

**Cheechakos, Sourdoughs and Soiled Doves:  
Men, Women, and Community in a Klondike Gold Rush Boomtown  
1896-1904**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

The research upon which this thesis is based explores the concept of ‘doing ethnography in the archives’ as a methodology to inform a case-study approach to studying the historic population of stampedeers residing in and around Dawson City during the Klondike Gold Rush. As an example of research situated within historical anthropology—a relatively novel area of expertise within the discipline—this thesis examines the nature of community in the boomtown context through the use and analysis of archival documents, thereby also contributing to the anthropological literature regarding both the study of ‘community’ as a concept and wider concerns with community studies.

Working from the perspective that boomtowns differ in fundamental ways relative to more established and enduring settlements, this research explores the influence of gender and socioeconomic stratification upon men and women in remote Dawson City as they renegotiated their roles and statuses relative to one another. This particular example is unique as the Klondike represented a *tabula rasa* wherein the stampedeers (who constituted a population of strangers arriving in a new place) were required collectively to forge both a novel community and to establish a new settlement in an unfamiliar terrain. To this end, this thesis contributes an anthropological perspective on the topic of boomtown life that proceeds from the understanding that social life is complex and multifaceted, and that models for appreciating the intricacies of human culture in the boomtown context cannot be taken for granted based on

understandings of ‘outside’ communities. Residents of these communities may find, for example, that the boomtown functions as a limbo-state wherein they exist outside of the continuity of their normal lives. This is accomplished as former markers of social status are stripped away to accommodate new models of socioeconomic stratification that emerge while a shared sense of community and feelings and sentiments related to place are reconstituted among a population of migrants in an unfamiliar landscape. Further to this, it is also observed that boomtowns can be characterized as places where normal gender roles and relationships that are characteristic of wider society do not necessarily apply. This is due both to the skewed sex ratios that typically characterize boomtown communities, as well as relaxed social controls in these often remote and isolated settlements that in turn offer a range of opportunities to both men and women that are perhaps exclusive to the boomtown context.

The study of community as it existed among and between men and women in the example provided by Dawson City in this thesis therefore offers a necessary foundation to the study of all other aspects of boomtown life both within and beyond the immediate context of the Klondike Gold Rush. The insight gained here can in fact be construed as providing an essential framework for structuring subsequent analyses of modern-day boomtowns in Canada and elsewhere, mostly a phenomenon of the development of extractive industries, many of which continue to struggle with social issues similar to those experienced by their historic predecessors.

## **PREFACE**

This thesis is an original work by Megan J. Highet. The research project, of which this this is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Study ID Number: MS3\_Pro00014387, May 24, 2011.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the culmination of several years of research, analysis, and writing that has only been possible due to the support of numerous archival institutions, funding agencies, mentors, and reviewers whose thoughtful comments have challenged me personally as a researcher and greatly enhanced the overall outcome of this project.

Many thanks to my supervisor at the University of Alberta, Dr. Mark Nuttall for his constant support, advice, and encouragement as I have worked to develop my research, writing, and myself as an academic over the course of my program. This support has taken many forms including reading and commenting upon numerous drafts of my thesis, offering letters of recommendation, and taking the time to meet with me to discuss my thesis, program, and opportunities for the future, all of which has all been genuinely appreciated. Sincere thanks also to my committee members within the Department of Anthropology. I appreciate the thoughtful critiques of previous drafts of my thesis offered by Dr. Sandra Garvie-Lok and Dr. Helen Vallianatos, which have encouraged me to consider alternative perspectives and ultimately enhanced the final outcome of my research.

None of this research would have been possible without the kind support of staff at the Canada Vital Statistics office in Whitehorse, Y.T., the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse, Y.T., The Dawson City Museum and Archives in Dawson City, Y.T., and the Library and Archives of Canada in Ottawa, Ontario,

whose countless trips into the archives to retrieve files on my behalf is also greatly appreciated.

Finally, this research has only been made possible by the funding granted to me by a variety of organizations. This monetary support has allowed me to pursue graduate studies at the University of Alberta, to travel to a number of archival institutions across Canada in order to gather primary data for my research, as well as supporting me throughout the writing phase of my program. These funding sources have included a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship (SSHRC Grant Number: 767-2008-1443) and the President's Doctoral Prize of Distinction (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta) that I held from 2008-2011. I was further honored to receive the Izaak Walton Killam Memorial Scholarship (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta) that I held from 2011-2013, as well as the Dorothy J. Killam Memorial Graduate Prize (Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Alberta) that was awarded to me in 2011. I am further thankful for the funds granted to me that allowed me to travel to visit the above-mentioned archival institutions in person, which have included; a Graduate Student Professional Development Award from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alberta in 2010, a Circumpolar/Boreal Alberta Research Grant from the Canadian Circumpolar Institute in 2009, a Grant-in-Aid from the Arctic Institute of North America in 2009, and a Research Travel Grant from the J.S. Ewart Memorial Travel administered by the University of Manitoba in 2008.

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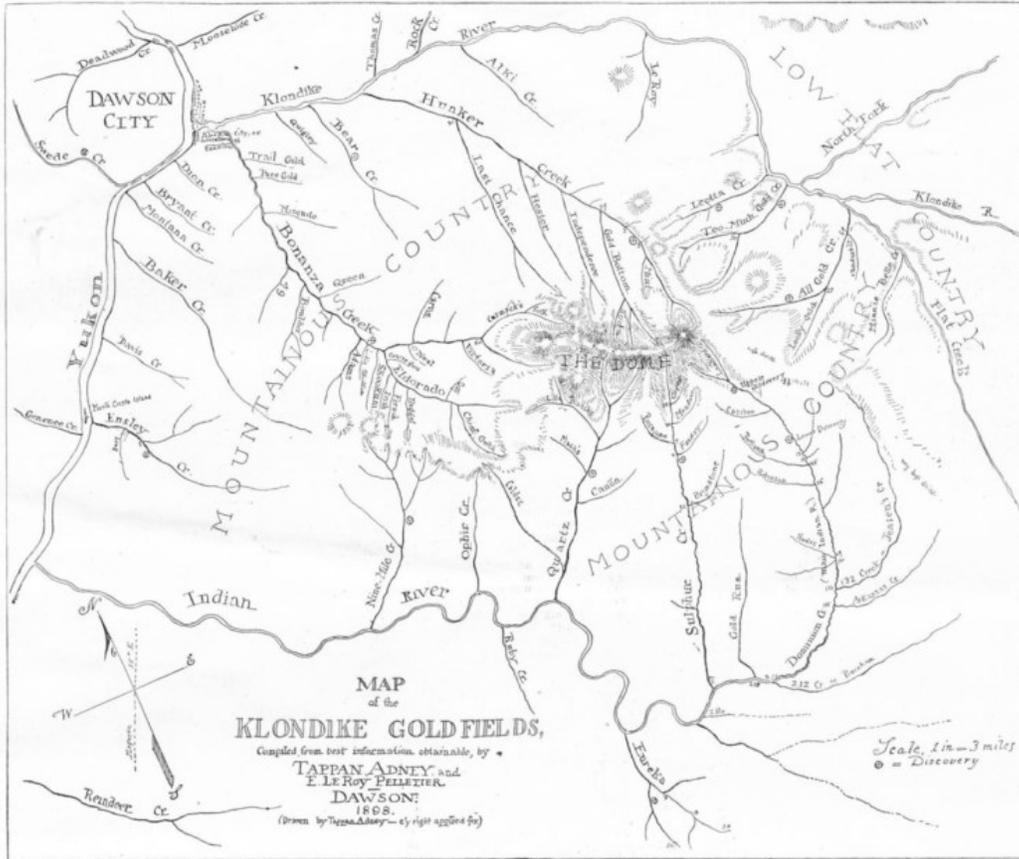
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# MAP OF THE KLONDIKE GOLD FIELDS



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Klondike has often been referred to as having been the ‘last great gold rush’. As a testament to the breadth of its impact upon North American culture in the final years of the nineteenth century, it has indeed been noted that the Klondike garnered the greatest and most widespread media coverage of any singular event up until its time (Guest 1985: 69). While the Klondike was in many ways a microcosmic culmination of social and economic tensions within wider North American society at the close of the nineteenth century,<sup>1</sup> it is the boomtown that sprang up at Dawson City specifically, that represents the focus of this study. With this context in mind, various interrelated cultural aspects involved in the generation of community in the boomtown setting and the emergent gendered social relationships that characterized the lives of men and women in this settlement represent the primary foci of my research.

Through an ethnographically informed and community-based approach, my research contributes to the body of anthropological literature concerning ‘community’ as a concept in and of itself. This is significant given that although a tremendous amount of scholarship has been aimed at documenting and describing the diversity of the human condition in communities throughout time

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<sup>1</sup>As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, the Klondike gold rush occurred around the time that the social consequences of the shift in the North American economy to the industrial marketplace were fully manifesting in North American society. In addition to coming on the heels of a global economic depression, many stampederers evidentially saw the Klondike as an opportunity for not only economic recovery, but as a means to achieve class security among a working middle class that began to emerge as men increasingly ventured outside of the home to work for wages in this era.

and across place, relatively less attention has been directed at studying ‘community’ for its own sake. This is likely a consequence of the fact that anthropologists and other researchers have traditionally located their studies *in* communities rather than studying *community* in its own right. In this vein, Bender has observed that “[c]ommunity is where community happens” (1978: 6). This is a significant but often overlooked principle guiding research since a prior expectation regarding ‘community’ as a concept can in turn direct the search for examples of ‘ideal’ communities to fit the preconceived mold rather than proceeding the other way around, with theories being based upon observations of real communities informing a working definition of ‘community’ (Hine 1980, Barrett 2010). This discrepancy in turn, might aptly be referred to as the ‘Community Myth’.

To the extent that it is possible to speak of ‘community’ as a larger concept based upon a single case study, this thesis discusses an example of community in the boomtown context specifically as it existed among men and women in the Klondike. One example of the utility of approaching the study of boomtown communities from this perspective is evident in response to the question posed by Hine, who asked “[c]an a sense of community [really] cross class lines? Can a community [ever] embrace working men and managers, proletariat and bourgeoisie?” (1980: 29). Proponents of the ‘Community Myth’ would likely be inclined to argue that the rifts created among individuals by divisions in socioeconomic stratification are simply too great to permit divergent members of society to share a collective sense of belonging, as is the case in

major urban centers where communities are fractured and overlapping as opposed to manifesting as inclusive and collective in nature (Harman 1988). Yet, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, time and again Dawson City offered opportunities that ran counter to the prevailing social order wherein many things were possible in the Klondike that were not so 'back home'. Thus, it was that men were able to remake themselves in the gold fields, regardless of whether or not they ever struck pay dirt. In a community where everyone entered on equal footing, the influence of politics, economics, and social hierarchy that hampered the development of a strong sense of community in most other contexts all but disappeared.

Although this definition will be elaborated upon later, briefly and for present purposes, a boomtown can be defined as a settlement characterized by elevated population growth, rapid development of infrastructure and heightened economic activity relative to contemporaneous settlements (Cortese and Jobes 1977). In this regard, it is paramount to impress the fact that although Dawson City was by no means the first North American boomtown, neither was it the last. This point is significant given that Dawson City and the community of gold rushers who resided there in fact share numerous similarities with other northern resource, single-industry, and boomtown residents including, importantly, those that persist into the modern era. For example, boomtowns residents (both past and present) often struggle with the effects of personal stress and social upheaval as the rapid pace of population growth and flux supersedes the rate of development and the responsive capacity of the community. The rustic and

unfamiliar setting of the boomtown combined with limited networks for socialization and deficits in social support services that would normally act as a buffer is further compounded by the challenge of adapting to ongoing change within the community and this can have an intense impact upon the residents of these places (Weisz 1979: 31-55). This is particularly true for remote boomtown populations wherein residents are often faced with the reality that their lives have simultaneously “become more complex and less predictable” (Freudenburg 1984a: 698). This is in part due to the continuous state of development characteristic of boomtowns, particularly in their infancy, which has particularly negative consequences for the delivery of essential infrastructure and services (Moffic et al. 1983). Combined with the additional stress posed by the unusually high costs of living, long hours of intensive manual labor, and limited entertainment opportunities (which, as will be demonstrated, were all characteristic of the Klondike), many boomtown residents find themselves inadequately prepared to cope with the unforeseen pressures of boomtown life (Cortese & Jobes 1977; Moffic et al. 1983; and Sharma & Rees 2007).

As a relatively recent episode of human experience, the Klondike is particularly well suited to study from the perspective of historical anthropology, which resides at a contested margin of traditional anthropological research. While the implications of the overlap between the disciplines of anthropology and history have long been debated by scholars working from both sides, the genre of historical anthropology brings this debate to the forefront since the overlap between these disciplines is apparent not only in the temporal sense, but also in

the primary data sources (archival documents) that are utilized by both historians and historical anthropologists. Where the line is ultimately to be drawn demarcating the respective boundaries of each discipline has been a matter of long standing deliberation among scholars. Advocates of both disciplines are quick to point to respective strengths of the different perspectives and methodologies, particularly in light of the fact that each of these disciplines is increasingly adopting the subject matter of the other (see for example, Faubion 1993, Geertz 1990, Thomas 1963). In fact, there is no clear or simple answer to be offered in response to the question of where anthropology begins and history ends, for example, since both fields recognize observation, description, analysis and interpretation as their foundational pillars (Wolcott 1999: 51). As such, any debate on the matter is potentially limitless, although the discussion need not be one of the legitimacy of claims of authority over a given topic or the supremacy of a particular approach over another given that these disciplines are in fact more properly understood as offering *complementary* rather than *competing* points of view when their subject matter coalesces (Thomas 1963). Indeed, disciplines that borrow and draw upon the merits of related areas of scholarship do not compromise the integrity of either. Instead, both grow stronger from shared insight and constructive discourse that interdisciplinary cooperation fosters, despite any initial resistance that such practices may garner (Cowan 2012).

Nevertheless, some scholars oppose the historical anthropologist's claim to archival documents, arguing that such a focus borders on 'armchair anthropology', and that archives are more properly left as the exclusive domain of

historians (Cunha 2006: 5). In response to this position I would argue however, that such a stance overlooks three key factors. First, that there is in fact a long-standing tradition of anthropologists visiting archives in support of their research activities. Second, that anthropologists' forays into the archives have been paralleled by the widespread borrowing of anthropological theory and methodology (particularly in regard to ethnography as a theory, method and practice) by scholars from other disciplines, including historians, which highlights the fact that the borrowing and sharing between disciplines is reciprocal and cooperative, not oppositional. Third, the dismissal of anthropological applications of archival documents as 'un-anthropological' or as constituting 'arm-chair anthropology' is unnecessarily antagonistic and misconstrues the impetus and intent of such research at its base. Indeed, it is perhaps possible that neither history nor anthropology have ever operated entirely independently of one another. That is, even if anthropology were to limit its scope to the study of the culture of living populations (which it never has), no reputable anthropologist would be satisfied with simply limiting their study to the immediately observable aspects of that culture. Indeed, at its base, anthropology recognizes the deep-seated need to situate a contemporary population within its wider socio-historical context, which invariably exerts an enduring influence upon the present condition of any given community and its inhabitants. In a similar vein, historians recognize that history is as much a cultural product as are the tangible artifacts left behind for archaeologists to study (Cowan 2012). In response to this ongoing discourse (see for example, Brettell 1992, Cohn 1980, Cowan 2012, Geertz 1990, Silverman

1986, and Thomas 1963) I argue that what qualifies this study as specifically anthropological (and therein distinguishes it from the extant body of historical literature on the subject of the Klondike gold rush) resides not in the data sources employed within, or subject matter itself. Rather, it is the intent to inform a broader discussion of the human condition in boomtown communities that constitutes the common thread running throughout this study.

In this vein, if one must be identified, perhaps the defining difference between the disciplines of anthropology and history follows from the concentrated interest of the former in regard to the “mundane, the ordinary, [and] the everyday” (Geertz 1990: 322) as the crucial site of human experience. While I would not argue that anthropologists are alone in employing a holistic approach to the populations that they study, this nevertheless remains a guiding principle of the discipline. Following from this view, it is necessary to draw upon insight about all aspects of social life in order to formulate a satisfactory understanding of the relevance of any particular issue within the context of the study population (Grace 2007: 95). With this in mind, my research draws upon a wide range of archival materials as primary data sources not only to reconstruct the demographic framework of the community, but to also speak to those issues that are the central concerns of anthropologists; political structure (laws, rights and obligations of individuals and the wider community), economic organization (division of labor, ownership of property, income, occupational titles), social stratification (gender roles, marriage practices, kinship, class and status), ideology (worldview, beliefs and rites of passage). Each of these areas of enquiry is necessary and in turn

contributes to a dynamic understanding of the human condition and manifestation of community in the context of the Klondike gold rush.

Consequently, I argue that what sets this case study apart from previous historical research on the subject of the Klondike and thus marks it as distinctively anthropological in nature is the encompassing intent to not only reconstruct, interpret and analyze the community being studied, but in turn also employ that insight to inform a discussion of broader concerns regarding the human condition in a comparative perspective, which surely falls squarely within the accepted domain of anthropological expertise.

Given this agenda, I expect that insight gained through an anthropological exploration of social life in the context of this historic boomtown community will contribute to three distinct bodies of literature including extant research on the topics of the Klondike Gold Rush in particular, boomtown communities in general, as well as anthropological research and methodology more broadly.

#### Contribution to Literature on the Topic of the Klondike Gold Rush

First, my research offers a new (anthropological) perspective on the subject of the human aspect of the Klondike gold rush. Although much has been written about the Klondike by lay researchers and scholars from a variety of academic disciplines, this nevertheless represents the first anthropological contribution to the subject. In this vein, Pierre Berton (1958) has provided what continues to be the definitive history of the Klondike Gold Rush, including a particularly

revealing account of the hardships faced by the stampeders as they struggled along the trail to reach Dawson City. More recently, Cruikshank (1992), Guest (1985), and Stone (1983), have each offered broad accounts of Klondike society from social and economic perspectives. In addition to these works, Guest (1982), Lux (1989), and Porsild (1995), have each provided in depth analyses of various aspects of gold rush society with special attention paid to the realities of life experienced by residents of Dawson City. Archibald (1981) has in turn commented upon the social consequences of the inflated cost of living in the Klondike. With a primary focus upon the lives of women in the Klondike, Backhouse (1995), Duncan (2004), and Ryley (1997), have each addressed aspects of gold rush life in regard to women and their work, while Backhouse (2010), has also more recently commented upon the lives of children in the Klondike. Finally, several researchers have also offered historical overviews of the Klondike gold rush as an event situated within the broader history (Coates 1985, Coates & Morrison 1988), geography and transportation (Minter 1987, Willis 1997) and political landscape (Coates 1991, Morrison 1985, Stone 1983) of the Yukon Territory.

The lack of anthropological attention on this topic to date is likely a consequence of the fact that historical anthropology (which relies largely on the use of archival documents as primary data sources) has only relatively recently emerged as a recognized genre of anthropological research. Thus, populations such as that constituted by the Klondikers—which are accessible to scholars only through historic documents—have remained inaccessible to anthropologists

that were hesitant to employ archival data as primary (as opposed to secondary) data sources. An anthropological approach thus promises to bring a holistic, ethnographically informed view to the subject of the daily lives and lived experience of people in this particular time and place, which will in turn contribute to the anthropological literature aimed at documenting the human condition for the purpose of cross-cultural comparison and, ideally, applied practical applications in regard to contemporary boomtown scenarios.

Much of the aforementioned pre-existing literature on the Klondike has been generated in direct response to criticism lodged against earlier manuscripts that have been accused of overly romanticizing life in the gold fields and as more closely approximating fiction than fact. This bias has culminated in what is now termed the 'Klondike Myth'. The motivations of writers who may have taken significant liberties with their subject matter are easily understood however, given the sizable market that has existed for both fiction and non-fiction literature on the Klondike since the time of the stampede in 1898. Caught up in the excitement of gold fever, indiscriminate readers consumed print media almost as quickly as it could be produced. Editors and publishers, on the other hand, were likely to overlook exaggerations made by authors when it came to topics of adventure, fortune, and debauchery in order to satisfy their readers' insatiable demands for such content since such stories were nearly impossible to verify anyways. Along these lines, Grace (2007) for example, credits the poems of Robert Service as having been primarily responsible for perpetuating the legacy of the romanticized view of the Klondike (and the Canadian North more

generally) that persists even today. Service's poems were originally published in 1907 (well after the gold rush had subsided), but it was in this era that many of the lingering impressions about life during the 'last great gold rush' were crystalized under the heavy influence of Service's depictions in poems such as *Songs of a Sourdough*, *The Call of the Wild*, and *The Spell of the Yukon* each of which has been replicated though subsequent reprints of Services' rosy and male-centric views of gold rush life in the rigorous northern landscape (Grace 2007: 90-91). In response to biased portrayals of the Klondike, recent scholarship has confronted such inaccuracies with the goal of freeing research on the subject from the sentimentality and hyperbole that has crept in to earlier accounts of 'the last great gold rush'.

#### Contribution to Literature on the Topic of Boomtown Communities

Secondly, my research builds upon the established body of literature that explores various aspects of social life in boomtown communities. While much has been written on both the generation of community and the unique social challenges faced by residents of boomtowns, it remains that the bulk of this literature pre-dates the 1990s. It is also worth noting that the majority of these studies have also been conducted by sociologists while other disciplines, including anthropology, are largely underrepresented or entirely silent on the subject. Much of the existing literature on boomtowns has further been focused upon the assumed detrimental effects or 'social pathologies' of boomtown life in regard to interpersonal relationships, community life, and social integration (or

lack thereof) among residents of such places (see for example, Brown, Dorius & Krannich 2005, Brown, Geertsen & Krannich 1989, Cortese 1982, England & Albrecht 1984, Hunter, Krannich & Smith 2002, Krannich & Grider 1984, and Little 1977).

Kasarda & Janowitz (1974) have summarized the approaches taken by researchers interested in the impact of boomtowns upon the social fabric of communities into two main models: the linear model and the systemic model. The majority of early literature on boomtowns that grew out of interest in American rural energy resource development has been grounded in the linear model. The linear model holds that increases in population size and density are directly responsible for any and all of the negative social consequences observed in boomtown communities. This is because as populations become larger and denser (and presumably more urban in nature), they are assumed to experience breakdowns of primary group ties with a correlated reliance upon faltering institutional supports compounded by corresponding decreases in community attachment and involvement. Along these lines, much of the existing research on boomtowns can, and has been criticized for exaggerating the negative aspects of boomtown life. This critique operates from the perspective that some researchers have grounded their conclusions in *a priori* assumptions founded upon overarching generalizations made in previous studies to the extent of sometimes even failing to employ any data or original analysis in support of their conclusions (see for example, Albrecht 1984, Brown, Dorius & Krannich 2005, Brown, Geertsen & Krannich 1989, Cortese & Jobes 1977, England & Albrecht

1984, Freudenburg 1984b, 1981, Greider & Krannich 1985, Hunter, Krannich & Smith 2002, Krannich & Greider 1984, and Little 1977).

William Freudenburg (1984b) has been the most damning on this front, arguing that some authors have become so caught up in their own expectations that they have written extensively on the subject of ‘boomtown pathologies’, informing their arguments with misconstrued assumptions in the absence of concrete evidence to support such their position (231). That is, he argues, researchers have often become so enamored with the idea of the boomtown as an unstable and inhospitable entity that research has been directed almost exclusively at exploring the so-called ‘social pathologies’ of boomtowns while failing to ponder the validity of such an assumption in the first place. This misguided emphasis upon the negative aspects of boomtown life is reminiscent of the bias in early research on the Klondike, and should perhaps be referred to as the ‘Boomtown Myth’.

Indeed, the complex and interactive social consequences of boomtown life cannot simply be labeled as inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’ (Freudenburg 1984b: 231). The view taken in my research then, is aligned with the systemic model, which recognizes that communities are comprised of complex networks of formal and informal social associations. In this approach, socialization is understood to be an ongoing process as communities take in new residents, grow, and transform. The focus then, is upon social *change* as opposed to social *consequences* of life in boomtowns. Although the distinction may appear

arbitrary, I argue (as subsequent chapters will make clear) that the implications are in fact great.

In addition to these facets, my study will then also complement extant research on boomtown life in light of two further biases in this literature base. First, these studies tend to be situated within boomtowns that owe their existence to either energy production or natural resource development (see for example, Albrecht 1984, Brown, Dorius & Krannich 2005, Freudenburg 1981, Markusen 1978, and Mowen 1980) as opposed to the placer gold mining that fueled the Klondike stampede. A second significant difference concerns the nature of the towns focused upon in research themselves, which, to date, have overwhelmingly been represented by pre-existing communities that subsequently underwent boom periods (see for example, Feagin 1985, and Greider & Krannich 1985, 1985). In contrast, Dawson City represents an example of a novel community forged in an area previously unoccupied by individuals of European descent. While existing literature on North American boomtowns has typically relied upon cross-sectional surveys that lack baseline data regarding the nature of the population prior to the onset of the boom period (for notable exceptions see, Brown, Dorius & Krannich 2005 and Brown, Geertsen & Krannich 1989), the Klondike provides an opportunity to employ a longitudinal approach with the advantage of capturing the entire span of the life of the community through birth, boom, bust and on into the era of stabilization. A further boon of my research concerns the fact that whereas the majority of boomtown literature has discussed destructive consequences to social life that

follow from the effects of preexisting communities undergoing rapid growth, the Klondike presents a contrasting example insofar as the discovery of gold had a *constructive* influence upon the community at Dawson City.

Along these lines and returning to the immediate goals of this study, my research seeks to address the ways in which the social matrixes generated in the boomtown scenario differ in character relative to other communities. This will be accomplished by first exploring how a community was constituted by a population of strangers drawn together in the Klondike and then how gendered relationships and socioeconomic structure subsequently came to be renegotiated by men and women in remote Dawson City.

Following from the emphasis of my research that rests squarely upon the social construction of community in the boomtown setting, it is important to note that although it is recognized that Dawson City was remote in a geographical sense it did not exist in a vacuum. Thus connections must be drawn between Dawson City and its wider socio-historical context in order to ground my research in a meaningful and relevant way. Nonetheless, adherence to the defined limits of this study requires attention to remain concentrated upon the boomtown population itself. Along these lines, it is acknowledged that despite sentiment surrounding Dawson City as an isolated and novel population, the stampedeers were certainly not the first individuals to reside in this vicinity. On the contrary, the Han First Nations people, for example, had occupied the very town site of Dawson City long before gold was ‘discovered’ in the vicinity by the Klondikers. When the stampede commenced however, a concerted effort was

made by local missionaries acting with the support of the federal government to relocate the Han to the Moosehide Indian Reserve located down-river from Dawson City.<sup>2</sup> Aside from packing stampedeers' outfits over Chilkoot and White Pass for wages, providing cordwood to steamer vessels along the Yukon waterways, and occasionally visiting Dawson City and other mining settlements to sell clothing items and game meat (Slobodin 1962), the indigenous people of the Yukon Territory had limited direct contact with the majority of the gold rushers. The most obvious explanation for this segregation lies in the deep-seated racist ideology that prevailed throughout this era. Thus although it was not uncommon for early prospectors to take First Nations women as 'wives', such unions were not considered to be legitimate marriages in either the eyes of the church or the government (Gates 1994). Their fellow gold rushers typically ostracized such 'married' men from their company, with this overt discrimination continuing well into the boomtown era in Dawson City.

Referred to as 'squaw men',<sup>3</sup> the term for these 'husbands' bespeaks the racist and classist disdain that the rest of the gold rush society held towards men who took First Nations women as their 'wives' and also highlights the social ostracism that such 'husbands' consequently suffered. Indeed, choosing to 'marry' a First Nations woman required no less than the European man relinquishing his position and claim to belonging to 'civilized' society, as Porsild has commented: "[i]n no part of the world... was the man who had a native mistress held in greater disrespect than [in the Klondike]" (1998:34). A

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<sup>2</sup> Indian Reserves, Yukon, Moosehide Creek, #21, RG85-D-2a, Volume 2259, File 20-1-2-2, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>3</sup> *San Francisco Call*, August 31, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

striking example of this can be seen in the ‘marriage’ of George Carmack (who is credited with having discovered gold in the Klondike) and the Tagish woman that he renamed ‘Kate’, as they never lived together in Dawson City. Instead, they resided among her kin for the duration of the time that they spent together in the Yukon Territory. It is telling that not long after Carmack secured his fortune in Klondike gold, he abandoned Kate to marry a white woman in the south without even bothering to file for a divorce from Kate since the union was not recognized as being legitimate in his mind, nor was it binding by the legal standards of the day. In renouncing his former union to Kate, Carmack was thus able to cast off his ‘squaw man’ status and reclaim his life as a middle-class gentleman (Grace 2007: 94-97).

While still in the North, prospectors and their First Nations ‘wives’ resided either on mining claims in the creeks or the husband took up residence in his wife’s natal community in order to avoid the stigma and shunning disapproval that they otherwise faced in Dawson City. This practice is reflected in the 1901 Canada Census, which reveals that of the entire population of Dawson City proper, only two individuals were noted as ‘Indians’. Of these, one was a twenty-nine year old man, identified as a Yukon Territory born ‘farmer’, while the other was a fifty-seven year old man identified as an American-born miner (likely recently arrived from Alaska). This data reveals that First Nations people were never truly part of the boomtown community centered upon Dawson City. In fact, First Nations men and women were habitually excluded from the social life of the gold rush community that focused upon barrooms,

dancehalls, and saloons as legislation explicitly forbade proprietors of such establishments from selling or otherwise providing alcohol to First Nations men and women. This prohibition was taken very seriously by everyone involved and transgressions were met with swift and severe punishment including fines, incarceration by the North West Mounted Police and the threat of the revocation of merchants' highly lucrative liquor license.<sup>4</sup> As a result of such practices, the presence of First Nations people in Dawson City was so notable that it was in fact considered to be newsworthy by the local media:

Twelve Mackenzie River Indians with seven fine dog teams arrived here from the Peel river trading posts yesterday, crossing the Rocky mountains and coming down the Klondike river. They brought with them smoked caribou and moose meat which they offered for sale at the various stores. They remained in town for about an hour and then went to the Indian village at Moosehide. They report plenty of game. They were greatly surprised at the size of Dawson, this being their first visit.<sup>5</sup>

The physical, cultural, and social separation that existed between the majority of the gold rushers and local First Nations populations was also importantly a consequence of the dedicated efforts of the federal government and local missionaries who worked to segregate the First Nations people in government reserves (such as the Moosehide settlement) from the presumed negative influences of the gold rush and boomtown life.<sup>6</sup> Thus, given that the purpose of

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<sup>4</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>5</sup> *Dawson Daily News*, February 15, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Indian Reserves, Yukon, Moosehide Creek, #21, RG85-D-2a, Volume 2259, File 20-1-2-2, Library and Archives of Canada.

my research is to explore the generation of community among boomtown residents informed by the example of Dawson City, coupled with the fact that First Nations men and women were neither physically present nor socially integrated within the emerging social order of the boomtown community, the impact that the gold rush had upon the lives and livelihoods of First Nations communities and vice versa is beyond the scope of this research. This important subject has, however, fact been discussed at length by scholars who have focused specifically upon this topic (see for example, Coates 1991).

