seemed to look at me as a screeching annoyance more than anything. Half the time the sled was on its side, and its contents were strewn all over the river.

Finally we made it to the trailhead and I stopped the team on a slight hill and put in the snow hook to keep them anchored. I looked back at the mess on the river and realized the musher I was working for would be on his return trip very soon and come across this disaster. It would take him no time to figure out what had gone wrong. I had totally lost control of the situation and madness ensued. However, I was NOT going back on that river yet. We had a 20-mile run to do and we were going to do it! I had thought of just turning the whole crew around and going back to the yard, but I was not giving up. Ok, so I also wasn't sure we'd even MAKE it across the river again.

In the end, the run went fine and there were no problems after that. Apparently Maude miraculously remembered commands and we were able to do our loop and come back. Upon return to that river, I noticed a few of my belongings were gone, and picked up the remainder.

2005 Dash for Cash Race, day 2. Harris, Ripper in lead, Jack and Rupert in wheel. That's me driving. We came in 5th.

I somewhat sheepishly returned to the yard, snacked and watered the dogs and headed into the house. When we discussed what had happened out there on the river, I was happy to hear that the musher was looking at the positive side of things. He pointed out the fact that we had this disastrous beginning, but ended up overcoming that and putting in a decent run. So what if a few things exploded out of my sled bag onto the river! So what if there was total anarchy between musher and dogs! In the end, we had a successful run, and most importantly, the dogs were happy no matter what was going on behind them.


My cabin.

Well, five years later and I like to think I've learned a lot about dogs. Although I must admit, it's like they're the teachers and I'm just the student who is sometimes slow to catch on. But, thankfully as many know, dogs are awfully forgiving and resilient. Of course, it helps when they're allowed to cram in the cabin with me on those 50 days! That's right, eleven furry beasts plus one not-so-furry beast sharing a small cabin. If they're not housetrained, I tell you, they sure learn fast! I've brought in a few older dogs from other kennels and most have not spent a night indoors. But these guys catch on quick. They figure out fast that if they behave inside, they enjoy the warmth pumping out from the wood stove. Not to mention all that


Taking a break on of our early season training runs on our regular trail system off the Klondike Highway. These little "forks" are great places to practice commands with your leaders.

warmth those extra bodies bring in. The extra hair is another matter for my vacuum and me...

I've got my own team of eleven and we live north of Whitehorse in a small 16x16-foot cabin with no running water. This winter I discovered the joy (yet another one of those learning lessons!) of really using the dogs for WORK! We mostly just run for recreation, while competing in a few small local races. However, during one particularly cold snap, a bunch of us in the neighborhood were stuck at home for more than a few days. Temperatures sunk to a wicked -55C at night, and rose to a balmy -43C during the day! No one could start their vehicles, nor did they want to. Those are temperatures that snap door handles off, crack extension cords and eat up your wood supply.

I live on a side road off the Klondike Highway, about 35 km north of Whitehorse. With the dogs, I go through a fair bit of water, especially when we are training. I refill my water jugs every few days in town. This cold snap though, left me dry and desperate for water. Now, there is always the option to melt snow, but the amount of snow needed to fill one five gallon bucket to feed the dogs would take all day to gather. So, my neighbors who have lived without water for years and knew the troubles the cold brought, offered up their water from their new well. I just had to find a way to drag it home on the toboggan. Now the obvious answer to that (for me) was to haul it down the road myself, which I had done before. But you can only pull so many heavy water jugs. My friends suggested putting those PULLING SLEDDOGS to use!

Another one of those early season training runs. We were up to about 10 miles a run at this point. Kuna, the big guy in back, is the "psuedo sled dog" - loves to come out with us, but not much of a puller. He also outweighs everyone by 50lbs, so he runs loose. He is also our "protector" - he'll chase loose dogs who attempt to chase us!

"Hey! Great idea I thought. Why didn't I think of that?" Well, there is a reason why we now refer to that as the **"Brilliant Idea of the Winter."**

So I loaded up the water jugs, bootied and harnessed up Jack and Harris (who were SUPER excited for whatever reason, maybe because it had warmed up to -43C!), and we headed down the road. The gravel road was perfect, with a nice layer of snow packed tight on top. I filled up

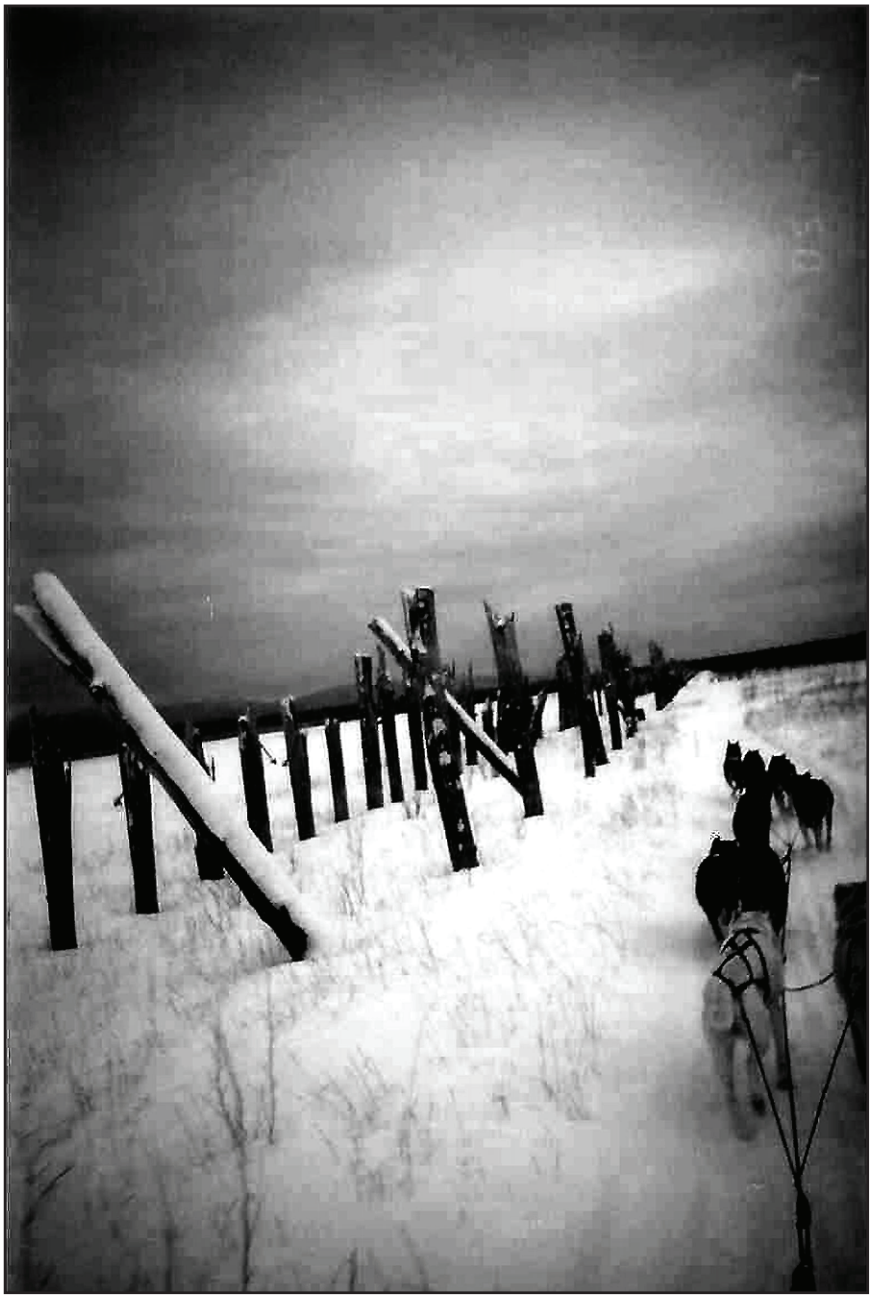
four jugs next door and put them on the sled. We started off with me running a bit ahead of them and the toboggan to see if they would do okay, and okay they did! They flew right to me and as I was looking back and trying to slow them at the same time, they passed me with their lines getting tangled in my feet. I stumbled and flailed for a bit, but finally tripped and ended up on my *face* in a nanosecond.

