

Dawson City Y.T.
Conservation Study

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Preface

This study has been produced in order that the Mayor, Corporation and Citizens of Dawson City might have at their disposal the means to conserve the historical character of their city. It is hoped that they will find it useful and beneficial.

This is volume four of four. It contains an account of the growth of the town as it passed through three phases of Gold Rush development between 1896 and 1905. Through written text and photographs it discusses the type of society existing in these periods and the visible town each produced. It is intended to provide a background for, and an explanation of, the Gold Rush buildings in Dawson which serve as the base of this study.

We gratefully acknowledge the co-operation of the Picture Division, Public Archives of Canada, Ottawa; the Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington, Seattle; the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Victoria; the University Archives, University of

Alaska, College; the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Ottawa; the Photo Library, Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa; the Historical Photograph Section, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver; the National Museum of Canada, Ottawa; the Yukon Territorial Archives, Whitehorse; the Dawson Historical Society Museum, Dawson; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa; the Special Collections Division, Washington State University, Pullman; the Special Collections Department, University of Alberta, Edmonton; the Vancouver City Archives, Vancouver; the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta, Edmonton; the Centennial Museum, Vancouver; the Glenbow Historical Library and Archives, Glenbow-Alberta Institute, Calgary; Mrs. S.E. Morton of Belleville, and Mr. Harold Denman of Ottawa. The photographs they collected and so kindly made available to us have been of invaluable assistance in the compilation of this report. Without them, the sketches and Gold Rush pictures which make up the visual historic dynamic of this study would not have been possible.

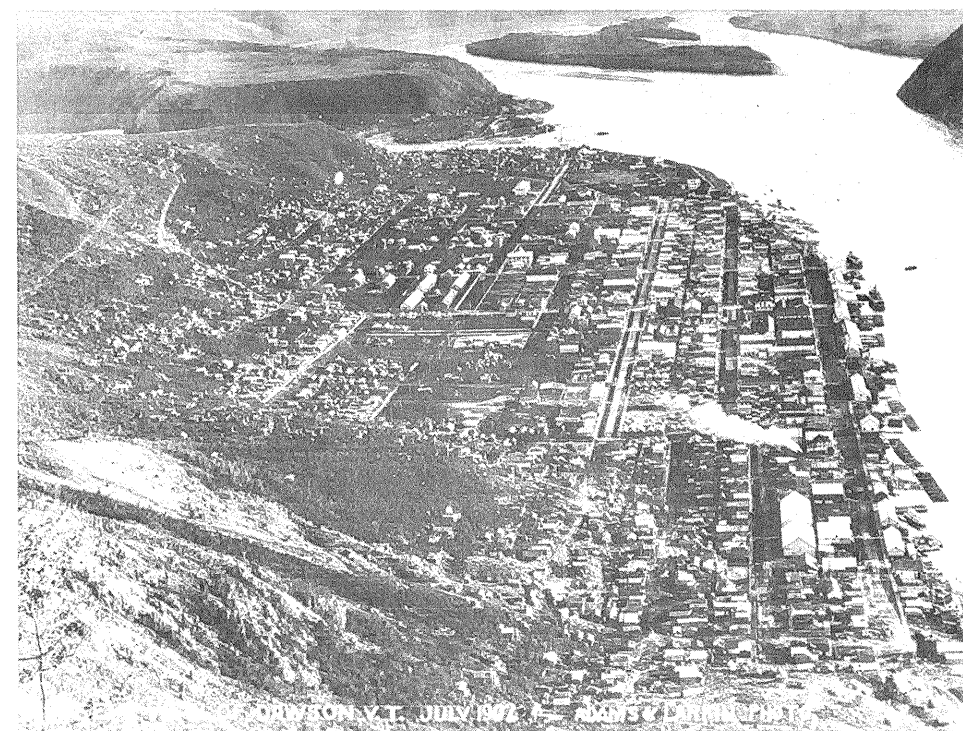
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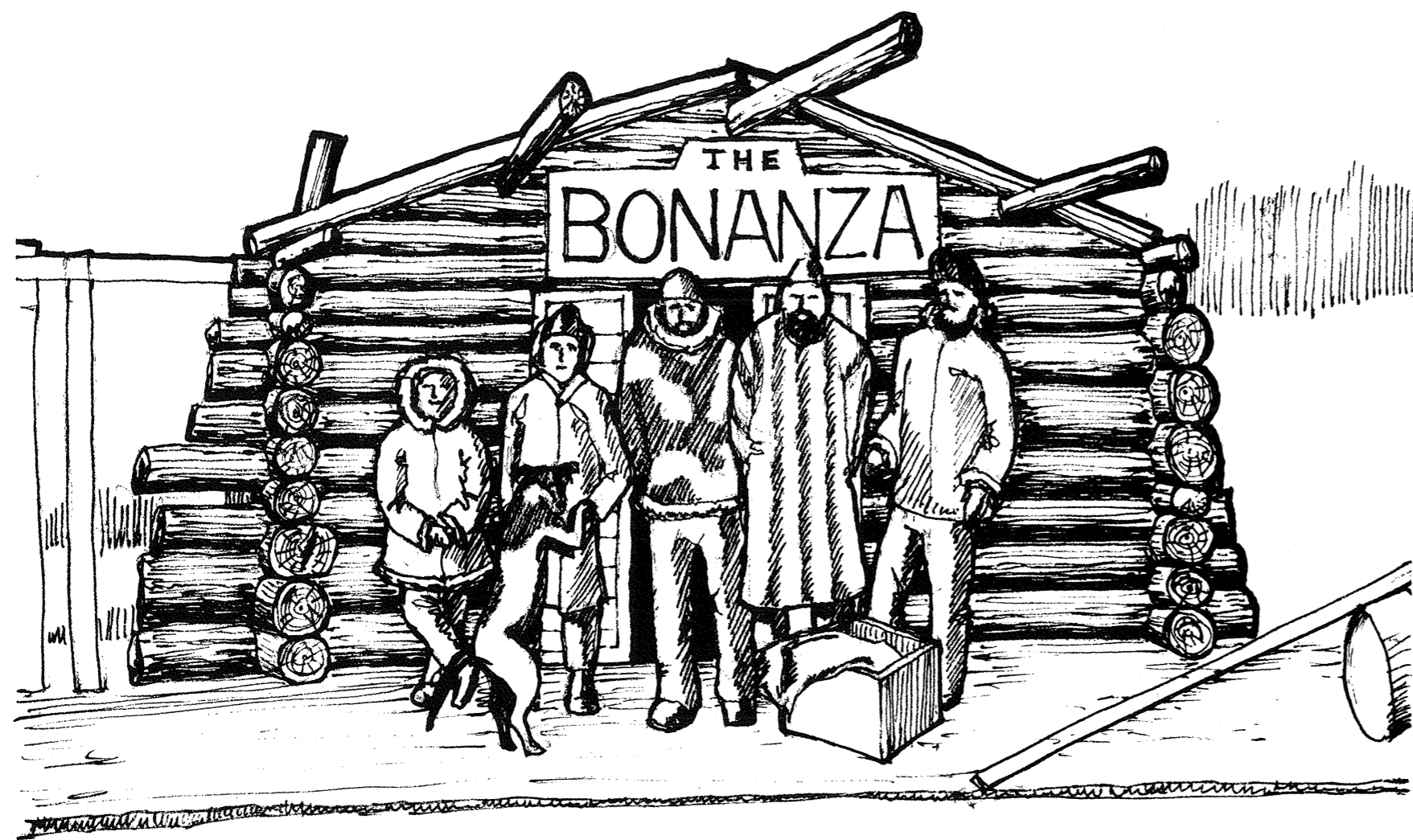
Dawson: Three Faces of a Gold Rush Town



Introduction

Here are three different Dawsons. Each of these photographs was taken during the period known as the Klondike gold rush, the first in 1897, the second in 1899, the third in 1902: all of them depict "Gold Rush Dawson." Yet how different they are! They illustrate visually the changes which occurred within the city over that time - changes so profound that they drastically altered the character of Dawson itself. Such changes are common to all towns and cities, but they usually occur so slowly and subtly that residents mark them one at a time and lose sight of the overall evolution. During the gold rush, however, Dawson was changing so rapidly that Dawson the mining town of 1896-97, Dawson the boom town of 1898-99, and Dawson the turn-of-the-century city 1900-1905, clearly presented three different faces.

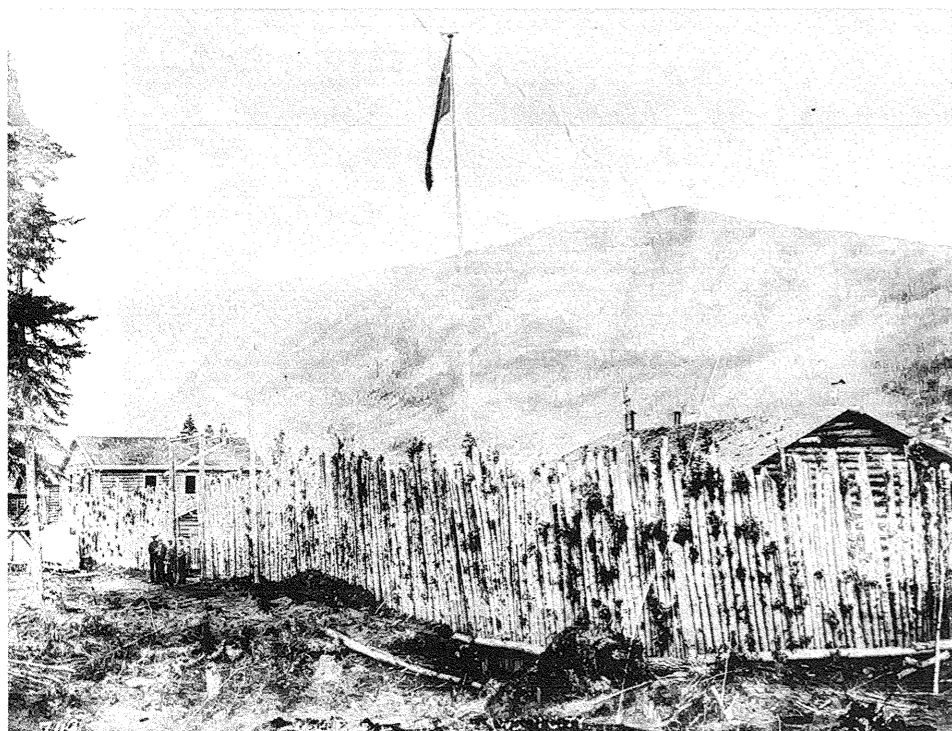
¹Picture Division, Public Archives of Canada (hereafter cited as Public Archives of Canada), PA 22518, 1897; C 20813, 1899; C 6366, 1902.



Mining Town

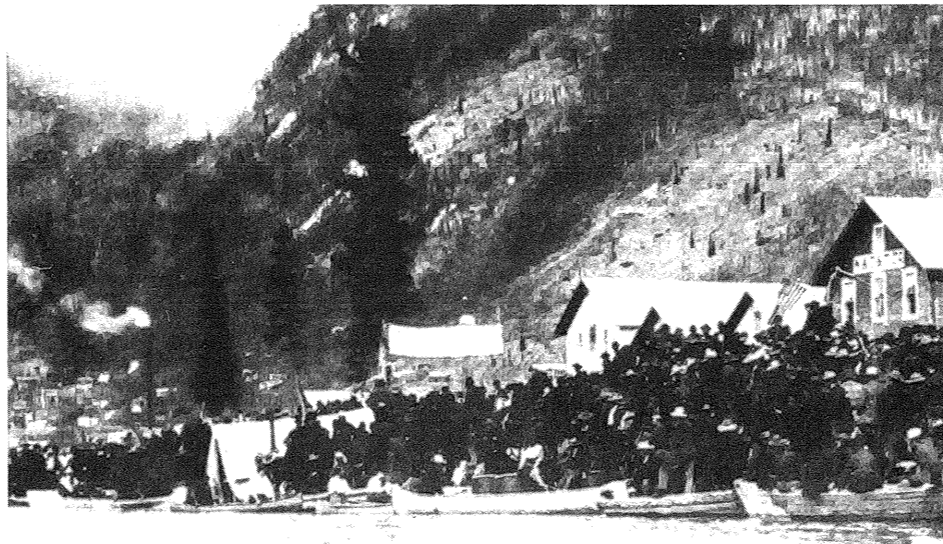
Very little is ever heard about the first Dawson. It was a northern mining town like its predecessors Forty Mile and Circle City. It was founded, as they were, in the wake of a stampede for gold. In this case, the discovery was made in mid-August of 1896 on Bonanza Creek, a subsidiary of the Klondike.² The town was established one month later³ by Joseph Ladue on a moose pasture at the confluence of the Klondike and the Yukon. He named it "Dawson" as a compliment to George Dawson, an early Canadian geologist in the north.

Like its predecessors, Dawson was intended to act as a "supply center and place of meeting" for the whole mining district as long as the strike should last.⁴ Shortly after the town was founded, all of the major institutions existing in the north were represented on its site. The Anglican Church had moved its miners' mission from Forty Mile to Dawson, and the Catholic Church had established a hospital under the guidance of Father Judge and the Sisters of St. Ann from Holy Cross Alaska. The North-West Mounted Police had set aside a reserve, and moved some of its men up-river from Forty Mile to build Fort Herchmer



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as its headquarters. The Alaska Commercial Company, with Ladue as its agent, was the first of the great northern trading companies to arrive. As this photograph shows,



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the North American Trading and Transportation Company was soon to follow.

As the banner and the smokestack at the left center indicate, Ladue and his partner Arthur Harper quickly set up a sawmill to accommodate the timber needs of old time miners who were arriving from every corner of the Yukon and the Pacific Coast. The temporary living accommodations these miners occupied during their stay in town can also be seen. On the waterfront in front of the Harper and Ladue banner a canvas has been secured on a scow, and to the far left tents have been pitched near a spring at the base of the slide.