#### Contribution to Anthropological Literature and Methodology

Finally, my research contributes to anthropological methodology by proposing several new approaches to the study of historic communities through the utilization of archival materials. While a growing number of biological anthropologists have turned to the archives for studies of demographic trends and morbidity and mortality among past populations (see for example, Burke 2007, 2001, 1999, Burke & Sawchuk 2003, 2001, Herring 1994, Madrigal 2003, 1997, 1996, 1994, 1993, 1992, Madrigal & Koertvelyessy 2003, Madrigal, Ware & Melendez 2003, Padiak 2005, Sawchuk 2009, Sawchuk & Burke 2007, 2003, 2000, 1998, Sawchuk, Burke & Padiak 2002, Sawchuk & Herring 1984, Sawchuk, Padiak & Purcell 2004, Smith 2003, Swedlund 1978, Swedlund & Donta 2003, Swedlund & Herring 2003) my research will contribute to the growing genre of historical anthropology which similarly explores the utility of archival documents for the study of communities situated within the historical

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era (as will be discussed in Chapter Two). It is within this genre that I situate this study and, indeed, my work as an anthropologist as a whole. Along these lines, I construe this genre as being situated at the nexus between archaeology and cultural anthropology in much the same manner that medical anthropology is widely accepted as having emerged at the intersection of cultural and biological anthropology. This view of historical anthropology is in line with the sentiment of Axel (2002) who argued that historical anthropology exists on the margin of operational frameworks of both disciplines. As such, historical anthropology even pushes its own boundaries as researchers draw upon the theory, method, and the primary data sources traditionally considered to fall within with the scope of multiple areas of anthropological expertise (2002: 3). It is out of these novel combinations of inquiry and approach that allows historical anthropology to pursue new areas of inquiry and address novel research questions from a synergetic approach that perhaps none of the traditional sub-disciplines can achieve independently (Axel 2002: 3). This approach is indeed particularly well-suited to the study of historic boomtown populations, particularly in the case of communities such as Dawson City that were created as a novel space through the combined efforts of the gold rushers, who in turn experienced complex connections among themselves in tandem with the connections that they maintained in the communities from which they originated and to which the majority would eventually return.

In order to accomplish my research goals, I will explore novel methodological approaches for locating certain individuals within historic

documents. This will initially proceed through an exploration of the practicality of identifying prostitutes in census data following the example of Dunae (2009). Following this I propose a new theoretical framework for identifying a cohort of prostitutes' male clientele by exploring ill-defined diagnoses in hospital admission records that chronologically correspond to a documented outbreak of venereal disease within the wider community. Specific details concerning the methodology employed in my research are discussed in Chapter Two, which also discusses the primary data sources employed in this research. This chapter also addresses both quantitative and qualitative particulars of key primary data sources, while also giving consideration to specific concerns that arise from employing archival materials as primary data sources in the analysis of historic populations.

Following this, Chapter Three establishes the conceptual foundation for the chapters that follow by offering a definition for the term 'boomtown' as an idea and an exploration of 'community' as a concept. In order to make valid interpretations concerning the existence and experience of community in this particular time and place (including the complex influences of socioeconomic stratification and gendered social relationships among the Klondikers), it is necessary to explore the socio-historical context of the gold rush itself. Along these lines, Chapter Three also describes the historical milieu and local context in which the Klondike gold rush unfolded, as well as situating the stampede within its wider context in regard to the immediate social history of North America.

Building upon this foundation, Chapter Four explores the renegotiation of men's socioeconomic status upon their arrival in Dawson City. This is in part addressed through an exploration of the significance of 'adventure' as both an ideal and an experience for men (and particularly Klondike stampeders) at the close of the nineteenth century. Questions regarding masculinity in the context of the gold rush specifically, and North American society more broadly are also considered here. Of particular importance is a consideration of how ideas about masculinity contributed to the decision of tens of thousands of men to cast off their previous lives and livelihoods in order to join in the quest for gold in a remote corner of the world. An examination of the resulting consequences that this had for the experience of community by the Klondikers during their time in the North then concludes this section.

While Chapter Four focuses primarily upon the men of the gold rush, Chapter Five touches upon the lives of women in the Klondike, specifically in regard to their place within gold rush society. Particular attention is paid here to the restructuring of women's status relative to her female peers in the Klondike. Chapter Six, which explores the dynamics of boomtown social life in regard to the interpersonal relationships between men and women that served as the structural foundation of the community and social life in the Klondike then complements this chapter.

The Klondike remains a fascinating episode of human activity that is certainly worthy of study in its own right. Insight gained through an anthropological approach to exploring the dynamic ways in which a wide range

of socioeconomic factors have influenced community as both a concept and as a lived experience in this historic boomtown, however, represents an even greater overarching concern for this study. This is because although they may be separated by more than a hundred years and several thousand kilometers, the boomtowns that emerged long after Dawson City nevertheless often struggle to find solutions to very similar problems. It is this premise, then, that informs the discussion that concludes my research in Chapter Seven.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The case study approach is a hallmark of anthropological research as it facilitates in-depth analyses of a particular community through the holistic gaze that also characterizes anthropology as a discipline. A foremost advantage of the case-study approach is that it permits for observations to be made about both the individual and the larger community to which they belong simultaneously and alongside local and wider socio-historical, economic, and political circumstances. This in turn permits meaningful observations to be made regarding associations between a variety of conditions that both influence and are influenced by contextualized human experience with applications and implications that extend beyond the immediate study population.

Of the diverse methodologies available for anthropologists from which to choose, ethnography is perhaps the most salient as it has become nearly synonymous with research of a sociocultural nature within the discipline. The term, however, is complex, given that ‘ethnography’ simultaneously refers to a process or experience (conducting fieldwork), a research methodology (data collection through participant observation, for example), as well as constituting a tangible product (the ethnographic manuscript) and the resulting body of literature (Fabian 2002: 776, Gracy 2004: 336). The term ‘ethnography’ is further complicated because it has been subject to broad usage by scholars of numerous disciplines in addition to anthropology although it has long served as a

guiding principle of anthropological research. Within anthropology, 'ethnography' has additionally been employed in reference to the study of a diverse array of research questions, which have in turn been situated in an equally diverse range of human populations. This reality has led Wolcott to conclude that despite the fact that 'ethnography' is ingrained at the heart of the discipline, the term "always has, and always will, provoke discussion and debate" among anthropologists in regard to what actually constitutes ethnography and how one should properly go about 'doing' it (1999: 3). Part of the confusion about what type(s) of research are properly labels as 'ethnographic' stems from the fact that ethnography as it is practiced, done or accomplished today bears slight resemblance to how it was originally conceived of by early anthropologists as simply "descriptive accounts of non-literate people" (Radcliffe-Brown quoted in Wolcott 1999: 43), with minimal theorization or synthesis. Since that time ethnography has been in a constant state of flux as the discipline itself has been busy reinventing both itself and ethnographic practice (Wolcott 1999: 277). Thus even today, the term 'ethnography' continues to be reinterpreted in response to an ever-broadening range of research paradigms that invoke the term. In this vein, as early as 1972, Spradley & McCurdy argued that ethnography is properly accomplished when the researcher moves beyond describing a culture, community, or the actions of an individual living under a particular set of circumstances to "specify[ing] the conditions under which it is culturally appropriate to anticipate that he, or persons occupying his role will render an equivalent performance" (111-112). In

addition to this transformation of ethnographic practice, we are also witnessing the adoption of ethnography in varying forms and degrees by scholars working in academic disciplines outside of anthropology. What distinguishes anthropological ethnography from that of other research pedagogies then, is the implication that the end product produces (or at least provides the basis for the subsequent generation of) theories of cultural practice in a given society (Spradely & McCurdy 1964: 122). This distinction is key in that although ethnography does not allow us to predict the future (Wolcott 1999: 27) valuable lessons can nevertheless be gleaned from the past. Thus, if ethnography is framed both as a “theory of cultural behavior in a particular society” (Frake 1964: 111-112 quoted in Wolcott 1999: 33) and the primary “communicative enterprise” of socio-culturally based research (Fabian 2002: 776), then insight gained through an ethnographically informed case-study approach to studying the nature of community among Klondikers can provide a foundational basis for analyses of contemporary boomtown populations including practical applications in regard to informing solutions to immediate real world problems.

The fact that anthropologists are interested in studying both living and past human populations presents something of a conundrum for social anthropologists interested in conducting their research in historic communities as anthropological inquiries into bygone societies has traditionally been left to the study of archaeologists. Yet, I have found that I am not alone in arguing that ethnography can and should be conducted in historic populations. Rather than representing a novel frontier, such an endeavor simply constitutes an extension

of this fundamental approach since anthropologists have in fact always been concerned with studying the culture of past populations. Indeed, this research and other studies like it within the genre of historical anthropology simply represent a novel application of ethnography to a new kind of data source (archival materials) in order to facilitate the study of past populations in such a way that permits for the bridging of the temporal spans between anthropological researcher and their subjects (Gracy 2004: 336).

This trend has in turn resulted in the diversification of research that can properly be labeled as ‘ethnographic’ as ethnography has outgrown its early reductionist categorization born out of a ‘salvage’ approach to fieldwork to become much more than a singular initiative to inventory of the cultures ‘non-literate people’. Indeed the ethnography of today’s anthropologists encompass both way of seeing and a manner of conceiving that results in a much more robust ethnographic practice and product. What this diversity of approaches share in common, however, is the persisting tie to ethnography’s deep-rooted drive to bring scholars of the human condition into contact with the lives of others. In this vein, historical anthropology is best understood not as a divergence from anthropological principles or a dabbling in the realm properly belonging to historians, but rather an expansion of the ethnographic toolkit facilitated by the continued desire to further explore the diversity of human communities (Gracy 2004: 335). In support of this position, Wolcott (1999) encourages the ongoing development of the discipline through the embrace of novel data sources (such as archival materials) and methodology (informing the

study of historic populations with ethnographic principles, for example), encouraging scholars to continue to expand upon the anthropological agenda by continuing to find new avenues for reaching and researching the human condition. To this end he offered the following words of support to like-minded scholars: “[i]f there is a place, a setting, of genuine interest to you, I hope you can find a way to get there” (30). Indeed, ‘the past is [as much] a foreign country’ as any of the ‘exotic’ destinations studied by early anthropologists who established ethnography as the backbone of the discipline.

Wolcott’s sentiment particularly resonates in regard to the ethnographically informed study of historic populations such as Dawson City. While past populations are not accessible by traditional ethnographic methods since the opportunity to converse with the inhabitants has long since lapsed, Wolcott argues that so long as there exists an opportunity for the study of a human community, then the chance for ethnographic inquiry persists (1999: 30). The important question in these instances then should not be whether such an avenue of investigation is properly framed as ‘ethnography’ or even ‘anthropology’ but rather, why it should be that “certain forms of communication should be privileged over others” (Wolcott 1999: 30)?

This sentiment resonates with the related observation that numerous parallels exist between research agendas situated in past populations that utilize data gathered from the ‘archival record’ and that, which draws its primary source material from the ‘archaeological record’. For example, while some may argue (as will be discussed below) that the archival record is prone to bias and is

woefully incomplete, the same is true and even characteristic of the archaeological record since the element of chance looms as a dominant concern in regard to the creation, preservation, discovery, and subsequent interpretation and representation of data sources comprising the latter much as so as in the case of the former. Such concerns are hardly seen as legitimate deterrents for the practice of archaeology though, which is valuable precisely because it provides a window into an otherwise unreachable episode of human history. The same can thus be argued for research that utilizes archival materials as primary data sources as these documents allow anthropologists to access a past population that is otherwise inaccessible.

It could furthermore be argued in the case of archival-based research that the ethnographically-minded historical anthropologist immerses themselves in the 'field' as fully as does the ethnographer conducting participant-observation, while the rich tapestry of 'voices' revealed through historic documents speak to the lived experiences, daily life and ongoing concerns of those therein represented as vividly as do artifacts in the archaeological record. This is particularly true for communities represented by a rich archival record, wherein the same individuals can often be located in multiple sources while the overlapping perspectives pertaining to a singular event or concern of the community encompasses multiple complementary views on the same subject. Not only do such cases work to mitigate bias in the archival record, but they also allow the researcher to weave together a rich tapestry of perspectives resulting in a dynamic view of the overarching life of the community and its inhabitants.

Thus, in much the same way that a great deal more about an ancient society can be gleaned from a shattered pottery vessel than the type of clay used in its manufacture, so too can a substantial amount of insight be garnered about a historic community from a collection of archival documents than simply what is written on the pages. For the historic anthropologist, the ‘field’ is represented in documents and photographs that contain all the same subtleties and nuances that are eventually revealed through an extended time spent immersing oneself in a culture of another during time spent in the ‘field’. In the archive, Klondike society comes alive with all of its pleasures and pains through the memoirs and diaries of the stampeders who themselves become manifest as their voices reverberate in the words that they used to describe both their struggles and triumphs, disappointments and joy. In this vein, reading the government and police records opens a window into the daily life and issues weighing on the minds of the community. Likewise, the societal discourse preserved on pages of newsprint invites the reader into community discussions on street corners and public offices, as invitations to public festivities, restaurant menus, playbills, and advertisements for local businesses carry one into the social centers of Klondike life, while the intimacy of personal letters breathe life into conversations and arguments that fell silent over a century ago. By immersing oneself in the cultural repository constituted by archival records and spending a considerable amount of time ‘among’ the informants in this research setting, I argue that an ethnographically minded historical anthropologist is capable of appreciating

nearly as much of an emic perspective of the society that they are studying as is an ethnographer who goes and lives among their informants.

While ethnographers who are able to interact with their informants benefit from the ability to directly question those that they study, an advantage of the historic anthropologist is the retrospective gaze, which permits them to situate their research not only in the ethnographic present, but to also witness the long term consequences of how various aspects of the social world of their subjects unfolded. This points to an additional benefit of employing archival sources to inform historical anthropological research. Namely, that such study may be expanded upon in a longitudinal magnitude of decades or centuries whereas fieldwork is temporarily limited to the career demands and even the lifespan of the anthropologist.

Nevertheless, the historic anthropologist must resist the urge to privilege the archive as a ‘raw’ objective reality of the past, since such does not exist. In this manner, if it is accepted that ethnography has grown to reflect the growing breadth of the anthropological perspective, then a case can also be made for the position that each time that ethnography is ‘done’ by a researcher in a particular time and place with a focus upon an ‘other’ in their own ethnographic present, then the product of that concentrated gaze can only ever be “*a way of seeing, not the way of seeing*” (Wolcott, 1999: 137 emphasis in original).

In light of this discussion, Cuhna (2006) has succinctly captured the scrutiny faced by historic anthropologists when they have occasionally been accused of practicing a modern brand of ‘armchair anthropology’. In this vein,

critics have framed archival research as “the antithesis of field research, while its transformation into ethnography is looked upon with skepticism” (np). Yet, it remains that for the historical anthropologist, the archive is the only means by which they may approach their study population—much in the same way that excavation permits the archaeologist to dig through layers of history in order to reach their ancient cohorts. Although the use of archival documents as the principle data source in anthropological investigations is a relatively recent methodology within the discipline, it should be remembered that anthropologists have in fact long visited archives while conducting field work and thus, such a practice is hardly revolutionary to the discipline (Des Chene 1997: 76). Given the breadth of the scope of the anthropological gaze, it is only natural that anthropologists should see value in archival documents not only for the long-appreciated insight that they can provide into the historical context of a study population, but also since archives are constituted of media artifacts of a society, which in turn represent the production and reproduction of knowledge within that society (Fabian 2002: 776). Archival documents are thus dynamic in their scope as they simultaneously represent artifacts left behind by past people (an arena unanimously agreed to fall within the purvey of anthropology), as well as primary data sources of sociocultural significance since they both contain and reflect the perspectives and voices of their creators (Gracey 2004: 337).

Given that archival documents are originally created by individuals who are at once members of a larger social body, which is in turn subjected to wider political influences, common sentiment concerning the use of archival materials

as primary data sources centers upon the fact that the information housed within the archives are the product of overarching differential social, economic, and political structures, and must therefore be understood as representing “a system of statements, partial truths, historically and culturally constituted interpretation” (Cunha 2006: np). While this is certainly true, I would argue that this is in fact true in the case of all ethnographic research and perhaps even all social science research since informants are all subject to similar forces throughout their lifetimes, as well as in the way that they continue to be (or not be) represented after their death. Two qualities of archival materials, however, may in fact serve to mitigate this bias in the event that it influences the researcher’s analysis. First, that such materials are housed within the archival institution ensures that they will be preserved and thus be accessible to subsequent researchers who, in the spirit of scientific methodology, will be able to review those materials in order to affirm or refute the arguments of previous generations of scholars. Second, the increasing uptake of archival materials by anthropologists interested in utilizing them for ethnographic purposes has in fact inspired an entire genre of scholarship aimed at understanding the power structures involved in the creation and maintenance of archives as societal institutions; the motivations of the original creators of the documents, the processes that led to the selection of those documents for initial inclusion and subsequent preservation in the archives, and how issues of accessibility and exclusion of certain documents may contribute to a biased perspective and the eventual interpretation and representation of the population under study (see for example, Cunha 2006, Dirks 2001, Gracy 2004,

Hill 1993, Stoller 2002). In this vein, it is possible to discern two areas of research centered upon the archive: ‘archival ethnography’ (which utilizes archival documents to inform ethnographic research, such as in the case of this research) and ‘ethnography of the archives’ (which is interested in describing and understanding political and economic influences surrounding the archives as a cultural institution). Along these lines, a discussion of the primary data sources employed in this study is obviously essential prior to providing a conceptual basis for the research that follows.

### Primary Data Sources

In reading many of these archival primary data sources I found that it was possible to connect with the members of this historic community through the words they used to write about their own observations and thoughts (often of a quite personal nature) about their experiences and impressions of life in this community and, most importantly, about what it meant to them to be a Klondiker. Of particular relevance to this study are the historic records maintained by the North West Mounted Police stationed in Dawson City and the official correspondence of the offices of the Yukon Council, which functioned both as the local governing body and the liaison through which Ottawa’s interests in the Klondike were channeled. The patient register for Saint Mary’s Hospital located in Dawson City and the manuscript census rolls for 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City also provided important insight into the gold rush community. These primary data sources are enriched by data gathered from

additional forms of documentation concerning life in this historic community including personal letters, diaries, monographs published posthumously, and even newspapers (many of which were produced by and for the Klondikers themselves). Many of the diaries referenced in my research were published by descendants of the original Klondikers. Although these works represent the original, unedited writings of the stampeders, the fact that they have been published necessitates their reference as published sources as opposed to archival documents. I would argue however, that they should nevertheless be afforded consideration as primary (and not secondary) data sources since they do in fact constitute the original, first-hand perspectives of the stampeders. It is indeed fortunate that these diaries and memoirs were formally published in the years and decades following the stampede since the majority would likely not have found their way into archival collections and they would thus have been entirely lost to researchers had this not been the case.

Data for this study were collected through in-person visits to the Yukon Archives located in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, the Dawson City Museum and Historical Archives located in Dawson City, Yukon Territory and the Library and Archives of Canada, located in Ottawa, Ontario, as well as through interlibrary loan of microfilmed materials (primarily newspaper materials). Other materials, including the 1901 Canada census and many historical American newspapers were accessible online through various archival repositories. Data collection proceeded under researcher agreement and license where applicable, and with ethical approval granted by the research ethics board

at the University of Alberta. During the initial data collection process I compiled separate electronic databases for information drawn from the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, the Patient Register for Saint Mary's Hospital, and the Death Register for the Yukon Territory. As will be discussed below, these data sources displayed a high level of completeness and for the few instances in which entries were illegible the corresponding space was noted as such during the transcription process. In all cases, care was taken to protect the enduring protection of privacy for individuals identified in archival documents containing personal information. By omitting the names of all such individuals during the transcription process, it was possible to ensure the legacy of personal privacy for members of the study population as well as for surviving descendants of individuals represented by this data. All statistical analyses were completed using the SPSS statistical software program.

Given the one hundred year limit imposed on access to documents containing personal information by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act in Canada, many of the sources consulted in my research have not been accessible to earlier researchers. Thus, while previous scholars have lamented the inaccessibility of many of these documents for research purposes including, importantly, the data contained within the 1901 Canada Census and the Patient Register for Saint Mary's Hospital (see for example, Guest 1982, Lux 1898), the present study draws directly from and relies heavily upon information gathered from these documents. As such, this promises both a fresh perspective and a more robust approach to addressing the aforementioned research questions

centered upon the historic population of Klondike gold rushers than has previously been possible.

#### The 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City

The availability of reliable vital statistics information in close temporal alignment with the era of the Klondike stampede (as represented by the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City) offers a valuable source of data concerning the demographic constitution of the gold rushers. Specifically, the manuscript census rolls provide the data necessary to address a multitude of questions regarding who the Klondikers were, what their motivations may have been for joining in the stampede, and how they became integrated into the resulting community of stampeders in Dawson City.

In this regard, the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City proper contains detailed information for a total of 6695 individuals. Although Dawson City represented the center of social life and commerce in the gold fields, it is important to note that the focus here does not take into account those Klondikers residing on mining claims or in the various outlying creek settlements that sprang up sporadically throughout the gold rush era. The actual population of gold rushers in the Yukon Territory was thus in fact significantly greater than that represented by the population residing in Dawson City. Due to the absence of public officials during the early years of the gold rush, in combination with the challenges of relying upon unofficial tallies and incomplete historical records that attempted to document the movement of people by various modes of

transportation, it has not been possible to achieve a reliable count of the greater gold rush population. The population residing in Dawson City at the time that the census was conducted is therefore being taken as a sample representative of the greater gold rush population that continuously flowed into, out of, and within the city limits.

In regard to the data contained within the pages of the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, individual entries were found to display a very high degree of completeness, with response rates in the range of 98.7% or greater in regard to biological sex, age, marital status, and skin color. Information for additional categories relevant to this study displayed nearly as great levels of completeness including: religious affiliation (92%), profession (86.2%), place of birth (96.5%), nationality (95.2%), and number of years spent in the Yukon Territory (93.1%). Considering the scope of information provided for each individual and the high level of compliance with the enumerator's request for such information that is evident therein, the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City proper represents an important source of information about the demographic backgrounds of the men and women who took part in the stampede and worked together to create a community in the context of a distant boomtown.

An artifact of the boomtown nature of Dawson City can be seen in this last mentioned column of the census roll, which asks informants how long (measured in years) they had been present in the Yukon Territory at the time that the count was made. Given that boomtowns are often characterized by transient

populations of migrant laborers who come, go, and are quickly replaced, the inclusion of this category on the census roll represents an interest on the part of the Canadian government to monitor the longevity of the Klondike. This interest likely stemmed from concern regarding the community's stability as well as a need to predict its potential for endurance in light of the federal government's interest in the value of gold being withdrawn from the region.

Finally, the census also recorded information regarding the employment status of each individual (such as whether they were an employer, employee or self-supporting), how much salary they received, as well as the value of any local real estate and mining claims that they may have held. The value of personal property in each person's possession was also requested, in addition to the number and monetary value of any horses, dogs, and any cows owned by the individual. While an interest in livestock seems a peculiar measure of wealth in a non-agricultural community, this feature of the census data highlights the importance of considering archival sources in the socio-historical context within which they were created. In this case, animals represented a substantial form of capital in the Klondike since transportation by dogsled or pack train were the primary means of over-land transport until the railroad was extended into the Yukon interior, which was well after the gold rush had begun to wane. Dogs for example, commanded an astounding price in Dawson City ranging between twenty-five to three hundred dollars each and as such were considered "precious" property valuable far beyond the dollar amount that they could

command at sale.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, cows (what few there were) provided the only source of fresh milk in Dawson City. This luxury item sold at a premium making a milk-producing animal an extremely valuable asset to a Klondiker. Thus, in terms of measuring the power, privilege, or prestige of individuals relative to their fellow Klondikers, something as innocuous in other settings as the number of livestock or canines that a person possessed could carry substantial influence in the remote setting of Klondike gold rush.

As is true with any data source, it is prudent to consider the motivation of those responsible for originally creating the document in order to effectively evaluate the reliability of the data contained therein. In the case of the 1901 Canada census, this source represents a federally mandated effort to tally Canadian residents and to simultaneously gather detailed demographic information for each individual present at the time that the census was conducted. To this end, the census had a national target date of March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1901. Despite this, notes made in the margin of records for Dawson City indicate that in remote regions of the country, the census was not completed until at least November of that year. While no explanation is offered, this discrepancy likely reflects the inevitable delays involved in shipping supplies to far away Dawson City through turn-of-the-century transportation networks perhaps compounded by difficulties sourcing and training an appropriate individual to act as enumerator in the remote boomtown.

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<sup>7</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 26, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection, and *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 177, March 26 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

Along these lines, according to federal mandate, the census enumerators were required to speak directly with each individual or the household head as tallied in the census. This was intended to ensure that respondents possessed satisfactory knowledge of each person present within the household unit in order to provide accurate information in response to the questions posed by the census takers. For their part, the enumerators were required to record verbatim, any response provided by the informant and liberties in this regard were not permitted to be taken based either upon direct observations to the contrary, or prior knowledge to that effect on the part of the enumerator. If an answer could not be provided, the space must be left blank. Together, these protocols bolster the high degree of confidence that can be had in the reliability of the data contained within this document, adding to its value as a data source for gaining insight into who these men and women were beneath the socially-ascribed titles of ‘miner’, ‘stampeder’, or ‘Klondiker’.

Despite the clear value of the 1901 Canada census as a primary data source, census materials are not entirely without their drawbacks. For instance, although information contained within the census displays a high level of completeness overall, when focusing specifically upon women the columns are frustratingly incomplete. This is, however, characteristic of a majority of documents dating to this era due to prevailing attitudes in regard to gender-roles of the era in which they were created. Nineteenth century ideology for example, saw women primarily relegated to the private sphere of the household unit wherein their contributions were unpaid and resulted in the reporting of

occupational titles such as ‘wife’ or ‘house keeper’ (Herr 1995). This bias is well known to researchers familiar with the vital statistics data of this era and must be accepted as an unavoidable limitation of the dataset. Despite this, the available demographic information pertaining to women contained within this source remains valuable, so long as researchers are mindful of the societal attitudes regarding women’s gender status that are reflected within its pages.

Census data in particular, beyond being useful for assessing numerical representations of various cohorts within a historic population, can further allow the researcher to scrutinize the interplay between gender, economic standing, and a host of other related indicators of class status by reconstituting historically documented populations (Fliess 2000). In addition to the reconstruction of the demographic character of the population as a whole, this approach also allows for individuals to be evaluated relative to their specific place within that community. In the case of past populations that are otherwise unobservable through a retrospective gaze, census data in fact becomes essential for recognizing demographic qualities of a given population, as well as analyzing trends and their consequences over the course of an extended period of time, (Fliess 2000), the products of which, naturally lend themselves to anthropological inquiry. Vital statistics data thus offer the further advantage of providing both aggregate and individual-level data for historic populations, thereby enabling researchers to seek answers to a wide range of questions that they may address as a result of the dynamic nature of the data contained within this source (McQuillan 1985).

### The Patient Register for Saint Mary's Hospital

Similar to the 1901 Canada Census, information for each of the 1258 individual patient admissions to St. Mary's Hospital recorded for the years 1900-1904 in the Patient Register for this institution were transcribed into an electronic database for analysis. Given the historical era in which this document was created it is worth noting that it displays a surprising degree of completeness, which bolsters its value as a primary data source. Although demographic data for individual patients is less complete than similar data provided by the 1901 Canada census, the categories of information that display the highest degree of completeness are in fact those that pertain to the circumstances surrounding the hospitalization of the individual, which is perhaps the most valuable data that one could hope to glean from such a source. Along these lines, a diagnosis was recorded for 90.06% (1133) of patients admitted to the hospital, while identification of the attending physician was made for 96.42% (n=1213) of entries. Precise dates of admission and discharge were noted for 99.52% (n=1252) and 97.14% (n=1222) of patients respectively, while the condition of the patient upon discharge was recorded for 93.33% (n=1174) of individuals. The occupation of each patient was noted for 65.74% (n=827) of all the cases, while the age, marital status, place of birth and nationality of each individual fell within a range of completeness between 67.17 (n=845)-72.97% (n=918). Interestingly, the patient register also made mention of whether or not the patient was indigent, in which case the cost of their care was to be provisioned by the Yukon Council. This information was available for 87.44% (n=1100) of patients.

It is likely that the majority of those 12.56% (n=158) of patients for whom no such determination was made represent paying individuals given the interest of the hospital in regard to documenting all those cases that they could collect payment for from the government. Perhaps the most significant fact to be gleaned from this category however is that it demonstrates that the hospital made it a regular practice to admit men and women from all socioeconomic strata, regardless of their ability to directly pay for the care that they received. This is significant as it precludes any bias in this source pertaining to social classes being differentially represented in these documents. Indeed, given the removal of financial constraints, all patients would have been seen as equally eligible for care in the eyes of their Klondike physicians.

This in turn raises the issue of the motive of the record creators for maintaining this patient register. In the case of Saint Mary's Hospital, administrators were focused upon documenting cases of indigent patients eligible to receive government funding within this institution. While the hospital was initially established as a charitable mission to care for the health needs of the stampeders, the high cost of provisions in the Klondike soon forced the church run hospital administration to charge for their services, with the Yukon Council subsequently agreeing to subsidize fees for the care of those who could not afford the high cost associated with hospitalization.<sup>8</sup>

In order for hospital administrators to make monthly claims for government reimbursement they required a record that officially tallied the number of indigent patients that were in their care, the numbers of days that each

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<sup>8</sup> Saint Mary's Hospital (Dawson City) fonds, Yukon Archives.

was hospitalized for, the physician that attended them, and—as a justification for their institutionalization—a description of their condition as (ideally) being improved at the time of discharge relative to the diagnosis that they were initially admitted for.<sup>9</sup>

Appreciating the motivation behind data collection at this facility explains the reason for the high level of completeness characterizing certain categories of patient information in the patient register relative to other data evidentially deemed less important by the administrators. Along these lines, when it came to the condition of each patient upon discharge, hospital administrators adhered to a limited selection of descriptors that included either ‘cured’ or ‘well’, ‘benefited’ or ‘improved’, ‘same’ or ‘fair’, or ‘dead’. In not a single case was a patient reported as being worse off upon leaving the hospital than they were upon admission. Although individuals sometimes died in the hospital, in these cases the insinuation was that nothing more could be done for the individual whose condition was unfortunately terminal (as implied by the diagnosis). This record then effectively demonstrated the hospital to be a boon to the community, so that when questioned by the government in regard to ever increasing operational costs, the hospital administration could point to its record book as concrete evidence of its efficacy and the continued importance of its role in the gold rush community.<sup>10</sup> The implications concerning the intent with which the patient register for Saint Mary’s Hospital was created does not nullify its utility or negate the credibility of the information contained therein. The success

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<sup>9</sup> Saint Mary’s Hospital (Dawson City) fonds, Yukon Archives.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Mary’s Hospital (Dawson City) fonds, Yukon Archives.

rate of patient treatment should, however, be taken with a grain of salt considering the obvious interest of hospital administrators to cast the facility and its patient outcomes in as favorable a light as possible due to financial support that hinged upon its good reputation.