Ok, so that didn't faze me too much... oddly enough, I'm used to wiping out! So I took the camera planning to get an action shot down the road. After all, I'm finally using my dogs for WORK!! Not just for fun and recreation. We had PURPOSE here today. It was an exciting moment. I got the dogs to stay while I ran up ahead, yes, once again (that slow learner thing...). My plan was to run alongside them down the road and then down our driveway. I don't know what was going on in my head that made me think I could keep up with these guys. I guess I thought the water would slow them down, but no. That didn't happen. Before I knew it I had two happy huskies, (grinning maniacally!) zooming right towards me at Mach speed! My neighbor described it well as he stood and watched - he saw the dogs speeding towards me, one went on one side of me, the other on the other side of me, and then I was there facing this toboggan full of water, *speeding* towards me. His comment to this was "oh, this should be interesting..."

I had no choice other than to take the hit to stop these two maniacs from heading out to our side road without me(either that or I was too stunned to react). Sure enough the toboggan hit me at full speed and I just remember ending up flat on my face (again) before I had time to process this craziness or my injuries. Once again, I was wound up in their lines and the toboggan, but hey, at least it stopped the dogs!

My friend Laura and I on a run one chilly and windy day across the Yukon River. We refer to this stop as "the village" - an old First Nations fishing camp complete with a few broken down cabins and a cache.

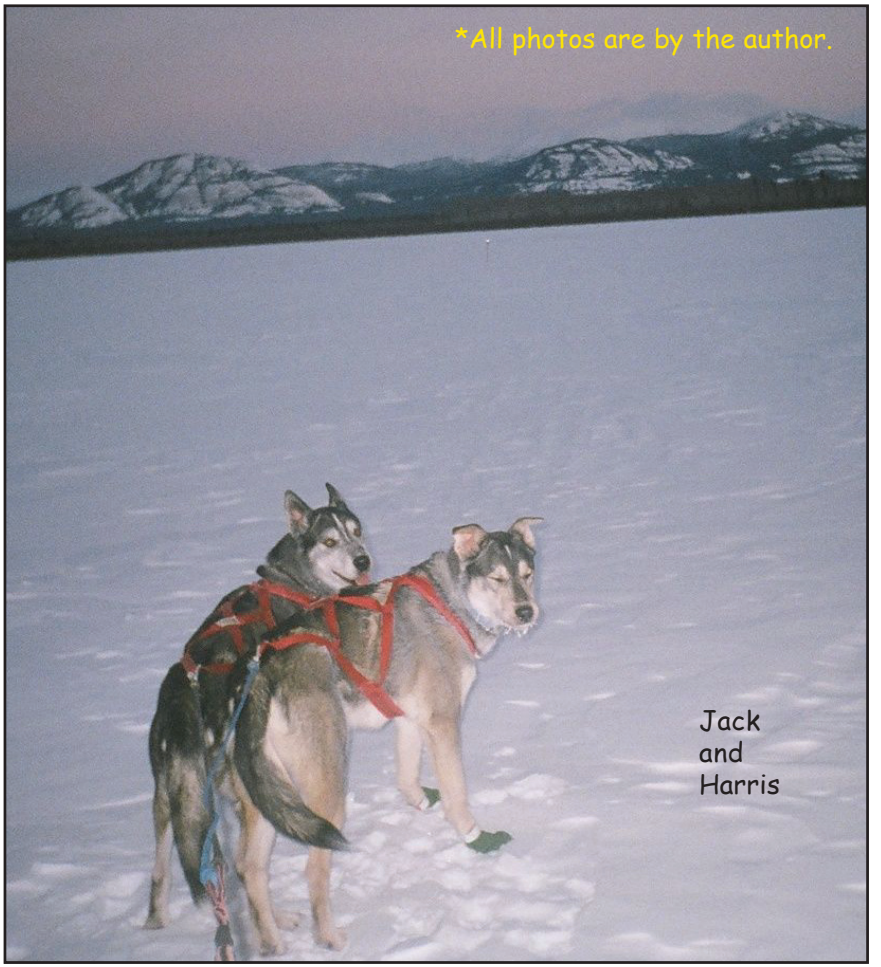
That's me on the sled, and Laura is taking the photo with her team in behind. You can really see the deep snow and how great a snow year we had this winter! I love how my leader, Ripper is looking back at me...waiting for the signal to go.



This is on the Yukon river at the the beginning of Lake Laberge. These posts are on a little island and can be seen up and down the river on both sides around here. They were used to guide the old sternwheelers upriver. I call it "Travelling through Time."