The miners' headquarters would be on their claims on the creeks where mining activity took place. When Ladue left Dawson in the spring of 1897, he estimated "there were some two thousand white men, forty families and two hundred Indians in the Klondike district, most of them living in tents or cabins on claims".⁷ As this statement shows he thought of the town and the mining area as one. They were

completely interdependent.

Indeed, by 1896, the importance of interdependence for survival was a principle that had been well established in the traditions of the north. These traditions had been observed in mining camp after mining camp before they appeared in early Dawson. Among miners, they enforced a code of social behaviour that acted for the welfare of all. The hat was passed to pay the expenses of the sick. Scarce food was "divided up even all round" to prevent starvation. The principle of fair play in both games and business dealings was insisted upon. At first this was enforced by the miners themselves at mass meetings; later they welcomed the intervention of the N.W.M.P. with its insistence upon non-violence.⁸ The Yukon Order of Pioneers incorporated more communal traditions into a brotherhood bond for the older residents.

On a larger scale, the miners and the trading companies formed a partnership that acted to ensure mutual survival. Miners bought their supplies at Company stores,⁹ and in return the Companies supplied the public services necessary to keep miners in the area. They provided transportation "inside" and "outside" on supply steamers via St. Michaels. They carried the mail, and they took seriously their

²William Ogilvie, Early Days on the Yukon and the Story of Its Gold Fields (New York: Lane, 1913), p 125-131.

³Edwin Tappan Adney, The Klondike Stampede of 1897-98 (Fairfield Washington: Ye Galleon Press, 1968), p. 179.

⁴J.L. Steffens, "Life on the Klondike Gold Fields: Personal Observations on the Founder of Dawson" in McClure's, September 1897, p. 962.

⁵Photography Collection, Suzzallo Library, University of Washington, Seattle (hereafter cited as University of Washington), Hegg #3195.

⁶Public Archives of Canada, C 28633.

⁷Steffens, loc. cit., p. 962.

⁸Ibid, p. 959.

⁹Ibid, p. 961.

responsibility to ensure that enough food existed within the area to prevent starvation.¹⁰ The fact that most of Dawson survived Starvation Winter of 1897-98 was a direct tribute to these Companies and their managers. Their action provides an example of the way in which the old northern "good will" traditions were alive in early Dawson.

Other elements of the established northern way of life were also evident. The major currency of the camp was gold dust. Fuel was obtained in nearby woods. Logs were the main construction material used for buildings, furniture and most implements. They were fashioned by miners-turned-craftsmen, for there was no skilled labour on the site and the cost of importing such goods was astronomical. Indeed, the isolation and the number of skills necessary for survival in so harsh an environment had always operated to limit the number of men who went to the area. Upon his arrival in Dawson, S.B. Steele noted these men, saying that "no finer could be found in the country."¹¹

While old-time miners still comprised the majority of the town's population in 1897, newcomers were beginning to arrive. As news of unprecedented gold returns broke, several groups began to prepare for the stampede they knew

¹⁰Lois Delano Kitchener, Flag Over the North: the Story of the Northern Commercial Company (Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1954), p. 45-6.

¹¹Col. S.B. Steele, Forty Years In Canada. Reminiscences of the Great North-West with Some Account of his Service in South Africa (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1915), p. 322.

¹²James Gibbon, "Report of Jas. Gibbon D.L.S." in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year 1897 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1898), p. 87.

¹³Thomas Fawcett, "Extracts from Reports of Thomas Fawcett, D.T.S., Gold Commissioner for the Yukon District" in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year 1897 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1898), p. 92.

¹⁴University of Washington, Larss & Duclos #82.

would follow. Among them was a tough, parasitic element consisting of gamblers, prostitutes and shysters. Skimming easy gold from miners' pokes was their business, and they spotted Dawson as a place where men would gladly exchange their heavy dust for lively entertainment. Not wishing to miss any opportunity that might arise for self-improvement, they appeared early on the scene.

Civil servants also arrived during this period. Ottawa predicted the rush that would follow, and sent a gold commissioner, surveyors, and a land and timber agent to relieve the N.W.M.P. of the specific tasks that would be the greatest burden. The businessmen already in Dawson also began to prepare. Early in 1897, Menzie, Smith, Day,

Atkin, Harper and Ladue applied to the government for town "locations" covering the entire flat. In mid-summer these were surveyed into regular streets fronting fifty foot lots by James Gibbon, D.L.S.¹² By mid 1897, all the preparations had been made. A skeleton town stood anticipating the stampede that would bring its population.

As the season progressed, Dawson did begin to fill out. Thomas Fawcett, the gold commissioner, estimated it had acquired "a floating population of about three thousand"¹³ by mid-September. Some of these newcomers cut timber as they waited for the winter work season to begin at the mines, while others intended to remain in town. All of them lived in tents.



As winter approached, it became necessary to build more permanent structures. When he arrived in October, Edwin Tappan Adney reported "about three hundred cabins and other buildings, half a dozen of which stand on the bank of the Klondike."¹⁵

He described the settled area as it stretched along the waterfront with St. Mary's church and hospital at the north end and the N.W.M.P. barracks on the south. Looking towards the north end of town, he must have seen something like this,



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for he mentions two sawmills running twenty-four hours a day in a futile attempt to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for lumber. Next to them were the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Trading and Transportation Company, each with a store, an extra building or two for their employees, and three corrugated iron warehouses. Some of these warehouses can be seen on the right in the photograph above, while others are under construction in the distance.

¹⁵Adney, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

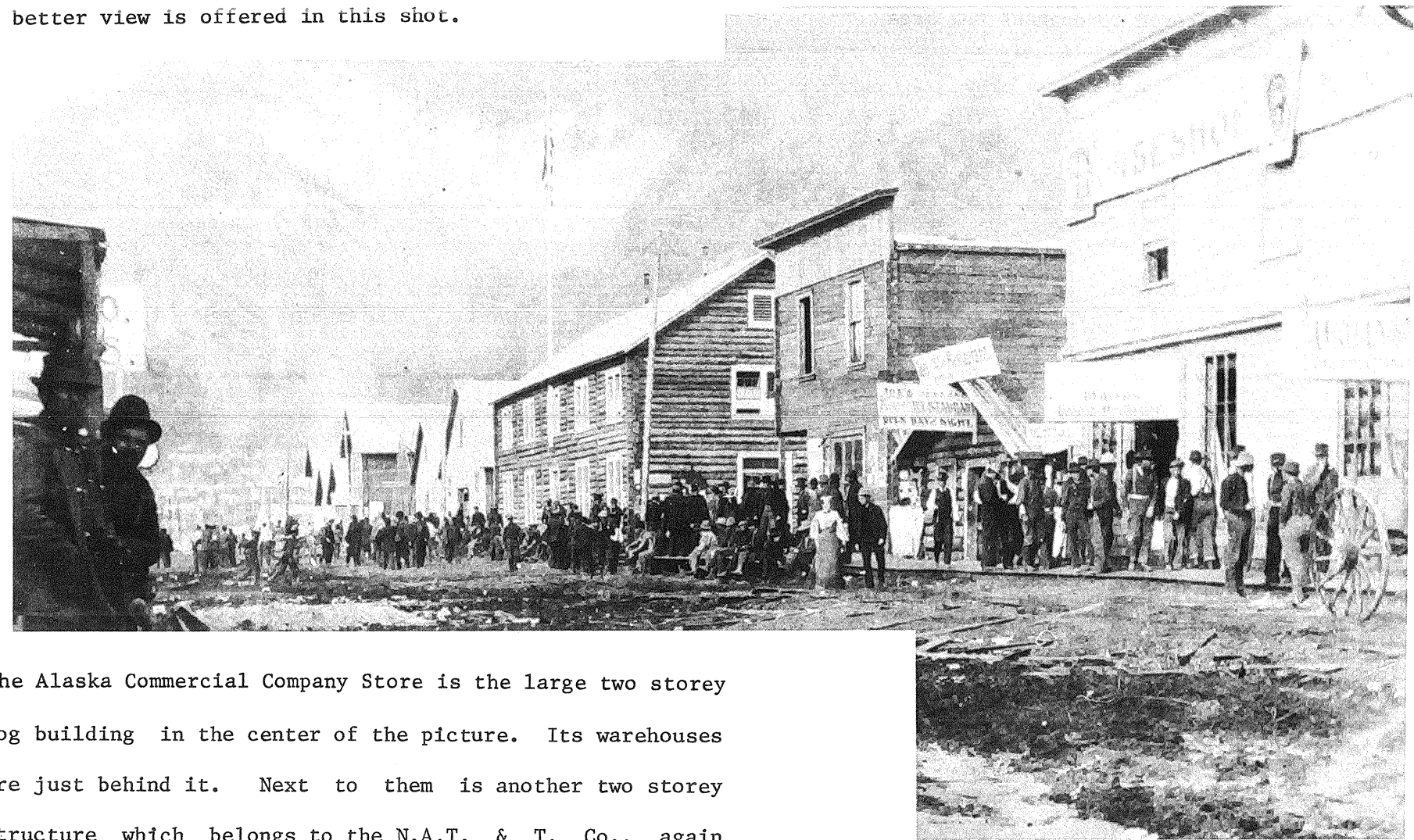
¹⁶Provincial Archives of British Columbia, #55781.

¹⁷Provincial Archives of British Columbia, #55778.

¹⁸Public Archives of Canada, C 28637.

¹⁹Adney *op. cit.*, p. 180.

A better view is offered in this shot.



The Alaska Commercial Company Store is the large two storey log building in the center of the picture. Its warehouses are just behind it. Next to them is another two storey structure which belongs to the N.A.T. & T. Co., again followed by its warehouses. Both the size and the number of these buildings emphasize the prominent position the Companies held within the community.

While it was less imposing, the south-center of town was surely more fascinating. There a line of close-knit two-storey log buildings interspersed with cabins and tents bore signs indicating "saloon", "opera house", "restaurant" and "hotel". This photograph shows one end of that line.



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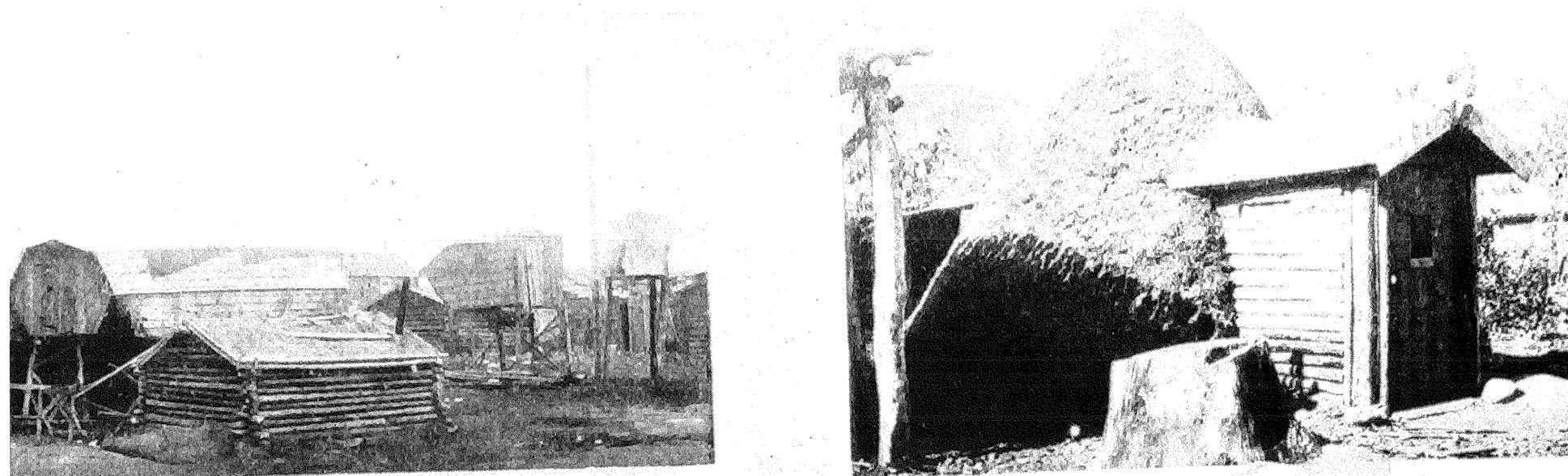
Facing them along the waterfront was this "ragged, motley assemblage" of tents, slab buildings and tent-topped scows



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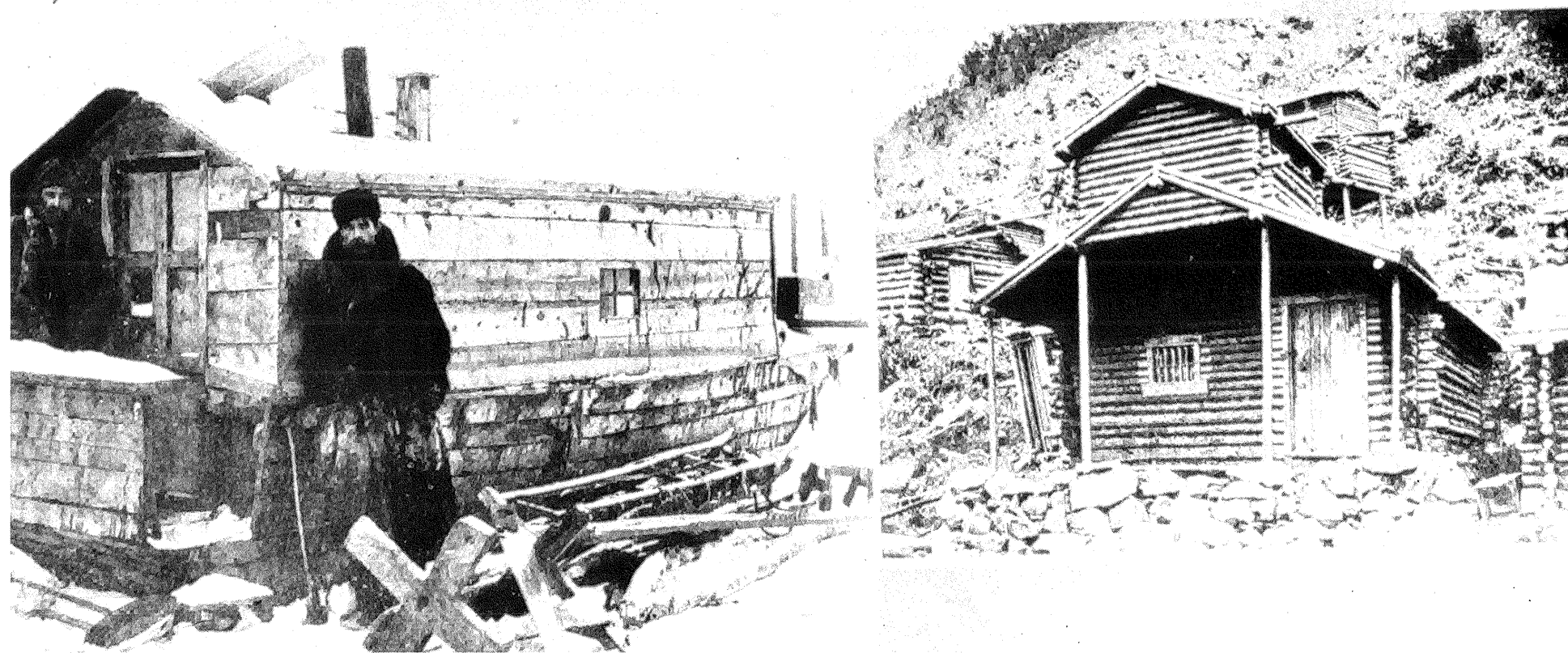
sporting evidence or similar commercial activity. Back to back with the main buildings, on Second Avenue, was a row of brothels.