Again, similar to the census materials, this data source is not without its limitations, the foremost of which concerns the fact that it does not offer morbidity or mortality pre-dating 1900. Thus, the majority of the patients treated during the height of the gold rush are not captured here, as no other hospital documents (neither for this facility nor for the Good Samaritan Hospital which also operated in Dawson City) have been preserved. The database constructed from the patient register for Saint Mary's Hospital must therefore be construed as offering a representative sample rather than an exhaustive compilation of Klondikers who sought medical care in public hospital facilities. Thus, although there is no reason to suspect that the range of diseases and disorders captured within the patient register is not representative of the greater overall morbidity experience of the Klondikers, it can by no means be considered a complete account of the total incidence of disease among the Klondikers, nor of the total number of hospitalizations that occurred within Dawson City over the course of the stampede.

While it is often the case that historic hospital records give the impression of excessive morbidity in a local population since these institutions tend to draw the sick and infirm from outlying communities without medical facilities of their own, this potential bias is mitigated in the case of the Klondike

gold rush as the remote geophysical location of the Klondike gold fields precludes the possibility of this having been the case.

While individual patient files are the ideal source for detailed information regarding health experiences and outcomes in a given historic population, these materials are exceedingly rare in the case of historic communities of this age. Patient registers that record less detailed but nonetheless valid information regarding individual patients may therefore provide valuable and perhaps even the only source of insight in this content (Risse and Warner 1992). Once more, these drawbacks do not negate the usefulness of the data contained within this historic data source. When taken as a sample representative of the greater morbidity experience of the population, the Patient Register for St. Mary's Hospital is in fact invaluable, since it represents the only reliable indicator of the morbidity incidence among the gold rush population.

#### The Yukon Territorial Death Register

A final electronic database utilized in this investigation was constructed from all 754 deaths (excluding stillbirths, which numbered five) recorded in the Yukon Territorial Death Register for the years 1898-1904. This document was made available under researcher agreement for the purposes of this study by the Vital Statistics office located in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. The register contains a record of all deaths that occurred in the Yukon Territory throughout the period of study and it is therefore representative of the entire population of Klondikers

residing in and around Dawson City throughout the gold rush period. The inclusion of all deaths in this database as opposed to focusing upon only those that occurred within the limits of Dawson City proper was necessary since the entries do not distinguish the precise location of the individual at the time of their death. Such a distinction would not have proven meaningful anyways, since it could not have been taken as a true indicator of where the individual lived, labored, or perhaps even spent the majority of their time whilst in the Klondike given the continuous flow of stampeders between Dawson City, outlining creek settlements, and the gold fields.

All entries noted in the Death Register for the Yukon Territory included a determination as to the biological sex of the deceased. The age of the individual was also noted for 78.25% (n=590) of entries, while place of birth, religious affiliation, and occupation were recorded for 73.61% (n=555), 58.49% (n=441), and 52.79% (n=398) of entries respectively. The date and cause of death was also noted for 98.41% (n=742) and 97.61% (n=736) of individual respectively. The somewhat lesser degree of completeness displayed by this data source relative to those previously discussed is not surprising given the context within which it was originally created—as a document of deaths that occurred among individuals residing within a community of strangers (who further lacked local kin to attest to intimate details pertaining to the deceased individual). Given the lack of availability of any other source of information in the immediate vicinity, friends made along the trail to the Klondike or once settled in Dawson City served as the informants for the overwhelming majority of

deaths. The balance of cases then would have been reported as unknown individuals happened upon by strangers as they traversed the territory in search of gold. In light of this, the Death Register in fact displays a surprisingly high degree of completeness relative to what might realistically be expected. Faith can further be had that those categories of personal information that are represented are indeed accurate given the practice of leaving unknown details as blank spaces rather than guessing at potentially incorrect information in the case of unknown individuals.

In regard to occupational categories, the ranks and professions noted in the Death Register were reconstituted into a discrete number of categories in order that meaningful analyses based on shared lifestyles and inferred qualities of life resulting from similar occupations could be made. In this way, for the purposes of this study, the self-reported professions of respondents have been classified into the following categories: ‘miners and prospectors’, ‘unskilled laborers’, ‘skilled laborers’, ‘white collar professionals’ and ‘hospitality sector employees’. As was the case in regard to women’s work in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, occupations other than ‘housewife’ were rarely noted for women in this data source (Inwood and Reid 2001).

#### Other Archival Materials

Additional archival data sources consulted for my research include photographic materials, personal letters and official correspondence, records maintained by local government and police officials, and contemporaneous newspapers

published both in and outside of the Yukon Territory during the era of the Klondike gold rush. The majority of these documents are housed within the collections of the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse and the Library and Archives of Canada located in Ottawa, with many having been microfilmed and consequently made available for research purposes through interlibrary loan.

In regard to government and police records, a considerable collection of correspondence (among a broad representation of both local government and police officials, as well as discourse carried out long-distance with interested representatives located in Ottawa) offers tremendous insight into the prominent concerns and day-to-day happenings within the gold rush community.

The North West Mounted Police Gaol Register for the detachment stationed at Dawson City contained within the collections of the Yukon Archives in microfilm format covers the period of 1899-1903. This document is much less structured than the primary data sources discussed above, as the majority of data written in these files was subjective and at the discretion of the recorder. The Gaol Record itself contains 220 entries detailing the circumstances surrounding the incarceration of individual inmates including details regarding their personal lives, physical attributes, and other identifying traits. The information most often recorded for inmates included the charge upon which they were brought to trial, the judgment handed down by the presiding magistrate, as well as the dates that the individual was charged, brought to trial, incarcerated and eventually released from police custody. In addition to this, details about the inmate's life prior to their arrival in the Klondike is sometimes provided to varying degrees of depth

and detail (presumably based upon how cooperative the inmate proved to be in response to such questioning), as well as their presumed occupation and comments regarding their standing in society during the time that they had spent in the Yukon Territory. Demographic data was also usually provided including mention of any known living kin and their places of residence, the inmate's marital status, place of birth, age, height, weight, complexion, nationality, religious affiliation, and any other observation deemed relevant in regard to the prisoner's physical appearance or demeanor by the record keepers. The leading categories of criminal offense noted in the Police Gaol Register account for 93.6% (n=206) of all incarcerations. Of these, the leading charges brought against Klondikers pertained to theft of personal property (n=89), assault or murder (n=27), 'insanity' (n=22), vagrancy (n=19), public drunkenness or disorderly conduct (n=17), fraud (n=12), supplying liquor to First Nations individuals (n=11) and prostitution related charges—the overwhelming majority of which pertained to women (n=9).

A final, but no less significant data source for this study is represented by archived copies of the Dawson Daily News and various contemporary newspapers published on the 'outside' in response to insatiable demand for information about the Klondike which in turn fueled the outbreak of gold fever in North America at this time. Fortunately, all of these newspapers are preserved in either microfilm format or are accessible to researchers via online repositories. Newspapers in general, but particularly those written by local journalists, offer an important perspective into historic communities. This is

especially true in the case of newspapers that published daily issues as this offers researchers a series of successive snapshots of the ongoing affairs of everyday life, which when viewed longitudinally, reveal the evolution of local concerns, social issues, and public opinion on a wide range of topics. Along these lines, Adelman and Verbrugge (2000) have observed that the use of newspapers as primary data sources offers valuable insight in regard to local social histories that may function as “barometers of [the] contemporary social impact” on a wide range of subjects (363). This is because it is after all, issues of local concern that initially lead journalists to write such articles, which consequently stimulate discourse and debate within the community (Adelman and Verbrugge 2000).

Although the validity of employing newspapers as primary data sources may raise concerns regarding the potential selectivity and impartiality on the part of editors and the objectivity of content produced by journalists who may have had unknown motives, Franzosi (1987) has convincingly argued that this does not negate the use of these data sources in analyses of historic populations.

Indeed, as Franzosi argues:

there is no *a priori* reason to believe that data collected from newspapers would be less valid than other commonly used sources...the type of bias likely to occur in mass media consists more of silence and emphasis rather than outright false information...By using the press as a source of historical data, therefore, we risk collecting insufficient, rather than faulty information (1987, emphasis in the original).

This position can arguably be extended to all archival data sources, which in regard to studies of historic populations offer a rich source of information about a population that may very well be impossible to glean from any other approach.

While archival documents do not offer the direct face-to-face interaction between researcher and informant that is facilitated by traditional sociocultural research methods, I would argue that ethnography may nevertheless proceed in the case of historic populations through the use of data sources such as those described above. Such an approach might be framed as ‘doing’ ethnography in the archives and if successfully accomplished, it represents an important methodological tool that has much to offer in circumstances where interviews and participant observation cannot proceed, particularly as in the case of historic populations.

Along these lines, an inherent advantage of physically and socially immersing oneself in field-based research lays in the fact that the researcher is therein afforded the opportunity to realize many of their own biases and assumptions that become apparent through interpersonal interaction with their informants. The emic perspective encompassed by written archival records may similarly identify and refocus inquiry in novel directions or along avenues for future research not previously considered by the researcher. Archival materials represent documents contemporaneously created by the individuals being studied and reflect the immediate concerns and direct observations of their physical and social environment. In this way, archival data sources should be considered no less valid or valuable than verbal responses solicited in response

to the researcher's direct questioning. Indeed, so long as these sources are read with an appreciation of the ethnographic present in order to keep observations situated within a context that is cognizant of the socio-historical milieu, they prove vital to sociocultural research of historic populations.

Archival documents employed as primary data sources further present unique opportunities in that they facilitate complementary levels of inquiry given that they are simultaneously records of the historical past and cultural artifacts of the past human populations being studied.

Along these lines, it is also significant to note that utilization of archival documents also permit for the exploration of a wide variety of research questions pertaining to life in historic Canadian communities as these materials and methodology promise to fill a gap in the social science literature that exists due to scant and often incomplete information available regarding early Canadian communities (Barkin & Gentles 1990). This deficit has resulted in an even greater deficiency in the literature pertaining to the development and social history of Canadian boomtown settlements, which my research also aims to begin addressing.

Given the extraordinary degree of documentation and preservation of archival materials pertaining to all facets of the gold rushers' social world, the Klondike presents an unparalleled opportunity to investigate the life of average individuals in the context of a historic Canadian gold rush boomtown. To this end, my research will be approached through a case study analysis of the population of stampedeers residing in and around Dawson City, Yukon Territory

during the era of the Klondike Gold Rush (circa 1896-1904). Despite the abundance of primary data sources accessible for this purpose, a notable challenge in regard to studying community and gendered social relationships in the context of the Dawson City lies in the fact that there is no existing direct literature base to draw upon given that this represents a novel avenue of research in the context of Dawson City specifically, and on the topic of the Klondike gold rush more generally. Thus, in order for my research to proceed, it has frequently been necessary to draw parallels between this and similar historic boomtown communities from a research base grounded in earlier North American gold rush settlements when employing secondary sources.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BOOMTOWN AND THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

In contrast to other types of settlements, a boomtown can be defined as a populace characterized by three basic qualities (each of which will be considered in turn): accelerated population growth, unusually rapid development, and substantially increased economic activity relative to contemporaneous communities. Historically, North American boomtowns have most often been associated with either energy-resource development or mineral extraction (Cortese and Jobs 1977). Due to the geographic location of these natural resources, such places have tended to be located on the fringe of civilization, appearing early in the 'wild west' and later in more remote and isolated locales such as American and Canadian regions of the circumpolar north. Located in the Yukon Territory in Canada's Far North, Dawson City presents a quintessential example of the boomtown in the historical perspective as it served as the social and economic capital of the remote Klondike gold rush.

Of the three defining features of a boomtown, population growth is arguably the most readily apparent characteristic of a boomtown. Little (1997) suggests that most urban communities can absorb an annual population growth rate of up to five-percent without experiencing negative economic or social consequences either at the community level or in the day to day lives of individual residents. Boomtowns, on the other hand, are defined as those communities that experience extremely rapid annual population growth in the

range of ten to fifteen-percent or greater (Little 1977). Dawson City certainly meets this first criterion for designation as a boomtown given that the local population—not including the innumerable number of Klondikers residing on their mining claims and in the surrounding creek settlements outside of the town’s limits—increased by a factor of 200% between 1896-1897, 182% between 1897-1898, and then continued with more modest increases ranging between 4.5-23.9% per annum through to 1904 even though these years mark the post-boom period since the gold rush had already peaked and begun to wane by this time (see figure 3.1).<sup>11</sup>

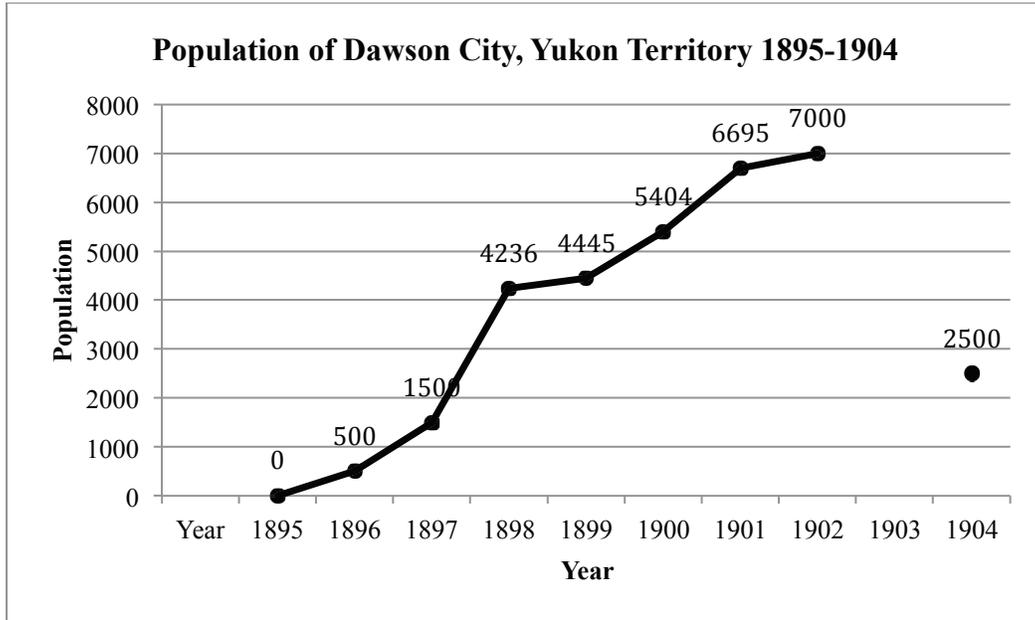
Turning to the second defining feature of boomtowns, these communities are also characterized by rapid development that proceeds at a pace that far outstrips that which occurs in contemporaneous communities under normal circumstances. Changes that often take decades to occur in other settlements may proceed in mere months in the boomtown scenario. As is evident in figure 3.2, Dawson City also meets this criterion to qualify it as a boomtown as the footprint of the settlement was transformed at a fantastic pace between the time that it first emerged from the wilderness in 1896 and 1898, by which time it had already become a burgeoning northern metropolis.

Finally, the third defining quality of a boomtown is evident in increased economic activity in the vicinity of the settlement. This is due both to the development of the resource base responsible for producing the boom in the first

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<sup>11</sup> Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada 1898 #15, 1899 #15, 1900 #15, 1903 #15, and 1905 #15, University of Alberta Libraries, Porsild 1998: 8, 1901 Canada Census, Library and Archives of Canada, and Dawson Daily News, April 19, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

**Figure 3.1:** Population of Dawson City Proper (1895-1904).



Sources: Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada 1898 #15, 1899 #15, 1900 #15, 1903 #15, and 1905 #15, University of Alberta Libraries, Porsild 1998:8, 1901 Canada Census, Library and Archives of Canada, *Dawson Daily News*, April 190, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

**Figure 3.2:** Dawson City's Remarkable Pace of Development



Dawson City circa 1898 (Above) and 1904 (Below)

Sources: Library and Archives Canada/C-063188 and PA-013319.

place, as well as being a consequence of the increased number of businesses and support industries that are subsequently attracted to the area. The increase in economic activity in the Klondike as a result of the boom is evident in the fact that at the time Dawson City was founded in 1896, Joseph Laude was the only retailer in the vicinity, yet by October 1899 a returned Klondiker estimated there to be no less than four hundred businesses operating within the limits of Dawson City alone.<sup>12</sup> The potential for higher income, contingent upon this climate of economic prosperity, likewise functions to attract more people to the area, which propels the cycle forward (Little 1977).

Although much has been written about boomtowns in general and the human aspect of these communities in particular, new studies of boomtown communities are pertinent since despite the resulting body of literature on the subject, it remains that the social aspects of boomtown life “have been guessed at more often than they have [actually] been studied” (Freudenburg 1984b: 221). Consequently, scholarship built upon this precarious basis by later researchers has resulted in a body of literature that offers interpretations consisting of little more than an assemblage of *a priori* assumptions presented as fact (Freudenburg 1984b: 236). Rooted in this bias, the majority of research on this topic conducted to date has proceeded under the problematic assumption of the inherently destructive tendencies of boomtown life (see for example, Little 1977). Such studies have typically set out to document an untold number of ‘social pathologies’ falling under one or more of the categories referred to by critics of

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<sup>12</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 31, October 31, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

this approach as the ‘four D’s: “drunkenness, depressions, delinquency and divorce” (Freudenburg 1986: 65), or to document wider-ranging trends of ‘social disruption’ (see for example, England and Albrecht 1984) that are assumed to run rampant as unavoidable consequences of life in these places (Freudenburg 1984b, Brookshire and D’Arge 1980). While deleterious consequences of boomtown life certainly do manifest among boomtown residents, it remains that focusing solely upon negative issues presents a distorted image of the social matrixes of these communities while simultaneously failing to consider the equally important beneficial aspects of life in the boomtown context.

#### Towards a Definition of the Boomtown Community

It is difficult to imagine any anthropological inquiry that does not at least touch upon the topic of community given that as social creatures we cultivate a sense of community and belonging in nearly every aspect of human experience. Like many broad concepts within the social sciences, ‘community’ has been notoriously difficult to define in a manner that meets both the needs and expectations of all interested parties. In this vein, Barrett (2010), for example, has commented that of the nearly one hundred definitions of community compiled by Hillery (1955), “the only thing [that] they had in common was that they [all] involved people” (116). Despite the ambiguity surrounding a concise definition for the term itself, Hine (1980) has identified three fundamental aspects of shared human experience that can be framed as quintessential features of community in the boomtown context. In this vein, the boomtown

‘community’ rests upon a shared sense of place, a mutual experience that cultivates recognition of a common identity among community members, and a determination made in regard to the threshold for the relative size of the group collectively recognized as representing ‘community’ members as opposed to other ‘outsiders’ (Hine 1980).

Cohen’s (1989) work in regard to the symbolic construction of community is useful for understanding how a sense of community came to be among the gold seekers as a result of the shared experience of stampeding to the gold fields, thereby achieving recognition as a Klondiker, and subsequently participating in a community set quite apart from the ‘outside’ world. While community can certainly exist among individuals on multiple-levels and across both physical and intangible dimensions (Anderson 2006), I argue that in the case of the boomtown community, it is the mutual sense of occupying a shared place achieved through similar experiences that is fundamental to the construction of community among residents. The Klondike drew a diverse complement of stampedeers to a single location, affording each one the status of ‘Klondiker’ that in turn served to symbolize their inherent belonging among the otherwise unfamiliar assemblage of strangers at their point of destination. In this way, belonging and community identification was not dependent upon a common ethnic background, geographical heritage, or culturally based beliefs and practices of individual members. Rather, individuals who shared neither prior nor enduring ties to one another (assuming that most stampedeers did not intend to remain in the Klondike indefinitely) found that their physical presence

in the landscape of the gold fields was sufficient to foster a sense of community among those who had proven themselves worthy of the title ‘Klondiker’ by successfully completing the journey to Dawson City. Again, Cohen’s (1989) work comes into play as his discussion centers upon the social construction of symbols and their centrality to simultaneously defining community membership and demarcating the limits of identity or belonging within the boundaries that define a community as a cohesive entity. According to Cohen, the basis of community is represented by something shared in common by all members of that group—a symbol or symbols around which individuals from diverse backgrounds may rally. Such a symbol provides a shared sense of meaning or understanding that binds members of that community together in a manner that is significantly more salient than any differences that may otherwise divide them. In the case of Dawson City, this was represented by the ‘Klondiker’ as both a symbol and signifier of individuals present in the boomtown community.

While the characterization of community offered by Hine (1980) is admittedly dated in a chronological sense, it has nevertheless been intentionally selected over more recent literature on the subject since Hine’s work has been taken up by scholars of boomtown life to an extent that it is cited in the majority of seminal literature on the topic, which as a collective, also has its foundation in this period. Although this collective body of literature on community in the context of boomtowns is now decades old, it remains relevant nonetheless and is in fact pivotal to informing discussions of the social life of boomtowns.

The work of Cuba (1987) provides a complementary perspective on the nature of community as it existed among gold rushers in the context of Alaska, from which numerous parallels with the Klondikers can be drawn in order to expand upon Hine's theoretical foundation for understanding how a boomtown community is structured. For example, Cuba identifies three primary ways by which a frontier landscape (such as that within which the Klondike was situated), can come to be defined as the basis of a community: as a geographic territory, as a form of society, and/or as a state of mind, each of which is also evident among the Klondikers residing in Dawson City (1987: 13-20).

According to Hine (1980), a sense of place begins with a group sharing geophysical space. With boundaries clearly demarcating the group relative to 'others', this represents the first pivotal step towards cultivating a sense of communal belonging. In the case of the Klondikers, this criteria was easily met as each individual made their way to a predetermined meeting place – Dawson City and its surrounding gold fields – where they would convene in a space separated by both vast distances and divergences of all manners from the places that the stampedeers had initially departed from. Cuba (1987: 15) observes that when framed as a geographical place, the frontier is typically characterized as a potentially dangerous and unpredictable space and this too is in keeping with the expectations of the stampedeers as well as their experiences that culminated in the establishment of a community in remote Dawson City. Having all shared the experience of triumphing over the trials of the trail and weathering the realities of life in the far north, the remote geographical location and physical qualities of

the local environment were in and of themselves sufficient to instill a shared sense of place among the stampeders. Although later means of transportation (such as steamer vessels and railway cars) to the Yukon interior greatly reduced the effort and endurance required to reach the Klondike, in the early years of the gold rush every man and woman had the equally daunting option of facing either the White Pass or Chilkoot Pass. The magnitude of the feat of scaling these divides is captured in a letter written by Rebecca Schuldrenfrei who simply suggested that “no living being who has not gone over it can actually imagine or anticipate what it really is”.<sup>13</sup> Thus those who accomplished the journey to Dawson City proved themselves members of an elite group of stampeders who were decisively set apart from all those who had turned back before reaching their destination or who had shied away from making such a rigorous journey in the first place.

With this first building block of community in place from the moment that the stampeders arrived in the Klondike, the second criteria—that of a shared sense of identity—would easily follow. Lovell explains that community belonging emerges from a feeling of mutual experience tethered to a shared sense of place (1998: 1). Given that the stampeders’ identification as ‘Klondikers’ was contingent upon their physical occupation of a common space, having a concrete location as their destination provided the Klondikers with the essential element (a shared sense of place) needed in order to construct a sense of community. In this way “landscapes [were] inscribed onto bodies through the

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<sup>13</sup> Letter written by Rebecca Schuldrenfrei dated September 25, 1897. Winter & Pond fonds, #2293, Yukon Archives.

mutual positioning of humans” (Lovell, 1998: 6) within a place while that place was likewise made significant by the presence of (social) bodies within it. This is also in line with the conceptualization of frontier communities outlined by Cuba (1987) wherein he argues that such places gain their significance not from the actual geophysical qualities of the place itself, but from the mutually shared experience of enduring the conditions that characterize that space (16). That community could have been generated by the Klondikers in large part by their combined achievements of ‘Klondiker’ status is echoed in the argument of Buber (1949), which holds that the origin of a community can be traced to the moment at which its members united in a common system relative to all other ties that draw them in other directions (135). In other times and places, this common denominator might have been found in religion, ethnicity, kinship, or cultural heritage (Hine 1980: 25), but in the case of the Klondike it was entrenched in the mutual recognition of community members as fellow ‘Klondikers’ that established this communal membership. This position finds further support from Cuba when he argues that “the development of a unique [boomtown] character [is] the result of individual adaptations to a new environment (1987: 16). ‘Klondiker’ (as the reader shall see), was a status that once earned, persisted throughout the individual’s lifetime as recognition of an achievement to which comparatively few could ever lay claim. As long as the Klondiker remained in the gold fields, this status overshadowed any number of other differences that might otherwise have contributed to the weakening of ties between men and women from diverse backgrounds and far-off places of origin.

Individual Klondikers certainly maintained ties to home communities (through written correspondence and visits home, for example), yet the persona as a bona fide ‘Klondiker’ was fervently cultivated in Dawson City given the prestige and privilege that this status afforded an individual (as will be discussed in subsequent chapters). Cuba might explain the stampeders’ uptake of the Klondiker persona following from the third principle that he identifies as defining frontier places—wherein the frontier constitutes a state of mind (1987: 18). If culture (and community) is created out of human interaction, which is shaped by reciprocal needs and in response to the place in which people are collectively situated, then the focus shifts from qualities of their surrounding to personal attributes of community members (1987: 19). In this vein, each of the gold rushers was drawn from pre-existing communities to which the majority maintained their ties. Evidence of these persistent connections to their places of origin can be seen in the numerous letters written by the Klondikers and especially in those that lamented the lack of timely responses received from loved ones due to the intermittent postal service in Dawson City:

I am so disappointed in not getting a letter from you or in fact from anyone, we are feeling so anxious to hear from you. I do write so many letters and do not get but a few, that sometimes I get almost discouraged...<sup>14</sup>

Despite enduring attachments to their previous lives, the Klondikers were able to simultaneously recognize and reorganize themselves in their current locale as members of a community of Klondikers since, as Lovell (1998) has observed, individuals can belong to multiple communities simultaneously. Thus, although

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<sup>14</sup> Letter from Julia Musgrave to her friend Ellen Hazard. Collections of the University of Alaska Archives.

attachment to other communities endured when one became a member of the Klondike community, it was the later membership that was both most immediate and imperative to the individual during the time spent in the gold rush boomtown since it was those connections that they relied upon for meeting their immediate needs and for socialization in their day-to-day lives.

Finally, the size of a given population has been identified as either potentially enhancing or detracting from the ability of residents to foster a sense of ‘community’ among themselves. The size of a community is crucially important if the entire population is to share a sense of ‘community’ since “[t]oo few would impoverish human resources and leave the group vulnerable to the idiosyncrasies of a minority...[while t]oo many would impersonalize, fragment and alienate” people from one another (Hine 1980: 22-23). The ideal suggested size for a community varies however, since the time of the Ancient Greeks, five thousand has widely been considered to be the optimal number (Hine 1980). At this level, face-to-face contact among the majority of residents is still a realistic ideal for the structure of interpersonal relationships among community members, while the population has not grown so large as to produce structural inequalities in power, privilege and prestige among residents (Hine 1980). The population of Dawson City—the center of community life in the Klondike—never rose significantly above this figure, and although people flowed in and out of the community as they arrived in the region, moved between their claims on the surrounding gold fields, and permanently departed from the area, the heart of the Klondike community always centered around Dawson City which remained

steady at around this level. Had the Klondike population grown sufficiently large to preclude widespread interpersonal interaction, it is unlikely that divisions between community members would have developed to levels seen in other communities anyways given that the nature of life in this context precludes the emergence of differences among community members based on socioeconomic status. This is not only because there were few opportunities for individuals to elevate themselves above their fellow community members through traditional socioeconomic avenues in the boomtown but also since under such rustic and isolated conditions, it did one little good to have a pocket filled with gold nuggets when even staple food items, lumber, or other essential supplies could not be had for any price.

Evidence for conventional indicators of a man's place within the wider socioeconomic hierarchy having evaporated upon setting foot in Dawson City can be found in the chronic shortage of most basic necessities available for purchase in the gold rush marketplace, in contrast to the seemingly limitless capital that could buy nothing (Berton 1958: 75). In the social world of the Klondike gold rush, money lost its currency, as gold dust became the standard means of payment for anything and everything that a man needed or desired. The worth of money was further devalued in the Klondike as "new millionaires rampaged down the line of Dawson's saloons in as feverish a scramble to [rid themselves of] their dust, as they had [initially] been to find it".<sup>15</sup> After all, they reasoned, when their poke ran out, they could simply refill it by digging more of

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<sup>15</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

the glittering currency out of the earth. Dumb luck may have decided whose claim would yield millions and who would be unable to lay claim to even a worthless plot of land, yet the irony remained that those who had been favored by fortunes often still had nothing to show for it by way of material goods while living in the Klondike. The element of chance then further functioned to decimate whatever remained of the class distinctions that had followed men to the Klondike given the random nature of success or failure when trying one's luck in the gold fields.

The heightened mobility of individuals in the Klondike posed a further potential threat to the generation of community in this boomtown setting. Along these lines, mobility has often been cited as a limiting factor in the maintenance of a strong sense of 'community' investment among a group of individuals who are perhaps just as likely to move on as they are to remain in the area for the foreseeable future. The Klondike, in particular, presents an intriguing counter example given that everyone present in Dawson City was highly mobile, having already relocated thousands of miles to the community, presumably with the expectation that their residence would only be temporary.