Ok, time to brainstorm. So far, we hadn't made it out of the driveway, had two disasters, and I was starting to get black and blue. I decided I had no other choice than to hop in the sled and wedge myself in between water jugs. I was hoping it would provide control, and bonus, I'd get a *ride!* Well, thanks to that slick road, they had NO problem dragging my bruised body plus the water all the way down to our driveway. It was a crazy, but fun ride! We sped down the road, me on my knees ready for a bailout just in case. There is little control on a plastic toboggan I quickly realized. But the view is great!! Anyway, they turned in our driveway like two old pros and there we hit the deeper snow, and lost a water jug. No problem, backtracking with two dogs is easy. We loaded up that renegade jug and headed home.

That was yet another kooky idea to chalk up in the record books, but hell, I'd do it again tomorrow!! We could use the practice. ❑



Bride to the Arctic

Recollections of Elly Porsild – 1930

In issue number 28 we ran one of several articles that Whitehorse writer Ellen Davignon has written about her mother, Elly Porsild. In 1930, Elly left her native Denmark for a life of adventure in northern Canada. In the Yukon she and her husband, Bob, built the original Alaska Highway lodge at Johnson's Crossing and operated it until their retirement in 1965. Some years before Elly's death, in 2004, Ellen and other family members encouraged Elly to share her story of life as a newlywed in Aklavik, Northwest Territories, near where her husband was preparing for the arrival of a herd of reindeer from Alaska. Here's Elly's story of her life at Reindeer Station.

I bought my ticket and left Copenhagen early in June 1930. It took about a week for the crossing to Montreal. And my father-in-law-to-be, Dr. Morten Porsild, was there to meet me. We were great friends. And he took me to Ottawa.

I stayed with Erling and Asta [Bob's brother and wife] in Ottawa. Well, he [Morten] was also there. Oh, I was bored silly! So one day Morten said "Why don't you come down and help me at the Museum?" Morten was spending the summer doing research in the botanical collection at the Canadian

Bob Porsild and Elly after their wedding at Aklavik, Sept. 1930.

National Museum of Man where his son Erling was employed. Erling was later head of the Herbarium at that institution.

It was a very hot summer, and of course I couldn't say, no. So every morning we trudged up to the Museum -- luckily it was in the basement so it wasn't so hot -- and I had to sit there all day with these dusty old plants and trying to tell which was what and it was terrible! Then we broke for lunch and went upstairs to the restaurant and we were more dead than alive when we came out of there. It was just awful.

I stayed there for two months because they were building me a house up north in Aklavik and it had to be finished. I couldn't come there until it was ready. I stayed until the 16th of August and it was the longest two months I ever spent because Asta and I didn't pan out too well. Of course I had to be nice because I was a guest and she had to be nice because I was a guest . . .well you know.

Across from Erling and Asta's house in Rockcliffe Park was a nice family, very good friends of theirs and they became very good friends of mine. If I couldn't stand it, I went over there to the Lloyds' and I got sympathy and everything else.

I left Ottawa on the train to Edmonton. Oh, I enjoyed it! Mrs. Black ([Martha Louise Black, first woman Member of Parliament from the Yukon) was on the train. She was playing cards all the time. I didn't meet her. Of course I didn't know who she was, but somebody told me after. I was getting off first and when I picked my things up, she said, "Oh you pretty girl are you going to leave us now?"

I wasn't shy, you know, but I was strange because I didn't know the language too well. At first I had only the English we learned in school but, when it was agreed that I was coming over here, we had a family whose son had been in Africa so spoke fluent English. So it was agreed that when we went to town we should go together and he would teach me to talk English.

I went to Edmonton and then the next day I took the train to Fitzgerald-Waterways [Fort Fitzgerald in northern Alberta]. My father-in-law had told me "You will meet many rough-looking men on the trip. You might not like what you see but there's gold inside."

I was the only woman on that train. Well, it was just a small one, the "Muskeg Limited," they called it. We got stuck. We came a day later than we should. It should have taken nine hours, I guess, but it took that night and most of the next day, and they had hardly anything to feed us, so we were kind of hungry when we came off. We stayed over night and the next day the boat was waiting for us - just a small boat, the *Northland Echo*. It ran from Fitzgerald to McMurray.

At McMurray we got on the *Distributor*. The Good Ship *Distributor* wasn't so good because we were one day out and then we had engine trouble. So we had to turn back and we transferred to the steamboat *Mackenzie*. We were on the Mackenzie River. And I fell in love with the purser; oh he was a nice guy. Anyway, so we came to Fort Smith.

There was Miss Cunningham and that other nurse that was there.

And they sat me on a chair and sat in front of me and wanted to know everything about me -- my religion and everything! Miss Cunningham was going to Aklavik and the other one was going to a smaller post to get married. She didn't stay with him. I can't remember her name.

The first night out from Fort Smith, we were sitting there on board ship and making merry. Playing cards, I guess. There was one Mounted Police. He sat at the table. He had his hat on, his gun by his side. Stiff and staunch he sat there all night. Never said a word to anybody. Never said a word all

He had his hat on, his gun by his side. Stiff and staunch he sat there all night. Never said a word to anybody. Never said a word all night.

night. No one paid any attention to him, because he didn't make any attempt to join in the merriment. The next morning he was getting off at one of the stations. When somebody got off we would all crowd around and wave good bye to them. So he was halfway down the stairs and we were hanging over the rails and he looked up and said, "Elly?" When you hear your name you automatically answer so I said, "Yes?" "Would you give me a kiss goodbye?" I just said "NO!" And everybody stared. That was awful. I blushed to my hair!

We stopped at all the places on the Mackenzie. We stayed at Hay River. There was a dance. We stopped at the other places and took in wood. We were on the Mackenzie, I don't know how many days. I left Ottawa on the 16th of August and I arrived in Aklavik on the 16th of September. The accommodations were fairly nice and the food was good. And there were all these young apprentices for all the various outposts. We had a heck of a good time.

When I came to Good Hope there was a telegram that Bob was waiting for me in Aklavik. Then it started to get cold. The day we came to Aklavik there was icicles all over the ship, you know -- the riggings and all over the place. That was my first experience, really, with cold weather. As we came around the bend, all the people gathered. It was always a big event when the steamboat came in. Two policemen were standing holding Bob's hands so he shouldn't jump in the water and swim out to the boat!