Dwellings like these were scattered throughout the area and on the hillside to the north.



surrounded by storage caches. The one at the top left is flanked both right and left by these tiny houses built on stilts. Men in the north had always used such caches to hold their provisions.

This was early Dawson. In construction, composition, population, ethics, and interest it was like any of the northern mining towns that had preceded it. It was a supply center and meeting place for miners just as they had been. But even at this early stage there was a difference. By 1897 Dawson was "far more prosperous and booming" than any of them had ever been, "even in their ... palmiest days."²¹



Most of them were made of logs, but some like the one on the bottom left, were converted scows. And as the photograph at the top right shows, others made use of far more inventive building materials! The photograph at the

bottom right also illustrates this point. A close look at its front window reveals it is made of bottles placed alternately right-side-up and upside down to let in the light while preserving heat. Often these cabins were

²⁰Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, Department of the Interior Collection, #3126-Yukon.

²¹M.H.E. Hayne and H. West Taylor, The Pioneers of the Klondyke (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1897), p. 166.

Boom Town

In 1898-99 this distinction was exaggerated. News of rich gold acted like a magnet, drawing a tumult of new forces into the town - forces which interacted to produce the bizarre tilt-a-whirl known as boom town Dawson.

The people who came to Dawson during this period were the most important factor in causing the change. They poured into the town in unprecedented numbers. The town's population, five to seven thousand in May of 1898, swelled to seventeen by July,²² and again to thirty thousand by the close of navigation that same year.²³ Depression in the outside world had turned men's thoughts to the Klondike where, it was said, riches could be picked up by the handful. Over half of them were American, some Swedish, others Canadian; the rest hailed from every part of the globe.²⁴ Carpenters and lawyers, bank clerks and mechanics combined to make the most unlikely troop of miners ever found in the north. Among their number were gamblers, promoters, prostitutes, actors and respectable business representatives heading for the town. Few of them were accustomed to either physical labour or the harshness of the northern climate. Almost all of them were on a once in

²²J.M. Walsh, "Report of Major J.M. Walsh" in the Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year 1898 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1899), p. 326.

²³R.L. Polk & Co., Alaska-Yukon Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1903 (Seattle: R.L. Polk & Co., 1903), p. 297.

²⁴Jeremiah Lynch, Three Years in the Klondike (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), p. 1-4.

²⁵F.W. Heathcote, "A Banking Outpost" in the Journal of the Canadian Bankers' Association (Montreal: Gazette Printing Co., 1908), Vol. XVI, p. 54-55.

²⁶Laura Beatrice Berton, I Married the Klondike (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1954), p. 36.

²⁷P.T. Nolan, "Captain Jack Crawford" in Alaska Review, 1964, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 42.

²⁸Public Archives of Canada, PA 16924.

a life time gamble for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The Dawson they created was as bizarre as their journey. It was a boom town, prodded into extremes by the cheapness of gold among those who had it, exaggerated by the oppressiveness of northern separation and winter darkness, and compounded by the heady freedom surrounding

the experience of a lifetime. The ties to sane normalcy had been loosened; saloons, gambling halls and brothels abounded. The smallest coin was a fifty cent piece.²⁵ The price of food was ridiculous; still one man bought every fresh egg in town at two dollars a piece to spite a dance hall girl who refused to have him.²⁶ Buffalo Bill's sidekick, Captain Jack Crawford, sold ice cream on Front St.²⁷ and posed as Uncle Sam at Fourth of July Celebrations.



Respectable ladies courted unaccustomed "if mild Bohemianism"²⁹ in theatre boxes watching performances like this.



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Dance hall girls promenaded in Paris creations on muddy streets. Bowling alleys, pool halls, picture shows and baths hung bright graphics and awnings to announce their débuts.



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Log hotels sporting Brussels carpets housed luxurious accommodations,



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and canvas-walled restaurants served "Calves Head à l'Espagnole", "Lobster en Mayonnaise", and "Rum Omlette"³³ to the accompaniment of sweet serenades.



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Dawson offered the most exotic of delights to those who could afford them.

²⁹W.S. Dill, The Long Day (Ottawa: The Graphic Publishers, 1926), p. 160.

³⁰National Museum of Canada, Neg. No. J 6077.

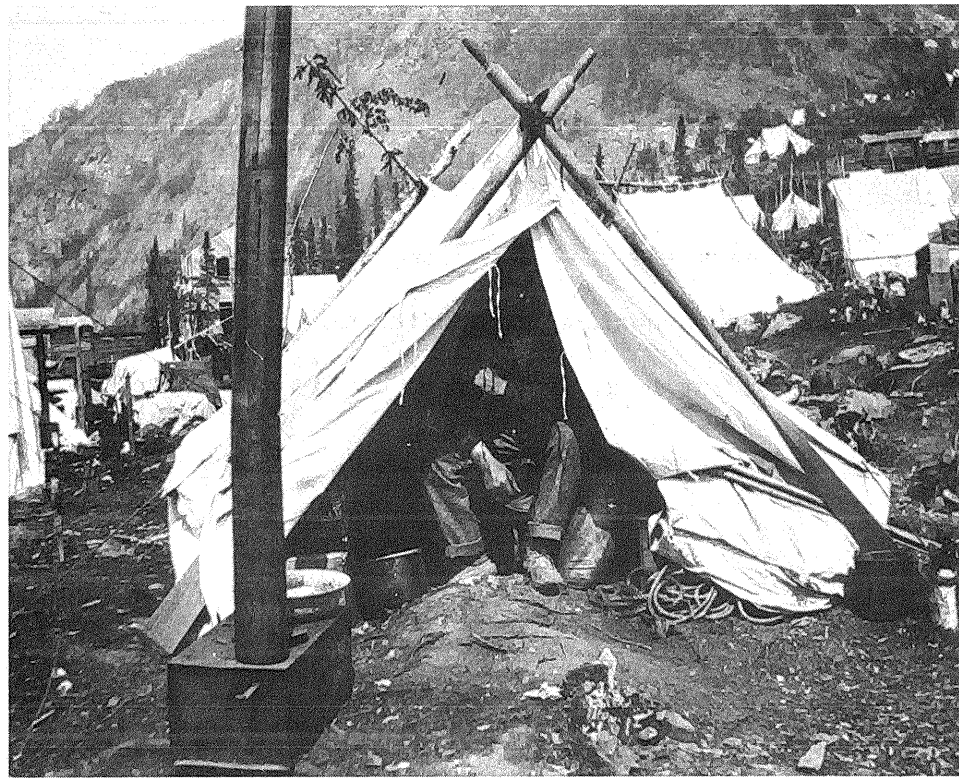
³¹University Archives, University of Alaska (hereafter cited as University of Alaska), Thomas Gibson Collection, #59-804-38.

³²Historical Photograph Section, Vancouver Public Library (hereafter cited as Vancouver Public Library), Album 3-19.

³³Dawson Daily News, October 28, 1898, p. 4, "Menu for the Café Royal", and Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, November 9, 1899, p. 2, "Andy Jr.'s Birthday Party".

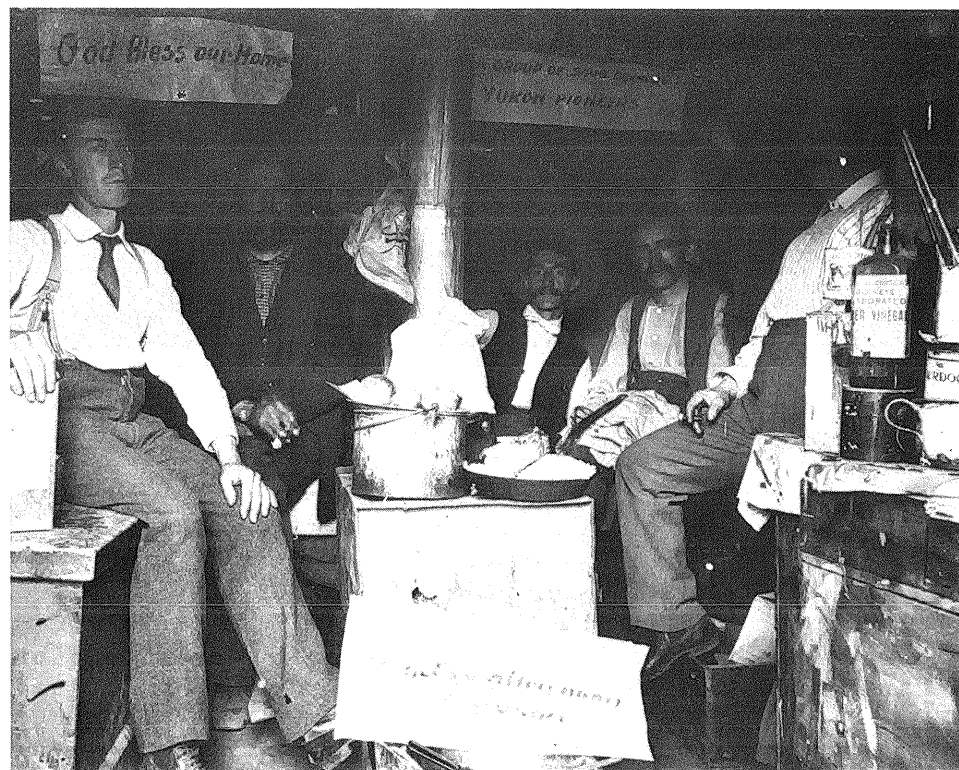
³⁴Dawson Historical Society Museum.

There were hundreds of destitute and disappointed cheechakos who couldn't. They lived in crude tents during the summer,



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and cramped shacks in the winter,



36

hoarding supplies like those on the Yukon stove above for a treat on a special occasion. The "mecca" had not been

quite as promising as they had expected. Almost all of the rich ground was occupied when they arrived, and prices were so inflated that their spare cash was soon devoured. "I should advise all New Englanders to stay at home. They can make more money there than here", wrote one disillusioned gold-seeker to his family.³⁷ Indeed, many were turning around and leaving. Two streets had been formed along the flat in front of the town where they sold their outfits for the cost of the fare.



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³⁵Yukon Archives, T.R. Lane Collection, #1369.

³⁶University of Alaska, Bassoc Collection, #64-92-781.

³⁷Mart Howard Collection, Washington State University. Unidentified newspaper clipping from a letter to Howard's family written on July 24, 1898 from Dawson.

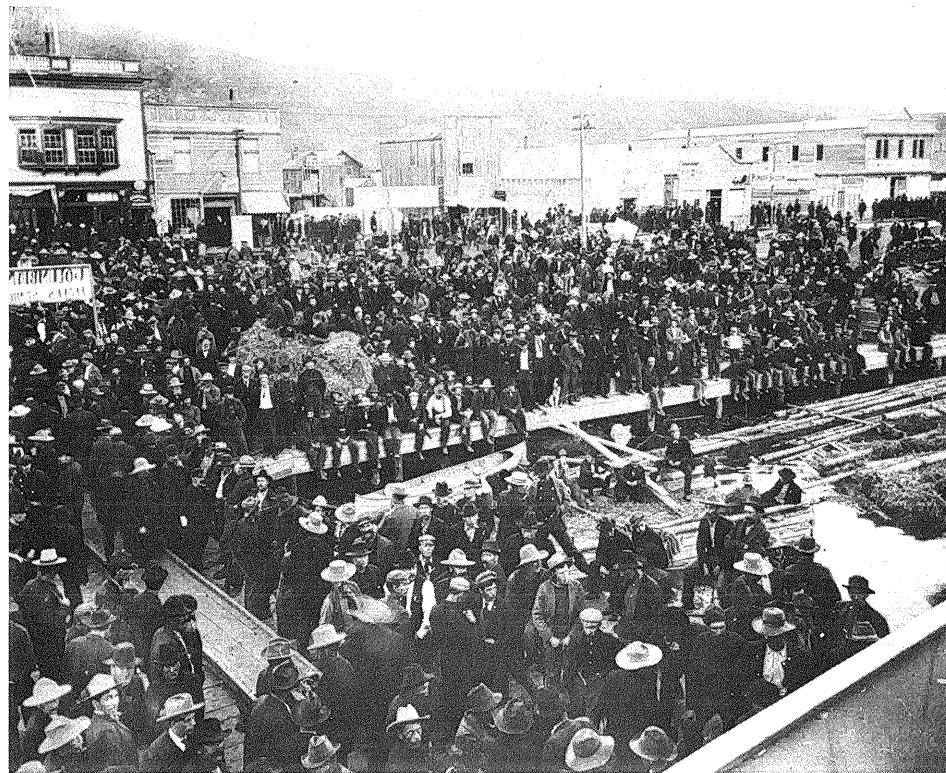
³⁸Private photograph donated by Mr. H. Denman, Ottawa.