Another factor traditionally working to detract from a shared sense of community is the fact that "in the ideal community, private and public interests would never conflict. What a member want[ed] for himself [would be] the same as what is required for the common good" (Hine 1980: 26). A boomtown such as Dawson City can hardly be said to emulate this model of mutual community interest. Rather, the Klondike, including both the physical community of gold

rushers and the network of relationships that comprised that community as a social entity, was built by and for the stampedeers, not the other way around. Evidence for the existence of a sense of community built up by the stampedeers for their own direct benefit can be gleaned from the Klondikers' recollections of a great variety of social institutions that were established in Dawson City that had nothing to do with gold mining, including but not limited to: the amateur opera society and athletic association, the Dawson City curling club, as well as a variety of sports leagues and events such as foot races and wrestling that, in the words of one observer, were widely attended by "the entire community".<sup>16</sup>

The Klondike therefore offers an intriguing opportunity to study a boomtown community that grew and prospered despite the challenges posed by factors that would normally detract from the creation of a strong sense of 'community' among residents under other circumstances. Given the challenges that had to be overcome in order for stampedeers to travel to the gold fields, to establish themselves in Dawson City, and to build a boomtown from the ground up, one then wonders why it should be surprising that the stampedeers were also able to germinate a strong sense of community among themselves. Given human reliance on social interaction, it is a peculiar artifact of scholarship on the topic of 'community' that somewhere along the search for "a prescriptive definition [of] what community *ought* to be", scholars evidentially lost sight of the value and wisdom in examining "what community actually *is*" (Hine 1980: 26 emphasis in the original).

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<sup>16</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

In order to reach the Klondike in the early years of the stampede millionaires and masons took the same path, endured the same hardships, and laid their heads side-by-side in the same tents pitched along the muddy waterfront of Dawson City. From this starting point, one's prior social standing held little sway and the community was permitted to develop in a manner quite unlike that which the majority of the stamperders had previously known. While the Klondike did not remain an utopian realm wherein each man was the next one's equal, the significance here lies in the fact that at least from the outset, this boomtown community offered each of its inhabitants at least the same opportunity to take part in renegotiating their respective position as the fledgling community was forged from its foundation up. From this, it follows that such a community would necessarily diverge from the norm given that members of the Klondike community were not bound by rigid class distinctions given the pervasive expectation for social and economic mobility that was initially expected and indeed accessible to everyone in the early days of the boomtown community.

#### A Brief History of the Klondike Gold Rush

Despite popular conceptualization of the landscape of the Klondike gold rush as a previously untouched frontier, there were numerous indigenous Hän, Dene, Athapascan, and Tlingit populations present in the Yukon Territory long before the arrival of the stamperders. While prior to the onset of the stampede only a smattering of individuals of European descent (all of whom were men) had ever

set foot in the region now known as the Yukon Territory, Russian fur traders and Christian missionaries also beat the Klondikers to this isolated region of Canada's North by several decades.<sup>17</sup> These men were joined by a handful of stalwart prospectors who had stubbornly spent the last decade or more of their lives traversing the region in search of the ever-elusive pay streak. These long-time northern prospectors in fact represent the initial Klondiker gold rushers as they were on hand to witness the Klondike discovery as well as the resulting flood of stampeders from the 'outside' whose arrival would herald the introduction of transportation networks, utilities, regular mail, telegraph service and later telephone lines to a region that had until that time remained largely impenetrable. Although they were few in number, the reasons that drove these handfuls of men to the remote northern region of Canada's wilderness (fortune, adventure, and freedom) were not unlike those that later compelled the Klondikers to set off on the largest population migration to a singular destination that the world had yet to witness (Guest 1982: 1).

The population influx and economic importance of the Klondike gold rush were in fact key factors impacting the decision by the federal government to demarcate the Yukon as a territory distinct from the conglomerated North West Territories. Up until that time, the North West Territories included the Yukon Territory, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, as well as sizable parts of modern-day Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec. In 1898 however, the Yukon Territory emerged as a separate territory, with Ottawa's interests in the area being represented by

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<sup>17</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

the newly formed Yukon Council headed by William Ogilvie in the role of Commissioner. Whereas the Klondikers had previously governed themselves by means of traditional miner's meetings, the Yukon Council brought bureaucratic protocol and procedure to this outpost of civilization therein representing a significant step forward in the march of progress that rolled across the continent to reach even the most remote fringes of North American settlement. In a rapidly constricting world brought together through the marvels of transportation and communication networks, the northern prospectors' lifestyle while strenuous, was also free from the constraints of 'civilization' and thus remained a viable option for men only when they certainly pursued it in the great outdoors on the fringes of 'civilization' (Cuba 1987: chapter 1, Kimmel 2012: 121-150). As a last outpost free from the 'civilizing' effects of Victorian society in the late nineteenth century world, the very setting of the 'last great gold rush' offered men much more than just a tantalizing chance to seek their fortune in the New World and to engage in what very well may have been their last opportunity for a true American adventure in a place where a particular way of life still remained possible. The character of the men responsible for spurring on the Klondike gold rush thus epitomized this rustic persona of the self-made man and this version of masculinity is particularly exemplified in the story of the discovery of gold in the Klondike.

## The Klondike Discovery

Without contest, the definitive account of the series of events that culminated in the Klondike gold rush, including the initial discovery of gold and the trials and tribulations of the stampedeers as they struggled to make their way to the Klondike valley is encompassed by Berton's (1958) comprehensive book on the gold rush, *The Klondike Fever*, from which I draw in this section. In addition to having earned a reputation as a renowned authority on Canadian history of this era, Berton was in fact a son of the Klondike who grew up hearing the old timers' stories about the days of the gold rush first hand as his father was among the original stampedeers. As such, Berton's recounting of the series of historical events leading up to the discovery of gold is so widely accepted that one is hard pressed to find any account of the initial strike that does not trace its reference directly back to this source. Berton's account of these very early events, recorded from stories that he heard from the old timers themselves, in fact serves as the foundation of nearly every account of the Klondike by later scholars as there are exceedingly few primary source materials that document these earliest days of Klondike life. This is likely an artifact of the nature of the Klondike itself. In their haste to reach the gold fields, the fervor characterizing the mad dash to stake claims and the confusion that ensued in the aftermath men were likely far more concerned with securing supplies and settling down to work than they were about documenting the moment for posterity. The consequence of this for contemporary scholars is that prior to the arrival of the first wave of stampedeers from the south, there is scant evidence to be found outside of

Berton's retelling to draw upon that pertains to the period immediately preceding the ensuing onslaught of the Klondike stampede.

Thus, as the story goes; in August of 1896, the seasoned prospector George Carmack had already spent more than a decade in the north and had even taken a Tagish woman, known by 'Kate' as a wife (Porsild 1998: 35). Together with Kate's brother Skookum Jim, and his nephew Dawson Charlie (see figure 3.3), the trio has long been credited with making the discovery that would set off a worldwide craze. The serendipitous series of events that ultimately culminated in the Klondike gold rush could, however, be argued to have been initially set in motion by two other men: a prospector by the name of Robert Henderson (see figure 3.3), and a long-time Northern outfitter and lumberman Joseph Laude.

Both Henderson and Laude had spent considerable portions of their lives in pursuit of gold in one form or another in the north. Laude in particular had been driven north in hopes of elevating his social standing back home in a manner that only gold nuggets could afford. Indeed, Laude hoped to improve his financial outlook so that he could "marry his sweetheart, Anna Mason, whose wealthy parents continued to spurn him as a penniless drifter" (Berton 1958: 35-36). In this way, although the fine points may have differed, Laude's reasons were not altogether dissimilar from the motivations that would soon thereafter drive scores of other men to the Klondike in search of prosperity in some form or another. For many years the pay dirt continued to elude Laude, yet he was nevertheless a shrewd enough businessman to realize that if not himself, then someone would eventually make a strike in the region. Banking on this

**Figure 3.3:** Discoverers of the Klondike



Shown above are George Carmack (upper left), Robert Henderson (upper right), Skookum Jim (lower left), and Taggish Charlie (lower right).

Sources: Library and Archives of Canada/H.J. Woodside PA-053228 and PA-053223/ C-025640, and C-025639

inevitability, Laude capitalized upon his foresight by positioning himself as a supply man to be at the center of the action, wherever and whenever it might strike and grubstaker. Laude's opportunity finally came the day that Robert Henderson arrived at the settlement where Laude was making a living by outfitting prospectors. That day, Laude struck a keen bargain, persuading Henderson and his disheartened group of men to commit to one last prospecting trip in order to explore the Indian River country, which based on a hunch, Laude assured them was practically overflowing with nuggets (Berton 1958: 37). Swayed by Laude's assurances, Henderson ultimately agreed to accept Laude's offer of a two-year grubstake in exchange for a share in any gold that they discovered with the help of Laude's backing.

For the next two-dozen months, Henderson drifted around the tributaries of the Indian River, finding small amounts of gold here and there, "but never enough to satisfy" (Berton 1958: 37). As the months passed by, Henderson finally decided to give up his search in the Indian River country and instead turned his attention to an adjacent valley. As he descended into this new prospect, Henderson paused to test his luck, and was encouraged when he washed eight-cents worth of gold from a single pan—a respectable prospect by any measure (Berton 1958: 39). Over the next few months, Henderson and his partners panned seven hundred and fifty dollars out of the creek, which they had christened 'Gold Bottom'. As supplies dwindled Henderson realized that the time had come to return to Laude's supply post to restock and to share the good

news of his discovery with his financier. But by the time that he managed to secure his stock of supplies and was set to make the trek back to his claim, it was already late summer and the water table of the Yukon had dropped sufficiently to make the Indian River too shallow to safely navigate with a vessel brimming with supplies (Berton 1958: 39). And so on an educated guess that the Thron-dicuk River (incorrectly pronounced by Europeans as ‘Klondike’) flowed into Gold Bottom Creek, Henderson set out on this safer route, and in doing so, he cast his fate along the route of the Klondike River, changing the course of history along the way (Berton 1958: 39).

Shortly after disembarking, Henderson happened upon the salmon fishing encampment of George Carmack and his family. Overtaken with pity for a man who resorted to “fishing for a living when there was [plenty of] gold to be had”, Henderson broke from his path and steered himself ashore to share news of his strike with Carmack, as was his custom whenever he encountered someone along his travels (Berton 1958: 40).

Carmack though, was hardly the downtrodden unfortunate that Henderson envisioned him to be. A son of the California gold rush, Carmack had been drawn north just as much by his desire for the northern lifestyle as he had been lured by a desire for gold (Berton 1958: 41). While not indifferent to the prospect of gold that drove other European men from creek bed to creek bed in a feverish dash, Carmack had in fact been content with his present situation on the shore of the Klondike River that fateful afternoon. Yet how he came to be there

reveals another precursor in the series of unlikely events and chance encounters that culminated in the legendary discovery of gold in the Klondike.

Not long prior to his encounter with Henderson, Carmack had a fateful premonition that “something unusual was about to take place in his life” (Berton 1958: 42). Unsure of how to act, he simply flipped a coin. When it came up tails he packed up his supplies, pointed his boat downstream and allowed himself to drift with the current the two hundred mile distance to Fortymile. Upon reaching this waypoint, Carmack is reported to have

had an extravagant and vivid dream in which he saw himself seated on the banks of a stream watching grayling shoot the rapids. Suddenly the fish scattered in fright and two enormous king salmon shot upstream and came to a dead stop in front of him. In place of scales they were armored in gold nuggets and their eyes were twenty-dollar goldpieces [sic] (Berton 1958: 42).

In a country infected with gold fever, it is telling that Carmack interpreted his dream not as a sign of imminent prosperity, but as an omen to go fishing—which he did—thereby accounting for his presence on the banks of the Klondike River the very afternoon that Henderson happened to be floating by (Berton 1958: 42).

By this time Kate, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley, had joined Carmack in his fishing venture. Thus the entire party was on hand to hear Henderson’s news when he landed ashore (Berton 1958: 43). Although an off-color comment made by Henderson in regard to Carmack’s companions may not have been a surprising occurrence in that era, Henderson’s quip that he “[did not] want any damn Siwashes staking” on his creek would ultimately cost

Henderson an untold fortune as Carmack and Henderson parted ways with bad feelings between them (Berton 1958: 43).

Which man it was that actually held the gold pan in his hands when the Klondike discovery was made is contested, but the fact remains that the pan contained a quarter ounce of gold from that first single try (Berton 1958: 47). In a country where ten-cents to a pan was considered rich enough to warrant staking a claim, the men's find was truly outstanding (Berton 1958: 47). Realizing the enormity of their discovery, the trio hastened to stake claims on Rabbit Creek (soon to be known the world over as 'Bonanza Creek'), a task which at this point in time merely required hammering a small signpost into the earth with the claimants' names and the date (see figure 3.4).

With this formality taken care of and without a thought in regard to Henderson—with whom Carmack had promised to share any worthwhile news prior to his offense (Berton 1958: 48)—the men set off to seek the necessary provisions to establish themselves on their claims throughout the encroaching winter months. As Carmack paused along the trail to share news of his strike with all those who he happened upon, these chance encounters ultimately made very wealthy men of each and every one he met along his way (Berton 1958: 48-49). Carmack even went so far as to go out of his way to search out a handful of men he felt obliged to let in on his good fortune, all that is, except for Robert Henderson (Berton 1958: 49). When Carmack arrived at Laude's supply post in Fortymile, his news set off a frenzied stampede, which by the following morning

**Figure 3.4:** Discovery Claim, Bonanza Creek circa 1900.



Source: Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections 33087

saw the entire settlement emptied of its inhabitants—a scenario that was repeated again and again as word spread like wildfire among the settlements scattered throughout the Yukon valley. The fervor that consumed these first Klondikers is evident in the fact that just five days after Carmack had hammered his signpost into ‘*Discovery*’ claim, every other inch of ground along Rabbit Creek (which was already being referred to as ‘Bonanza’) had been staked, double-staked, sold, and traded resulting in such a tangled mess of confusion that it took legal authorities more than six months to sort out the jumble (Berton 1958: 52). Caught up in the fervor and carried away by even the most remote possibility that gold lay beneath their feet, these first men on the scene in the Klondike were “like madmen in their desire to stake” (Berton 1958: 52), and by November 20, 1896 three hundred and thirty eight claims had been legitimately recorded.<sup>18</sup> Without giving it a second thought, these longtime prospectors “staked from force of habit, as they had staked so often before, and once this ritual was completed, often enough they forgot about it, or failed to record their ground, or sold it for a trifle”, before moving on in search of an ever elusive bigger, brighter prospect (Berton 1958: 52). Not surprisingly, given the pandemonium that had ensued within a few short days of word getting out about Carmack’s discovery, any men who arrived at Bonanza later than the end of August of 1896 were dismayed to find that all of the claims had already been spoken for (Berton 1958: 54).

As fall and winter closed off passage to and from the Klondike for the balance of 1896, those men who had both managed to stake a claim and believed

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<sup>18</sup> Gillis Family fonds, #4512, Yukon Archives.

their property to be a worthwhile venture dug in and hunkered down. This first Klondike winter would be characterized by freezing temperatures and the backbreaking labor required in order to wrest the gold (if there actually was any on their claim) from the frozen northern ground. Despite popular misconception, there was in fact only a limited amount of gold laying exposed on the surface that could be collected by panning in the Klondike. Rather, the true test of a claim lay concealed deep beneath the surface. This required the sinking of shafts into the permafrost earth in order to determine whether one's claim would pan out when a miner hit the pay streak or be found to be practically worthless. This method of mining was a time consuming task in the winter of 1896. The frozen earth first had to be thawed with fire. Only after the fire had burned out could excavation proceed at the painstakingly slow rate of a few inches at a time before a new fire had to be lit and the process repeated. As the shaft walls gradually sunk below ground level, the debris had to be hauled to the surface bucket-by-bucket, lifted through endless rotations of the windlass handle. This process carried on throughout the winter months—when one shaft hit bedrock another shaft, and then another, and yet another would be sunk. The pay-off for this grueling work remained unknown until runoff in the springtime provided sufficient water for the miners to 'wash' the massive gravel piles that had accumulated on their properties. It was with stubborn persistence then, that these men hauled bucket after potentially worthless bucket of muck out of frozen earth all winter long.

Despite excitement over the potential that remained to be seen in the Klondike when the miners panned-out in the spring, not everyone was convinced that the pay dirt would materialize. Having witnessed innumerable discoveries fail to pay off, many of the old-timers present in the vicinity held back with reserved skepticism, citing countless reasons ranging from the wrong taste of the water to the unfavorable bend of the trees that grew there as bad omens for the likelihood of finding any gold in the vicinity of Bonanza (Berton 1958: 53). In light of external whispers of doubt and nagging hesitation that came from within, the additional investment of labor, time, and resources that were necessary in order to fully explore a claim was evidentially more than many of the initial stakeholders in the Klondike could muster, as Klondiker Joseph Bird commented; "...it is an awfully hard life and a man receives hard knocks from the moment he leaves until he returns".<sup>19</sup> Given their choice, more than a few men took one look at their humble little creek claims and turned tail as quickly as they had rushed to the scene of all the action. In their haste, stakes were swiftly disposed of to the first willing buyer and in this way, incredible fortunes changed hands without the sellers ever knowing it. Thus although all claims had long been staked before the majority of stampeders arrived in the Klondike:

"it [was] not hard to get hold of lots of wildcat property... [selling] all the way from 3 to 15 ounces [of gold dust]. Of course it may turn out good and it may not... Some of the mines [paid] well, and some came out only a

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<sup>19</sup> Account of Joseph Bird, a returned Klondiker, printed in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 41, July 11, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

couple of thousand ahead on their whole winter's work, and not a few came out behind".<sup>20</sup>

In this way some of those claims that sold for a pittance later produced fortunes for those brave enough to wager a bid. Charles Anderson for example, awoke one morning following a drinking spree in Dawson City's barrooms to find that he had purchased claim number twenty-nine on El Dorado creek for eight hundred dollars the night before. When he begrudgingly set out to survey his new claim in order determine how much this drunken mistake was going to cost him, he was pleasantly surprised, and the claim eventually produced nearly three-hundred thousand dollars in dust and nuggets.<sup>21</sup>

#### News of the Klondike Spreads Gold Fever

Due to the geographic isolation of the area and the collective lack of confidence vested in the true worth of the strike, Carmack's discovery remained cloistered within the north for more than a year after the discovery of gold was first made in the Klondike. It was not until the *Excelsior*—a steamship brimming with the first Klondike millionaires—landed in San Francisco on July 15, 1897 that the world first heard the word 'Klondike' or associated this remote locale with the glitter of gold. While many remained skeptical of initial reports of the purported unlimited opportunities for wealth in the Klondike, excitement surrounding the discovery reached a fever-pitch when the *Portland* docked in Seattle three days later loaded with even more gold than the *Excelsior* had carried. This

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<sup>20</sup> Unattributed personal letter from a Klondiker in Dawson City printed in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 60, July 30, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>21</sup> *San Francisco Call*, September 6, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

development set off a particularly virulent outbreak of gold fever in both San Francisco and Seattle that quickly spread to the eastern seaboard and then across the ocean as “the Western world was thrown into a state of great excitement, by the reports of the discovery of rich placer gold fields on the Yukon”.<sup>22</sup>

The madness surrounding the rush to the Klondike did not build slowly as had been the case with earlier discoveries of gold in North America. Rather, the outbreak of ‘Klondikitis’ was highly contagious, seeming to take hold everywhere at once and producing an unprecedented outbreak of gold fever that insidiously spread over incredible distances with voracious speed.

The speed with which news of the discovery in the Klondike spread has been attributed to both a new brand of sensationalist journalism that brandished front pages with capitalized fonts and bold headlines, as well as the introduction of new marvels of technology that permitted images to be quickly and affordably inserted into newspapers. Both of these tactics grabbed and then captivated readers’ attention as they brought to life the multitude of thrilling possibilities that awaited them in the Klondike in a manner that was much more salient than had previously been possible (Guest 1985: 4-8). Not missing a moment to capitalize upon the profitability of gold fever in their home market, newspaper syndicates played upon the public’s infatuation with the Klondike, screaming out that: “Gold, Gold, Gold, Gold...more than a ton of solid gold” had already been brought out by the new Klondike millionaires.<sup>23</sup> Although the majority of such

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<sup>22</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>23</sup> *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, July 17, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

reports were exaggerations at best and outright fabrications at worst, this angle indeed paid off as the public eagerly snapped up any morsel of news that they could lay hands upon in regard to the Klondike (Guest 1985: 4-8). Coupled with improved communication and transportation networks that accelerated the speed at which news could be disseminated over vast distances, the word 'Klondike' spread rapidly throughout the North American consciousness, touching off waves of gold fever in each community that it reached. The eagerness with which the North Americans grabbed hold of the Klondike dream was therefore certainly facilitated by changes in the popular media of the time. However, the underlying factor that might explain why men and women from all walks of life were so susceptible to the grandiose promises of gold waiting for them in the mysterious and romanticized north can be traced to larger social and economic factors characterizing North American society in the late Victorian era.

The Klondike was not the first, last, nor even the richest of the North American gold rushes that spread up the western coast from Nevada and California, to British Columbia and Alaska and then finally into the Yukon Territory, but for a number of reasons that will be elaborated upon in later chapters, the fervor surrounding the Klondike strike arguably surpassed the excitement that had characterized all of the previous gold rushes combined. In fact, as a singular entity, the Klondike Gold Rush has been credited with having been both the widest and most intensively reported upon event of the nineteenth century (Guest 1985: 4). Coming on the heels of a global depression and persisting throughout the height of the Second Boer War (1899-1902), the idea

of fortunes to be had “by merely stopping down for it” (as was widely albeit inaccurately purported to be the case in the Klondike),<sup>24</sup> offered men and women a glimmer of hope in a time of otherwise bleak economic prospects. For others, the Klondike promised men (and some women), the opportunity of their lifetimes to achieve the prized middle-class status that followed from social changes characterizing life in the newly emerging North American market economy. But beyond the possibility of finding a fabulous fortune, the northern landscape of the Klondike also offered a tantalizing opportunity to step out of line in the droning march of a rapidly industrializing society to pursue an alternative course in life and to test oneself against the rigors of nature in a world where such opportunities had otherwise all but disappeared (Cuba 1987, chapter one).

#### Dawson City: Golden Metropolis of the North

In the five days that lapsed between Carmack’s proclamation of gold in Fortymile and the ensuing stampede to Bonanza Creek, Joseph Laude realized that the chance he had been waiting for had finally arrived as there would be more than one way to mine gold in the Klondike. Rather than racing to secure a piece of the action on Bonanza Creek then, Laude packed up his supply post stock and lumber mill and staked claim to the muddy flat at the junction of the Yukon and Klondike rivers, which he named ‘Dawson City’ (Berton 1958: 51-52). While the first Klondike miners toiled away at their claims on Eldorado and

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<sup>24</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 157, March 6, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

Bonanza, Joseph Laude labored just as rigorously but on a different kind of goldmine throughout the winter of 1896, clearing the muddy, moss-entangled town site and sectioning it into lots which he then began to sell at the rock bottom price of just five dollars a piece (Berton 1958). With the footprint of Dawson City established and Laude's sawmill and warehouse relocated and fully functioning, Dawson City thus emerged from the wilderness as the supply center, transportation hub, and epicenter of social life of the gold fields.

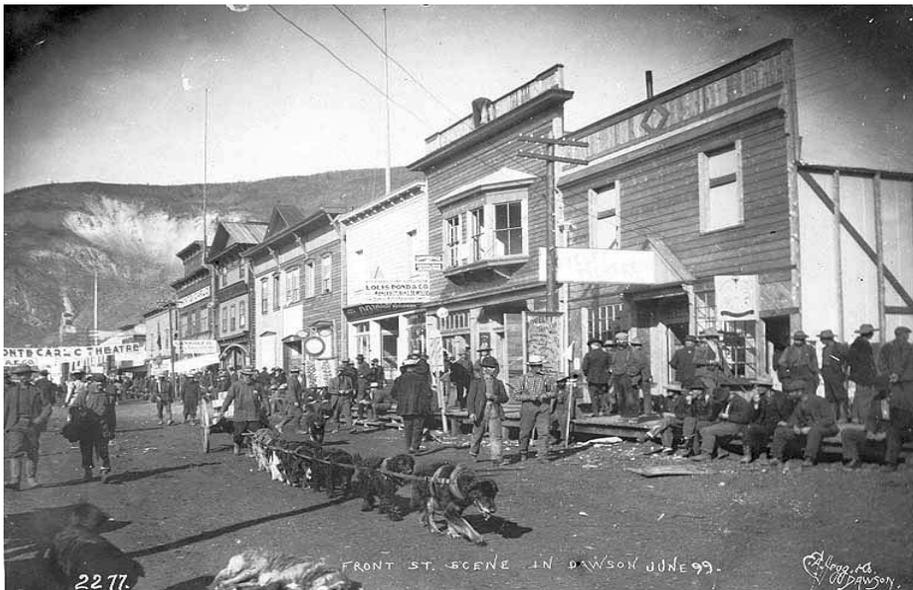
In the spring of 1897, Dawson City's commercial sector was initially built-up (see figure 3.5). The first permanent structures in the community were located in this district along the waterfront and were overwhelmingly represented by saloons, dance halls and other such establishments.<sup>25</sup> The majority of Klondikers at this time were still residing in the tents that they had packed with them into the Yukon, as were the majority of businesses that likewise conducted their sales out of soft-walled structures due to the high cost of lumber and building supplies in the region.

When winter choked off transportation to the outside world for the remainder of the 1897, Dawson City was unremarkable and indistinguishable from any other rustic mining outpost, yet the following spring would see it transformed into a metropolis dubbed the 'Paris of the North'. After months on the grueling trail to reach the Klondike, Dawson City the following spring is said to have emerged like a mirage from what was perceived by the weary travellers

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<sup>25</sup> Observation of a Frank Riley, returned Klondike miner interviewed in Tacoma, Washington and published in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 84, August 23, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

**Figure 3.5:** The Commercial Centre of Dawson City



Views of Front Street in Dawson City circa 1898 (above) and 1899 (below).

Sources: University of Washington Libraries/Special Collections/Hegg 742 and 2277.

as endless and unbroken wilderness. As the stampedeers rounded the bend of the Yukon River in their handcrafted boats and Dawson City at long last came into view, it surely would have presented a surreal vision:

[r]oaring into the Yukon from the right was the Klondike River... [b]eyond the river rose a tapering mountain with the great scar of a slide slashed across its face. And at its feet, spilling into the surrounding hills and along the swampy flat and between the trees... were thousands of tents, shacks, cabins, caches, warehouses, half-erected hotels, false-faced saloons, screeching sawmills, markets, shops, and houses of pleasure. Here in the midst of the encroaching wilderness, a thousand miles from nowhere, was a burgeoning metropolis... unreal, simmering in the June heat, bathed in a halo of sunlight, blurred slightly at the edges by the mists that steamed from marshes... the golden city (Berton 1958: 286-287).

As the first true stampedeers landed in Dawson City, the community began to grow at an incredible pace. Even as early as 1897, Dawson City was world-renowned, with visitors describing it as “if not the largest city in the world, it now takes first rank among the liveliest and most thriving”.<sup>26</sup> The rapidity of this development was unrivaled by any other North American city undergoing urbanization towards the end of the Victorian era, and as one contemporary observer noted “[n]ever again in the world’s history will the scenes of 1897-98 be duplicated”.<sup>27</sup> By just 1898, Dawson City had already undergone a dramatic transformation, growing from a sparse tent-town to a capital city “that

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<sup>26</sup> Ernest Ingersol (1987). *Gold Fields of the Klondike and the Wonders of Alaska*. Edgewood Publishing Company: 106-110, University of Alberta Libraries.

<sup>27</sup> *Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904*, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

present[ed] nearly all of the features of a modern city of the [United] States.<sup>28</sup>

The community even boasted “two newspaper syndicates, five churches, two banks, as well as telephone, electric light and acetelyn gas service”, a waterworks, regular garbage collection, two public hospitals, well-maintained sidewalks and even graded and paved streets (Hight 2009: 26). Among the growing compliment of professional services, Dawson City was further home to hundreds of business and supply companies (Porsild 1998: 188), ensuring that any luxury that was available on the outside could be had in Dawson, provided that the customer’s pockets ran deep enough. Evidencing both the loneliness of the miners and the market that existed for luxury items in Dawson City is the example of kittens that sold for upwards of thirty-five dollars each in 1898.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, rather than more practical merchandise, one enterprising merchant opted to import an entire boatload of cats to Dawson City, which stock he quickly sold out of to men readily willing to part with their gold for the comfort of a companion animal at a price of one ounce of gold per pet (Berton 1958: 291).

The first sizable wave of gold rushers that had not been present in the region when Carmack made his discovery arrived in Dawson City by boat on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1898. Scores more followed close on their heels, arriving by the hundreds on a daily basis (Porsild 1998: 188), until Dawson city was teeming with young, single men from virtually every socioeconomic, ethnic, and geographic background. Along these lines, a Klondiker by the name of Mr. W.R.

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<sup>28</sup> Special Dispatch by reporter Sam W. Wall printed in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 85, Number 26, December 26, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>29</sup> Letter written by George Musgrave dated October 1898, Collections of the University of Alaska Archives.

Beardslee observed that Dawson City was “alive with people; greater numbers, indeed, [were] to be seen on Front Street than on Spring Street in Los Angeles”.<sup>30</sup> This cosmopolitan influx of stamperers soon made Dawson City not only perhaps the most diverse and cosmopolitan community of its era in North America, but also the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg up until that time (Guest 1985:1).

As the stamperers descended upon Dawson City the town site and the men changed one another forever. Tents were haphazardly pitched, torn down and relocated, lots were purchased and sold almost as rapidly as titles to claims changed hands in the gold fields, and permanent infrastructure began to spring up in the fledgling community which was soon filled to its brim with men who flowed in, around, and through the community (see figure 3.6).