Then of course when we came to Aklavik, everyone is milling around, and we were two girls, you know, and we were quite pretty and looked happy, both of us, and everyone wanted to know "who is who" but when Bob came forth there was no doubt about it. That was the 16th. We got married on the 18th. We were waiting for the booze and supplies. The rest of the supplies came on the next boat, two days later.

First we had a wedding dinner at the roadhouse run by Mr. and Mrs. Kost. Caribou roast with all the trimmings and a great big wedding cake with icing that was so hard we could hardly cut through it, the two of us. We

had all the white people - I guess there were about thirty. Of course the Anglican minister, Reverend Bill Murray was there. And we had invited the Catholic father, but he said, "No." After the white people ate, everybody else came and ate; there was lots for everybody. Then we danced until early morning.

I was taken up to the alter by a Mounted Police, Arthur Fielding, in all his finery. And Bob and his best man, Hans Hansen were standing up there with their backs to me. When they played "Here Comes the Bride" they never even turned around, they just stood there! And I thought, "What in the world am I doing here, I might just as well turn around and go out again. They don't care if I'm here or not!" So we got duly married.

And then we went in to sign the register and while we were in there we heard "STEAMBOAT" And when we came out, there wasn't a soul in church. So much for the first white wedding -- we were the first white couple who got married there -- but it was more interesting to get to the boat and get the stuff.

There were about 30 white people, and about 100 people in Aklavik altogether and they all came to the dance. After the wedding we danced in one of the warehouses to the music of three fiddlers. The Eskimos were wonderful dancers, so light on their feet no matter how big and fat they were, and being a good dancer myself, I made many, new friends that evening. They are a jolly people, always smiling and happy. The language barrier was no problem; smiles and nods were all that were necessary. Bob spoke their language fluently; later he taught me a few words, but it is a hard language to learn.

A little scow came in and all the officers came down to the dance as well. About 12 o'clock word came down from the wireless station that there were ham sandwiches and coffee for everyone so we went up there. For the past year, Bob had been looking over the grazing for the reindeer so he knew everybody and everybody knew him. He had been building our house and the corrals. I never saw a reindeer. I was taken out to see the corrals. But after the deer came they were far from where we lived. I didn't see a reindeer until much later.

On my wedding night I slept at the minister's house, where I'd been staying, and Bob stayed on the boat. There was just a blanket between their bedroom and ours, you see. . Mrs. Murray said we were welcome to stay with them but Bob said, "No." So the next day I waited for a telegram from home and then it took two days on the boat to go down to the reindeer station in the Delta where our house was. The first night, Hans and Wilhelm Hatting -- they were both Danes you know -- said they didn't want to sleep on board so they took all the dogs and the tent and slept on shore.

We were going to stay down in front of the steering house. There was a little trap door to the hold and in there it was clean. Two bunks, one on each side, and a brand new sleeping bag on each and we were going to sleep down there. And Bob came down there and he was going to close the trap door. And I said, "Don't do that . Don't do that! I have to be able to see out! I can't, I can't. . ."

I think he thought, "What a crazy woman I've married." He told me it was getting too cold at night for that, but I said "I can't do it -- there must be some little bit of air." So he put his sleeping bag over beside my bunk. And he lay there all night holding my hand. Not that it helped my claustrophobia very much. But I had that little bit of the trap door open so I could see out. It was awful.

But he had a house ready for me at Reindeer Station. It was way up on the cutbank above the delta. Bob carried me over the doorstep, as custom demands, kissed me, and put me down to explore my new domain. The view was grand. It was getting winter of course. There were mountains all over the place, and just the wide river there, stretching for miles and miles.There were no trees, just some wind-blown willow bushes. There were no neighbours for 15 miles, no radio, no telephone. We were entirely alone.

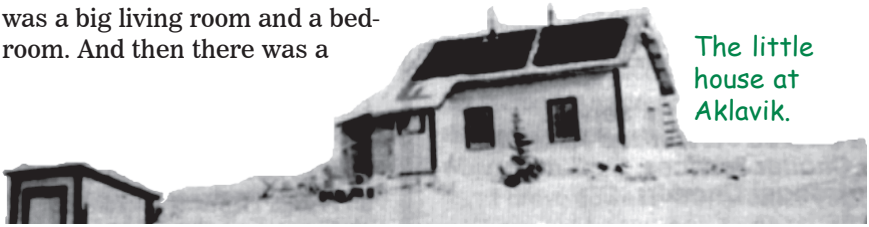
When I came in the house there was a big pot of applesauce sitting on the stove and it was warm yet. And I said why is that warm? Meanwhile he was looking for Donald, an Eskimo boy. Donald didn't know when we were coming so he had made the apple sauce and then had gone to visit some friends that lived further back for the afternoon. Oh! Was he ever disappointed when he came back and saw that we were home? He almost cried when he saw us he was so disappointed. He wanted to be there when we came. He was very, very nice.

And the first thing I saw after the applesauce was one of my Danish sausages lying on the table, and I asked what it was doing there? It was drying out (Elly had shipped three boxes of her personal belongings ahead of her, but they had arrived wet, so Bob had unpacked all her things to dry them out).

In those days the sanitary napkins they were knitted. Our grandmothers and mothers, they all knitted sanitary napkins for the young girls. And of course there were lots of those in there (in the boxes that had been damaged by water). Upstairs Bob had put lines up for clothes and hung them all up to dry! Imagine! So he'd forbidden the guys from going up there He told me he felt like an intruder, because he didn't want to mess around in my things, but if he didn't do it, well they would just get spoiled.

The next morning Hans and Hatting gave us breakfast in bed. They gave us boiled eggs and toast and coffee and juice. It was very nice. Served it with a flourish!

You came into our house through a small lean-to. Then there was a big room where there was a big stove and a table under the window that looked over the river -- beautiful. Behind that was a big living room and a bedroom. And then there was a



The little house at Aklavik.

big kitchen and behind that a bathroom which was never used because there was no running water. There was a bathtub but it took so much water and you had to haul the water way down from the river.

I have never been homesick, except during the war, because . . . I didn't know what was happening. The first letter I got after the war, I was sitting there with it in my hand and I didn't dare open it, you know. But nothing had happened to my family in Denmark. Of course, when my mother died, I felt left out of things and like nobody cared where I was. Otherwise I never felt homesick.