Other men sized up the situation, swallowed their dreams, and sought whatever employment was handy. Like the man in this picture,



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they became cooks, woodcutters, laundry men, bartenders, and store clerks - anything that would provide them the means for survival. The throngs still arriving



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kept wages low, but no-one expected to remain for long, and

once great aspirations had been squelched, one job was as good as another.

As has already been pointed out, Dawson's boom town population came primarily from southern cities - that is, cities south of 60. Some of them came not as entertainers, not as miners, but as businessmen representing either their own private interests or the interests of large southern firms. Seattle's ex-mayor, S.D. Wood started a large trading company.⁴¹ McLennan, McFeely of Victoria, the Bank of Montreal and Herschberg's of Seattle,⁴² all sent agents hoping to get a share in the profits for the duration of the strike. Together these men managed to diversify and specialize local commerce in a way that was much more familiar to cheechakos than it was to old northerners.

In fact, despite its boom town gaiety, the Dawson of this period contained many elements that are reminiscent of southern urban life. On the social front it offered a circulating library for those who cared to read, and non-alcoholic evening gatherings at the Presbyterian and Methodist churches for those who preferred singing to revelling. This photograph was taken on St. Andrew's Day,

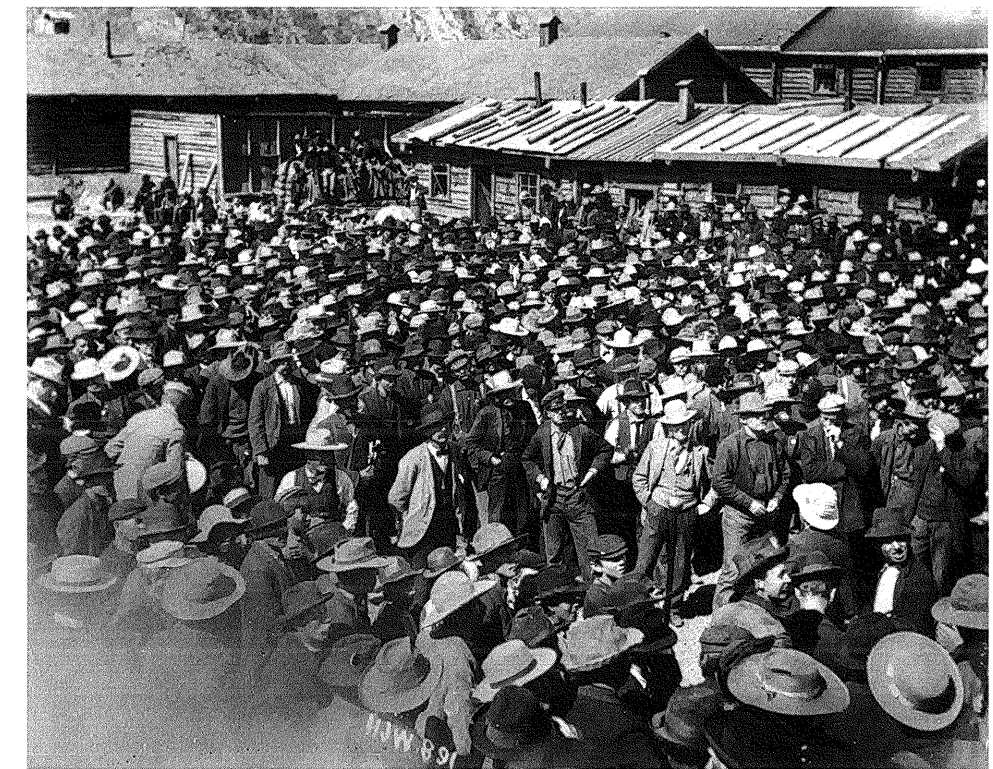


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1899 when the town held its first formal ball. The fact

that prostitutes were forced from their prime location on Second Avenue onto swampy ground in front of the warehouses on Fifth Avenue⁴⁴ should indicate that the Victorian prudery of the urban south was more prevalent than is usually acknowledged.

Newspapers, the self-proclaimed mark of civilization, were also present. The Klondike Nugget, the Dawson Daily News and the Yukon Sun all began during this period, and the enthusiasm with which their appearance was greeted is evident here, as a crowd awaits the release of a special issue of the Yukon Sun.



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³⁹University of Alaska, Lulu Fairbanks Collection.

⁴⁰University of Washington, Child #23.

⁴¹Yukon Territorial Records, Public Archives of Canada. File 492, Seattle-Yukon Trading Co.

⁴²University of Washington, Cantwell #15 supports this.

⁴³Public Archives of Canada, C 6367.

⁴⁴Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, May 24, 1899, p. 2, editorial.

⁴⁵Public Archives of Canada, PA 16233.

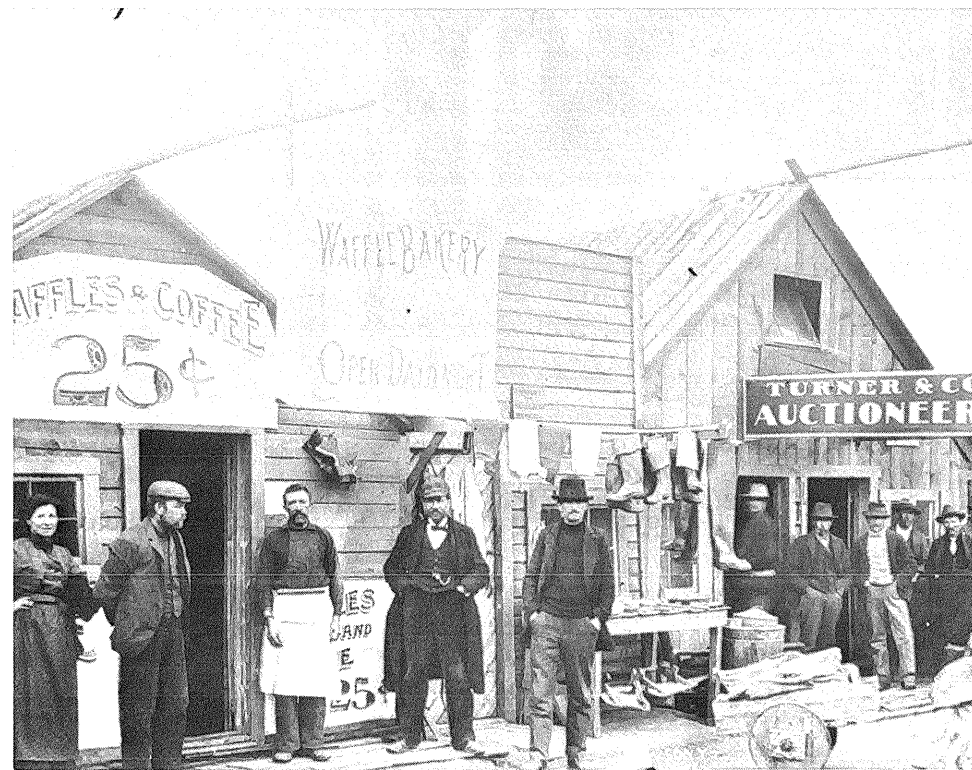
These newspapers drummed up business by airing complaints common to all residents of the town. The garbage scattered over the site, they contended, was a health hazard.⁴⁶

Services were needed to drain the swamp behind the business area.⁴⁷ The tents



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and shacks



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like these along the waterfront on First Avenue presented a fire danger.⁵⁰ Sidewalks in the main business area needed

to be widened. The streets were quagmires when it was wet, they protested, and justly so if this photograph is any indication.



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Their words fostered political expression of an urban consciousness that had more basis in traditional verbiage than it had in urban fact. In 1899 Dawson applied for a city charter at the height of miners' protests against federal restrictions. The application was more the registration of a complaint against federal policies on the mine fields than a legitimate bid for recognition. That same year a Chamber of Commerce was founded, but local business interests soon found the get - all - you - can - while - you - can profit motive was stronger

than the spirit of co-operation. If the Free Lance of 1903 is to be believed, the organization was never intended to

⁴⁶Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, April 22, 1899, p. 2, "Disposal of Garbage".

⁴⁷Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, August 27, 1898, p. 2, "Disease Problems".

⁴⁸Provincial Archives of British Columbia, #67276.

⁴⁹Public Archives of Canada, PA 13513.

⁵⁰Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, July 20, 1898, p. 2, "The Fire Situation".

⁵¹Public Archives of Canada, C 666.

be anything but a quixotic farce to further the interests of a particular group of businessmen.⁵²

The truth is that booming as it was, none of Dawson's residents really thought of it as anything but a temporary mining town. This becomes quite clear whenever "civilization," which usually represented Ottawa, imposed unpopular restrictions on them. The law instituting Sunday closing invoked the following protest:

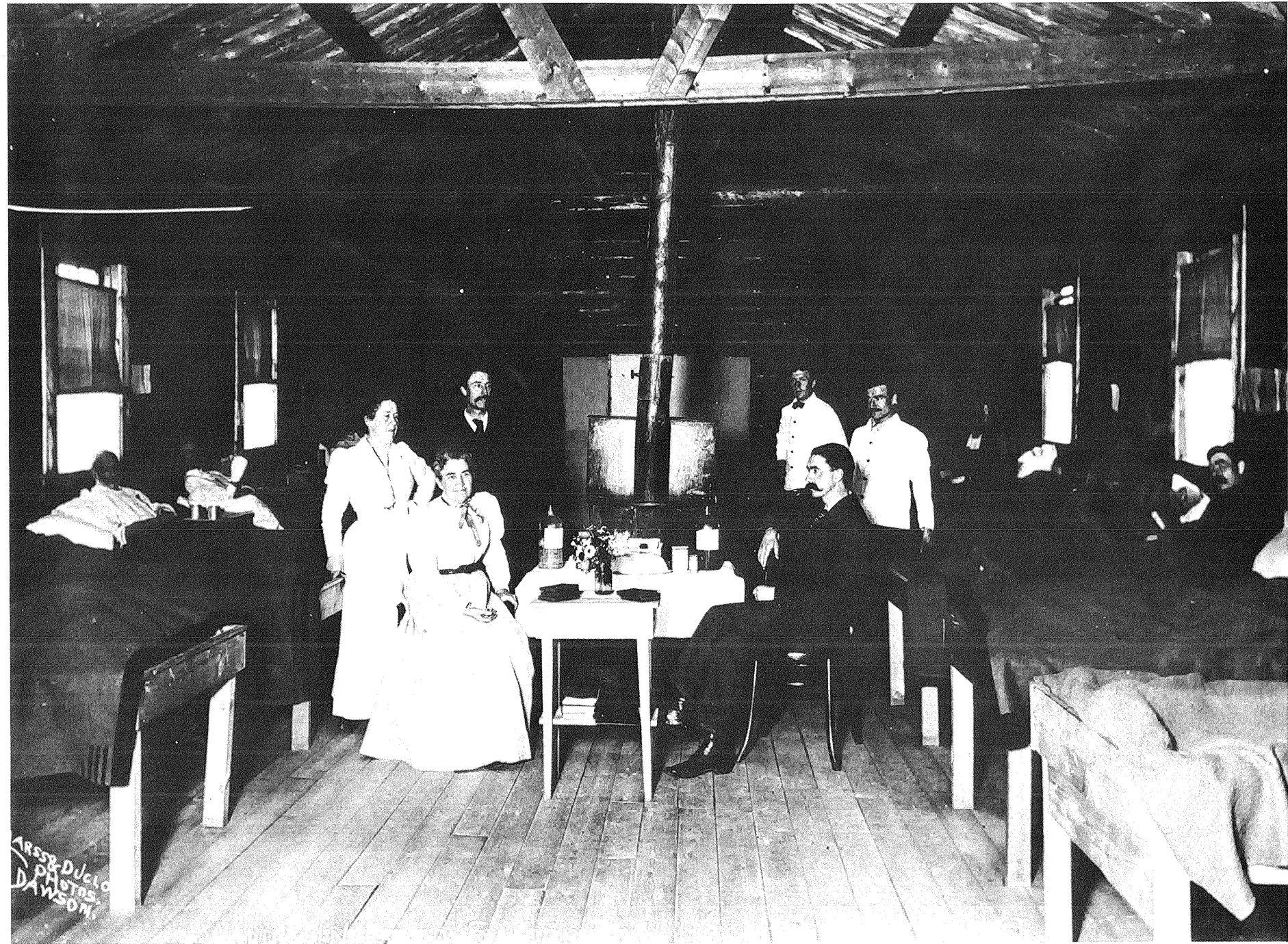
It was a movement unheard of in any mining camp on the face of the globe. A mining town is different from other towns. They are populated by a different class of people than staid business towns, and as such are run on the wide open policy. Everybody expects this and are disappointed when they find a mining town otherwise, and class it as strictly no good. While as a rule law-abiding and honest they want things easy.⁵³

That is to say, Sunday closing was bad for business because it cut down profits, and profit alone was the reason for staying in Dawson.

For the most part, residents were quite happy to let things take care of themselves without forming a co-operative citizens' group to voice their opinions. Under these circumstances, much of what would have been normal civic activity was ceded to government officials in addition to their regular duties. Commissioner Ogilvie appointed a council of four men to recommend improvements necessary within the area. Under his authority, it imposed Sunday closure, and recommended the collection of liquor license fees, the proceeds of which were donated to

operating hospitals to care for the sick.⁵⁴ It also recommended that the swampy area of town, where the Mounted Police had banned settlement, be drained to remove the breeding ground it provided for typhoid.⁵⁵ For their part, the North-West Mounted Police provided a civic police

As has already been mentioned, the churches supplied necessary hospital facilities. The Roman Catholics had opened Saint Mary's as early as 1897, and the Presbyterians followed with the Good Samaritan Hospital shown below in 1898.



force with a special town station. Apparently they also ran the local dog pound, as it was located in the park area behind the barracks.⁵⁶ Town legal matters were decided by dual-purpose municipal-federal judges appointed from Ottawa, and Dominion Land Surveyors performed work that was intended for the town.