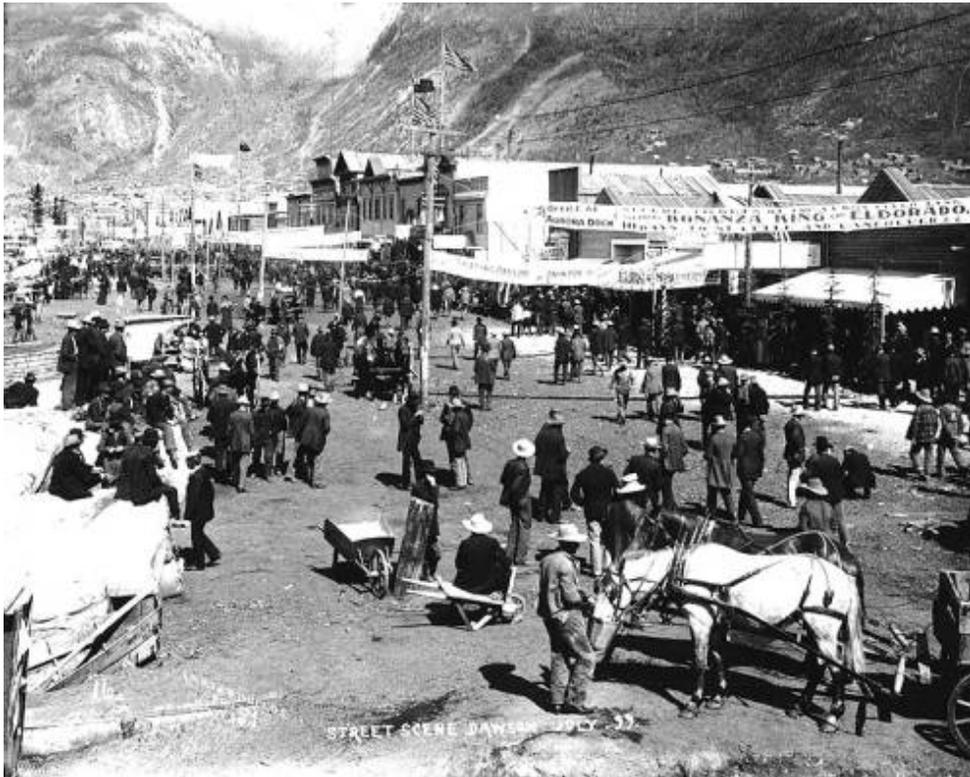
In 1898, the North West Mounted Police made the first earnest attempt at generating an accurate tally of the population residing within the limits of Dawson City proper, turning up a figure of 4236 men, women and children. They cautioned however, that perhaps another three thousand Dawsonites had gone uncounted since they encountered numerous “empty cabins and houses of people who [were] gone up on the creeks to their claims, or [had gone] prospecting”,<sup>31</sup> at the time that they made their count. The impact of the population explosion can be seen in the local cost of living, which skyrocketed at this time. In a tight real estate market, city lots that had previously sold for a paltry sum were now fetching a minimum of one thousand dollars for even the

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<sup>30</sup> Letter of W.R. Beardslee published in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 306, August 2, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1999 #15: 21, University of Alberta Libraries.

**Figure 3.6:** Dawson City Teeming with Men circa 1899



Source: University of Washington Libraries/Special Collections/Hegg 431

most undesirable of locations, with \$5000 being the average price of undeveloped land.<sup>33</sup> The cost of rental accommodations was similarly inflated, as quaint log cabins that would have to be shared by several men could not be had for less than four-hundred dollars a month, while a single room on the outskirts of town cost a man and his partner as much as one-hundred dollars in rent per month (Berton 1958: 295). Maintaining residence in the Klondike during the heyday of the stampede was thus a costly venture that added substantially to the risk already entailed in gambling on the gold rush. For example, contemporary sources estimated that a fully provisioned man might be able to survive in Dawson City for as little as three dollars per day if he spent nothing on additional food, entertainment, or luxuries.<sup>34</sup> Taking into account all costs incurred, one could expect to face astronomical expenses ranging (depending upon the standard of living that one was willing to endure) between five and ten dollars per day—an astonishing amount given that while meals in Dawson City restaurants sold for as much as two dollars and fifty cents per plate, one could enjoy a comparable meal in cities such as Seattle for a mere five cents at this time.<sup>35</sup> The overall expense of a Klondike expedition was indeed significant enough that experienced prospectors offered a final caution to men contemplating joining the stampede, imploring them to carefully consider their

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<sup>33</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 81, August 20, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection, and *Sausalito News*, Volume 14, Number 26, July 30, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>34</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 88, August 27, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>35</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 83, August 22, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

decision on the grounds that “it would be foolish for a man to give up all he has on a chance, to leave a good position...and risk all his money there”.<sup>36</sup>

Although the stampede for Klondike gold reached its zenith in 1898, the population of Dawson City continued to increase throughout 1899, reaching 4445 that year.<sup>37</sup> Despite a series of discoveries in the nearby Alaskan gold fields that drew many of their stampeders from disenchanted Klondikers, Dawson City’s population continued to grow, reaching 5404 in 1900 and then 6695 in 1901, before peaking at approximately 7000 in 1902.<sup>38</sup> After the turn of the century though, the character of Dawson City began to change dramatically as the primarily young, single men who characterized the early gold rush population were gradually joined by their wives, daughters, and sisters. As the community transitioned from a raucous boomtown to an established community, families began to feature predominantly. Reflecting this trend, the 1901 Canada Census counted 1253 women and 411 children under the age of fifteen as residents in Dawson City,<sup>39</sup> which represents a considerable increase over the 786 females and 163 children tallied in the North West Mounted Police count only two years prior.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> This warning was published in a guidebook directed at advising men and women considering joining in the Klondike stampede. Sol, A.E.I. (1897). *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New Eldorado*. London: The Mining and geographical Institute: i.

<sup>37</sup> This second attempt at an accurate census by the North West Mounted Police likely also underrepresents the true number of people residing in Dawson City as people continued to flow between Dawson City and the various creek settlements where the mining claims were located. Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1900 #15: 54, University of Alberta Libraries.

<sup>38</sup> Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1901 #15: 44, University of Alberta Libraries. 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada, Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1903 #15: 27, University of Alberta Libraries.

<sup>39</sup> 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>40</sup> Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1900 #15: 54, University of Alberta Libraries.

By 1904, the Klondike gold rush reached a turning point as the majority of the stampeders departed the community in search of brighter prospects or simply greener pastures. As increasingly more heavy machinery was brought into the region, corporate-operated dredges came to replace the work of individual miners and their partners in the gold fields, heralding the end of the era of placer mining in the Klondike. 1904 therefore serves as a logical, upper-chronological limit for the purposes of this study, as the boom period drew to a close and the community began to transition from a boisterous mining camp to stable and enduring community.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DIGGING GOLD: A MEANS TO CLASS SECURITY AMONG  
ADVENTUROUS MEN IN THE KLONDIKE**

Much like the Californian gold rush that preceded it nearly half a century earlier, the Klondike stampede drove a tremendous number of men—popular estimates place the number at no less than 100,000—to venture beyond their sedentary lives in established communities leaving behind jobs, homes, and families in order to journey to a remote locale where little more than the potential of gold awaited them. The suddenness and the scale of the migrations characterizing both the Californian and Klondike gold rushes made the resulting communities distinctive as rarely throughout history have so many people from such diverse backgrounds migrated to a single destination without the benefit of a pre-existing transportation network and no promise of supply chains or infrastructure to support them upon their arrival (Hamilton 1978, Clay and Jones 2008). As was the case among the Californian gold rushers, the Klondikers were widely recruited from all walks of life, as is exemplified in the description of a single party bound for Dawson City that was comprised of a “minister, half a dozen doctors, lawyers, farmers and mechanics”.<sup>41</sup> Particularly striking though in both cases was that these movements were comprised of men in the prime of their lives, that the migration was so rapid, and that it occurred on a scale that has been approached by few other instances save for military campaigns (Hamilton

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<sup>41</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 83, Number 97, March 7, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

1978, Clay and Jones 2008). Along these lines, the 1901 Canada census for Dawson City reveals that even by this time—after the rush had in fact peaked and begun to wane—Dawson City was still primarily a man’s realm. This is reflected in the data of the 1901 Canada Census, which shows that of the 6695 individuals residing within the limits of Dawson City proper at that time, 5364 were males, primarily between the ages of 20-44 (4262), and most males were unmarried (n=3719).<sup>42</sup>

Recent research of historic gold rush communities has critiqued earlier contributions to the literature, charging that researchers have traditionally approached their studies from a singular perspective looking only to the West in the example of the Californian Gold Rush (Roberts 2000: 5), and only to the North in the case of the Klondike. It remains that the image of the ‘average’ Klondiker, as revealed by census data is that of a young, unmarried man. Yet when he is framed within the wider socio-historical context, a great deal can be learned about the motivations that each man may have had for joining in the stampede, as well as the part that he played in helping to construct the new community of gold rushers upon arriving in the gold fields.

#### Adventurous Masculinity and Strangers in the Klondike

Adventure, like ‘community’ is a subject often alluded to but in fact little studied by anthropologists and other social scientists in its own right (Yengoyan 2006). As a discipline, anthropology is however, perhaps ideally oriented to the study of adventure given that it owes its own existence to adventuring scholars who set

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<sup>42</sup> 1901 Canada Census, Library and Archives of Canada.

off in search of encounters with the 'other' and the unknown in order to document human diversity and reflect upon the significance of their own experiences as social and biological beings. Despite this ironic lack of attention, adventure in general (but particularly as is the case of adventurism in the Klondike), continues to offer an extraordinary context for the study of innumerable aspects of human social life since it provides a window into a reprieve from the monotony of daily human experience (Gordon 2006: 3).

In a classic essay, Simmel (1959) argued that adventure occurs when one is presented with an opportunity to step outside the constraints of everyday life and to move beyond the continuity of ordinary experience in order to engage in something that is entirely inconsistent with life episodes that both precede and follow it. The rare occasion in which adventure happens marks these events as memorable moments not only because of the initial excitement that characterizes them, but more importantly, because of how adventure punctuates the experience of the rest of one's life (Simmel 1959). In this regard, the Klondike certainly would have qualified as the adventure of the majority of the stampedeers' lifetimes. The gold rush permitted the Klondikers to abandon the grind of menial labor, to free themselves from the drudgery of social obligations and to pursue instead the satisfaction of indulging in entirely self-directed interests, impulses, and desires beyond the reproach of normal social acceptance (Green 1993). Without immediate responsibilities to provide for the immediate welfare of anyone but himself, many stampedeers were free to spend what money they had however they pleased, while their lack of accountability to a time clock

likewise liberated them from the constraints of scheduled workdays. Jack Carr, a Klondike mail carrier related this sentiment upon his return to Seattle:

[Men in the Klondike] have hardly enough to purchase a supply of grub for the winter, and as a result of their drinking and dancing live in a terrible condition... They are on a spree for about half the time, and the other days in the week are too much played out to work".<sup>43</sup>

Separated from their home communities by both geographic and social space, the Klondikers experienced a limbo-like state wherein they were freed from usual social constraints governing their actions in the public sphere. While adventuring in the gold fields, the stampeder further experienced a profound disconnect as ahistorical individuals existing in the space between the life that they had led prior to their departure and that which they would lead again when their period of adventuring in the North drew to a close (Simmel 1959).

This framework is useful for understanding why the Klondikers were so eager in their calculated abandon and subsequent indulgence in the various pleasures and vices that abounded in Dawson City, as well as how they were able to reclaim their previous social identities upon returning from the Klondike unscathed by their conduct in the North. Indeed, with the expectation that one's experiences as a stampeder would be confined to his time in the goldfields, a Klondiker enjoyed a truly liberated state as even the future (and the usual consequences that it lorded over a man in order to encourage respectable behavior) ceased to exist for these adventurers who only truly existed in that

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<sup>43</sup> *Seattle Daily Times*, July 27, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

particular time and place in the adventurous moments that were segregated from the remainder of their lives (Simmel 1959).

Since adventures by definition take place in spaces that exist beyond normal experience and in the company of the unfamiliar, it follows that adventurers should necessarily find themselves surrounded by strangers as a newcomer to a community set apart from their previous social world (Simmel 1959). In this sense, adventurers are in essence strangers, both to their previous selves, but also, importantly, in relation to the other individuals that they find themselves in association with upon commencing their adventure. In the context of the Klondike gold rush and the community of stampedes that was founded in the gold fields, the nature of the stranger was twofold given that everyone was a stranger or newcomer to the community that did not exist prior to the arrival of the gold rushers themselves. This sentiment is captured in the diary of Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Patchell who wrote of her surprise and great pleasure at unexpectedly finding a strong sense of community amongst her newfound neighbors, all of whom were previously unknown to her, upon her arrival Dawson City:

I feel happy living in Dawson and enjoying the hospitality of so many good friends. Words cannot express my feelings towards these friends, so liberal, true and noble-hearted. They came into my life in a mysterious way and their kindness will always be appreciated by me.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell, page 103.

The conceptualization of the stranger as someone “who comes today and stays tomorrow” (Simmel 1971: 185), indeed epitomizes the description of the “venturesome men...[who] plodded madly over the trail” to the Klondike offered by contemporary observers.<sup>45</sup>

Considering the intent that makes adventure possible—that it will be comprised of a bound period of time, during which period the adventurer is permitted to step outside of the boundaries of his typical life and prior social identity, it necessarily follows that in order for this to occur, that the adventure would have to take place in a space beyond the normal confines of his day-to-day life. To accomplish this, the adventurer is required to step beyond the boundaries of his own community in order to immerse himself in the realm of another. In doing so he transplants himself from the place in which he possesses a fixed identity bound by a network of reciprocal rights and responsibilities, to a place in which he has none and is unknown. In this new space he then becomes the antithesis of his prior self, requiring him to take on the anonymous persona of the stranger. Yet security can be found in the knowledge that the time spent enjoying the advantages of ‘stranger’ status is limited by the fact that the adventure cannot continue indefinitely. Eventually, the time will come that the adventurer will experience a return to the known, at which time he will relinquish his status as ‘outsider’. In the case of the Klondike, this was represented either by the stamper departing the gold rush community and returning to his place of origin to resume his previous roles or alternatively,

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<sup>45</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell, page 61.

resigning himself to becoming a permanent member of the Klondike community, at which point he would by definition cease to be a ‘stranger’ and assume the exalted status of ‘sourdough’.

Presuming that one has a choice in the matter, the decision to engage in an adventure such as that offered by the Klondike gold rush requires either an element of faith or the steadfast courage to weather the risk of uncertainty and the unknown that without engaging in, the adventure could not occur (Simmel 1971, Gordon 2006). In the case of the Klondike gold rushers this is epitomized by the decision of many of the stampedeers to leave stable careers, established social networks and to even (at least temporarily) abandon the comforts of family ties in favor of the precarious unknown. In this vein, whereas one could reasonably expect to earn a decent living and to eventually rise through the ranks along his career path through steady dedication and competence in his work (Gordon 2006, Rotundo 1993: 168-175), the Klondikers’ decision to risk all; sacrificing this comfort for the mere chance at a better outcome, without any guarantee that they would be successful posed an affront to the prevailing social order. Such an outcome was indeed the experience of forty-five year old J.E. Ebe who had been among the first wave of stampedeers that set off for the Klondike in 1896. Ebe had gone north “well supplied with money...[yet o]ne misfortune and another had been met with which had delayed his journey until it was late into the winter before he reached the awful Chilkoot pass. Already his stores were going low, his money had vanished and his health was broke”.<sup>46</sup> Ebe

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<sup>46</sup> Sol, A.E.I. (1897). *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New Eldorado*. London: The Mining and Geographical Institute: 81-82.

was ultimately unsuccessful in his Klondike bid, failing to even overcome the hardships of the trail in order to set foot in the Yukon gold fields and according to the reporter who interviewed those who knew him, he was “forced to return [home] unsuccessful, broken in health and penniless...[where] he succumbed to his disappointments...and ended his life by taking strychnine”.<sup>47</sup> The hardships of the trail endured in order to reach the Klondike could indeed be severe, as described in an interview given by William Mullin upon his return from the goldfields:

The scenes of distress along the trail are vividly impressed upon our minds. We passed fully one hundred outfits...and many of them were actually starving. The poor fellows had in many cases lost everything – clothing, horses and provisions – and were struggling along in a half-dazed condition, eating gophers, groundhogs and squirrels – in fact, anything they could get. They are a ragged, hungry and desperate crowd of men, with small hopes of reaching their destination...All along the trail you could see them lying under the trees and under improvised shelters, trudging helplessly along in the daytime, and often lying down at night without a bite to eat. It is simply terrible.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the persistent risk to both body and bank account, men both caught up in the excitement of the gold rush and disillusioned by the emasculating march of industrialism across North America often downplayed such threats. As such, many men of this era evidentially saw the Klondike adventure as an opportunity to demonstrate the virility of their masculine identity, to measure their self-

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<sup>47</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 52, November 21, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>48</sup> Interview of William Mullin published in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 106, September 14, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

sufficiency against the rigors of nature, and to test their own physical limitations and mental ingenuity as men, as opposed to the standards against which they were measured in their desk jobs and managerial positions in the emerging North American market economy (Gordon 2006, Bederman 1995: 15, Rotundo 1993: 238). Men who were not up to the challenge often paid for their overestimation with their lives, as attested to in the Death Register for the Yukon Territory, which reveals scores of accidental deaths from causes including drowning, freezing to death on the trail, being buried alive in avalanches and being crushed by over-turned sleighs carrying supplies.<sup>49</sup> In the words of a witness to the harsh reality of the stampede, of those whose limits were tested by the Klondike:

[m]any brave men fell from exhaustion in the early days struggling into this country and are now sleeping in lonely graves near the trails along the mountains and river sides.<sup>50</sup>

The impression of adventurers held by those who do not experience the adventure first-hand has been explained as representing a schismatic perspective. Whereas the adventurer is convinced of his own ability and prowess to overcome any challenges that lay before him, the outsider views the same circumstances as folly and the adventurer's unfounded and indeed irrational belief that the unknowable is in fact known (Gordon 2006, Simmel 1959). It is when the outcome is unclear—as in the case of the Klondikers who set off on a hopeful but uncertain quest for gold—that we normally exercise caution and

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<sup>49</sup> Yukon Territorial Death Register 1896-1904, Vital Statistics, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

<sup>50</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell, page 59-60. [note that no date of public

restraint in our daily lives. Yet as in the case of adventurism, the Klondike required men to adopt the fatalist attitude of the adventurer and to proceed as if “[t]he obscurities of fate...[were] more transparent to him than to others”, giving the impression to onlookers that the security “which normally only belongs to the transparency of calculable events” superciliously guided his actions (Simmel 1959: 14). To outside observers then the actions of the stampedeurs who were tested and indeed often failed in their endeavors seemed more an episode of irresponsible indulgence or even insanity than an admirable escapade of heroic adventuring. Following this reasoning, the stampedeurs, rather than believing in their own ability to locate and recover gold in the Klondike, instead simply saw such an outcome as inevitable given their commitment to join in the gold rush as most earnestly envisioned “gathering nuggets as [easily as] picnickers pick wild flowers”.<sup>51</sup> This fallacy of the ease with which stampedeurs envisioned filling their sacks with Klondike gold is prevalent throughout contemporary and later writings about the Klondike stampede and is often alluded to as a prime motivation of individual gold rushers for setting off for the gold fields. In addition to confidence garnered from the adventurers’ embrace of the unknown, this attitude must also be considered as an artifact of the wider social history in which the Klondike gold rush was situated. This will in turn reveal a contextually legitimate understanding of the motives that drove scores of men to the Klondike at the turn of the last century.

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<sup>51</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

### Middle-Class Masculinity and Adventurous Men

News of the discovery of gold in the Klondike reached the ports of San Francisco and Seattle in the summer of 1897, at a time when the Western world was still “bogged down” by a global economic depression with little promise of financial recovery in the foreseeable future (Guest 1985: 5). Only a few decades prior (around the time of the Californian gold rush in fact), North American society had also begun to undergo a dramatic social transformation as the means of production shifted from a system based upon household economies towards wage labor, industrialization and the capitalist market economy. Dominated by men working in a range of occupations outside of the home, the newly emerging working class family came to be defined by the wages and occupational title of the male laborer. Thus the Californian gold rush had occurred just as a recognizable ‘middle-class’ had begun to emerge in North American society (Johnson 2000a), as the possibility for an industrious young man to strike out and raise himself to a higher social standing by proving himself in the wage-labor marketplace was being realized. The nature of this work for young men aspiring to middle-class status most often took the form of white-collar labor, which meant a service to “the office, the desk, and the cubicle...[which had become...the mold of [North] America’s emerging middle class” churning out men to fill these roles who were stifled and refined by its confines (Roberts 2000: 2). Achieving this new measure of masculinity, however, required the successful navigation of a competitive workplace environment, which in turn

hinged upon the young man's willingness to conform to Victorian middle-class values and ideals of respectable behavior and practice.

Moral proclivities of the Victorian era called for thrift, moderation and restraint in all respects with a man's priorities focused squarely upon his reliability as a husband, father and provider (Kimmel 2012: 43-102). In this context men were required to guard their moral character (Bederman 1995: 12), as any degree of excess in corporeal pleasures evident in one's public life "had become a sure marker of low breeding" (Roberts 2000: 121), marking even the slightest personal indulgence as socially undesirable. Inhibition had thus become a beacon of manliness and a necessary quality for men hoping to carve out a middle-class existence for himself and his family (Bederman 1995: 87), while his success in this regard would ultimately be gauged as a measure of his prowess in the amassing of material goods (Johnson 1994: 8). Capital—whether in the form of money in the bank or tangible personal artifacts—served as a concrete symbol of social standing that could only be achieved through hard work (Rotundo 1993: 55), "delayed gratification, repressive manners and above all, respectability" in the eyes of his peers and social superiors (Roberts 2000: 4). In order to understand the Klondikers, their motives and their actions in this particular time and place, they must be considered within this wider socio-historical context. It is only in this light, that it becomes possible to reconcile the conception of these otherwise upstanding young men with their un-gentlemanly behaviors while residing in the Klondike.

Previous studies of the Klondike gold rush have been critiqued by contemporary scholars for their romanticized portrayals of the Klondikers, as much more closely approximating fiction than fact (see for example, Porsild 1994, Cruikshank 1992). Perpetuated over the last century by folklore and hyperbole, distorted views of the Klondike have subsequently come to inform many of the long-held assumptions framing studies of the gold rushers themselves. Along these lines, the Klondike has been popularly dubbed ‘everyman’s gold rush’ implying that it was characterized by men drawn from all walks of life who lacked mining experience and who were average or ordinary by any measure aside from their Klondiker status (Porsild 1998, chapter three). Working from this perspective, I have identified three misconceptions pertaining to the Klondikers prevalent in the literature that are largely responsible for perpetuating the ‘Klondike Myth’.

First, it is essential to realize that the men who participated in the Klondike gold rush were rarely destitute. The placer mining that characterized the Klondike economy is often referred to as the “poor men’s mine” since this method of extracting gold initially requires little more than a “pick, shovel and pan”, and therefore requires relatively little start-up capital.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the lack of significant investment needed to develop a placer mining claim, this form of gold was also attractive to inexperienced men since contemporary sources assured Klondike hopefuls that even “[a] man who never had a pick or shovel in his hands [stood] just as good a chance [at locating a paying claim and

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<sup>52</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co., page 94.

subsequently striking pay dirt] as an old and experienced miner”.<sup>53</sup> Although the affordability of the mining tools themselves certainly would have been enough to have facilitated the spread of gold fever in men from even the lowest stratum of society, the extraordinary cost entailed in actually reaching the goldfields would nevertheless have proven prohibitive for men of modest means who may have otherwise contemplated joining the stampede. According to a Klondiker interviewed by a hometown reporter upon returning from the goldfields, “[a] man had no business [going] to the Klondike...[unless he had the] capital to invest” in the endeavor.<sup>54</sup>

Travel guides produced by those who had been among the earliest Klondike stampeders for consumption by those who would follow in their footsteps during the height of the Klondike gold rush reveal even the so-called ‘poor man’s route’ to the Klondike to have necessitated an expenditure of at least one-hundred dollars in order to reach the goldfields.<sup>55</sup> This ‘budget’ route to the Klondike entailed traveling by boat from either San Francisco or Seattle to the Alaskan ports of either Dyea or Juneau, at which point the stampeders were required to disembark and continue on foot over the Chilkoot or White Pass trails and then on to Dawson City in the Yukon interior. Alternatively, for between two and three-hundred dollars (plus an additional surcharge for baggage weight), passage could be booked via the ‘all water route’, which ferried passengers

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<sup>53</sup> Observation of a Frank Riley, returned Klondike miner interviewed in Tacoma, Washington and published in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 84, August 23, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>54</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, July 31, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>55</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co.

directly from western American seaports up and around the coast of Alaska and then down the Yukon River on steamboats that disembarked directly on the pier at Dawson City.<sup>56</sup>

The cost of just traveling to the Klondike thus required the expenditure of a considerable sum of money at the turn of the last century even before factoring in the other expenses that Klondikers would face once they landed in the gold fields. In addition to the price of travel fares, the best advice of the day recommended that Klondike hopefuls purchase their supplies and one-year's worth of stock of provisions in the south where a complete outfit could be obtained for between two and five hundred dollars, as opposed to the higher rate that ranged from five hundred to one thousand dollars for a comparable kit in the North.<sup>57</sup> Stampedeers were additionally cautioned to have funds on hand to cover at least two years' living expenses in the goldfields, the duty required to be paid on goods imported at the Canadian border crossing, and enough money set aside to cover the cost of a return ticket home.<sup>58</sup> Men were explicitly warned by experienced prospectors that "a gold-seeker [was] a fool" to set off for the diggings without a reserve fund of at least three hundred, but ideally no less than five hundred dollars in his pocket to provide for any additional unforeseen expenses.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co.

<sup>57</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co.

<sup>58</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co.

<sup>59</sup> The Klondike Record (1897). *Klondike: The Chicago Record's Book for Gold Seekers*. Chicago: Chicago Records Co., page 49.

Given that the average daily wage for a laborer in the United States was just \$1.41 in 1899 (Lebergott 1960), assuming a 6-day workweek over the span of 52 weeks afforded an average annual salary of just \$439.92. In order to finance a Klondike expedition at this rate many stampeders had to resort to selling their homes,<sup>60</sup> while “properties of all kinds [were] sold at a sacrifice...[in order] to reach the place where gold was to be found”.<sup>61</sup> Those who were able often borrowed the funds necessary to finance their participation in the stampede from friends, family members or investors, in which case they were typically expected to share a portion of their bounty with those who had grubstaked them upon their successful return from the goldfields.<sup>62</sup> An illustrative example of this can be seen in the case of Rebecca and Solomon Schuldenfrei who sold their family business, invested every cent of their savings, and also borrowed as much from friends and family as they were willing to loan, in order to finance their Klondike expedition.<sup>63</sup> Despite their sizable investment and preparation for their Klondike venture, the couple was destitute by the time that they reached Dawson City and had to resort to selling Rebecca’s fine clothing in order to put a roof over their heads in the gold region.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> San Francisco Call, Volume 84, Number 98, September 6, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>61</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>62</sup> Charles Lamb was in fact taken to court by a group of friends who contributed financially to his Klondike excursion as they claimed that they were due a portion of the sizable amount of gold that he could not have mined without their support. *San Francisco Call*, September 12, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>63</sup> Rebecca and Solomon Schuldenfrei. Correspondence 1897-98, 84/87, MSS 166, Yukon Archives

<sup>64</sup> Rebecca and Solomon Schuldenfrei. Correspondence 1897-98, 84/87, MSS 166, Yukon Archives

Based on this line of reasoning, it is clear that not everyone interested in reaching the Klondike would have had the collateral or connections necessary to finance their endeavor. The cost of not only making the trip, but also of subsequently being prepared to sustain oneself while in the Klondike (not to mention looking after any financial responsibilities that had to be provided for back home) would therefore have proven prohibitive to many who could not afford to participate in the so-called ‘everyman’s’ gold rush. As opposed to hapless drifters and vagrants, it was primarily from this cohort that many of the gold rushers were drawn, as one stamperer indeed commented upon returning from the goldfields that there were many good men in the Klondike “who left good positions in the East to try their luck”.<sup>65</sup> Thus despite popular misconception, the Klondike in fact offered very little opportunity in the way of ‘poor man’s’ diggings.

A second misguided sentiment regarding the Klondike concerns the image of stamperers as rebel drifters fleeing to the North for the sole purpose of escaping the encroaching westward advancement of civilization. A reading of Roberts (2000) reveals that many men of earlier gold rushes remained strongly tethered to the communities from which they originated. The majority of men present in Dawson City at the time that the 1901 Canada Census was taken were single, widowed or divorced (69.5% of men over the age of 15). Yet this does not necessarily imply that they were free from familial responsibility, nor that they did not maintain ties to those they left behind. On the contrary, those that

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<sup>65</sup> Account of J.D. Thomas printed in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 41, July 11, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

did not have wives waiting for them at home, often had fiancées, mothers, siblings or other relatives, to which a great multitude of letters between the gold rushers and their families attest. While some of the stampeders to the Northern gold fields of the Klondike and Alaskan gold fields wrote home about pragmatic issues such as advising wives on how to pay the bills and enclosing money along with a promise to send more as soon as possible,<sup>66</sup> others were more sentimental, bemoaning their separation from loved ones:

I dreamt of you and the children last night. How I would like to take you all in my arms if only for a moment. I don't think any man ever thought more of his wife and children than I do.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, it is problematic to portray the Klondikers en masse as fringe elements or marginal individuals as many in fact appear to have held fast to their ties to those that they had left behind.

Evidence of the Klondikers maintaining enduring attachments to their home communities can be gleaned from the extremely high rate at which people flowed in and out of the Klondike. While an estimated 100,000 individuals set off for the gold fields, the population residing within the limits of Dawson City never rose above 7000, with perhaps that many more individuals being scattered on claims and in the neighboring creek settlements at any given time.<sup>68</sup> Given the context of their migration, it can be argued that few Klondikers realistically

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<sup>66</sup> Charles A. Goodwin fonds, R7808-0-4-E, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>67</sup> Letter written by Robert J. Young, published in Ruskin Evey (1986). *Letters to Lizzie: A Koyukuk Gold Seeker Writes Home*, *The Alaska Journal* 16: 126.

<sup>68</sup> *Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada* 1898 #15, 1899 #15, 1900 #15, 1903 #15 and 1905 #15, University of Alberta Libraries, Porsilid 1998: 8, 1901 Census of Canada, Library and Archives of Canada, Dawson Daily News, April 19, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

expected their relocation to the Yukon Territory to be a permanent one. This is echoed in the letter of R. J. Young who assured his wife “my dear you can rest assured that my prospects will have to be very flattering if it keeps me from blowing homewards and to those who I love best”.<sup>69</sup> Indeed 97.5% of the population residing in Dawson City (n=6538) had been present in the Yukon for less than five years at the time that the 1901 Canada Census was taken.<sup>70</sup> Hamilton (1978) has asked what, then, “made the possibility of discovering gold...so attractive to some individuals that they knowingly took several years out of their lives in the society of their aspirations to pursue the venture” (1473)? Far from the expectation that one could establish themselves and build a new life in a remote boomtown, the primary motivation of the Klondikers is better understood when framed as being rooted in a desire to solidify or perhaps modestly raise one’s socioeconomic standing back home. The following account is illustrative of this mindset that evidentially characterized the decision of many men of moderate means to join in the Klondike stampede:

In a little town in Duchess county...there lives a man with a family consisting of two sons and one daughter. The youngest of the children is 15. This man is the owner of a small dairy that has brought him in an income sufficient to maintain all in comfort. The trouble has been, however, that it ended with that. The balance in the bank had about the same limitations. Now, the dairyman argues after this fashion: “If I keep on here, as long as I am able to work, the chances are I will have enough to eat and to wear for both myself, and wife and children, just as long as the latter stay at home. But

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<sup>69</sup> Letter written by Robert J. Young, published in Ruskin Evey (1986). Letters to Lizzie: A Koyukuk Gold Seeker Writes Home, *The Alaska Journal* 16: 123.