Hans and I floundered around in the ice-cold water, trying to get our hands on solid ice.

We spent that winter in our little house. I was pregnant right away that winter. That was the winter we went through the ice and Donald drowned. Early in October we took the boat seven miles down [to the Inuit village at Kittigazuit] to put it up for the winter. It was decided that Hans and Donald should take me home and come back the next day for Bob, who would stay behind to tie up all the loose ends with the boat.

Away we went, Hans behind, Donald ahead and me sitting like a queen on the sledge. The boys decided to take a shortcut over the ice; the sledge broke through and Donald drowned. We lost all the dogs too. One of them put his feet on my shoulder like asking me save him, but I told him I had to save myself and I couldn't. Hans and I floundered around in the ice-cold water, trying to get our hands on solid ice.

We finally succeeded, and half crawling, half walking, freezing and me crying, we went back to a white-faced and horrified Bob, who got a fire going so we could get dry and warm. And poor Donald drowned. He was just 18 or 19. He was one of many, many kids, but he was the best of them. It was a very well respected family he came from. Oh, it was sad.

Next morning we walked back only stopping for lunch (which consisted of canned sardines kept under our shirts to thaw them). Frozen sardines taste very nice when they're all you've got and you're hungry. It was a sad little trio that trudged the long way home.

Now we had no dogs to haul wood in with, so we went down to the river and found driftwood and had to haul it by sleigh but there was lots of good driftwood. Of course I had to stand at one end of a big crosscut saw and Bob at the other end. And one day he looked at me said "Boy you can sure see that your Dad was an old lumber man!" That was a great compliment to me!

When the snow came, it was my task to fill a large water barrel which stood beside our big wood stove (so it would melt) but that was a thankless job because it seemed no matter how much snow I dumped in, there never seemed to be much water.

We used gasoline lamps for illumination and from when the sun disap-

peared on November 15th until it came back again on January 19th, they were almost always going.

The dogs left pups, you know, and they were big enough for the sleigh but they had never pulled it before and they had to be broken in. Bob, he went behind with the sleigh, and I went in front of them with the frozen fish, trying to get them along. It must have looked pretty funny. Well, that was the only way to do it, he said, so that's what we did.

At Christmas we went to Aklavik with Hans' dog team, collected our sacks of mail (what a treat as we hadn't had any since September), and had a gay old time. Hans lost his heart to an Eskimo girl and stayed behind. We borrowed four dogs -- the sledge was ours -- which got us safely home.

We stayed mostly inside in the winter. We had a big stove. Bob and I were the only ones there. The other ones had gone back. Once in a while we would get visitors, and the Eskimos would visit with us and so on. We read and played records, Bob played his guitar, and he had all his things with Ottawa to report on. I learned how to make snowshoes, to make ammunition for the gun, and to fire a gun. I didn't see a white woman until June.

One afternoon I got offended over some trivial remark from Bob, so I took my parka and went out. I was not going to stay with such a brute. I knew there was an empty cabin 12 miles away; that was my goal. It got darker, I didn't like it one bit, and once I turned around to see how far I had gone, I saw the lights from the windows high up there in my home, and that put a stop to my attempted runaway. I went back, prepared to be forgiving, and the monster hadn't even noticed that I had left him and was unaware of any wrong doings on his side. He'd been engrossed in some bookkeeping. It was several months before I told him that story.

Bob's brother, Erling, was in Ottawa and then he got this job to pick up Laplanders to come and herd reindeer. Bob had hoped to get that job, but Erling said he couldn't spare him so it was Erling that picked up the Laplanders. The reindeer drive was in progress, and the Laps were coming up there to teach the Eskimos to herd reindeer.

On June 3, our house burned to the ground at 7:00 a. m. It was a near disaster, as we lost everything, and only had the clothes we had hastily put on. Bob got his face burned and his red hair singed when he tried to save something. We lost everything. I didn't cry. I was taking it very calm and collected. And one day, something was wet and I was going to hang it up, and I came up over by the house and of course there were no clothespins. That did it. Just a little thing like that, you know.

But those are the kinds of things that make you a better person, I suppose God looked after us as He always has. Some Eskimos came along who had food to spare and helped to get the boat out (the ice had gone out three days earlier) so we could get to Aklavik. And the baby -- she was not supposed to come until July -- came early.

When Betty was born I asked what it was and they said it was a girl, so I said to Bob "Are you sure you're not mistaken, because I wanted a boy," it being the first one, you know. Oh, he was sure, all right! He picked out the

name - Anna Elizabeth after an old girlfriend of his. So I said, "we can't call her that," and we called her Betty.

And then Erling and the Lap families came. They came and built log houses. I don't know where the heck they got the logs from, but they were all log houses. One family was newly married. There was one that had a little girl and there was another family that had three kids. So we were added to. It was nice to have them to visit with. And Asta [the sister-in-law from Ottawa], she decided she was going to teach them English -- very much against their will. She had them all over there and tried to teach them English a couple of times.

About a two years after Betty was born I had another baby, but he didn't live. The nurse said "I fought so hard for him but I just couldn't save him." It was tragic because I was alone. Bob was called out to Ottawa. I was to come out as soon as the baby was born. He was born the 5th of August and I left on the next boat. Well, I was in the hospital for a week. Then two days later the boat was there and Betty and I left.

We were finished then, you see. There was nothing more for us to do. Erling was there and Erling was the boss and Bob had had enough of answering to his younger brother. They had almost come to a parting of the ways when they were looking for grazing grounds, you know. For half a year the brothers didn't talk to each other.

I didn't go to Ottawa. I waited for Bob in Edmonton. He met me there and we stayed in the McDonald Hotel....

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RCMP cabin at Granville. 1949.

Aaro Aho The Mine Finder

By Jane Gaffin

First and foremost, Aaro Aho was a geologist—a mine finder—who believed deeply in the Yukon.

He was sure as much ore could exist at a thousand feet below surface as near surface in the Anvil Range and that the ore potential was limited only by exploration depth and extraction economics.

An extraordinary man endowed with a good mind that he used imaginatively, he had a knack for seeing invisible things others could not.

Aho was a careful scientist, making his own luck. Ambition and optimism were his strong points. He thrilled when breaking new ground and exploring the unknown. He endlessly raked over muskeg and mountains, searching for what he wanted.