⁵²Free Lance, January 22, 1903, p. 2, "Board of Trade".

⁵³Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, June 28, 1898, p. 1, "Martial Law".

⁵⁴Steele, op. cit., p. 323.

⁵⁵Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, August 13, 1898, p. 2, "Becoming Almost Epidemic".

⁵⁶Public Archives of Canada, PA 16992 shows a dog pound behind the N.W.M.P. barracks.

⁵⁷Yukon Archives, MacBride Collection, #3769.

All denominations had funds which were dispensed to the needy for food, clothing and transportation. Both Anglicans and Roman Catholics operated schools for any children who might be in town.

Private enterprise furnished other civic necessities unsolicited by the usual group of town fathers. In this case it is safe to assume private investors expected to skim off a substantial profit during the short time the town was in existence. Private individuals opened short-term hospitals and sold "care subscriptions" that were really insurance policies. As these photographs show, men collected water at convenient springs in the summer,



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melted ice and snow in the winter, and peddled "the drink that refreshes, but does not inebriate" on the streets in

carts like this.



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Electric lighting first appeared in October of 1899 when the Dawson Light and Power Company brought a small steam generator "inside".⁶⁰ The Yukon Telephone and Telegraph Syndicate installed somewhat shaky services between Dawson and the creeks by telephone by 1898, and Dawson and the world outside by telegraph by September, 1899.⁶¹ In 1899, the number of steamship companies operating between Dawson and the outside world numbered close to eleven,⁶² and the White Pass and Yukon Route had begun to build a railway into the Yukon from Skagway.

Most of these private companies provided necessary facilities without a substantial long term investment: their aim was immediate service, not long term efficiency, and they did not invest in expensive durable machinery. The two exceptions to this statement are the telegraph and railway.

Both required expensive surveying procedures that had to be completed before more expensive equipment was installed. In each of these cases, the original proposal had been made, and the survey completed before the rush of '98. While the gold rush undoubtedly provided the impetus for the final decision, in effect it merely served to make an already attractive proposal that much more appealing.

⁵⁸Public Archives of Canada, PA 13437.

⁵⁹Public Archives of Canada, PA 16925.

⁶⁰Dawson Daily News, October 13, 1899, p. 1, "Bright Lights for Dawson", and Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, December 2, 1899, p. 2, "New Electric Light Station".

⁶¹Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget, June 28, 1898, p. 3, "Telephone Plant Arrives", and Dawson Daily News, September 2, 1899, p. 4, "The Telegraph Line an Accomplished Fact".

⁶²From a compilation of advertisements in newspapers of the year.

In 1899 Dawson was still very much a temporary town. Many of its residents still lived in fields of tents like this one in South Dawson,



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⁶³Public Archives of Canada, PA 16926.

⁶⁴Public Archives of Canada, C 14478.

⁶⁵Geological Survey of Canada, G.S.C. #5816.

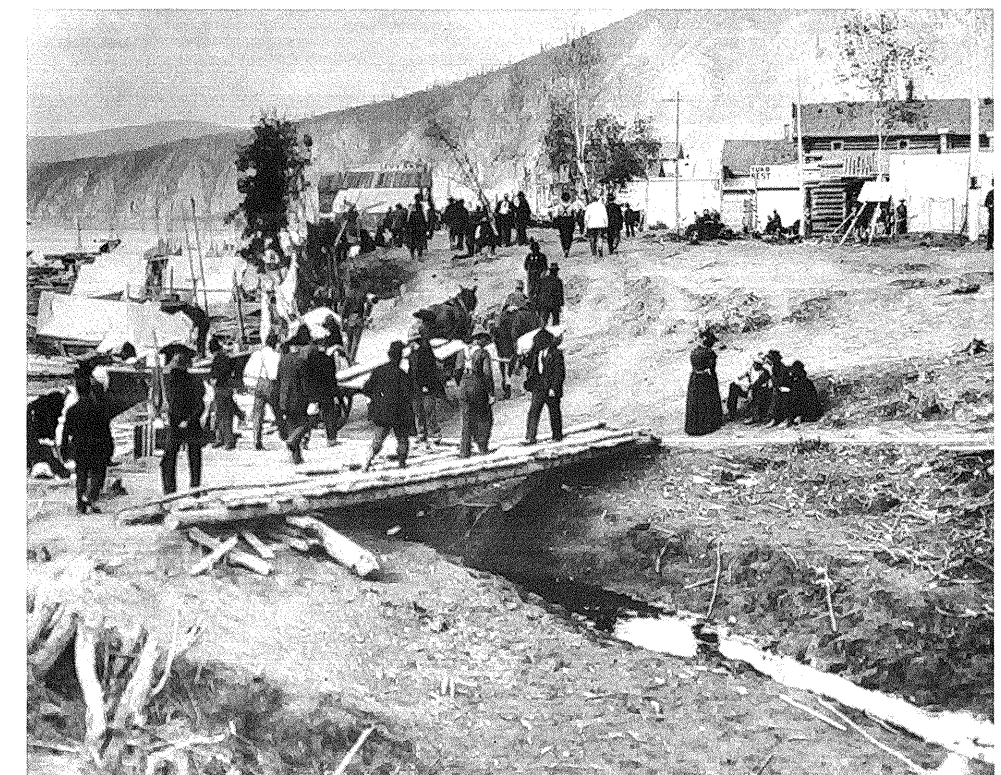
although the barber pole to the left of the picture acts as a reminder of the superior services that were available to them. The swampy centre section of the town remained

unoccupied with the exception of this row of brothels,



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another like it, and four warehouses behind them. While the commercial core had extended to Church Street on the south, Albert St. on the north, and Third Avenue on the east, most businesses were still conducted in log buildings, tents and slab shacks. This photograph shows the corner of Church and Front Streets in that area.



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This, Second Avenue between King and Queen, the area backing onto the core commercial block.



66

After the brothels had disappeared in 1899 and Second Avenue had been rebuilt, crude businesses like this



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continued to line both sides of the street.



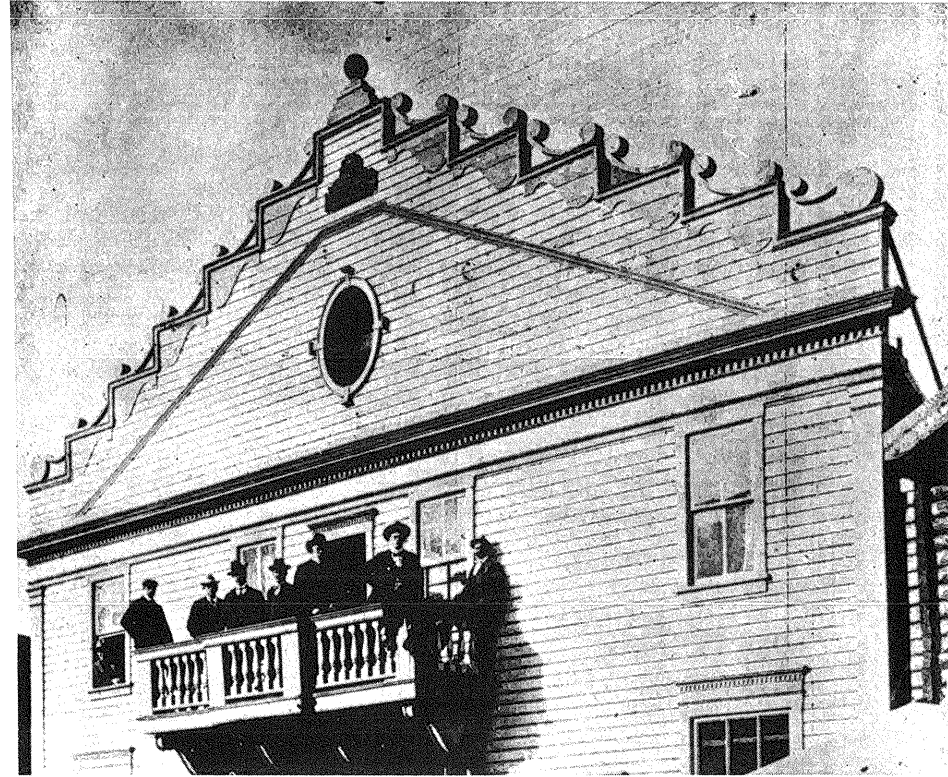
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⁶⁶Public Archives of Canada, PA 16941.

⁶⁷Dawson Historical Society Museum.

⁶⁸Vancouver Public Library, Yukon I-3.

Even the more ornate buildings in town were superficially grand. The deceiving curlicues on this elegant post office



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were details on a false fronted log structure as this second photograph illustrates.



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Indeed, false fronts, elegant signs and sprightly gimmicks were used to gloss over the temporary construction of the town, and dress it up cheaply as the expensive good time girl it wanted to be.

There were two reasons behind the temporariness of boom town Dawson. The first, certainly, was that most of the cheechakos who went to the Klondike in 1898 never intended to remain there in isolation from all they had left behind. The second, was that no one was sure exactly how rich the gold deposits were or how long they would last. At the time of the stampede, the price of gold was high, and the placer methods used for extraction were cheap. The price of gold was not fixed, and easy gold, despite slight technological adaptations in placer techniques, could not last forever. Dawson was still inextricably bound with the mines; its only reason for existence was as a mining supply and service centre. There was no point in making a long term investment unless it had a future.

⁶⁹Public Archives of Canada, C 18622.

⁷⁰Public Archives of Canada, PA 13324.

Turn - of-the - Century City

As the twentieth century dawned, the mining future of the Klondike creeks became more certain. Gold returns for the year 1900 were the highest ever, and mining magnates began investing in expensive dredges to increase efficiency. Dawson, it now appeared, was going to last. Residents sat back, loosened their belts, and pondered this fact. Would they stay? Or would they leave? As it happened, they did a little of each. The disappointed left, the glamorous boom town followers departed for easier pickings in the Tanana, and the confident remained.

During the next five years they attacked the business of building Dawson, the permanent town, with the same vigor and zest that had been characteristic of life in the boom town. In fact, the raw materials they used -- know-how and money -- had been present during the earlier period. The difference was confidence. Confidence in the future of the town activated the latent urban know-how that had entered the country with the stamperers during the boom and bustle of 1898-99. Confidence infused direction into the still-excessive expenditure of gold rush profits. The

⁷¹Dawson Historical Society Museum.

⁷²Public Archives of Canada, PA 16714.

⁷³Laurier Papers, Public Archives of Canada. Letter, J.A. Sinclair, Dominion Creek, Y.T. to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Ottawa, June 14, 1900. Vol. C 766, p. 46505.

⁷⁴Dawson Daily News, September 18, 1902, p. 5, "End of Resorts".

⁷⁵Dawson Daily News, May 16, 1903, p. 1, "Salas in Prison"; Dawson Record, September 15, 1903, p. 1, "Gamblers Are Fined", and Dawson Record, August 16, 1903, p. 5, "Against Lewd Women".

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Dawson Daily News, July 15, 1904, p. 4, no title.

⁷⁸Private Photograph donated by Mrs. S.E. Morton.

⁷⁹Martha Louise Black as told to Elizabeth Bailey Price, My Seventy Years (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1939), p. 171-6, and Berton, op. cit., p. 46.

result was a heyday period of expansion that trimmed, tailored, reconstructed and converted the town. When it was over, Dawson emerged a thoroughly modern turn-of-the-century city.

Men sent for their families once they decided to remain. The presence of ladies



71

and children

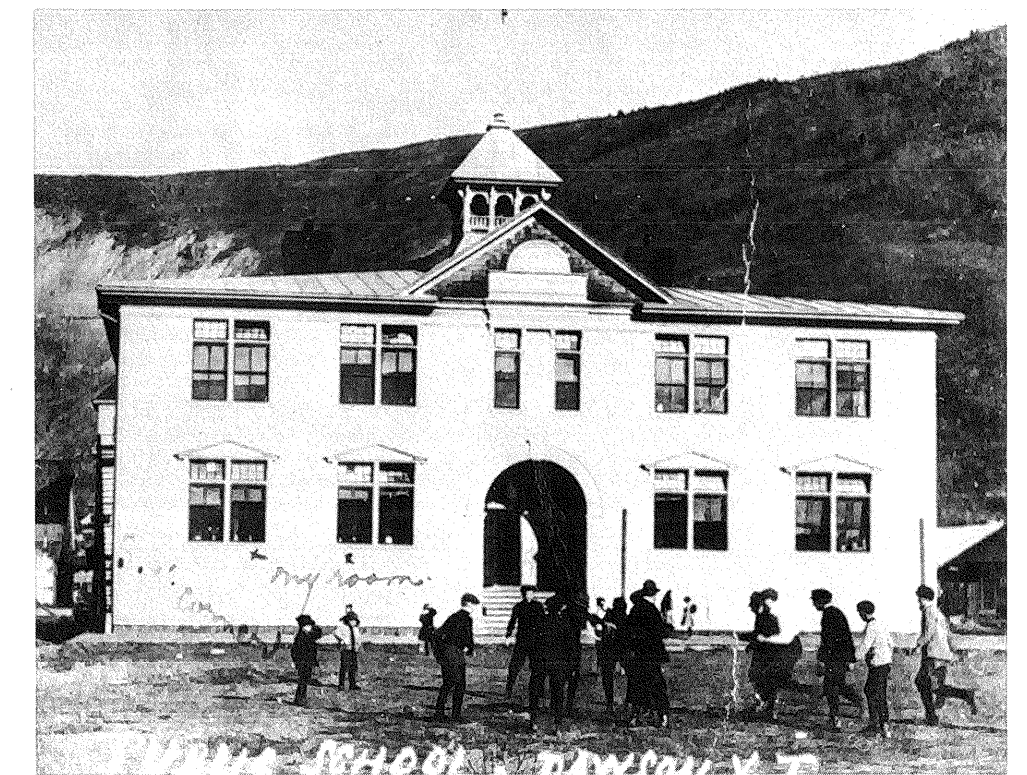


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in town rendered the antics of boom town Dawson both

embarrassing and unnecessary. In 1902 a purifying campaign was launched to remove the temptations that "polluted manly character"⁷³. Brothels were forbidden within city limits, forcing the town's most colourful element into exile in Lousetown.⁷⁴ The following year the authorities clamped down on pimps, gamblers and dance hall women.⁷⁵ The latter were speeded on their way by a petition signed by sixty-seven Dawson women, but the movement gained the support of the entire community. "Even the saloon men admitted them to be a nuisance"⁷⁶ in an attempt to safeguard their own businesses. They were unsuccessful, however, for in July 1904 thirty-five saloons in the Yukon, - eight of them in Dawson - were refused licence renewals.⁷⁷