<sup>70</sup> Based on data for whom a response was noted in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

when I get old and the children carve out their own lines of life, what will become of the wife and me? I can get money enough to get the best kind of a start in the Klondike and maintain myself and family for some time. Now, we are all used to hard work, very hard. Why not rough it for three or four years out there and get enough to be comfortable always, instead of just being satisfied enough to eat and wear from one year's end to another, with nothing but hard work to look forward to?"<sup>71</sup>

Rather than a permanent relocation then, the majority of the Klondikers anticipated dedicating a few years to mining in the hopes that their efforts would afford them the opportunity to at least enjoy class security and at best to 'jump classes' by circumventing the usual socioeconomic formalities, limitations and restrictions imposed upon men attempting to raise their standing within the socioeconomic hierarchy back home. Such was indeed the mindset of Arthur Winters who as a young man of 22 or 23 years old, was among the first to set off for the Klondike, leaving his job as a coachman in search of brighter prospects. Less than three years later, he returned to his hometown of San Rafael successful in his efforts, which allowed him to transform his life "[f]rom poverty to opulence, from hard labor to the life of a man of ease", and to finally be in a position to be able to marry his sweetheart, Miss Daisy H. Smith who had been faithfully awaiting his return.<sup>72</sup>

Capital had by this time become a prerequisite for solidifying class status in North American society, and this is indeed evident in the 1898 headline of the

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<sup>71</sup> Interview with a local man headed for the Klondike published in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 26, Number 340, September 5, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>72</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 85, Number 14, December 14, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

*San Francisco Call* that blatantly proclaimed “gold is necessary to make a success in society nowadays”.<sup>73</sup> The case of Mr. Will J. Russell exemplifies this new social reality. As a youthful and handsome college graduate and ‘society leader’ among his peers in San Francisco, Mr. Russell joined the stampede in 1898 upon realizing that “more than brains and the ability to dance [would be] necessary to continue successfully” along the life course that he envisioned for himself.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Mr. Russell consented to temporarily forgo the comforts that marked his aspiring middle-class status—“kid gloves, white neckties, patent leather shoes, creased pants, plug hats, enormous canes and occasional diamonds...the ballroom, the drawing room and Broadway”—as he set off on his “practical expedition” to the Klondike.<sup>75</sup> With the expectation that the hardships of the remote gold fields would bring him little of the luxuries that he was accustomed to in Oakland, he proclaimed his determination to nevertheless persevere, asserting that “I do expect to find more money”, which would afford him the means to resume enjoying the benefits of middle-class status upon returning home.<sup>76</sup>

Thus, in the context of the industrializing North American economy, the perceived abundance awaiting men in the gold rush boomtowns surely presented as the most expedient and lucrative path to reaching a coveted higher social stratum (Hamilton 1978: 1484), as well, perhaps as a golden opportunity for men

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<sup>73</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 21, June 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>74</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 21, June 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>75</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 21, June 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>76</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 21, June 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

without any other prospects in this regard. For those who were successful in the gold fields, the nuggets that they returned home with indeed served as a gleaming symbol of their new class status, particularly when they were showcased in gaudy displays aimed at publically demonstrating the Klondikers' newly acclaimed standing in the community. James Clements, who set out from the Klondike on March 15, 1896 "without a nickel to [his] name" understood the need to flaunt his good fortune upon returning from the gold fields in order to substantiate his claim to high society. After struggling to gain his feet in Dawson City, Clements was able to earn enough money to go prospecting and eventually staked a claim that initially produced "\$150,000 out of eighty square feet". Following this, he returned to New York City a wealthy man where on December 24, 1897 he erected a Christmas tree in the Lafayette Hotel that was skirted with piles of \$2 gold pieces while the tree itself was laden with \$40,000 worth of Klondike nuggets that had been crudely tied to its branches in lieu of traditional ornamentation. This show of his Klondike wealth drew a wide audience that transformed his Klondike gold into a perhaps more valuable form of social currency. This occurred as Clements received his guests alongside the garish display of his newfound affluence as he simultaneously "celebrated the yuletide and his transformation from a brakeman on the South Pacific Railroad to a Klondike Prince".<sup>77</sup>

While attaining middle class status during the Victorian era necessitated venturing outside of the home in order to participate in the wage economy, there

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<sup>77</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 83, Number 25, December 25, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

were, nevertheless, also limits as to how high one could realistically hope to rise regardless of one's personal aspirations. As opposed to the 'south' where opportunities for advancement were limited by finite resources and the aptitudes and abilities of individual men, resources in the 'north' were rumored to be infinite, as mining claims were free and available to any who could manage to stake a claim, while no special skills or knowledge were required to try one's hand at placer mining (see figure 4.1). All that stood in the way of a man and his financial prosperity in this idealized setting then, was his own ambition and endurance. Thus, much more than fantasies of instant fortune, the gold of the Klondike could have itself served as a symbol of the broader desires of the stampedes in much the same way as it had for the miners of earlier North American stampedes (Roberts 2000: 21). Attaining or solidifying one's middle class identity and in the process, proving one's manliness by demonstrating his ability to 'strike out on his own' and prosper in a context outside of the domestic household production unit were further attractions of the opportunities awaiting men in late nineteenth century gold rush boomtowns (Roberts 2000: 13). No other man embodies this premise more than Alexander McDonald, a true self-made man forged in the Klondike. Through a combination of luck, perseverance and shrewd business transactions, McDonald amassed a staggering personal fortune in the Klondike. The boon was not limited to his back account however, as his Klondike success in turn facilitated his dramatic social transformation as a contemporary commentator observed:

There is quite a difference between the Alexander McDonald who arrived at Juneau...two years ago and the Alexander McDonald who is now shaking

**Figure 4.1:** Simple Mining Technology of the Gold Rush circa 1897



Source: Library and Archives Canada/PA-005389

hands with old and less fortunate friends, for today his fortune is estimated as close to \$5,000,000.<sup>78</sup>

In accordance with the expectations for members of his newly attained status, McDonald was openly commended for his gentlemanly public demeanor. As a newly minted Klondike millionaire, as he was praised for being “modest and unassuming, quiet and unobtrusive...[despite the fact that h]e still look[ed] like ninety-nine out of 100 prospectors” and had only just returned to ‘civilization’.<sup>79</sup> Thus stories of self-made Klondike millionaires combined with the perceived abundance that the gold fields indiscriminately offered, tempted men with the prospect of an alternate route by which they might achieve the class security that otherwise eluded them.

Third, as opposed to the vulgarians that they have often been made out to be in early Klondike literature, the men of the gold rush (being of primarily middle-class standing) would have ascribed to the values and Victorian ideals associated with their class. While many may have felt stifled by the stipulated restraint and moderation expected of men of their station back home, the Klondike was removed, both culturally and geographically from this context. It is likely then that another reason that the men who joined the stampede did so with such gumption, was because it offered them a temporary escape from the confines of their middle class identities. At the very least, North American gold rush boomtowns historically promised a reprieve from “the foppish trappings of the parlor...the daily grind and isolation of white-collar office work” (Roberts

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<sup>78</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 138, October 16, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>79</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 138, October 16, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

2000: 57), and the relentless marketplace competition that men endured in their tightly buttoned and crisply starched shirts within the encroaching walls that quartered off their offices and cubicles. Throughout their time in a gold rush boomtown, stampedeers reveled in the fact that although they worked hard on their claims and endured harsh conditions of labor and subsistence, when the time came to unwind in Dawson City, they were truly free to do as they pleased without concern for who was watching and how their conduct might reflect upon their reputation as upstanding young gentlemen. Along these lines, one particularly flamboyant ‘spree’ was observed by a Klondiker by the name of Adney who recalled that upon selling his mining claim for \$35,000, Jimmy McMann proceeded directly to Dawson City and spent \$28,000 of his proceeds on an infamous binge. During the height of this hubbub, the bartenders were sent out into the street to drag passersby into the establishment to share in celebratory drinks at McMann’s expense. Following the excitement, McMann took a short trip to the outside to attend to his interests in the south but soon returned to the Klondike and settled back down to continue mining on his other claims no worse the wear for this extravagant display of public debauchery.<sup>80</sup>

That many men were “ready for the gold rush, or something like it” each time that a North American gold rush took off (Roberts 2000: 60), is eloquently captured in the case of the Klondike in the lines of the aptly titled a poem by

Robert Service, *The Spell of the Yukon*:

there's gold, and it's haunting and haunting;

It's luring me on as of old;

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<sup>80</sup> Adney, Edwin T. (1900). *The Klondike Stampede of 1896-1898*. New York: Harper, Page: 316

Yet it isn't the gold that I'm wanting

So much as just finding the gold.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the pleasure that men took in their Klondike reprieve, they nevertheless realized that their ‘rebellion’ would be a temporary sojourn. Throughout their stay in the boomtown a great many of the men held fast to the very standards responsible for provoking dissent among their rank in the first place. For instance, those who could afford to, regularly indulged in many of the luxuries that their gold dust could buy—champagne and oysters, wallpaper for their rustic residences and even fine clothing to wear while strolling along Dawson City’s gritty boardwalk sidewalks. It was because of this fundamental reluctance to abandon their middle class aspirations that Dawson City, a rustic outpost of humanity, was soon renowned as the ‘Paris of the North’ where “stylishly dressed women, many of them being just as refined as in the States” could be seen walking the dusty streets of Dawson City alongside men in their soiled and tattered mining garb.<sup>82</sup> In this way, Dawson City offered its inhabitants the best of both worlds—an opportunity to measure oneself against the rigors of nature and the refinement of civilized life that compelled many to journey to the Klondike in search of the means to secure such a lifestyle for themselves.

Gold rush culture, particularly in the case of the Klondike, can thus be conceptualized as a scene of striking oppositions (Roberts 2000: 4). Once removed from ordinary life and the restraining influences of home, men were free to wallow, however temporarily, in the uncouth behaviors characteristic of

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<sup>81</sup> Service, Robert W. (1907). *The Spell of the Yukon*. The Spell of the Yukon and Other Verses. New York: Barse & Hopkins.

<sup>82</sup> Account of a female Klondiker returned to Washington State published in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 95, September 3, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

those belonging to lower social stations. The eagerness with which many young men cast off gentlemanly responsibility and joined in the Klondike stampede at the precise time in their lives when they were expected to begin earnestly striving towards establishing themselves in society must still be reconciled with societal expectations since when it came to upstanding young men of the times, “theirs was a life of serious business. They had families to support, reputations to earn, responsibilities to meet. Their world was based on work, not play, and their survival in it depended on patient planning, not spontaneous impulse” (Rotundo 1993: 55). Support for this position can be found in the numerous cases of divorce that were awarded to ‘widows of the Klondike’—women who were granted divorces from their absentee stamper husbands on the grounds of abandonment. In some cases, the grounds for divorce were explicit, as in the case of Mrs. Harriet McGowan who successfully petitioned for divorce after receiving a letter from her husband “in which he told her that she might go and do whatever she pleases, as he, on his own part, intended to do”.<sup>83</sup> In other cases, divorce suits were won based on allegations of a lack of communication between spouses that ensued when men set off for the Klondike and were, for whatever reason, unheard from for years on end. In such cases, couples were occasionally happily reunited upon the ex-husband’s surprising return, as in the case of Mrs. Ayers, who had been granted a divorce “on her plea of abandonment”, but consented to her ex-husband’s pleas to re-marry when he returned from the

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<sup>83</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Issue 82, Number 165, November 12, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

goldfields totaling \$20,000 in gold dust.<sup>84</sup> Yet in many other cases the marriage remained ruined by the husbands' disappearance to the Klondike. In any event, the commonality among cases highlights the fact that certain tensions did exist in the space of conflict between expectations concerning the conduct of 'respectable' gentlemen and their willful decision to gallivant in the Klondike. Such behavior had to be reconciled with the expectation that responsible men of the era did "not throw over his family, disregard his business partners, or quit his job...[rather, a] man had to have a sense of duty based on enduring loyalty, not on the strongest impulse of the moment" (Rotundo 1993: 55).

The conundrum of 'respectable' men engaging in a gamut of objectionable behaviors all the while in a bid to assure their membership in the very social class that would have looked most disapprovingly upon such behavior, might nevertheless be reconciled by framing these men's actions in the context of adventurism.

According to Hamilton, the label 'adventurer' is properly applied to those who move beyond the geographical boundaries of their respective society, whose actions might "be considered marginal and, at times, antagonistic to normative social activity", but whose motives are nevertheless grounded within the strictures of their social moors as they acted to pursue wealth to better their own class standing (1978: 1466-1467). What made adventurism such an attractive option for ambitious, able-bodied young men of this era was that there existed relatively few standards for entry into the middle-class echelon in North

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<sup>84</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 121, September 29, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

American society during this period. In fact, all that was really necessary was a demonstration of an ample “accumulation of objects highly valued by the group” (Hamilton 1978: 1479).

The association between adventurism and the Klondike was even recognized by one returned stamper quoted as saying “gold hunting is adventure pure and simple”, while the association between the Klondike and the coveted middle-class status that drove many north can be gleaned from the same man’s recommendation that no Klondike hopeful set off without a dress-suit carefully preserved in his outfit since such is the formal attire of “every adventurer [he] had ever seen”.<sup>85</sup> The decision to embark on an adventure to the Klondike can be framed as rational, in the context of a society wherein a man’s relative status rests upon his individual achievements, yet wherein opportunities for young men jockeying for a position within the emerging middle-class were limited.

Given the poor economic outlook following from the global depression that loomed over this generation of stampedeers, and in contrast with the certitude and fervor surrounding the richness of the Klondike strike, it is easy to factor the calculations weighed by men who saw the stampede not as a gamble but—physical risks to their person aside—as a sure means for upward social mobility. This can be seen in widely published proclamations along the lines that “the placer mines of the Klondike [were] the richest ever discovered in the history of

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<sup>85</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 83, Number 54, January 23, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

the world”,<sup>86</sup> which were reinforced by the concurrently running headlines heralding the seemingly endless arrival of new Klondike millionaires unloading their sacks of gold on the docks of San Francisco and Seattle, although comparatively little was written about those who failed to locate gold in the first years of the stampede.

Indeed, the opportunities for social climbing in the Klondike were not lost on contemporary observers. A columnist for the *Los Angeles Herald* commented that “[t]he men who are talking Klondike are not those who cannot make a good living from themselves and family, but simply representatives of a class who seek competence, and who do not care to be among the toilers in the vineyard all their days”.<sup>87</sup> In such a light, rather than an irresponsible impulse, the decision to take leave of one’s everyday responsibilities to join in the quest for gold can be construed as a well thought out response to the persistent desire to “achieve personal goals rapidly by circumventing established modes of upward mobility” (Hamilton 1978: 1487). An example of this is illustrated in the case of Morris Baxter who ventured to the Klondike in search of the financial stability that he required to win the hand of Miss. Ida Luce, who although she fancied him, nevertheless resisted Mr. Baxter’s advances on the grounds that “he did not have enough of this world’s goods to support a wife and she refused to accept until he had accumulated sufficient capital to assure them a good start in

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<sup>86</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 74, August 13 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>87</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 26, Number 340, September 5, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

life”.<sup>88</sup> After earning his fortune in the Klondike, Mr. Baxter sent word to his would-be fiancée and couple married within a week of his return.

Adventurism as a means for securing capital and the social distinction that it afforded thus appealed as a viable strategy that promised “a rapid, if not any easy, road” (Hamilton 1978: 1478) to elevate one’s standing in late-Victorian era North American society. In this way a man’s unconventional ‘social climb’ could be legitimized by a substantial enough amount of gold dug out of the Klondike creek beds. Upon returning home, the newfound affluence of successful Klondikers was evident wherever they convened. San Franciscans, for example, were very much aware of newly acquired status of such men as they observed that at

an uptown hotel...you will find many evidences of the wealth...[of] the successful prospector, his bags filled with gold dust, taking his ease in an armchair and enjoying the best which the pleasure loving city of San Francisco can furnish. There is an air of well-to-do prosperity about the place. The men who are there have risked every form of danger and hardship, but they have made their pile and are going to have a good time while they are about it. Life goes easily in this quarter. For these favored individuals there is no daily routine of business duty, no tiresome office hours. Their time is their own. They have nothing to do but to spend their money, and all around them is abundant facility.<sup>89</sup>

Along these lines, the socioeconomic transformation of successful Klondikers upon their return from the gold fields is further symbolized by the popular

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<sup>88</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 86, Number 2, August 2, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>89</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 103, September 11, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

practice of affording particularly successful men in the Klondike with poignant titles such as ‘Klondike King’,<sup>90</sup> ‘Klondike Prince’,<sup>91</sup> and even ‘Czar of the Klondike’,<sup>92</sup> in recognition both of their newfound social currency and economic prowess.

### Klondikers as Liminal Men and Liminality in the Klondike

For each individual who decided to participate in the stampede north, this course of action required them to “forg[e]t...everything except the one idea—the great craze for gold”,<sup>93</sup> as taking part in the gold rush necessitated a departure from their responsibilities, their social preoccupations, and indeed taking leave of every aspect of their identity that tied them to the communities from whence they originated. As such, the Klondike can be construed as liminal both in the sense that the Klondikers were socially secluded, as well as being geographically isolated from the very ‘civilization’ that many soon sought to recreate in the remote boomtown. By casting off their previous social responsibilities to take part in the rush, the men who ventured to the Klondike entered a liminal period in their lives that could only end in one of three ways; in their death, when they made the decision to return to their place of origin or when they became determined to remain in the Yukon Territory permanently.

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<sup>90</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 88, August 27, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>91</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 83, Number 25, December 25, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>92</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 41, July 11, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>93</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell, page 60.

Victor Turner explored the concept of liminality in the context of rites of passage, and while these occurrences are normally associated with transformative life-cycle events such as “birth, puberty, marriage and death”, Turner stressed that there are additional occasions for which the concept of rites of passage in general, and the liminal period specifically, might be applicable (1994: 5). Rites of passage, for example, occur when a person undergoes a formative and socially recognized transformation. The liminal period of this transition is particularly reminiscent of the changes that each stamper invariably experienced as they moved from their previous socially recognized statuses to the shared identity of ‘Klondiker’, and this framework can be employed to understand the meaning of experiences that marked the transition and transformation of Klondike stampers from one status to another. This is significant given that the stampers inevitably emerged from their adventure in the goldfields as changed men, in some cases barely even recognizable to their wives,<sup>94</sup> as the demands of the journey were severe and the conditions that they encountered in the Klondike were not what most expected. Working from this perspective, valuable insight can be gained into the nature of community in the Klondike in particular as well as in boomtown communities more generally, when the stampers are framed as an assemblage of individuals experiencing a shared period of liminality.

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<sup>94</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections wherein the author describes setting eyes on her Klondiker husband for the first time since his departure. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 65.

According to Turner, rites of passage are typically marked by three phases through which individuals must progress in a linear fashion. The separation phase entails “the detachment of the individual or group from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or set of cultural conditions” (1994: 4). In the case of the Klondikers, this phase was demarcated at the moment the stampeder set off on their quest for gold. By taking their first step towards the gold fields and in doing so, becoming a bona fide ‘stampeder’, these men disengaged their social selves from their previous roles, responsibilities and obligations while also dislodging themselves in geophysical space. The separation phase was also visually marked by the donning of Klondike garb, and it is no coincidence that this simple action presents one of the most indelible and enduring symbols of the Klondike gold rush (see figure 4.2). Numerous photographs recall steamboats loaded to the brim with men dressed in nearly identical outfits as they set off on the first leg of their long journey to the Klondike (see figure 4.3). Wearing their mackinaw trousers, woolen work shirts, rubber boots and iconic miner’s hat, the costume of the Klondikers further made it virtually impossible for men to portray rank or class status through the garments that they wore. This in turn, suggests that very early on and long before they reached the gold fields, class distinctions among the Klondikers were already being dismantled.

**Figure 4.2:** Typical Outfit of the Klondike Gold Rushers circa 1898



Source: University of Washington Libraries/Special Collections/Asahel Curtis

Klondike Alaska Collection 214

**Figure 4.3:** Identically Dressed Men Departing for the Klondike circa 1898



Source: Seattle Museum of History and Industry/88.33.116

Aboard the vessels en route to Alaskan ports, the stampeders found themselves among a motley crew of strangers. This is illustrated by the ad hoc medley comprising a single party that included “a minister, half a dozen doctors, lawyers, farmers and mechanics”.<sup>95</sup> Freight vessels were called into duty to accommodate the throng of stampeders wishing to book passage north and conditions aboard these vessels were indiscriminating:

The steamer Bristol...was a coal carrier, and had accommodations for about twenty passengers, but the charterers accepted over 300 passengers. Bunks were provided between decks, and below were carried in the neighborhood of 200 horses, 50 cattle, and about 100 sheep, dogs and the like...Meals were served the passengers in wash-tubs. [Regardless of his affluence, e]ach man took a plate, and dipped the mulligan out; then sat wherever he could find a place.<sup>96</sup>

With their ties to their previous affiliations temporarily severed, men were no longer clerks or tradesmen or physicians or merchants. Most lacked kinship ties to those around them and recognizing the need for support networks in the unknown that awaited them, many opted to instead forge serendipitous friendships and alliances with those that they met along the way.<sup>97</sup> Along these lines, the liminal phase is recognized as an ambiguous state in which one moves through a social space that is unfamiliar both in regard to the states that came before and will follow afterwards (Turner 1994: 5). The discontinuity between

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<sup>95</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 83, Number 97, March 7, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>96</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>97</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 28.

‘civilized’ society and the unfamiliar wilderness that stampedeers encountered along their way to Dawson City certainly qualifies as such a realm.

After disembarking the steamers at their Alaskan destinations the journey over the Chilkoot or White Pass trails undertaken by the first stampedeers in the winter of 1897 was brutal by any measure. The White Pass (see figure 4.4) began as a deceptively flat wagon-trail over easy ground, but “gradually became a hideous nightmare. People moved along it, step by step, to dump their loads, and plod back only to do it over, and over again”.<sup>98</sup> This route has been described by Berton (1958) as:

a forty-five mile switchback that plunged through bog and mire, over boulder and shale, skirted cliff sides, crossed and reclosed rivers, leapfrogged mountains, and followed canyon, valley, summit, and slope until it ended on the crescent beaches of Lake Bennett, where the Yukon River had its beginning (153).

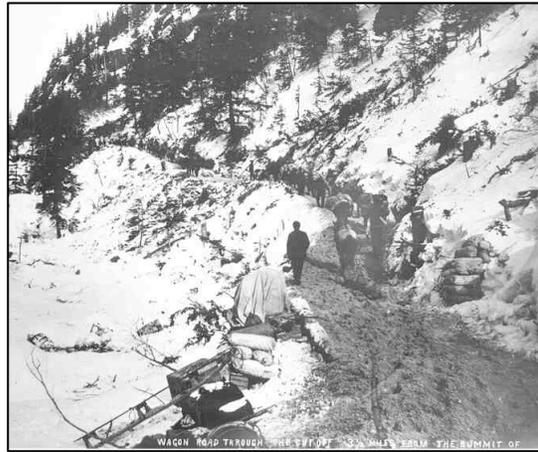
From this point on, the stampedeers were required to build boats or scows utilizing local lumber resources and to then shoot several series of rapids aboard their vessel in order to complete the last leg of their tumultuous journey down the Yukon River to reach Dawson City. The scene that greeted stampedeers upon arrival at Lake Bennett was one of

[t]housands of argonauts...whipsawing lumber, and building boats so as to be ready to sail at the first opportunity. The sight...when they did start, was like a large regatta. Every kind of craft, in all shapes, and sizes, was to be seen...A score or more sank almost at once, to the jeers of the rest...They

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<sup>98</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

**Figure 4.4:** Views from the White Pass Trail circa 1898



Source: University of Washington Library/Special Collections/Hegg128, 181, and 681

crashed into one another amid lusty oaths and a bawling confusion of orders.

But the race for gold was on...<sup>99</sup>

The physically demanding and unforgiving geology of the Chilkoot Pass (see figure 4.5), in contrast, presented

a sight never to be forgotten, [as] the constant stream of humanity climb[ed] like a lot of ants, through from morning to night...[o]nly the luring wanton, Gold, could have kept that weary line in motion, bent sullen, and silent, every muscle complaining, each man desperate to hold the space...the dreaded and famous Chilkoot Pass... heartless destroyer of golden hopes, was five miles of steep winding trail...Of the 75,000 gold hungry men, who formed the historic trail of Ninety-eight half of them never reached Dawson.<sup>100</sup>

Once they had hazarded the perilous trails and finally set foot in the gold fields, men still faced fierce competition. The reward for those who were lucky enough to be able to stake a claim was long days marked by grueling labor, the likes of which most had never known and which stood in stark opposition to the expectations of 'easy pickings' that most had envisioned when they had embarked on their quest for gold. If nothing else, the hard physical labor demanded of miners in the Klondike (see figure 4.6), would have been sufficient to fracture any lingering attachments to previous class identities, much as it had among men of previous North American gold rushes (Cornford 1998). The journey to the Klondike and the circumstances that the stampedeers endured upon their arrival can therefore be characterized having functioned as a great equalizer of men.

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<sup>99</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>100</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

**Figure 4.5:** Klondikers Scaling the Chilkoot Summit circa 1898



Sources: Library and Archives of Canada/C-005142 and C-004490

**Figure 4.6:** Mining in the Klondike circa 1898



Sources: Yukon Archives/Anton Vogee fonds/147, and Adams & Larkin  
fonds/9161

In this way, whatever or whoever the stampedeers had been prior to their arrival in the gold fields mattered little as the superficial distinctions drawn between them were systematically eliminated. This reality was echoed in a contemporary handbook for gold rushers that proclaimed “[o]ne man is in literal truth as good as another” in the Klondike.<sup>101</sup> This resulting quality of equality among the Klondikers is similarly characteristic of those who undergo rites of passage together. During the liminal period, social status is stripped away members of the cohort transitioning through the rite of passage are subjected to “ordeals and tests...[which] transcend distinctions of rank, age, kinship position” (Turner 1994: 8-10). In the context of rites of passage, the purpose of “reduction to a uniform condition” represents a necessary step whereby members of the group “are ground down to be fashioned anew” (Turner 1994: 4). Evidence of this transformation among the Klondikers was clear even by the time that men made it to the remote boomtown. As one contemporary commentator noted with regard to the early arrivals to the Klondike gold fields:

[t]here were, indeed, many sorts and conditions of men: veteran miners, who had prospected and mined for years in more than one State of the union, and pale shop clerks, vainly trying, with the aid of flannel shirts, broad-brimmed hats, and pipes not to have the stamp of the “tenderfoot”. There were lawyers and doctors, a candidate for the Populist ticket in Tacoma last autumn, two Yale graduates, a prize-fighter known as the “Montana Kid,” and ex-judge, and an ex-governor of a territory. There were men with grey beards, mere boys...there were many with attractive but rough faces, and here and there

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<sup>101</sup> No Author. (1897). *On to Klondike! And the Great Alaska Gold Discoveries: A Concise Treatise Answering the Two Questions, How to Get There and What to Take With You; Also Containing Much Essential Information Including Maps and Illustrations*. By A Practical Miner. New York: A. Marks: 23-24.

one who looked as if he had seen the inside of a jail; but all were...the same...<sup>102</sup>

Men had thus taken on a new persona that distinguished them as ‘Klondikers’, which identity neither resembled who they had been in their prior lives, nor found a parallel with any other cohort of men in North America at that time. Indeed, upon reaching Dawson City the stampeders had fully entered into a state of liminality clearly recognizable as a space detached from ‘normal’ life.

The physical appearance of men upon reaching Dawson City further marked them visibly as liminal men and served as concrete symbols of their endurance as the trail ground down up their previous social selves:

They had grown tattered beards to protect their faces from the elements, and they had smeared their skin with charcoal to prevent blistering sunburn, and they had fashioned slitted masks of wood to protect their eyes from snow-glare. The stiff new mining costumes in which they had been proudly, if awkwardly, photographed clung to them like a second skin, worn and faded, and patched neatly in a dozen places by unaccustomed hands. Almost all had lost weight; gaunt and paunchless now, with their coal-black whiskered faces and their primitive eye-shields, they presented a weird and fearsome sight (Berton 1958: 270)

Their emergence from the separation phase upon successfully reaching the Klondike in turn garnered them the limbo-esque status of ‘Cheechako’—a term bestowed upon all greenhorn newcomers to the region.<sup>103</sup> Despite the numerous

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<sup>102</sup> Coolidge, Archibald Cary (1897). *The Nation*, August 12, 1897: 125.

<sup>103</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 28.

liberties soon to be enjoyed by the cheechakos during their time in the Klondike, Dawson City must have surely have struck them as a very strange place; a liminal realm in which—in contrast to the places that they knew had previously known—the world had suddenly been turned on its head.

### Equal Footing in the Klondike

Through my reading of primary source materials, I have identified four factors that acted to diminish socioeconomic stratification among the men of the Klondike, reducing them to equal footing as they stood on the common ground of the gold fields. First, although misconstrued, the expectation of unrivaled abundance to be had in the Klondike nevertheless negated any attempt that might have been made to draw distinctions among men based on their prowess when it came to the accumulation of capital. Since it was widely assumed that there would be more than enough gold to go around in the ‘promised land’ of the Klondike, little effort or investment was thought to be needed in order for a man to secure a share of the Klondike fortune for himself, quite unlike the limited opportunities characteristic of the economic opportunities back home.

Second, the common obstacles and hardships that each man had endured along the journey to the gold fields served as a point of mutuality among them, providing a shared sense of camaraderie that bound them together as fellow ‘Klondikers’ as they found commonality in their shared struggles.

Thirdly, the stampedeers’ communal inexperience in prospecting and mining functioned to further dissolve any lingering remnants of the divisions

previously drawn among them based on privileged trade knowledge or skill up until the time that they became gold rushers. In the early days of the stampede when the primary means of extracting gold from the earth was to pan and then dig for it, men could claim no special proficiency or expertise over their peers that might have corresponded to categories in any way resembling the occupational hierarchies back home.