"I was hunting elephants, either a high-grade profitable deposit or a low-grade of large enough tonnage to be profitable,' said Aho, a whiz in petrology. (This special branch of geology comes from the Greek word "petrol" for stone plus "logos" for science deals with the origin, structure and history of rocks.)

Originally, he had planned a career in research. But he thought research was less exciting than hunting elephantine mineral deposits in the Yukon's clean laboratory, a detour that changed the territory's economic health by opening up the country.

Later, he spoke of his mixed feelings about the results.

Since the Yukon's mining industry was based on high-grade gold and

silver production, he first looked at the Klondike area of 1898 gold rush fame. Next, he moved into the Keno Hill area where high-grade silver veins were masked in heavy overburden.

There was no magic formula to lead to a major discovery except Aho's characteristic of doubling his work load and injecting extra muscle and brains into his performance. He untiringly promoted his ideas.

Tall and khaki-clad, he had a dark brush cut, tolerance and a benign disposition. He was a sentimentalist, environmentalist, technician, educated gambler and a mentor to many.

To him, enthusiasm ranked as high as experience and he always attracted the cream of the crop. Summer students who attended Aho's School of Hard Rocks learned about mineral prospecting, human nature and how to get along with Yukoners. Many went on to very successful careers in the mining business.

Aho's unwavering faith in the Yukon was rewarded in 1965. He and a small exploration contingent had moved into the Anvil Range area and discovered the mine that spiraled the Yukon into world prominence.

The 78 million ton lead-zinc-silver Faro deposit came into production in 1969 and was destined as Canada's largest lead producer. It contributed 50 percent to the Yukon's economic well-being while directly employing 400 people.

Since only one prospect in a thousand makes a mine, it is definitely a feat to find one deposit worthy as a major mine. Yet Aho gave a repeat performance in 1973 when he found the Grum zinc-lead-silver deposit, prefaced by the 1970 discovery of the Sierra Gorda copper molybdenum deposit in northern Chile.

Aho's bent for the outdoors harkened back to his boyhood when he spent many happy hours exploring Vancouver Island alone.

He was born on a farm near Ladysmith, British Columbia, on June 30, 1925. Although his parents' small farm was a mile from the closest neighbors and playmates, his childhood was normal and happy, other than suffering an illness in his fifth year. Spinal meningitis destroyed half of his equilibrium mechanism and he had to re-learn to walk. He was left deaf in one ear.

He was of Finnish descent and inherited the best qualities from each parent. His father, Emil Aho, was the builder and his mother, Alma, had a good business head.

Mrs. Aho had moved from Finland via Colorado to British Columbia at age 17. Born liberated, she was among the first women in the province to vote and get a driver's license.

To honor his parents, Aho placed a slab of white quartzite from the Keno Hill area on the top of Aho Mountain, located 100 miles north of the village of Ross River. The commemorative plaque is inscribed "in dedication and for inspiration".

The beginning of his 30-year love affair with the Yukon started in 1946. He and a friend, Ian Campbell, sailed north on the *Princess Louise* in May to Skagway, Alaska. They rode the White Pass train over 110 miles of

narrow-gauge track into Whitehorse where they stayed in the White Pass Hotel on the corner of First Avenue and Main Street.

"It was squeegee, with holes under the doors," Aho recalled. "The doors had no locks. It was the same in Dawson. Nobody locked anything. They gave liberal credit. They knew you couldn't get out of the country."

In Dawson City, it was easy to land laboring jobs for 87 cents an hour stripping overburden for Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation or longshoring for the sternwheelers.

At one point, Aho assisted Mike Winage. (He died a few months before Aho in early 1977.) Black Mike was as old as the rocks then and a "businessman" with gimmicks to make a house-leveling job last.

The pair jacked up and leveled Clear Creek Placer Mines' offices, then visited the Pearl Harbor Hotel, splashed back a round of double overproof rums and returned to unlevel the foundation. The crooked job had to be redone.

It was fun until the stark reality of mounting bills interrupted pleasure.

Aho worked, saved and settled his debts, which had to be done before he could board the sternwheeler Whitehorse and leave Dawson City while he could. His friend Campbell didn't get out—or didn't want to leave—for three years.

After hitch-hiking the Alaska Highway from Whitehorse, Aho reached Vancouver with $131 to continue his education. He entered university unsure of a specific field of study. But geology's combination of science and the outdoors was a natural magnet.

The next summer he worked for the Geological Survey of Canada. The 1947 field season was his favorite, spent with mountaineering expert, Dr. John Wheeler. The following summer, 1948, spent with Dr. Hugh Bostock, the grandfather of Yukon geology, was the most influential.

"It was Dr. Bostock's empathy for the Yukon, its people, the little animals and the environment which inspired me," Aho said. "He was the most eloquent of persons."

Aho went on to earn a double degree in applied sciences and arts from the University of British Columbia in 1949 and a doctorate degree from the University of California at Berkley, before teaching a year at Oregon State University.

By 1953, Aho was back North in an exciting job as exploration manager for British Yukon Exploration, a newly-formed arm of the White Pass and Yukon Corporation. His job was to find mineral deposits to support the railroad operation.

Three years hence, 1956, an expanded budget offered him freedom to roam the territory beyond the railroad's proximity. He found a few small deposits and inconsequential showings. By 1957, White Pass curtailed the mineral-hunting program. The company opted to be a cheerleader from the sidelines rather than participate directly in mineral development.

Aho became a free agent when most geological consultants were older and more experienced. He soon found out why.

"For two years I didn't qualify for an income tax bracket," he remembered.

"Some clients were reputable. Others were strictly promoters. If I wrote an adverse report, many times I didn't get paid. In other cases I was paid in stock or commodity instead of consulting fees. That's why I decided instead of looking and losing on others' projects, I'd start my own."

His experience and persistence eventually paid off with the magnificent Faro discovery. Initially, the mine was operated by Anvil Mining Corporation, a partnership between Cyprus Mines of Los Angeles and Dynasty Explorations, a syndicate he had formed.

But the companies he created tended to run him rather than him running himself. "That's not the best way for an individualist," he added.

In March of 1973, he resigned as Dynasty's president and went back into the geologic arena where he preferred to work on mine-finding projects.

The first thing he did was set up AEX '73 to prospect for mineralization in various parts of the Yukon.