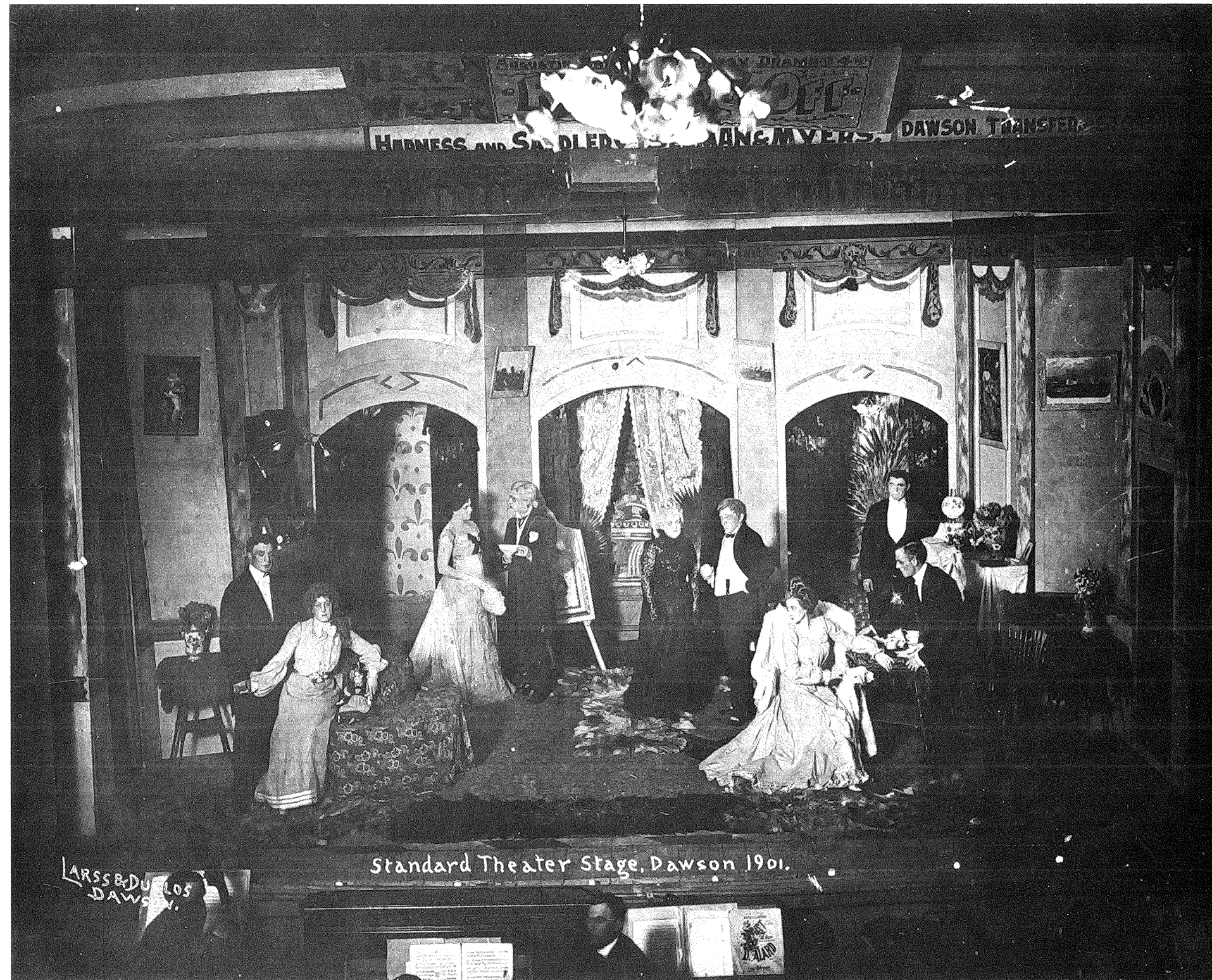
In place of the revelry came a new social order. This school



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upstaged the brothels on the corner of Queen Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. Regular afternoon "at homes" replaced saloons as a meeting place. Respectable white women gradually managed to ostracize all but their own kind from "society".⁷⁹ They promoted formal dinners, balls, and party outings as more stimulating alternatives to the amusing diversions of balmier days.

Under their gentle guidance the type of entertainment available changed. Shakespeare and opera



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succeeded burlesque in the theatres, and a literati developed to glorify the trials of the past.⁸¹ Sports assumed a more significant role on the social calendar. In

the summer, Dawsonites played cricket, football, and tennis; they rode, and swam at the new "natatorium". During the winter they played hockey, skated on the new rink, and

curled at a modern club. The town was beginning to take on the social values of most other Canadian cities, and like them it had its problems with professional beggars⁸² and stage horses that panicked at the sound of one of these "new fangled automobiles."



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In the period of expansion and organization that followed, enthusiasm drove businessmen to invest at a pace far racier than Henry Ford's new "wonder" had yet achieved. The prospect of stabilization drew fresh activity into the town. The N.A.T.&T. Co. relocated its headquarters in

⁸⁰Provincial Archives of British Columbia, #68275; Dawson Daily News, April 28, 1905, p. 2, "Opera Patience is a Success", and Ibid, May 19, 1905, p. 4, "Taming of the Shrew is a Success".

⁸¹Dawson Daily News, February 27, 1905, p. 3, "Dawson Lawyer Writes in Canadian Magazine on Yukon's Gold Fields"; Ibid, February 28, 1905, p. 3, "The Great Stampede", and Ibid, February 18, 1905, p. 5, "Lost in a Snowstorm While en Route to the Klondike: A Story on the Trail in the Winter of 1898".

⁸²Dawson Record, July 30, 1903, p. 2, "Professional Beggars in Dawson".

⁸³Dawson Record, July 31, 1903, p. 2, "Bad Runaway Averted", and Dawson Historical Society Museum.

Dawson in 1903,⁸⁴ and new industry appeared to provide for long term needs. Two brick works, an iron works, a brewery, and several sawmills were started in the town during this period; these augured well for a prosperous future.

Established businessmen were exuberant when they surveyed their new potential. They built elaborate stores,



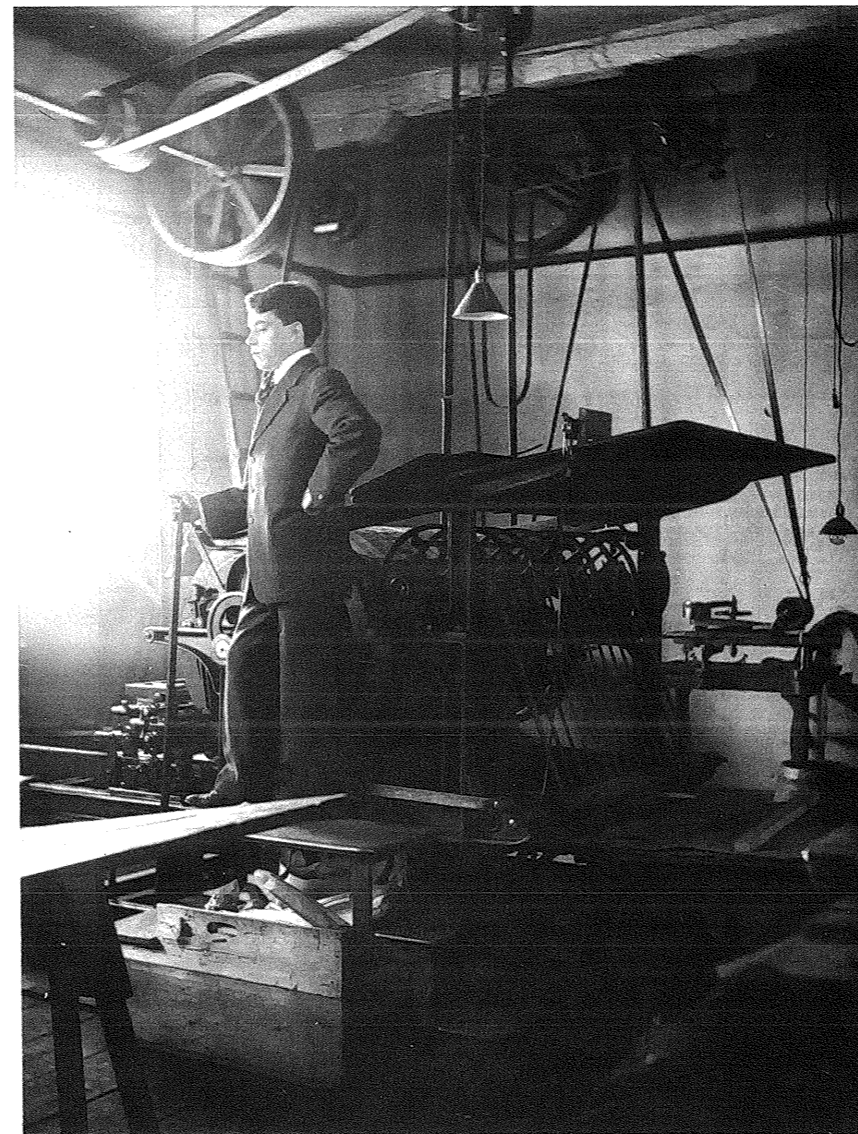
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bought the latest in display furnishings, and stacked their wares in towering pyramids around the life-size figure of the India Tea Maiden so popular at the time. Brick

warehouses were constructed to provide weather-proof storage; dock facilities were expanded to expedite transportation, and expensive up-to-date machinery like this steam-driven press



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was purchased to ensure maximum efficiency. By 1902, F.C. Wade assessed the local investment in "personalty and realty" at \$12,000,000.⁸⁸

New investments meant new debts, and businessmen stream-lined their procedures to maximize profits. They made arrangements with outside manufacturers for regular shipments of stock articles. Some firms established permanent agents in Vancouver and Victoria to ease the problems of long distance communication⁸⁹ with far away suppliers. Branch stores were opened on the creeks closer to principal markets. Catalogues were printed and dispensed to enrich the material aspirations of the lonely

claim-bound miner,⁹⁰ and advertisements like this



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appeared in local newspapers to underline the reputable character of local merchandising houses. Individual businessmen did all in their power to ensure the success of their firms.

However they soon found that individual efforts were not enough. A slow financial slump began in 1901 that soon drove them to collective action, and they established a Chamber of Commerce in 1903 to protect their interests. Through this organization they lobbied as a group for reduction of rents, cheaper insurance, and better bank rates.⁹²

⁸⁴F.C. Wade, "The Klondike - A Four Years' Retrospect" in *Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute* (London: The Institute, 1902), Vol. xxxiii, p. 298.

⁸⁵Provincial Archives of British Columbia, #33265.

⁸⁶University of Alaska, Thomas Gibson Collection, #59-804-37.

⁸⁷University of Alaska, Bassoc Collection, #64-92-225.

⁸⁸F.C. Wade, *loc. cit.*, p. 298.

⁸⁹*Dawson Hardware Company Papers* in the possession of Mr. J. Langevin, Dawson.

⁹⁰*Dawson Record*, July 28, 1903, p. 2, no title.

⁹¹Dawson Historical Society Museum.

⁹²*Dawson Daily News*, August 23, 1903, p. 2, "Reduction of Rents"; *Dawson Record*, September 7, 1903, p. 3, "Visitor in the Yukon", and *Ibid*, August 14, 1903, p. 4, "Yukon Sun Defends Banks".

They demanded improvement in the roads to the creeks, and sent a collective shipment of goods to the Tanana as stages in their master plan for Dawson -- the supply center of the north.⁹³ They encouraged one another to make new improvements, and mounted this elaborate display

really surprising, for the town offered an excellent market for large commercial enterprises and manufacturers. As might be expected, Simpsons' and Eaton's catalogues were found and used in every home as soon as the mail service improved.⁹⁵ Local merchants chafed when they were asked to

opportunity to host the Society's meetings in Dawson in 1903.⁹⁶

The initial suggestion for these meetings came from the Society itself, for the Yukon stirred and excited the imagination "outside". When gold had been discovered in 1896 most of the country had viewed the influx of population as a quixotic occurrence that would soon disappear. However, when the town achieved municipal status on December 16, 1901 after a mere five years of existence, eyes began to turn north with a new interest. Perhaps the current feeling that "Canada might be a very large country, but that its northern regions were absolutely useless"⁹⁷ should be revised. Perhaps there was a future in the north. The Canadian steel-rail imagination embarked on another fanciful flight, and in 1903 a proposal was made to extend the "All-Canadian route" to Dawson.⁹⁸

The Canadian government, on a more realistic track, had changed its opinion of Dawson's potential at a much earlier date. Once it became clear that mining investors were prepared to finance intensive development, authorities were willing to recognize the need to separate the



Yukon Horticultural and Industrial Fair, Dawson Sept. 9, 10, 11 & 12, 1903. Photo. by Duclos.