Fourth, in the context of the gold rush era, the epicenter of which was situated in the boomtown community of Dawson City, there were few institutions or services in place that might have realistically functioned to elevate even the most successful of the miners above their peers, let alone to permit the re-emergence of a class structure that could have significantly impacted the relative standing of Klondikers in the gold rush community. For example, when wood for building permanent residences (or even food for that matter), could not be had at any price in the Klondike due to scarcity,<sup>104</sup> it mattered little if one possessed an ounce of gold or a ton. In this light, advantage conferred by differences in standards of living were negligible since capital, no matter the currency, did not carry the same value (symbolic or concrete) in Dawson City. Gold and money could not, therefore confer wealth or prestige to men in the Klondike in the same ways that it could back 'home'. Rather, its real measure resided in its value on the 'outside', where it could be melted down into coin and used to secure a desired lifestyle upon departure from the Klondike. This is exemplified in the experience of F. E. Leonard who related his story to a local

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<sup>104</sup> Account of returned Klondiker, Robert Hughes printed in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 97, January 5, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

reporter when he was interviewed at San Francisco smelting works while overseeing “a little clean-up intended him to keep him through the winter at his home”. Mr. Leonard had decided to abandon his Klondike diggings and return home with “some of the yellow stuff” that he had managed to dig out of the creek bed since although the nuggets could afford him many of the comforts that he desired in the south, he had been unable to replace his depleted outfit in Dawson, explaining that “[j]ust before I left Dawson City...I tried to buy canned goods of any kind for any price. I could not get them. The stores are practically closed, and nothing but small quantities can be bought”.<sup>105</sup>

#### The Klondike: A World on Its Head

While most men arguably set off on North American gold rush stampedes seeking a “shortcut to middle-class manliness”, what often awaited them in the diggings was instead “a bewildering array of humanity that confounded whatever sense of a natural order of things” that they had previously held (Johnson 2000b: 135). This was as true in the case of the Klondike, as it had been in the Californian gold rush that preceded it. Not only was social class irrelevant in remote Dawson City, but men’s encounters in the goldfields would have challenged the fundamental beliefs that were ultimately responsible for bringing them to the Klondike in the first place. Once the grand stampede to Dawson City had been accomplished for example, the smaller but no less formidable task of rushing to stake a claim on the surrounding creeks remained.

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<sup>105</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 82, Number 102, September 10, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

A. W. Hall reminisced of this experience following the strike at Dominion Creek:

sixty miles of the territory was staked in a day's time. Horses were run to death, and people who participated in the rush were bed-fast for days from sheer exhaustion. And with all this only one in seven got a claim, many of which are utterly worthless.<sup>106</sup>

It would have come as a tremendous disappointment, for example, when the majority of Klondikers finally reached their destination only to discover that all of the productive claims “within forty miles of Dawson” City had already been staked,<sup>107</sup> or as in the case of tenderfoot stampeders, to find themselves hastily “pushed to one side by the more vigorous miners”.<sup>108</sup> In contrast to the assumption that hard work was its own path to prosperity, the Klondike was revealed as a realm wherein dumb luck prevailed when it came to staking a productive claim and blind chance triumphed in actually hitting the pay-streak. In truth, these qualities featured just as, if not more importantly, than did the character of individual men engaged in such work. Despite what they knew about diligence in the workplace as a means to get ahead in the industrializing world, the stampeders thus soon faced the harsh reality that their unremitting labor and dogged perseverance was no guarantee for success in the Klondike.

Gold rush boomtowns have thus been historically construed as “a place where a man might ‘make himself’, but where he also might lose himself”

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<sup>106</sup> Letter written by A. W. Hall to the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 319, August 15, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>107</sup> Letter of W. R. Beardslee printed in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 306, August 2, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>108</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 85, Number 42, January 11, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

(Johnson 2000b: 320-322). In a time and place where identification with the middle-class to which men aspired was stripped away, where hard work carried no certainty of success, where 'society' was irrational, and where men found themselves beyond the reach and gaze of the respectable women to whom they were obliged to mind themselves back home, many Klondike men may have felt that the separation from their prior lives in this liminal state therefore afforded them the opportunity to act with impunity. In the face of glaring oppositions between expectation and experience, men were suddenly rid of the need to maintain an outward appearance of self-control during time spent in the boomtown community. While Victorian etiquette required men to restrain and constrain their ungentlemanly proclivities, the Klondike on the other hand, offered a reprieve for uninhibited expression and experience free from the repercussions that such behavior would otherwise normally entail. In this way, the Klondike, as a liminal place occupied by individuals undergoing a shared episode of liminality, permitted divergences from socially prescribed behavioral norms. When framed in this way, it is possible to understand the counter-intuitive actions of men who sought middle-class association yet nevertheless plunged themselves into the moral imperilment of gold rush boomtown life (Johnson 2000b: 158). The activities that characterized men's class-endangerment saw otherwise respectable gentlemen engaging in a variety of objectionable behaviors (drinking, gambling and openly cavorting with disreputable women for example), all of which were typically seen only among those classes decidedly beneath that of an emerging middle-class determination

of respectability (Roberts 2000: 117). In the context of the Klondike boomtown, however, such conduct could nevertheless be framed as permissible, at least until such time as these men emerged from this limbo-like state. This model therefore, additionally offers an explanation for how such behavior could subsequently be overlooked when they emerged from their adventure and were welcomed into middle or upper class society, so long as such behavior remained confined to the spectacle that was the last great gold rush.

### The End of Liminality

During aggregation—the final phase of a rite of passage—an individual is returned to normative society and they take up the place afforded them by their newly acquired reciprocal rights and obligations (Turner 1994: 4). Upon assuming these new roles, one is again expected to behave in accordance with prevailing social attitudes and expectations associated with individuals of their newly attained status (Turner 1994: 4). The final stage in their adventuring required Klondikers to move beyond this liminal realm of the gold fields and to rejoin society in one of two ways: either the Klondiker could return to the place of their origin, or they could choose to remain in the Yukon Territory, emerging into a new social category as a ‘sourdough’.

‘Sourdoughs’ took their name from the rustic type of bread that the Klondikers baked for themselves (see figure 4.7), and was an affectionate term of recognition afforded to those seasoned northerners who had demonstrated

**Figure 4.7:** Men Baking Sourdough Bread in the Klondike circa 1898



Source: Library and Archives of Canada/PA16141.

their merit by having successfully weathered an entire year in the Klondike.<sup>109</sup> In offering a framework for understanding Alaskan residents' exalted self conceptualization of themselves relative to the rest of the American population, Cuba offers a means for appreciating the special significance of sourdough status among the Klondikers:

Although many can lay claim to being [Klondikers], few can call themselves [sourdoughs]. By simple virtue of having moved to [the goldfields long-term], residents of the [gold rush community] can point to a characteristic that few share (1987: 58).

The sourdoughs of the Klondike were widely respected for their knowledge, experience and perseverance in the face of formidable adversity. Professor Charles Daggett who had been among the earliest throng of Klondike stampedeers spoke of "hundreds of men who a few months [prior] left for the gold fields in the best of spirits and health and with well-filled pocketbooks...[who were slowly] returning, heartsick and discouraged, 'dead broke' and without a cent in the world".<sup>110</sup> In spite of numerous men who found the Klondike to be too daunting, the sourdoughs had successfully demonstrated their competence and contribution to the Klondike community and their continued presence was taken as a measure of the value of their character. Much like the experience of being a Klondiker in general, who a man was before he became a sourdough mattered very little in Dawson City. The prestige otherwise afforded by the title of doctor, lawyer, or banker, for example, carried little

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<sup>109</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 29.

<sup>110</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, Volume 94, Number 59, October 19, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

weight when such men were just as likely to be among those who turned tail and rushed to flee the gold fields with as much haste as they had initially taken to reach the Klondike. In earning the respect of his fellows by demonstrating his merit and attaining the title of sourdough, a man might in fact garner far more support from fellow community members than an unknown cheechako who could very easily have been his social superior in another time and place. This aspect of social organization in the Yukon has been captured in words of Robert Service, in his aptly titled poem *The Law of Yukon*:

This is the law of the Yukon, that only the  
Strong shall thrive;  
That surely the Weak shall perish, and only the  
Fit survive.  
Dissolute, damned and despairful, crippled and  
Palsied and slain,  
This is the Will of the Yukon, - Lo! How she  
makes it plain!<sup>111</sup>

In a community such as the Klondike, recognition as a sourdough indeed carried far more influence than any previous social standing or professional title that a man may have possessed prior to joining the stampede. This influence was evident when a man required the support of his peers in social situations, in soliciting partners for mining or business ventures, or even when he made a routine trip for groceries or supplies since store credit was discriminately extended to clientele deemed to be worthy of such favor. An example of this is evident in the example of the sale of provisions by Dawson City suppliers, who

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<sup>111</sup> Robert Service (1907). *Songs of A Sourdough*. Toronto: Ryerson, page 18.

in times of shortage in the early years of the rush, often refused to sell stock to those that they did not know or who they considered to be community 'outsiders'.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, returning cheechako Klondikers often resented the fact that while the price for staple foodstuffs soared in Dawson City, local suppliers continued to sell their "stock to old residences at cost".<sup>113</sup> Men who had recently arrived in the Klondike, and who were without established social ties to others in the vicinity, therefore faced the very real threat of starvation as a direct consequence of their cheechako status if their outfit supplies ran short.

It is in this context, therefore, that the difference between cheechako and sourdough was probably the most important social distinction drawn among the Klondikers themselves. In this way, the Klondike offered men the opportunity to achieve a respected standing in the community based solely upon demonstration of their merit. This stood in opposition to the opportunities generally available to men within wider North American society at this time, wherein a man was ascribed a status by virtue of his birth according to his father's occupation (although some degree of class mobility was certainly possible later on in life). Although the Klondike failed to provide most men with the economic capital necessary to catapult their social standing back home, it nevertheless offered an alternative path to attaining a higher social stratum within the gold rush community based upon the valuation of a man's social capital. That is, if they were successful in their quest, men could return home to enjoy a social status cemented in Klondike gold, or by choosing to remain in the Yukon Territory,

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<sup>112</sup> *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 26, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>113</sup> Report of a returned Klondiker printed in the *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 41, July 11, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

men could achieve a respected standing in the boomtown community by proving their worth and earning recognition as a 'sourdough'.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### GOLD DIGGING: FEMININE CAPITAL AND WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE KLONDIKE COMMUNITY

Despite persistent misconceptions stemming from the Klondike Myth, there were indeed a large number of women present in the Klondike at the time of the gold rush. While still substantially outnumbered by men, the 1901 Canada Census tallied 1253 females present within Dawson City limits.<sup>114</sup> Of those females for whom an age was recorded (n=1241), 1051 were fifteen years of age or older, accounting for 16.9% of the total adult population (n= 6194), or a ratio of roughly one adult female for every five adult men present in the boomtown. This sex distribution is in line with that observed for the contemporary gold mining community located at Rossland, British Columbia circa 1901, wherein men were likewise found to have outnumbered women at a ratio of five-to-one (Mouat 1995: 116). While certainly constituting an unbalanced sex ratio, the excess of males in the Klondike nevertheless approaches a balance between the sexes much more closely than that which has been observed among earlier North American gold rushes. Hurtado (1999) for example, noted a ratio of more than twelve men for every woman during the heyday of the Californian gold rush approximately fifty years prior. Thus it is clear that the Klondike women broke from the example of their predecessors in earlier North American gold rushes wherein women had “ambled” behind the throng of male stampeders (Hurtado 1999: 4). Given the more balanced gender ratio of Dawson City, it seems that women were in nearly as great a hurry to reach

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<sup>114</sup> 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

the Klondike as were their male counterparts. This finding in turn presents a picture quite different from the exclusively male realm propagated by earlier accounts of life during the 'last great gold rush'. It also highlights the necessity of giving separate consideration to the roles and experiences of women present in the community alongside the male stamperders, particularly in light of the fact that to fail to do so would ignore the importance of gender and its influence in regard to the social construction of this boomtown community.

In this regard, it is essential to keep in mind that as much as the gold rush was about economic incentive and personal desire, it was also concerned with liberties permitted as a consequence of the rapid social and economic transformation that was occurring in North America at the dawn of the twentieth century. In the context of a boomtown, men's and women's status relative to one another (as well as their respective places within the new social order) had to be renegotiated drawing upon familiar rules and expectations, but also importantly, by adapting these ideals to fit within the unique local situations and circumstances.

In recent years, a handful of scholars have addressed the topic of women's contributions to Klondike society (see for example, Backhouse 1995, Duncan 2004, Morgan 1999, Porsild 1998, and Ryley 1997), yet attention has tended to focus upon recounting tales of a small number of extraordinary women made famous by their notorious behavior as opposed to the less flamboyant lives of ordinary Klondike women. Evidence of the lived experiences and contributions to the construction community in the Klondike boomtown through the actions of less boisterous women has received relatively little attention to date.

### Status Seeking in the Klondike

Gold rushes have historically drawn a diverse complement of stampeders and therefore served as a sort of meeting place for people with a wide range of previous experiences and expectations. At a basic level, the motives driving women to join in the Klondike stampede appear to have been strikingly similar to those of the male gold rushers. This is evident in the case of Miss Lessarge, who at the age of nineteen set off alone to the Klondike in hopes of finding if not great fortune, then at least enough gold to prevent her single mother from losing their modest cottage to bank foreclosure.<sup>115</sup> It was not just desperation that drove women to the Klondike though, as many more were lured by the promise of brighter futures secured through their own industriousness. This is exemplified in the experience of a widow who set off for the Klondike with plans of establishing her own dressmaking business in Dawson City. Once in the north though, she soon realized that her keen mind for business qualified her for far more profitable ventures and she was soon hired to manage the books of a wealthy miner by the name of Joseph Beck before shortly thereafter formally partnering with him and eventually becoming his wife.<sup>116</sup>

While men fifteen years of age and older in Dawson City overwhelmingly reported themselves as 'single' to census enumerators at the time of the 1901 Canada census (n=3452), women, on the other hand, were much more likely to have identified themselves as being married (n=683). Of these married women, twenty percent (n=137) also stated that they had resided in the Yukon Territory for

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<sup>115</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, September 5, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>116</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 87, Number 86, February 24, 1901, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

less than a year at the time that the census was taken, while an additional twenty-seven percent (n=186) had resided there for less than two years.<sup>117</sup> It can thus be inferred that many of these married women such as Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Patchell represented recent arrivals to the region that had come to join their stamperder husbands once the raucous boomtown had begun to settle down,<sup>118</sup> although such was not always the case.

Newlyweds, Ethel and Clarence Berry for example, made the Klondike their honeymoon—a fortuitous decision as it turned out as the Berrys went from scraping by on modest means to amassing a small fortune over the course of their sixteen-month sojourn in the goldfields.<sup>119</sup> Many contemporary commentators indeed advised men that they would do well to follow suit of the Berry's and bring a wife along to attend to the husband's domestic needs. Along these lines, an authoritative guide to the Klondike Gold Fields, for example, advised stampeders to allow their female counterparts to join them in the stampede since “[a]fter a man has worked hard all day in the diggings he doesn't much feel like cooking a nice meal when he goes to his cabin, cold, tired and hungry”.<sup>120</sup> Yet despite this prudent advice, the presence of wives did little at the end of the day to ensure the ultimate success of couples in the diggings. The example of Sol and Rebecca Schuldenfrie is illustrative of this harsh reality as a mere two years after they sold their established family business and invested their life savings in a variety of ultimately failed

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<sup>117</sup> 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>118</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell.

<sup>119</sup> Recollection of Ethel Berry in her self-authored article “How I Mined for Gold on the Klondyke” published in the San Francisco *Examiner Sunday Magazine*, August 1, 1897.

<sup>120</sup> Leonard, John William (1897). *The Gold Fields of the Klondike: Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon region of Alaska and British Columbia*. Chicago: A.N. Marquis and Co. (p. 154).

enterprises in the Klondike, the pair were forced to abandon their dream of fortune and returned home empty-handed and heavily in debt.<sup>121</sup>

Despite these and a handful more documented examples of brides accompanying their husbands on their quest for Klondike gold, these partnerships nevertheless represent the exception rather than the rule. Extrapolating from the time that they reported having spent in the Yukon at the time of the 1901 Canada census, it was evidentially a far more common occurrence for wives to join their husbands a number of years after the men had established themselves in the Klondike than to have joined them in their initial trek to the gold fields.

To understand why this was the case, it must be considered that if it raised eyebrows for men to shirk their responsibilities back home in order to join in the gold rush, it was nothing less than scandalous for a woman to break from convention, announce herself a stamper, and set off from the Klondike in the late Victorian era. This was particularly true if she intended to make the journey on her own accord. Despite the disapproval of family, friends, and society in general, the prize that female Klondikers set their eyes upon nevertheless proved a tempting target, as riches came in a variety of forms for Klondike women. Thus, while women like Lillian Oliver saw the Klondike as an opportunity to seek financial security in order to provide for her chronically ill husband whom she left at home,<sup>122</sup> other women envisioned a different kind of opportunity for themselves as the Klondike presented an alluring path for social advancement for women as well

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<sup>121</sup> Rebecca and Solomon Schuldenfrei. Correspondence 1897-98, 84/87, MSS 166, Yukon Archives.

<sup>122</sup> Lillian Oliver's memoirs were published in the World Wide Magazine in 1899 under the title "My Klondike Mission".

as for men. As opposed to men who viewed the Klondike as a means to elevate their status back home, many women conversely found that many doors that had been closed to them back home were thrown wide open in the boomtown setting. In this regard, women to whom the prospect of class jumping appealed soon discovered that opportunity awaited them in remote Dawson City. Thus, many women who could not have qualified for membership in the upper strata of society back home, were met with a welcoming arms by the respectable ladies of the gold rush community. The opportunity to climb the social ladder in Dawson City was possible given the extenuating circumstances wherein there “were [very] few respectable women...but a larger number of not so respectable women” for the local elite to pick and choose among in order to fill their ranks in the rustic boomtown community.<sup>123</sup> It was in this way then, that school teacher Laura Thompson not only found that she could command a significantly higher salary in the Klondike (where her skillset was in high demand), but given the paucity of women qualified to fill the ranks of genteel society, that she was also guaranteed an invitation to the elite social circle of Dawson City’s ladies. This is echoed in the diary of Mrs. Patchell whose entries recollect countless luncheons, dinners, and social gatherings to which she was invited as a reputable woman recently arrived in Dawson City.<sup>124</sup> This proved opportune for socially ambitious women who were thus able to gain entrance to a coveted social station that in most other contexts, remained the privileged realm of the wives of lawyers, bankers, civil servants and

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<sup>123</sup> Account of returned Klondiker, Robert Hughes printed in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 25, Number 97, January 5, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>124</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell

their like.

Thus, in more ways than one and by way of perhaps even more avenues than were available to the men of the stampede, women's prospects in the Klondike offered a wide variety of opportunities to elevate one's standing both economically and socially. The golden opportunities promised by the Klondike therefore appealed to more liberal-minded women who envisioned a life for themselves beyond the confines of four walls, a corset and the scrutinizing gaze of middle-class society. Once in the north, however, the majority of women would soon realize (much like their male counterparts) that the reality of life as a stamper did not always align with that which they had envisioned for themselves. Indeed, not all was glitter and gold in the Klondike.

#### Women at Home in the Klondike

In much the same way that many men found their professions less than satisfying around the time that gold was discovered in the Klondike, the majority of North American women were likewise faced with unappealing prospects for gainful employment. Women's work outside of the home was typically characterized by marginal pay, long hours at either menial or grueling labor, substandard working conditions, and bleak prospects for promotion or career advancement (Butler 1987, Laite 2009). Given these circumstances, the notion of a woman feely choosing to work outside of the home for any reason other than necessity posed an affront to middle-class sensibilities at the dawn of the twentieth century (Backhouse 1995: 139). This sentiment was indeed pervasive in North American society at the time of

the gold rush, as it was even propagated by women such as Ethel Berry who had returned from a successful prospecting trip to in the Klondike. Berry went so far as to advise other women to “stay away...[claiming the Klondike was really] no place for a woman”.<sup>125</sup> The thought of a respectable lady shirking her responsibilities to her family, home life, and modest moral virtue in order that she might pursue masculine vices of adventurism and economic profiteering in the Klondike was truly not considered behavior befitting a respectable lady at this time.

Yet, the valuation of women’s skills that were typically taken for granted and unpaid back home, commanded a premium in the Klondike as women capitalized upon both the scarcity of women and their talents in the north by way of men who had habitually depended upon women to attend to their domestic needs and suddenly found themselves without such comforts.

While some women (such as Mrs. Berry who claimed to have “scratched \$10,000 out of the earth with a little stick”),<sup>126</sup> actually directly engaged in mining ventures in the Klondike, the majority did not, as is evidenced by the exceedingly rare documentation of women engaging in mining preserved in photographs or other archival documents dating to the gold rush era. The 1901 Canada census reported that in Dawson City, only 120 adult women (11.4% of all women over the age of 15) held mining properties, although anyone over the age of majority was entitled to apply for a mining license. Further, the majority of these women likely

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<sup>125</sup> This was the personal advice given in an interview by Mrs. Berry that was subsequently published in a very popular travel guide. John William Leonard (1897). *The Gold Fields of the Klondike: Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon region of Alaska and British Columbia*. Chicago: A.N. Marquis and Co., page 154.

<sup>126</sup> Letter written by Mrs. Clarence Berry published in the *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

represented wives such as Mrs. Berry, who registered a claim under her own name thereby entitling a husband to legally operate multiple claims. Rather, it seems that the majority of women soon realized that the rigors of mining were far more demanding than was necessary for them to endure in order to amass a pile of Klondike gold. That is, instead of shoveling pay dirt, women could instead offer their domestic skills to the men in the diggings who were all too willing to pay women to cook, clean, wash and mend laundry since, as one contemporary commentator observed:

Men, compelled to do their own cooking, [were] longing for the refinements of home life and something good to eat...[p]lain cooking is all that is expected on the Klondike, so a woman doesn't [even] have to be very expert to please first-rate...bacon, canned meats, beans...[a]lmost any woman can cook these things well, and a girl that can't cook them well can at least do better than a man.<sup>127</sup>

Evidence of the profitability of domestic roles assumed by women in the Klondike can be found in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, which reveals that of all women over the age of fifteen who reported an occupation (n=487), 60.37% (n=294) were engaged in domestic work such as: laundering, sewing, cooking and food service, housekeeping or keeping a lodging house (this category falls under the classification of 'unskilled labour in the aggregate data). In the Klondike, women could earn between one hundred and two hundred and fifty dollars per month working as housekeepers, laundresses, cooks or seamstresses,<sup>128</sup> whereas a

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<sup>127</sup> San Francisco *Examiner* article on the Klondike published on February 7, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>128</sup> Based on salaries reported by women over the age of fifteen in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

woman might earn four dollars per week as a housekeeper back home.<sup>129</sup> An additional 18.28% (n=89) of women reported themselves simply as ‘wives’ or ‘housewives’, implying that their productive activities were likewise centered upon the domestic unit, although unpaid. A final 11.91% (n=58) of this cohort of women was employed as dance hall girls, performers, and actresses within the entertainment/hospitality industry. Women in historic boomtowns such as the Dawson City were, therefore, able to capitalize upon the paucity of females in the community and thereby dramatically elevate their economic earning potential by profiting upon their femininity in a manner and to an extent that likely would not have been possible in any other context at that time.

Freewheeling or not, life in the Klondike reflected many of the realities of wider society inasmuch as many of the traditionally male-dominated paid positions remained closed off to women in the Klondike. Aside from sexual commerce, the bulk of work available to women in Dawson City and the surrounding creek settlements, although lucrative, nevertheless centered upon the domestic realm. Respectable women’s lives in the gold rush community differed little then (except perhaps in regard to the scenery and their pay), as their labor in the north fit within traditional frameworks of ‘women’s work’ that most had likely engaged in prior to joining in the Klondike.

Although women could command higher salaries in the Klondike, the work that was available to them was nevertheless also often temporary and irregular. Compounding the problem of an unreliable source of income in the Klondike was

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<sup>129</sup> McDonald, Alice. (1984). As Well As Any Man: A Swedish Immigrant in Alaska. *The Alaska Journal* 14(3): 38-45.

the exorbitant cost of living in Dawson City. This fact of life saw many of the financial incentives for women to relocate to the remote community evaporate once the cost of subsistence was factored in. Along these lines, a newspaper correspondent in the Klondike observed that just for the necessities of life “it is not easy to get along [in Dawson City] on less than £10 a day, and many of the men spen[t] ten times that much”.<sup>130</sup> To make ends meet some women opted to take in lodgers while others supplemented their main source of income by taking in laundry, mending clothes, or by selling excess baked goods to neighbors.<sup>131</sup> At a rate of five dollars for crafting a plain ‘Mother Hubbard’ style dress,<sup>132</sup> such piece-meal work could prove extremely lucrative for industrious women. However, as in the case of Mrs. John Home who proudly bragged of doing laundry in order to earn enough money to support her husband’s prospecting endeavors,<sup>133</sup> it was always taken on in addition to and not as an alternative to women’s other work and responsibilities.

Although women were not the only ones to capitalize upon male Klondikers’ desire for domestic comforts since some men also worked as cooks, women were nevertheless at a distinct advantage in offering cooking and cleaning services. Along these lines, the feminine touch was often praised for elevating the

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<sup>130</sup> Special correspondent of *The Financial News* commenting upon observations garnered during time spent in Dawson City in the summer of 1897. Quoted in: Williams, Ernest E. (1899). *Klondike: A Study in Booms*. Volume 16467 CIHM Microfiche Series, University of Alberta Libraries.

<sup>131</sup> Letter written by Mrs. Clarence Berry printed in the *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>132</sup> Report of Mrs. Chester C. Adams based on her experience as the first dressmaker present in the Klondike, published in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 26, Number 232, August 19, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>133</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 86, Number 61, July 31, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

passable domestic skills of men who longed for the comforts of home, to one a level of relative refinery in the remote gold fields. Along these lines, the Territorial Health Office for Dawson City even went so far as to suggest that if more women went north, it might just be possible to eradicate scurvy among the miners strictly on the basis of the prowess of women in Klondike kitchens.<sup>134</sup>

### Fortune Went Hand-in-Hand With Disenchantment

Whether she sought financial independence from a man, freedom from Victorian era regulation of her femininity, or the promise of adventure in the Klondike, the reality of life in the gold fields was evidentially a disappointment to many women. The rustic lifestyle left much to be desired, especially in light of the popular but ill-informed promise of easy pickings to be had in the north. In this regard, Butler (1987) has noted that life for women in isolated, historic boomtown communities has frequently proven particularly “demanding, boring and brutal” for even the heartiest women in short order (46). This was certainly in line with the experience of Mrs. Sarah Elizabeth Patchell, who wrote of her initial impressions in her Klondike diary:

...when I arrived in Dawson...I saw [our] little cabin and its contents, I was disappointed, as all my dreams seemed to have crashed. I felt almost heartbroken as my despairing eyes glanced restlessly around; a sense of desolation and despair came over me as I realized my disappointment...<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Sessional Papers of the Dominion of Canada, 1900, #15, report of Dr. J.W. Good, Health Officer, Dawson City, University of Alberta Libraries.

<sup>135</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 65.

Food preparation, for example, was often a daunting and thankless task in the Klondike. Women unaccustomed to cooking under rustic conditions were nevertheless expected to produce varied and appetizing meals using few ingredients that were perpetually frozen into a solid mass in caches stored outdoors. Such was indeed the experience of one woman who accompanied a party consisting of herself, her husband and several other men to the Klondike, each of whom reportedly threw dishes while simultaneously hurling insults in her direction in complaint of her competency (or lack thereof) in the kitchen.<sup>136</sup> In addition to food preparation, women were also responsible for keeping as tidy a home as possible under the make-shift circumstances, attending to laundry and mending, caring for the sick and injured, as well as raising any children that were brought along or born in the north. In the evenings when men sought relaxation after a long day of hard labor, the tents and cabins that women tended to became centers for social gathering that offered an intimate alternative to the bar rooms and saloons where men otherwise met to socialize. While these visits offered enjoyable reprieves from solitary domestic workdays of Klondike women, the expectations levied upon them as hostesses were considerable. These gatherings often entailed cooking meals for up to “a dozen hungry miners”, while guests often visited late into the night and “it was not an uncommon occurrence for the guests for supper to stay all night and have breakfast the next morning” as well, resulting in a significant increase in expectations placed upon women and their domestic labor as they attended to the

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<sup>136</sup> Lasher, Carl. (2004). *Enterprise North – Backdoor to the Yukon: Annotated Diary of Otto Lasher*. Bloomington: Author House.

needs of each of their guests.<sup>137</sup> Thus, it is clear to see why it was widely believed to be “much better for a man...if he ha[d] a wife along” with him in the Klondike,<sup>138</sup> considering the premium commanded by feminine skillsets relative to a husband’s ‘free’ access to such services if he had had the foresight to secure a wife along with the rest of his gold rush outfit.

While the deficiency of opportunities for men to socialize outside of saloons and dance halls was lamented by the men of the Klondike (who often faced long, dark nights of solitude in their tents and cabins during the winter months), the situation could only have been worse for those women present in the community who had still fewer outlets for companionship available to them if they were at all concerned with preserving a respectable reputation. As the self-proclaimed first woman (in addition to another lady in her party) to set foot in Dawson City, Mrs. Berry wrote of feeling like “the most isolated and lonesome woman in this world...[with n]ot a thing to do, nor a thing to see except snow, ice and wilderness” to occupy her time over the “five long, draggy, dreary weeks” that her husband was gone prospecting for a claim while she stayed behind in the couple’s cabin.<sup>139</sup> Isolated, and perhaps the only reputable lady around for miles if she were residing in the creeks, women faced uninterrupted days of isolation while the men worked in the diggings, enduring weeks, or perhaps even months on end without the comfort of any female company or camaraderie to break the monotony (figure 5.1). In this

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<sup>137</sup> Letter written by Mrs. Clarence Berry, printed in the *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>138</sup> Leonard, John William (1897). *The Gold Fields of the Klondike: Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon region of Alaska and British Columbia*. Chicago: A.N. Marquis and Co. (p. 154).

<sup>139</sup> Letter written by Mrs. Clarence Berry printed in the *San Francisco Call*, January 23, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

**Figure 5.1:** Respectable Women Led Isolated Lives in the Klondike



Source: Yukon Archives/Provincial Archives of New Brunswick Collection

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vein, Mrs. Patchell recalled being privately devastated by the reality that awaited her when her husband, in his vain search for gold, left her alone in Dawson City while he traveled the creeks on year-long prospecting trips in search of the strike that continually eluded him.

As I bade him farewell, I tried to be brave as I told him I would be all right here and I will be watching and anxiously awaiting his return. Although at that moment my heart was almost broke with grief as I thought of the lonely life that lay before me...Days passed by and I was very cold and uncomfortable in the little cabin...Words can never describe how I suffered from the cold and the loneliness during those dull, dreary days...<sup>140</sup>

Given the conditions under which a Klondike wife could expect to live in the gold fields, it was perhaps a better to be a single woman in the Klondike, despite the financial hardships that such a disposition could potentially carry.