He still viewed the Anvil Range as "elephant country." Recycling old ideas and untangling an ownership mess, he concluded an option on Kerr Addison Mines' Vangorda, Swim and Grum properties.

Aho and his second wife, Silvia, a social worker from Chile, moved into the condemned Faro Hotel, which resembled the Leaning Tower of Pisa. They used the restaurant tables to spread out maps to compare and color.

It was August. Aho was gathering and assembling information, correlating and sifting through every bit of research material. Closing his eyes, he mentally pictured the data.

"It's the creative process, based on intuition, abovenormal incentives, some bullheadedness and a lot of data," he explained.

"I may not know exactly why I want to drill in a certain place, but I'm drawn to it. My idea may—or may not—work. That's trial and error, like research. When the circuits are lit, I'll borrow from the bank to keep a program going because there is no question in my mind."

The first drill hole intersected low-grade mineralization. The next two holes were duds and Aho vowed to put up the money for the cash-strapped project.

"That's an advantage if you are in a position to keep drilling and get conclusive results one way or the other before having to stop."

The fourth hole of high-grade zinc-lead-silver sections was the pay off. Aho had found another large deposit.

"Searching is a helluva risk, and people are negative about what they can't see," he explained. "If there's overburden and no sign of mineralization, an unexplored area is often assumed to have nothing."

The Grum was a prime example. The Faro mine road was built overtop the orebody. Traffic had to be diverted because of two drill rigs beside the road.

To possess the power to be able to do things, you need money, he said.

"I wanted to make my own mistakes rather than someone else making

them for me. My objective was not to get rich. My objective was to create something. Find mineral resources. Build something for the North.

"I wanted to contribute something to the progress, whatever the destiny of mankind might be. I'm a part of it. I'm here for a purpose. I'm here to create things, to make my contribution somehow.

"Then I look at the way resources are squandered. Everything has to be obsolete in a few years so you can market more. This has to be turned into a more realistic approach. The energy crunch may do it."

The Grum deposit was rolled into his company Canadian Natural Resources which had the potential to put the Yukon over the top financially.

"But it depends on whether the federal government keeps milking us with taxes. There's hardly any incentives left to be able to do the sort of things that have been done in the past."

The increasing cost of exploration is risky and returns restricted. Aho warned that Canada doesn't have a monopoly on resources.

He would often say these things as a speaker at the Northern Resources Conferences he founded in 1963. The meetings were held once every three years in Whitehorse.

While he always advocated effective mining and environmental laws, unreasonable government restrictions were the strongest deterrent to the high-risk exploration business.

He expressed dismay with the enormity of unnecessary government control and regulation introduced after the Faro's development. One reason excellent projects were able to be brought to fruition had been due to the ability for people to operate with a minimum of red tape.

When Anvil Mining Corporation was reorganized into Cyprus Anvil Mining Corporation, Aho relinguished the vice-president position in favor of one as director and company consultant in 1973.

About 1975, he gave up the presidency of Canadian Natural Resources for a directorship. He wanted to spend more time in the bush and on a farm he was planning to buy.

Just about anything other than looking for mines, which was both a career and a hobby, was considered a dreadful waste of time...except agriculture.

His keen interest in farming was a carry over from boyhood. It prompted him to acquire land in partnership with a beef cattle expert in March, 1976.

It was on the opposite side of the mountain from where he grew up near Ladysmith that Aaro Aho, the man who more than any other brought modern exploration techniques to the Yukon, spent the last 14 months of his life. He was killed on May 27, 1977, when the tractor he was driving rolled on him. He would have been 52 years old come June.

The 1978 Northern Resource Conference was dedicated to the conference founder and eminent geological engineer. Excess money from the 362 registrants fees went toward a $500 grant. The Aaro E. Aho Northern

Resources Scholarship was awarded annually to a Yukon College or technical school student who was majoring in resource-related studies.

Despite the tragic deaths of Aho and some of his colleagues, these men remain immortal within the Yukon mining fraternity. Their geologic theories, ideas and boundless energies helped discover millions of tons of open-pit ore that sparked a base metal rush and hurled the Yukon into world prominence.

But it is unfair to identify any one person as a hero when so many people contributed in varying and meaningful degrees.

In the Anvil district, Paul Sterriah, an old Indian, initially brought the Vangorda area to the attention of prospectcr Al Kulan who found the outcrop (Yukoner Magazine #14). He and lodge-owner Bert Law staked the original Wynne and Wile May discovery claims.

Geologist Ted Chisholm interested the Prospectors' Airways company into optioning the showing, which eventually led Chisholm, Kulan and Aho to other mineral deposits.

Promoters raised capital; developers proved an orebody; the government provided the services.

So who should get the credit?

In Aho's opinion, "The driller on shift."

* * * * *

Postscript:

Dr. Aho was a prolific writer. Examples of his work include: Birth of a Giant, the story behind the Faro mine discovery; The History of the Keno Hill District, a collection of interviews turned into an invaluable historical document which he donated to the Yukon Archives; and Riches of Keno Hill, an unpublished manuscript focusing on the district's geology .

An abandoned building at the Elsa minsite. (S.H. photo)

Over the Divide

A Winter Trip to Kluane Country

By Sam Holloway

Instead of Mexico or Timbuctoo, my favourite winter destination is a collection of shacks along the Alaska Highway.

In January of this year, 2005, I drove old Dodgie west to Haines Juntion then north, up and up and up over the Bear Pass divide into Kluane country. It was 40 below zero and I met perhaps six vehicles on that 200-mile stretch of frozen highway.