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at the 1903 Horticultural Fair as a form of self-congratulation. Dawson, they were convinced, was the most progressive city on the continent.

Apparently their exuberant boasts fell on eager ears, for it was during this period that "greater Canada" began expressing a confidence in Dawson's future. This was not

exchange ill-fitting garments purchased from their competitors in the south by mail order, but this was not enough to prevent them from promoting the idea of closer ties with the "outside". They beamed when their M.P. was asked to speak to the Trade Manufacturer's Association of Canada on Yukon trade needs, and they welcomed an

⁹³Dawson Daily News, June 4, 1903, p. 1, "Creek Road to be Built without Delay"; *Ibid*, October 23, 1903, p. 5, "Yukon's Roads Must be Kept Open"; and *Ibid*, July 28, 1903, p. 3, "To Improve its System"; and *Daily Klondike Nugget*, December 24, 1902, p. 2 & 9, "The City of Dawson, Brief Review of Its Growth and Development".

⁹⁴Public Archives of Canada, PA 13256, and *Dawson Record*, September 10, 1903, "Yukon's Array of Products Would Astonish the World".

⁹⁵Dawson Daily News, June 13, 1904, p. 3, full page ad from Simpsons, and M. Black, *op.cit.*, p. 171.

⁹⁶Dawson Daily News, June 24, 1905, p. 4, "Will Aid in Trade", and *Dawson Record*, October 21, 1903, p. 2, "Will be Welcomed to Dawson".

⁹⁷Wade, *op. cit.*, p. 297.

⁹⁸*Ibid*, October 23, 1903, p. 2, "Canada and Yukon Trade", and *Dawson Daily News*, November 11, 1903, p. 7, "For Road to Dawson".

government of the city from that of the territory.⁹⁹ They envisioned the City of Dawson as their headquarters for Yukon administration, and constructed expensive professionally-designed buildings to implement this function with grace. The Commissioner's residence, the courthouse, the administration building and the beautiful post office seen here

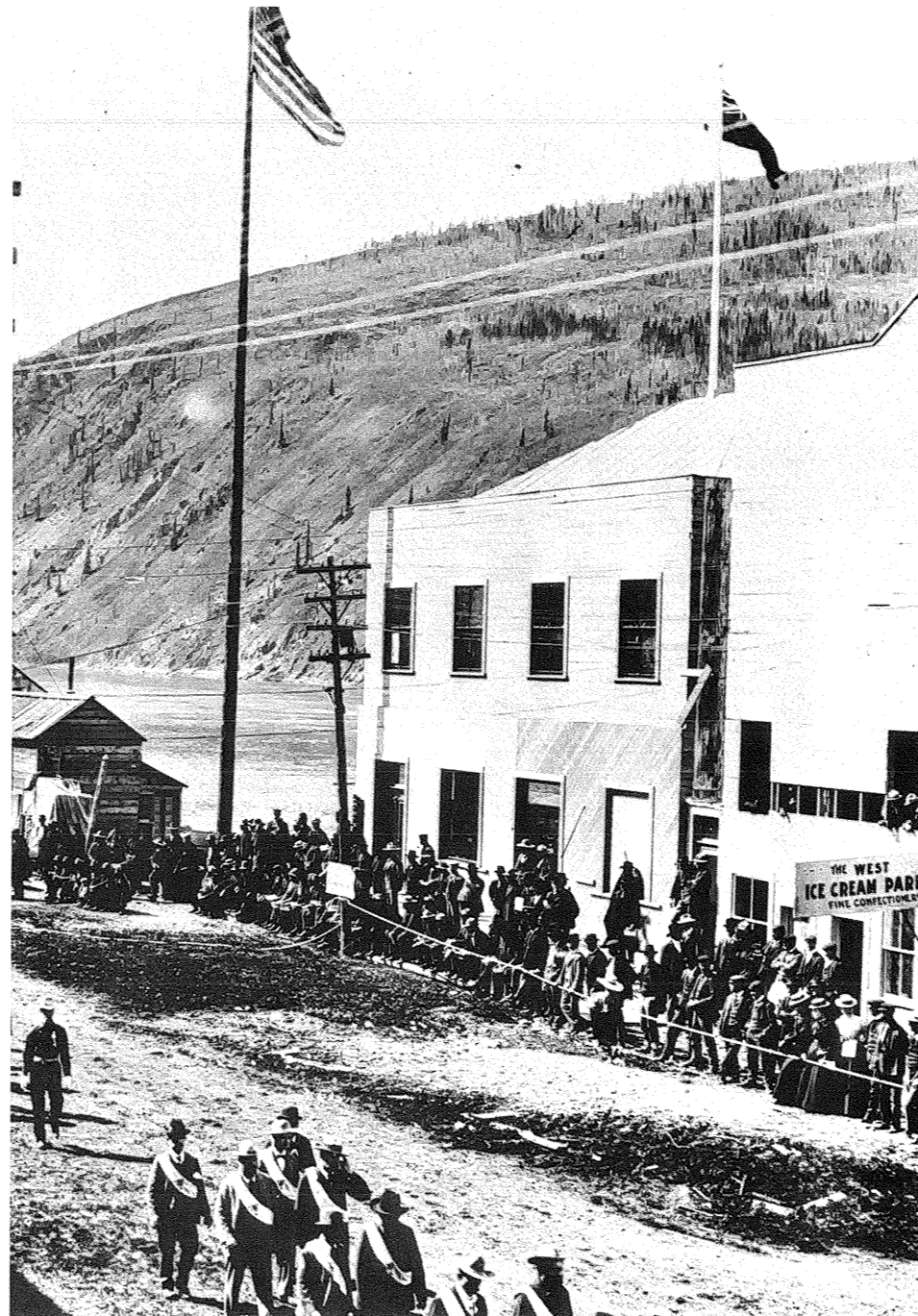


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all set an elegant backdrop for municipal and private improvements. A comparison of the design and construction materials of this post office with its boom town counterpart expresses the extent of federal confidence concretely.

Buildings like these were quite in keeping with the new

face of Dawson. In 1903, Mart Howard marvelled that "the buildings fronts are on an average better than those in Webster",¹⁰¹ his long-established home town. The miniature slab and canvas slum along the waterfront was outlawed early in the period¹⁰² and replaced by these towering structures.



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The Bank of Commerce Building, seen in the centre of the picture, was soon covered with metal cladding to add a more decorative appearance. Two years later, in 1903, a two-engine fire hall replaced the building housing the West Ice Cream Parlour on the right. Substantial office

buildings and business premises sprang up to witness the serious intentions of their owners. A contract was even let to build a block of brick stores — a certain, though somewhat mistaken, stamp of prosperity and permanence.¹⁰⁴

In tune with their new image, businessmen moved their living quarters out of downtown stores and established homes in other parts of town. Impressive residential sections like this



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grew up on Seventh and Eighth Avenues, then moved forward to fill in the gap left between Sixth and Fourth. Another

⁹⁹James H. Ross, "Report of the Commissioner" in Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year 1901 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1902), p. 4.

¹⁰⁰University of Washington, Ellingsen #34.

¹⁰¹Mart Howard Collection, *op. cit.*, clippings from Webster Telegram, October 26, no year, "Brings Nuggets Home With Him".

¹⁰²Dawson Daily News, January 15, 1900, p. 1, "Practical Suggestions for Fire Protection by John Astley, Engineer".

¹⁰³University of Washington, Hegg #1974.

¹⁰⁴Dawson Daily News, April 4, 1904, p. 4, "To Build Nine Stores".

¹⁰⁵Public Archives of Canada, PA 20547.

slightly less ornate but no less substantial area of housing formed here on the South West end of town.



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As the following photograph shows, these homes were often decorated in the height of fashion.



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¹⁰⁶Public Archives of Canada, PA 16500.

¹⁰⁷University of Washington, Larss and Duclos #50.

¹⁰⁸Polk's 1903 Gazetteer, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

¹⁰⁹Dawson Daily News, October 1, 1902, p. 1, "City is Improved".

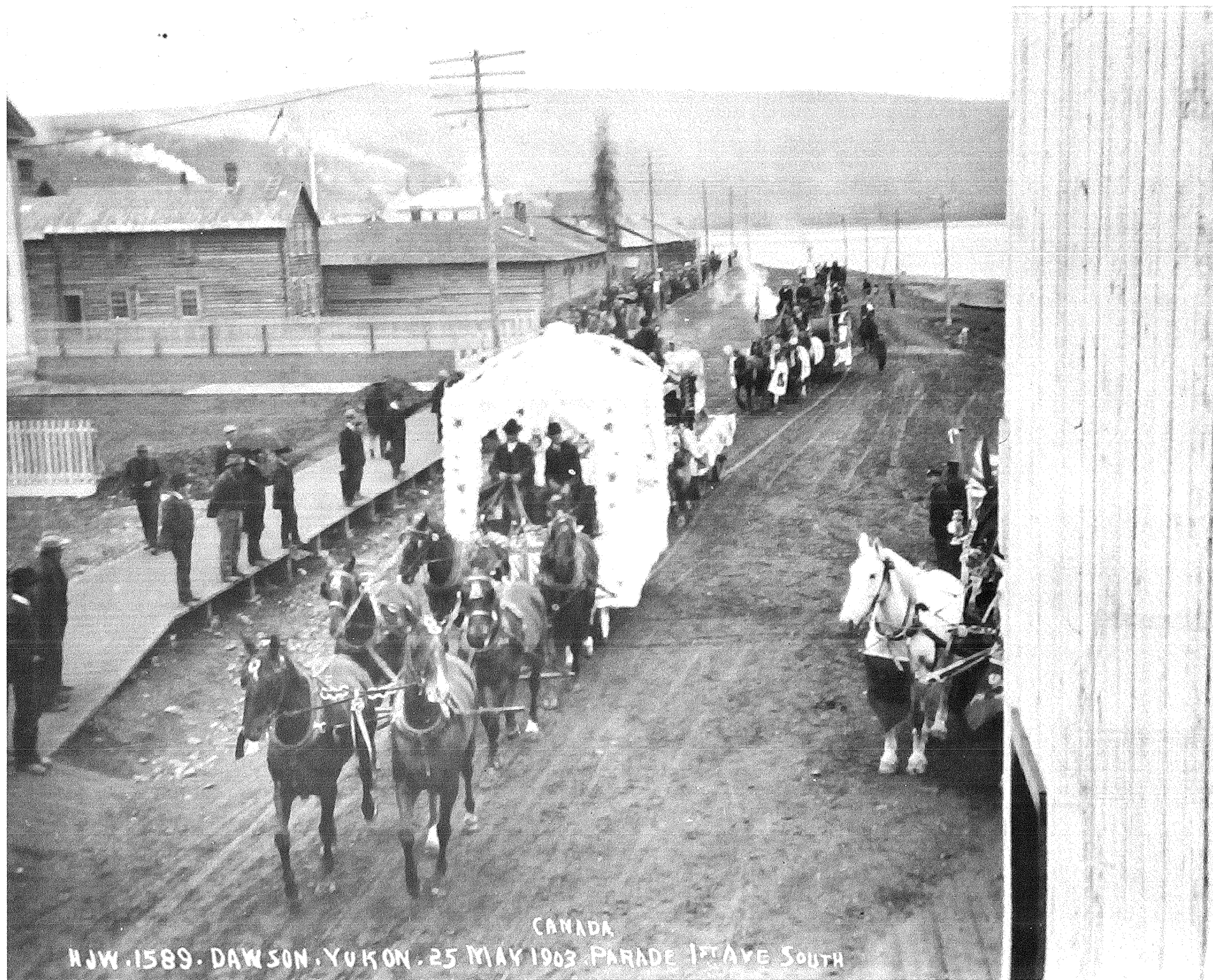
¹¹⁰Dawson Record, September 9, 1903, p. 3 "Sidewalks To be Built".

¹¹¹Dawson Daily News, May 19, 1903, p. 5, "Dangerous to Health".

¹¹²Dawson Daily News, April 2, 1900, p. 4, "Dawson Health Is Good".

This attention to style and detail was extended to civic improvements. According to the 1903 directory "every housewife boasts of hot and cold water spigots, with bath room attached."¹⁰⁸ The water was obtained from two wells and piped along all of the principal thoroughfares. Roads were macadamized for the first time in 1902.¹⁰⁹ Street light and sidewalk facilities were improved several times

during these years.¹¹⁰ Garbage was dumped onto a pier in the harbour.¹¹¹ Provision to keep the swampy section drained was made when a sewer system was installed early in the period, making Dawson "one of the healthiest cities on the continent".¹¹² Indeed, if contemporary accounts are to be believed, it contained the most up-to-date facilities available at the turn-of-the-century.



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By 1903 when this parade took place, the good citizens of Dawson had something to be proud of. Each of these floats represented the achievement of a particular firm or social group, and as the parade wound its way through the City's streets, residents must have noted the improvements with satisfaction. As one astonished visitor from the south commented,

There is about Dawson an undefinable atmosphere which one never expects to find in a mining camp, but

associates with older cities where progress, educational institutions, culture and refinement are expected to be found.

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In the space of a few short years, gold, confidence, and know-how had made Dawson a thoroughly modern metropolis.

¹¹³Public Archives of Canada, PA 16551.

¹¹⁴Anonymous, "Prominent Industrial Centres in Yukon Territory and Alaska - Dawson", in Alaska-Yukon Magazine, March 1907, Vol. 3, p. 24.



Conclusion

While Dawson the mining town is distinct from Dawson the boom town, and both differ from Dawson the turn-of-the-century city, they all have features in common during the Gold Rush period. For one thing, the tension surrounding the race for gold promoted a frenetic pace in the town throughout these years. This pace is evident in the preceding review of the vast changes that occurred.

For another, it was always a supply and entertainment centre for the Klondike creek areas. This was its only reason for existence. During any of the three Gold Rush periods, Dawson streets were peppered with signs promising food, accommodation, transportation, entertainment and better supplies. Concern with the condition of creek roads was constant for they provided an avenue of contact between merchants and miners. The alliance between Dawson and the manufacturers and capitalists "outside" was also strong. These men supplied the goods for its shelves, and the credit to extend its development, and they could not be ignored.