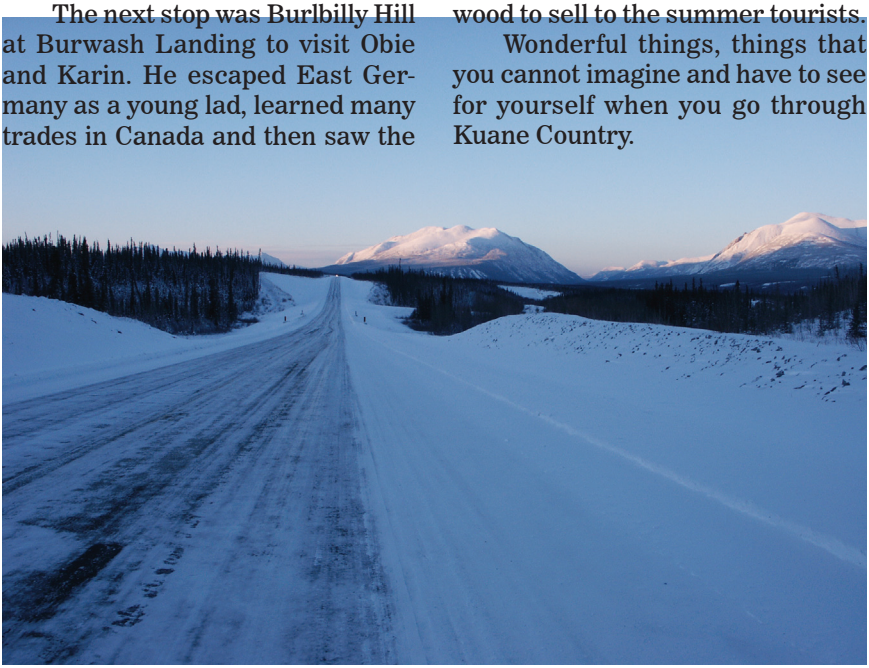
I stopped at Destruction Bay to visit Dubie, fugitive bookkeeper and drywaller from the Ottawa Valley. Like so many, he came to the Yukon for a looksee and never went back.

The next stop was Burlbilly Hill at Burwash Landing to visit Obie and Karin. He escaped East Germany as a young lad, learned many trades in Canada and then saw the Yukon for the first time in 1986. He too never left and about ten years ago he met Karin, also from Germany and they married in 1996.

And then I travelled another 25 miles to Quill Creek and stopped there for dinner, which was rice and pork stew. Don Rooney and Scully have been friends since the 1950s. Nokomis and her daughter Raven also live here.

To tell all their stories in detail, I'd have to write a book. In the meantime, they all make a living in the same way, creating things out of wood to sell to the summer tourists.

Wonderful things, things that you cannot imagine and have to see for yourself when you go through Kuane Country.



Dubie's workshop, called "Kluane Country B.o.a.l.s," behind the Destruction Bay Lodge.

Dubie in his winter lair. I asked him to show me what he does in the winter. He said from his chair, "This is what I do." And he does it very well as you can see.

This is Burbilly Hill at Burwash.

Obie at his workshop and souvenir stand.

Obie, Karin and dogs singing to pass the long winter nights.

Sign at the entrance (left side of highway going north) to the Woodwackers, once a mining camp and mill.

Here we go, heading for a great dinner of pork and rice at the Woodwackers' headquarters.

As far from civilization as you could want to be, comfortable with lots of wood for heat and a generator for power.

Nokomis and her daughter Raven in the kitchen. Poetry, paintings, carvings, gadgets and games await the visitor to their shop.

Nokomis and Rooney having coffee outside at 50 below zero.

Rooney looking at his latest musical instrument. It is a multi-speed fan that plays a drum and strums a mandolin. You've got to hear it to believe the melody.

Rooney and Scully, content to be in their winter quarters. Scully has his own burl shop (Scullywood) at Kluane Wilderness Village, and he was the first to set up shop in the area. You could say that all the other carvers were inspired by Scully.

Here I am heading south again after a great three-day holiday. Kluane Lake in the distance.

Home of the Month

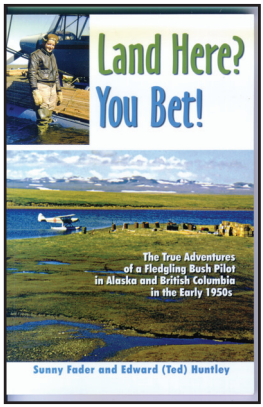
(S.H. photos)

Nokomis, Kluane artist, at her home on Quill Creek.

Alaska Highway, near Destruction Bay, Jan. '05. (Dianne Green photo)

From the Publisher

IN 1998, while I was on visit to Los Angeles, Sunny Fader showed me a draft of her first book. It chronicled the adventures of a bush pilot she had met while she was living near Seattle, Washington.



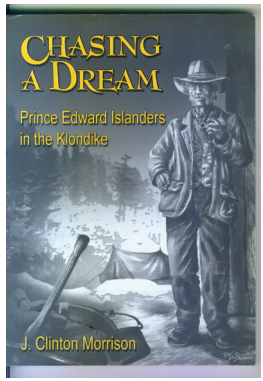
The summer of 1951 marked the beginning of 20-year-old Ted Huntley's initiation into the world of bush flying. That summer and the next saw young Ted hauling a team of surveyors and their equipment over the uncharted edge of Alaska and the Bering Sea. The Cold War was on and the U. S. government needed to map the territory so it could install a northern radar alert system.

After his two summers flying in Alaska, Ted found it difficult to settle down to his normal routine at his cousin's seaplane repair company in Seattle. So, in the summer of 1956, when he was offered another northern bush-flying assignment, he didn't hesitate. This time Ted headed for Stewart, B. C., Canada's northernmost ice-free port. While flying for a mineral exploration company there, he underwent an initiation of another sort: landing with pontoons on a glacier.

Later Ted went onto a successful career as an airline pilot. He had been retired only a short time when Sunny rented a cabin on the property he and his wife owned. In anticipation of a book project with Sunny, Ted recorded his memories on tape. But, before the project really got started, Ted died, in 1996.

Working only with Ted's tape recordings, her interviews with Ted's friends and family, and her own recollections of her friend, Sunny has managed to create a seamless, first-person account of Ted's life.

Land Here? You Bet! by Sunny Fader and Edward (Ted) Huntley is a Spring 2005 offering from Hancock House publishers. It features coloured and b/w photos from the 1950s and is available in Canada for $19.95.



PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND author Clint Morrison became interested in the Klondike Gold Rush when his father and uncles would share stories about the family's ancestors. Of particular interest to young Clint were the tales about his paternal great grandfather, Barnabas Trowsdale Morrison. Research on his relatives created a desire in the author to unravel "the mysterious lure of the Klondike that had not only beckoned my great grandfather away, but also hundreds of other Islanders."

Chasing a Dream by J. Clinton Morrison is the story of Prince Edward Islanders in the Klondike. Among the many b/w photos are family photos of Islanders. Printed on high-quality glossy paper with a nice cover illustration by P. John Burden. Available from Crescent Isle Publishers, Summerside, PE.

Email the author at: cmorrison@pei.sympatico.ca