In addition, Dawson's location north of sixty dictated a physical isolation from the rest of Canada. The concomitant long, cold, dark winters also imposed restrictions. During the Gold Rush these geographic conditions had profound effects of life in Dawson -- effects that made it impossible for residents to forget that above all, Dawson was a northern metropolis. Transportation and communication with the world outside was a constant problem, whether the effort involved a trek

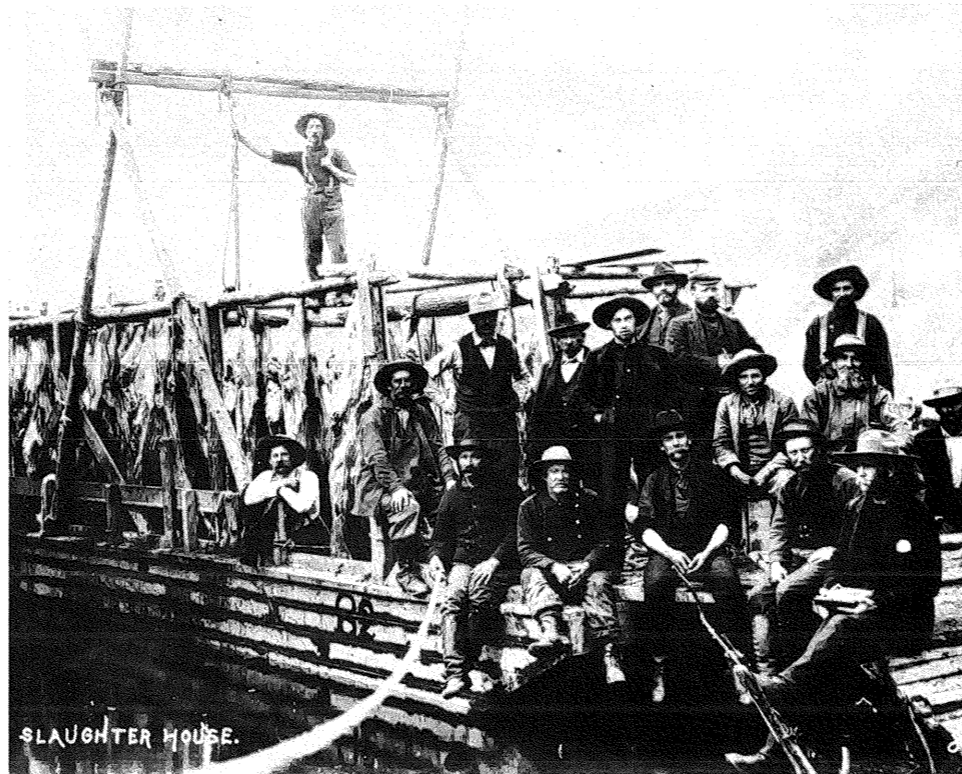
¹¹⁵ Dawson Historical Society Museum.

¹¹⁶ University of Alaska, Bassoc Collection, #62-92-429.

¹¹⁷ Berton, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Fawcett, *loc. cit.*, p. 87.

over the mighty Chilkoot, or a telegraph line that was constantly snapping dead. Despite the efforts of scow-men like these,



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fresh fruits, vegetables, eggs, and "civilized meat" were always difficult to obtain. Local gardeners had some success, but they were never able to satisfy the appetites of freshness-starved Dawsonites. As the next photograph shows,



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the town used immense quantities of wood for power and toe-toasting during the winter, and fuel was a constant worry. Severely low temperatures prevented outside work for a time during the winter, curtailing the type of activity that was possible. Geography also had ramifications which pertain more directly to the emphasis of this study.

It did, for example, place a restriction on building materials, and this can be traced through an observation of the buildings constructed. Veteran miners simply made their dwellings of timber and chinked them with mud. Their cabins were small to make maximum use of the heat produced, often containing only one window to provide a minimum of light and ventilation. The practicality of this type of construction seems to have escaped late Gold Rush residents. When they built "their Dawson" they aped the expansive modern architecture of the south, issuing an unconscious challenge to the weather to prevent them. They won the fight for a type of design which admitted sunshine and ventilation at the price of extra fuel, but the battle of modern building materials was not so easily taken. When faced with extreme temperatures and permafrost, "stable" brick structures crumbled. Plaster would not "take", and Laura Berton comments that in 1908 interior walls were still covered with cheesecloth.¹¹⁷ As a result, wood remained the only practical construction material.

During the gold rush period, this combination of wooden structures and cold dark winters proved a constant fire hazard. In the earliest days, this was accentuated by the use of coal oil lamps. During October of 1897, there were two fires in Dawson, both caused by carelessly toppled lamps.¹¹⁸ At least one fire in 1898 was attributed to the same source, and at that time the incendiary threat was increased by the number of

canvas-topped and slab shacks warmed by red-hot stoves. Between 1896 and 1905, there were eleven fires in Dawson, nine of which destroyed areas of its commercial district. Parts of the King-Queen centre block were levelled six times between 1897 and 1901. The effect this had in "sprucing up" the block can be seen in the following photographs.



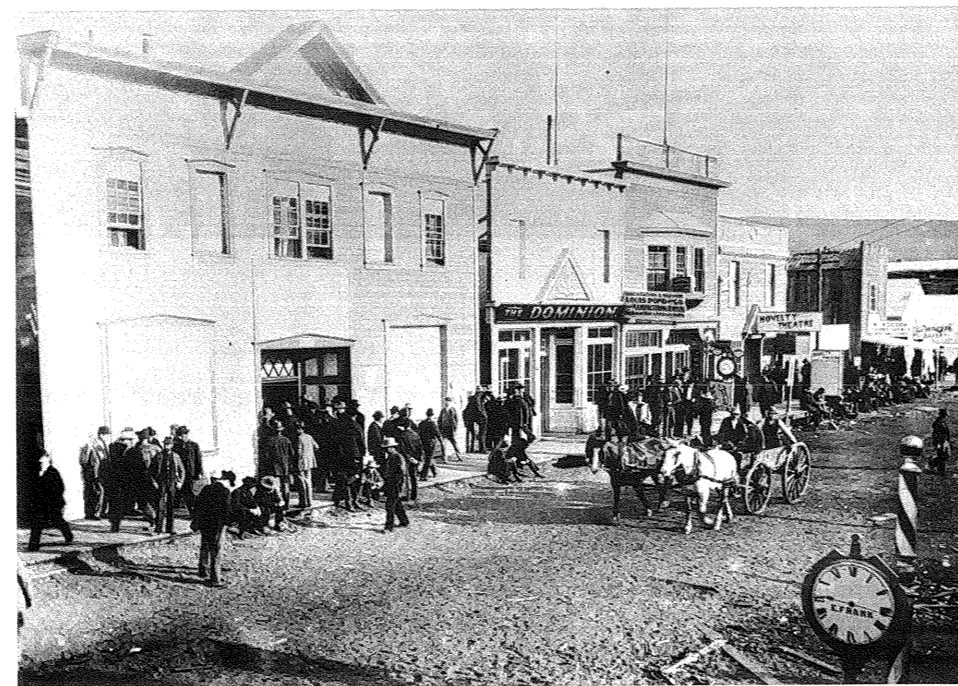
Christmas 1898



May 1900



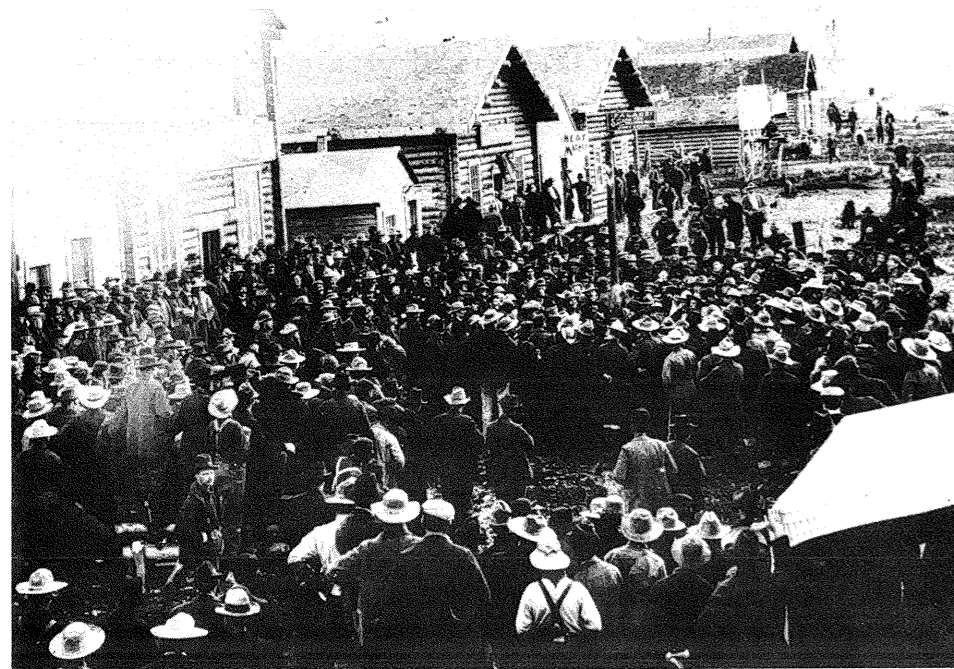
Spring 1897



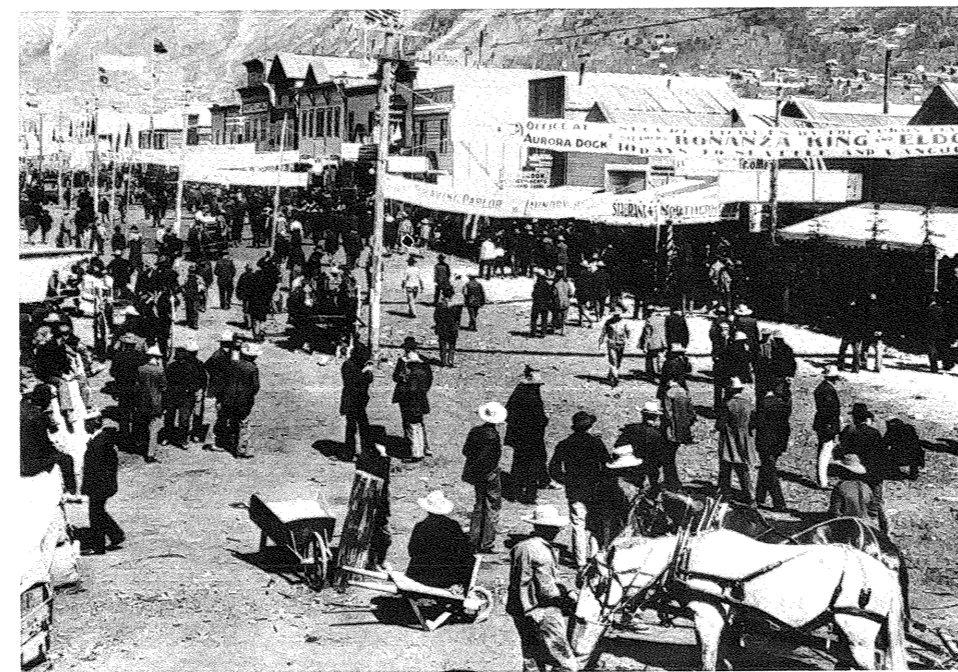
May 1899



May 1903



Fall 1897



July 1899

119 Washington State University, Mart Howard Collection, Lantern Slide #101. Public Archives of Canada, C 28637, Public Archives of Canada, C 8797, University of Washington, Curtis #985, Public Archives of Canada, C 6648, Public Archives of Canada, PA 16227, Public Archives of Canada, PA 16457

Gold Rush Dawson was certainly not a consistent entity! While the geographic facts that dominated its existence never varied, the means by which they were combatted changed from period to period. The factors governing these changes were the character, skills, and expectations of its populace, and the role of gold in their activities.

Citizens of the mining town of 1896-97 were old-time northerners for whom "it was not so much the gold, as finding the gold" that mattered. To them, riches from the Klondike creeks meant a super-sprees in Paris or Rome, and credit-free outfits for years to come. They expected to abandon Dawson and move on as they had always done. So they built a solid but crude town of nearby logs that varied little from the northern mining towns they had already constructed.

In contrast, the cheechakos that followed them in 1898 were southern urban men. They arrived in Dawson intending to get rich quick and leave, booming the economy with their exuberance. They too saw their residence as temporary, and they hastily threw together slab shacks and ornate false-fronted structures as short term protection from winter's blasts. While they were in the north, they were happy to participate in the raucous antics of boom town Dawson, but they were not content to sacrifice the urban amenities they had left behind. Consequently the town they created contained all of these amenities, in gerry-built form. These were designed, as was the rest of the town, to serve as a stop gap "that would do" for the short time they would be needed.

The Dawson of 1900-05 reflects a change in this attitude. Once the City's future had become secure, some of these men decided Dawson was a good location for permanent business and residence. They sent for their

wives and children, and dug in their heels to build a town they would want to live in for the rest of their lives. They spent the money they had earned from Rush gold production to build the city of their dreams. It contained expensive up-to-date facilities, and elegantly tailored edifices: it was a thoroughly modern turn-of-the-century metropolis.

Today's popular concept of Gold Rush Dawson really straddles only two of the three periods considered here. The first 1896-67 mining town period is common place, and usually ignored in favour of its more dramatic successors. The second, the 1898-97 boom town, contributes the bizarre excesses and extravagant contrasts that live on as the spirit of the gold rush. It is in the third, the era of the turn-of-the-century city, that today's visible legacy of gold rush Dawson originates. New confidence redirected citizens' enthusiasm towards construction of a permanent town during this 1900-05 period. It produced the gold rush buildings that survive today, and as such it is this era which forms the historic base of our conservation study.