### Women, But Not Ladies

There were a number of respectable ladies who ventured to the Klondike on their own ambition who did indeed earn considerable amounts of their own gold. Among these ladies was Mrs. Chester C. Adams who was hailed as “the first woman who [could] cut and fit a dress”, which skill set earned her the impressive amount of ninety dollars for a mere thirty days work in Dawson City.<sup>141</sup> Despite such legitimate opportunities for upstanding women to profit from a determined work

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<sup>140</sup> Diary of a female Klondiker later published along with her retrospective recollections. Patchell, Sarah Elizabeth (n.d.). *My Extraordinary Years of Adventure and Romance in Klondike and Alaska*. London: A.H. Stockwell., page 53-88.

<sup>141</sup> Account of Mrs. Chester C. Adams, and early woman present in the Klondike, printed in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 26, Number 323, August 19, 1897, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

ethic, there were many other women who saw an easy opportunity to line their pockets with Klondike gold by capitalizing upon men's limited access to women in the boomtown. Along these lines, the first white woman formally credited with scaling the Chilkoot Pass to reach Dawson was Emilie Tremblay, who accompanied her new husband into the Yukon Territory two years prior to the Klondike strike. Yet, credit for this title is in fact rightly due to 'Dutch Kate', a prostitute whom made the climb a full decade earlier (Duncan 2004: 45). The fact that a prostitute was the first white woman to make this trek, while history instead bestows this honor upon a 'respectable' married lady who followed in the former's footsteps is telling. This reattribution implies something significant not only in regard to the relative status of women in the Klondike, but also of the relationships between 'respectable' women and 'that other class of women' who catered to the fancies of the miners. Thus, all the while that the men's eyes were fixed squarely upon the pay dirt, a good many women set their sights on much easier diggings; offering their companionship to men who were only too happy to pay handsomely for a woman's undivided attention. Located squarely in the public realm, these early entrepreneurial women of the Klondike capitalized upon the shortage of 'proper ladies' in the vicinity, which made possible the total commercialization of leisure in the gold rush boomtown whereby "men purchased proximity to women" in the as entertainment (Johnson 2000b: 298). This feminized marketplace offered Klondike men a variety of entertainments ranging from companionship over a few drinks in a local saloon, to dancing and innocent flirtations in the dancehalls, to intimate liaisons carried out behind closed doors.

As was the case with every other commodity in the Klondike, the scarcity of women drove prices up to unprecedented levels. Combined with the enthusiasm with which the majority of men appear to have been willing to give themselves over to the thrill of “the moral peril of [historic] Gold Rush[es]” (Johnson 1994: 15), it is hardly surprising that many women were equally willing to seize upon this opportunity in order to gain relatively easy access to the gold that readily flowed from men’s pockets into the hands of women in Dawson City, proving that there was indeed more than one way to mine gold in the Klondike.

### A New Class of Women

In the overwhelmingly male realm of a gold rush boomtown, the consequence of there being few ‘respectable’ women present had a dramatic impact upon women’s place in Klondike society. During the early years of the gold rush, women who would have been measured as ‘unladylike’ in other settlements enjoyed a relatively high status at the heart of the Klondike community—one that they could never have achieved where ‘respectable’ middle-class ladies were present in sufficient numbers to contest any incursions into their carefully guarded social realm (see figure 5.2). Whether they dealt cards, draped themselves over men in the saloons, peddled drinks and dances in the dance halls, performed on Dawson’s stages, or entertained men privately, a commonality among such women was that they capitalized upon catering to the varied desires of the male gold rushers. As daughters of the Victorian era, their actions in this regard stood as an affront to middle-class ideals of ‘womanliness’—living as they were in the boomtown community “without true

**Figure 5.2:** Klondike Prostitutes Occupied the Centre of Social Life



Source: Macbride Museum of Yukon History Collection/1898-2-110.

homes or families” and behaving in a manner that actively demonstrated reproach for modesty (Murphy 1984: 30). But in the context of gold rush boomtowns it was not just sex that was for sale. Indeed, “men would lay down gold dust for far less” (Johnson 1994: 20). This is because regardless of whatever else they may have purveyed, the primary commodity that women bartered in the Klondike was proximity to themselves.

The image of availability cultivated by women engaged in the sexual marketplace (see figure 5.3), shifted sexuality from a private, unspoken aspect of middle-class life to a very public spectacle in the boomtown society (Murphy 1984). In doing so, these women actively ventured outside of the home in order to engage in profiteering by flaunting their feminine charms as opposed to presenting a guarded, passionless presence. Making themselves available to the men of the Klondike in this manner, such women became ‘public women’. According to Murphy (1984), rather than identifying herself with a husband or family in the role of wife and mother, ‘public women’ instead belonged simultaneously to everyone and to no one in particular. Given the social ideology of the Victoria era that bound women’s social and economic identities to men by means of their relationships through kinship and marriage ties, the majority of the women in the Klondike therefore occupied a precarious position. Although they met the necessary criteria of being adult and female, they were nevertheless not sufficiently womanly, and thus such ‘public women’ were “not quite women at all” (Murphy 1984: 30).

**Figure 5.3:** Klondike Prostitutes Were Highly Visible in Dawson City



Source: MacBride Museum of Yukon History Collection/1989-2-108

## Prostitutes and Their Place in Klondike Society

At its base, the Klondike gold rush was fundamentally about masculine desire, as it was, after all, a shared lust for capital, adventure, and freedom that compelled the primarily male population of stampedeers north in the first place. Once they arrived in Dawson City, these men soon found themselves subject to a wide array of complementary temptations (Goldman 1981). The fact that these indulgences were simultaneously offered in venues catering to a variety of vices remains the primary reason that confusion persists when it comes to deciding which women of the Klondike should properly be labeled a 'prostitute'. The variety of liaisons offered by women in the Klondike in exchange for varying amounts of gold confounds a clear understanding of each woman's standing in the community as it complicates the determination of who should rightly be labeled a 'prostitute' considering the various meanings inherent in the word. For the sake of clarity, the definition offered by Flexner will be used here, which identifies a prostitute as someone

who habitually or intermittently has sexual relations more or less promiscuously for money or other monetary considerations... [a] woman may be a prostitute, even though not notorious, even though simultaneously otherwise employed in a paid occupation (quoted in Butler 1987: xvii).

Drawing this distinction among women residing in the Klondike at the time of the gold rush was problematic then and has only become more convoluted through the retrospective lens of the researcher. What is certain, however, is that although the Klondike was a great equalizer for men, this did not necessarily extend to the women of the gold rush. Rather, female Klondikers continued to be distinguished by rank, with an individual woman's standing being determined by her relative

position on a sliding scale of respectability. The criteria used to judge these women were, of course, firmly grounded in Victorian ideals about womanhood and the nature of legitimate male-female interactions in both public and private spheres of life. This is reflected in the writing of Martha Black as she reminisced about the time that she had spent in Dawson City: First, there were the

[m]embers of the oldest profession in the world, who ever follow armies and gold rushes; [then there were the] dance hall and variety girls, whose business was to entertain and be dancing partners...[and finally there were the] wives with unbound faith in and love for their mates or the odd [respectable] person like myself on a special mission.<sup>142</sup>

Within the demimonde, the scale continued to position women in a hierarchical order, in this case based primarily upon where they carried out their work. On the top rung of the ‘scarlet ladder’ were the high-end brothel workers and women who ran their own clandestine houses (or store-fronts) of prostitution. Beneath them were the tawdry residents of houses of ill-fame, who were in turn of higher status than the residents of Paradise Alley.<sup>143</sup>

Although saloon, dancehall, and theatre proprietors were quick to exploit the sexualized nature of the entertainment that they offered to their overwhelmingly male clientele, debauchery was never tolerated in Dawson City’s public establishments. When Freda Maloof danced the infamous hootchie-kootchie on the stage at the Novelty Theater, for example, it ended up costing the dance hall girl a stay in the jail of the North West Mounted Police on the charge of public indecency (Backhouse 1995: 93). Other dance hall starlets may have also tested the limits of

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<sup>142</sup> Black, Martha Louise (1980). *My Ninety Years*. Edmonds: Alaska Northwest Publishing: 47.

<sup>143</sup> Commentary of Klondike Kate Rockwell, *In Porsild* (1998): 113.

tolerance, however the stance of the community was firm when it came to where that line was to be drawn. Transgressions, such as the “depravity seldom heard of in the very lowest ranks of slum life” that occurred during a public performance at the notorious Bartlett House thus saw the two French women responsible for the display put on trial on the charge of “participating in exhibitions of a grossly indecent nature” and sentenced to two months of hard labor by the magistrate of the North West Mounted Police court.<sup>144</sup> Along these lines, M.H. Haynes of the North West Mounted Police noted that although the saloons may have gotten a bit raucous from time to time, “[he] never saw anything the least bit objectionable take place when [he] was on duty”.<sup>145</sup> Thus, despite Dawson City’s reputation as a wide-open center where sin and vice ran rampant, this gold rush community was in fact steadfast when it came to sexualized entertainment and permissible public conduct.

The distinction made between saloons, dance halls, and houses of prostitution in historic boomtowns can ultimately be reduced to the primary vice being offered within these establishments. In licensed barrooms, liquor was the principle commodity, the sale of which was facilitated by the suggestion of female sexual availability on the part of the women who worked within the premises. Liquor was also typically supplied within gold rush prostitutes’ rooms, yet it was never the main lure for customers in these settings (Spude 2005). While it would be naïve to suggest that prostitution never occurred in association with saloons and dance halls, it can be surmised that explicit sexual encounters were not advertised by these venues given that the proprietors would have risked their highly lucrative

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<sup>144</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, May 11, 1903, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

<sup>145</sup> Haynes, M. H. E. and H.W. Taylor. 1897. *The Pioneers of the Klondike*. London: Sampson, Low, Marston, page 89.

business license if they were found to have been accommodating women of ill fame within their establishments.

While there existed a physical division then between the spaces wherein men may and may not have expected to engage the services of a prostitute, the labeling of certain Klondike women as prostitutes remains problematic. This is because women interested in engaging in sexual commerce moved freely between each of these places, and in many cases likely engaged in prostitution while also drawing an income from other more legitimate occupations.

While it would be imprudent to classify all of Dawson City's female entertainers as prostitutes (although they all certainly occupied a realm squarely outside of respectability for women of the era), it would nevertheless likewise be hasty to surmise that none of these women ever engaged in prostitution to some extent or in varying degrees of frequency. Along these lines, Dawson City's saloons and dance halls could have served as a point of contact for men willing to pay for the luxury of proximity to women, including those women willing to sell themselves in varying degrees to male customers, as is indeed reflected in the reminiscences of a Klondiker who wrote:

After long sessions of hard work...even the rasping music of the dance hall sounds sweet...a touch of feminine life, even if not all the fastidious or strictly moral might desire, comes like a warm breath from the southern latitude over the frozen hills...Of course the miners have to pay well for it...<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Haskell, W. B. 1897. *Two Years in the Klondike and Yukon Gold Fields*. Hartford: Hartford, pages 163-164.

Under these circumstances, it is likely that even the most pious of women employed by these establishments would have been propositioned from time to time, presenting an opportunity for making after-hours arrangements with men who presented an attractive enough offer.

The 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City noted seventy-one women employed in a variety of occupations within Dawson's saloons and dance halls, accounting for 6.76% of the total local female population over the age of fifteen. This count however, undoubtedly represents only a fraction of the number of women employed within the entertainment industry during the height of the gold rush since only two legitimate drinking and dancing establishments remained in Dawson City by this time. Nevertheless, for a total population of just under seven thousand, these seventy-one women who made a living by explicitly catering to male entertainment is substantial and points to the continued importance of women outside of reputable occupations as central figures of the Klondike community. In fact, as a 'respectable' female Klondiker reminisced, the presence of prostitutes at the center of the Klondike community was impossible to overlook: the "scarlet women were the most notable accents of Dawson's sights and bright lights. A blind man could have sensed their presence".<sup>147</sup>

Earlier accounts of the Klondike are indeed rife with accounts of the presence of an abundance of prostitutes (see for example, Backhouse 1995, Berton 1958, Lux, 1989, Morgan 1999, Porsild 1997, 1995, and Ryley 1997). Rather, it is a

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<sup>147</sup> Davis, Mary Lee. (1933). *Sourdough Gold: The Log of a Yukon Adventure*. Boston: W.A. Wilde Company: 183.

wide-ranging misconception grown out of the ‘Klondike Myth’, however, that all women present in the Klondike were, to varying degrees, prostitutes.

Given the extremely high market value for women’s company and/or her domestic skills, combined with the physical and economic hardships that she endured in order to make her way to Dawson City, it seems unlikely that any woman would have undertaken the endeavor without a firm expectation of how she could potentially earn enough to justify the risk and social disapproval that such an enterprise would garner. Along these lines, Dawson City’s dance hall girls (see figure 5.4) were paid to entice men to purchase more alcohol than they would otherwise consume. After performing on stage, the variety girls were expected to join the regular percentage women on the floor to assist in canoodling the men into buying whirls around the dance floor followed by refreshments at the bar. To partake in this transaction, men purchased tokens from the cashier or bartender that could be exchanged for single dances with the ‘girls’, each of which lasted for no more than a minute or two. After dancing, men were expected to accompany their partner to the bar for a drink. The potential for profit was great since women earned twenty-five cents per dance, while they were expected to endure as many as one hundred and fifty whirls around the dance floor each evening. In this vein, some establishments, (such as the Orpheum) had their ‘girls’ under strict contract which forbade them from leaving the premises from the time that they arrived at 9 p.m. until business wrapped up at 5 a.m. the following morning.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Records of the Yukon Government, Territorial Court Records 1897-1950, YGR 1, Series 11, GOV 1431, file 7, Yukon Archives.

**Figure 5.4:** Klondike Kate Rockwell the Dancehall Queen of Dawson City



Source: University of Alaska Archives/UAF-1972-116-335

In addition to the dance tokens accumulated throughout the night, women also received a twenty-five percent commission on drink sales tallied under her tab.<sup>149</sup> With standard refreshments fetching between fifty-cents to a dollar, and champagne selling for forty dollars per quart,<sup>150</sup> women could quickly accumulate small fortunes in the Klondike without ever laying hands on a pick and shovel. Indeed, as one female Klondiker observed: “[t]he sums of money spent in these billiard saloons and dance halls was simply fabulous... fortunes change[d] hands every night”,<sup>151</sup> and one particularly popular dancehall girl was reputed to have earned seven-hundred and fifty dollars in commissions just in her first week of employment.<sup>152</sup>

While retrospective accounts unanimously paint Dawson City’s dancehalls in a rather unseemly light, as women who behaved lewdly and appeared scantily clad amongst a roomful of strange men, the reality was that the ‘girls’ that Klondike men twirled around the floor would have been nearly indistinguishable from any ‘respectable’ woman that they might have met in any other time or place (see figure 5.5). Thus, while stage performers certainly adorned themselves in costumes intended to titillate male audiences (see figure 5.6), these were theatrical garments worn only on stage and then changed out of before the actresses engaged in personal contact with the customers. Taking on this more modest image was desirable since rather than more provocative scenes it was the memory of women left behind that the Klondike men longed for in particular. It was thus in the

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<sup>149</sup> *Prices in the Klondike*, The New York Times, December 25, 1898.

<sup>150</sup> *Prices in the Klondike*, The New York Times, December 25, 1898.

<sup>151</sup> Account of life in the Klondike published in the *Sausalito News*, Volume 14, Number 26, July 30, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>152</sup> “*Prices in the Klondike*, The New York Times, December 25, 1898.

**Figure 5.5:** The Modest Dress of Dawson City's Dance Hall Girls



Source: Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto, J.B. Tyrrell papers.

**Figure 5.6:** The Daring Costumes of Klondike Stage Performers



Source: MacBride Museum of Yukon History Collection/1989-2-1-260

dancehall women's best interest to cultivate this image by cladding themselves in the familiar long sleeves, high collars and floor-length hems worn by women outside of the gold fields (see figure 5.5). Far from projecting the scene of depravity propagated in popular Klondike lore, this scene instead presents a scene in which it is decidedly more difficult to label a woman a prostitute strictly on the basis of her occupational title or the fact that she offered a minute of physical proximity to herself in exchange for a wooden token surrendered by a lonely and homesick miner.

Perhaps the most ambiguous activity of dance hall women contributing to the confusion over their prospective classification as prostitutes was the practice of headline performers entertaining men in private screened boxes following the show.<sup>153</sup> This more intimate setting offered men the undivided attention of one or more dance hall 'girls', whose job it was to entertain them privately in the rented enclave. Such special attention came at a premium however, and the only men who could typically afford to splurge in this manner were those who had something special to celebrate—striking pay dirt on the creeks or perhaps hitting it big at Dawson City's gambling tables. In this setting, men were expected to keep the liquor flowing in order to compensate the woman for monopolizing her time. Although the privacy of the boxes would have afforded ample opportunity to engage in illicit trysts, the women had much more to gain from unconsummated flirtations that allowed her to hold the attention of her customer(s) for as long as possible since she would earn a premium commission of between \$2.50 and \$4.00

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<sup>153</sup> Special Dispatch from the Klondike reprinted in the *San Francisco Call*, Number 88, August 27, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

per cork from each bottle of champagne that was delivered to her box (Backhouse 1995: 89). As long as men did not have all of their desires satisfied, they could continually be persuaded to order additional bottles of liquor, which, over the course of a night, could earn a woman far more in liquor sales than she could potentially make by offering up her one-time sexual services. This familiar scene that played out time and time again in the saloons of Dawson City was captured from the perspective of a miner in the lines written by Robert Service:

I've let you dip your fingers in my purse;  
I've crammed you at my table, and I've drowned you in my wine,  
And I've little left to give you but--my curse.  
I've failed supremely in my plans; it's rather late to whine;  
My poke is mighty weasened up and small.  
I thank you each for coming here; the happiness is mine--  
And now, you thieves and harlots, take it all."<sup>154</sup>

It was in fact in this manner that famed dance hall queen Gussie Lamore and her two sisters that joined her in the Klondike

commenced to coin money at a rate regarded as even too rapid for the rapid Klondike...[as] several unsophisticated miners...complained of having been too expeditiously separated from their dust while enjoying the society of the sisters in a theatrical winerom.<sup>155</sup>

Shortly after such complaints began to surface, Gussie and her sisters surreptitiously departed the Klondike with a combined fortune estimated at

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<sup>154</sup> Service, Robert. (1909). *The Man from Eldorado*. Ballads of a Cheechako. New York: Barse & Hopkins.

<sup>155</sup> Special Dispatch from the Klondike reprinted in the *San Francisco Call*, Number 88, August 27, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

“upward of \$100,000 in gold, diamonds and drafts” without so much as having to ever set foot in the creeks or hand to pickaxe and shovel.<sup>156</sup>

While the close contact between men and women in Dawson City’s entertainment venues certainly afforded women who were so inclined the opportunity to market themselves to prospective clients, such an arrangement could realistically have been undertaken by any woman in any setting thus such places were by no means contingent upon Dawson City’s drinking and dancing establishments. Much as the opportunity to engage in prostitution could present itself in any context, it could similarly be argued that by picking up the gold nuggets tossed at her feet during on-stage performances, or even agreeing to receive a percentage of drink sales or commission from tokens cashed in following a whirl around the dance floor with a paying customer that any such woman could be loosely construed as engaging in a form of sexual commerce that might approach a form of prostitution. Yet it remains that in the proper sense of the term, the majority of dance hall ‘girls’ likely never engaged in acts properly considered as prostituting themselves.

Outside of the saloons and dance halls the question of who is rightly labeled a prostitute remains no less complicated. As elsewhere, women in the Klondike often found ways to supplement their primary source of income, including sometimes sleeping with men (either regularly or occasionally) in exchange for money or gifts. Given the economic reality of life in the Klondike, it was frequently necessary for women to combine odd jobs and paid positions in order to earn

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<sup>156</sup> Special Dispatch from the Klondike reprinted in the *San Francisco Call*, Number 88, August 27, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

enough money to support themselves and this could easily have included combining occasional acts of prostitution and more reputable lines of work. In this regard, Sergeant McMillan of the North West Mounted Police reported entering seamstress' places of business in Dawson City and observing the women completing sewing work for their customers despite the fact that he also knew the women operating the establishment to be prostitutes.<sup>157</sup> That women may have been compelled to engage in whatever kind of work it took for them to make ends meet is further supported by the Gaol Register for Dawson City as distinctions were drawn within its pages between women considered to be a 'prostitute by trade' and those charged for prostitution related offenses who also reported legitimate occupations outside of sexual commerce. On the other hand, legitimate job titles were also sometimes employed as euphemisms for prostitution (Dunae 2009).

When it came to women who reported being employed in reputable occupations, the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City identified 106 women over the age of fifteen purported to have earned their living as housekeepers, and an additional thirty-three women employed as cooks. Men who could afford the luxury of paying a woman to attend to their domestic needs presumably employed both of these groups of women. These positions paid quite well, with the majority of women reporting pay on par with the base salary received by women working in Dawson's dance halls and saloons.<sup>158</sup> Given that such wages were often paid in addition to room and board, it is likely that some of the employers may have

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<sup>157</sup> Yukon Government Records, Series 1, Volume 9, File 1443, GOV 1619, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>158</sup> 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, Library and Archives of Canada.

expected intimate relations to have been included in the deal.<sup>159</sup> This is exemplified in the experience of Alice McDonald who despite having difficulty finding employment upon arriving in Dawson City nevertheless promptly declined the offer of a lonely miner “to be his housekeeper and mistress for a year”, despite his promise to “make [her] independent for life, as he had a very rich claim [that] he was working”.<sup>160</sup>

Arrangements along these lines again complicate the determination of who should, and who should not properly be considered a prostitute in the Klondike. Certainly not all women hired to cook and clean also went to bed with their employers, but then again, some probably did. Mable Larose, for example, famously auctioned herself off for five thousand dollars plus room and board in the Monte Carlo saloon in 1897 as a ‘winter wife’, promising to live out the impending winter season as ‘wife’ of the highest bidder, with all the privileges that that distinction would normally entail to be included in the deal (Porsild 1998: 127). Other couples undoubtedly negotiated the terms of similar arrangements in a more private manner, with a woman being formally ‘employed’ as ‘housekeeper’ or ‘cook’ in order to lend an air of respectability to a situation in which a man and his mistress openly cohabitated.

Women had any number of reasons for entering into such arrangements in the Klondike, not the least of which included her own sexual gratification, genuine love for the man, or a basic desire for companionship in the remote and

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<sup>159</sup> McDonald, Alice (1984). *As Well As Any Man: A Swedish Immigrant in Alaska*. *Alaska Journal*, 14(3): 42.

<sup>160</sup> McDonald, Alice (1984). *As Well As Any Man: A Swedish Immigrant in Alaska*. *Alaska Journal*, 14(3): 42.

inhospitable boomtown setting. Given the climate of the gold fields though, it is likely that the majority of such arrangements were economic at their basis. Desperate times called for desperate measures and with winter approaching—throughout which time Dawson City would remain cut-off from the outside world—women in particular felt the pressure to provision for their survival and preferably their comfort. In return, women could expect to be very well compensated for the compromises that they made as ‘winter wives’.

Given the willingness of men to pay for proximity to women, for domestic services, and for sexual relationships in the Klondike, it is tempting to frame women in general as just another commodity bought and sold on the gold rush market. Along these lines, one might even assume that every woman had a price at which, if a miner’s pockets ran deep enough, she was willing to sell herself to varying degrees. It is problematic, however, to hold that all women were merely biding their time until a lucrative enough offer was presented and to thereby paint all women as prostitutes in waiting with a single broad stroke of the scarlet brush.

Such sentiment is not intended to deny that there was indeed a very large number of prostitutes present in the Klondike, especially in the early years of the stampede. Given their illegal status and subsequent lack of representation in most primary source materials it is, however, consistently difficult to accurately assess the actual number of prostitutes present in Dawson City at any given time. Police records are often used to inform estimates of the number of prostitutes residing in historic communities such as Dawson City since these were typically the only form of documentation created in the interest of accurately recording the precise number

of such women present in the midst of the community. In this vein, it is known that the North West Mounted Police charged one hundred and fifty women during a campaign in Dawson City's red light district in September of 1898,<sup>161</sup> and that by 1900 there remained only forty-three known prostitutes residing in the immediate community,<sup>162</sup> while this number had dwindled to just thirty in the vicinity of Dawson City by 1901.<sup>163</sup> While these numbers represent only those women who had run-ins with local law enforcement and therefore fail to capture many of the more discreet arrangements that men and women privately negotiated, such numbers still fall far short of the 1051 women over the age of fifteen residing in Dawson City counted in the 1901 census. Thus, despite the prevailing myth regarding rampant, unchecked vice in Dawson City, it is clearly unrealistic to conclude that all, or that even a majority of women present in the Klondike could be labeled prostitutes in the proper sense of the term.

#### Locating Prostitutes in Historic Documents

While there is no way to determine precisely how many women engaged in the sex trade industry in the Klondike or even the precise quantity of gold that flowed between the miners and Klondike prostitutes, it is nevertheless possible to identify a sample of the women who very likely engaged in formal prostitution in order to learn something about the lives and livelihoods of the scarlet women of the Klondike gold rush.

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<sup>161</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, September 17, 1898, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

<sup>162</sup> RCMP Records, vol. 1445, file, 181, pt. 6, McPhail Report, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>163</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, October 16, 1901, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

To this end, Dunae (2009) has employed the 1901 Canada Census for Victoria, British Columbia to detect women likely engaged in ‘the world’s oldest profession’ in order to uncover details of the private lives of such women residing in the community. Since the census captured all members of the population and prostitutes were most certainly present (although they may not have openly identified themselves as such), it follows that such women are nevertheless represented in historic census data even if they may not be immediately recognizable as such. The census therefore contains a wealth of personal information about the lives of prostitutes, although detecting such women after a century of camouflage requires careful scrutiny of these documents (Dunae 2009: 297). Despite the challenge, this is not an impossible task and it is in fact one that is well worth the effort given the wider applicability of this method considering that many historic prostitutes left no other written records or photographs to document their existence.

For a number of political reasons, women were rarely, if ever noted as ‘prostitutes’ in Canadian census rolls. Nearly every aspect associated with prostitution was illegal in Canada at the time that the 1901 Canada Census was taken. Many women therefore surely felt it necessary to either embellish or sidestep around their actual occupational title when enumerators came calling. One way that this was commonly accomplished was by offering popular euphemisms for prostitution such as ‘seamstress’ or ‘dressmaker’, or simply failing to specify an occupation at all, thereby requiring the enumerator to leave a blank space on his form (Dunae 2009). For his part, enumerators were legally required to document

the responses as they were verbalized and to leave blank any questions that were not provided by those that he surveyed, without taking any liberties of interpretation or making assumptions in order to complete this information on behalf of respondents. Census officials were also typically resident members of the larger community, who had little to gain from documenting a sizable population of prostitutes in its midst in an era preoccupied with moral reform (Dunae 2009: 272). It was therefore not attributable to ignorance on the part of the enumerator that some of the women he recorded as ‘seamstresses’ or ‘laundresses’ were in reality shielding the true source of their income behind a façade. Rather, this represents a tacit agreement whereby both parties entered into an unspoken social contract in the interest of presenting both an individual and communal guise of civic respectability (Dunae 2009). The known omission, camouflaging, or exaggerating of prostitutes’ occupations in census materials (for example, when a woman employed in food service but who also engaged in acts of prostitution simply reported herself as a ‘waitress’ to enumerators) is not sufficient, however, to negate the value or utility of these primary data sources. Indeed, if one “read[s] the records carefully, consider[s] them in context, and [is] cognizant of certain code words” (Dunae 2009: 269), these anonymous women are suddenly rendered visible as their lives quite literally become revealed on the pages of history.

As will be discussed below, previous scholars have cast some light on the lives of Klondike prostitutes utilizing documents commonly employed in other examinations of historic boomtown prostitution. These include police documents relating to their incarceration, records of legal proceedings surrounding their

prosecution, and even newspaper accounts of sordid aspects of their personal lives when they erupted into public debacles. One example of this can be seen in the gossip that spread nearly as quickly as the fire that had torn through Dawson City when a dancehall girl employed at the M & N Saloon started a devastating fire that consumed much of Dawson City's business district when she threw a lit lamp at one of her rivals during an argument. The story caused a sensation with headlines proclaiming "Dawson Women Fight" and "Furious Flames Destroy Dawson" followed by columns recounting the incidents as well as gossip about the nature of the dispute between the women even reaching the pages of American newspapers in the south.<sup>164</sup> While the aforementioned materials have offered important insights, the opportunity to employ census data promises to offer an even clearer and more detailed depiction of Dawson City's demi-monde and its constituents. In cases where others have employed documents of the North West Mounted Police in order to uncover aspects of prostitutes' life in the Klondike (see for example, Porsild 1998 and Ryley 1997), it should be noted that such records have proven inherently limited as they capture only those prostitutes that were both known to police and actually arrested for plying their trade. In the context of the Klondike gold rush where the majority of prostitutes were periodically fined rather than being brought up on formal charges, it stands to reason that such records represent only a small minority of the prostitutes operating within Dawson City. The Gaol Register of the North West Mounted Police stationed in Dawson City, for example, documents of

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<sup>164</sup> See for example, *Sacramento Daily Union*, Volume 96, umber 86, November 15, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection, *Los Angeles Herald*, Volume 26, Number 35, November 15, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection, *San Francisco Call*, Volume 25, Number 173, May 22, 1899 California Digital Newspaper Collection, *Sacramento Daily Union*, Volume 97, Number 90, May 22, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

only nine prostitution related convictions throughout the years 1899-1903.<sup>165</sup> These records make no mention of the routine fines handed out to prostitutes by the police, or obviously of those women who managed to conduct their business under the radar of local officials. These records are useful in that they do identify the keepers of ‘houses of ill fame’, yet little additional insight is offered within their pages into the lives of individual prostitutes or comparison to the experiences of Klondike women in general.

#### Dawson City Prostitutes in the 1901 Canada Census

Prostitutes have historically represented significant socio-economic demographics in North American mining communities (Simmons 1989: 63), and Dawson City was no exception. Yet, while much has been written about the Klondike in general and the lives of a few extraordinary or infamous women in particular, little is yet known about average women working as prostitutes who lived and labored in Dawson City. In addition to the anonymity afforded by the boomtown, it remains that few boomtown prostitutes left written testimony to attest to the legitimacy of the lived experiences that have been attributed to them by later writers working from a variety of motivations. Proceeding with this in mind, an opportunity is presented by a novel approach to analysis of the 1901 Canada Census data for Dawson City, which facilitates the identification of such women among other residents of this the historic community.

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<sup>165</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada.

Much as some categories for data collection differed in the Klondike relative to the wider Canadian example (counting dogs and cows as measures of personal affluence, for example), so too did some of some of the popular euphemisms given by prostitutes when asked for their occupation. For example, while Dunae (2009) has observed that ‘dressmaker’ served as a popular euphemism for prostitutes in Victoria, accounts of the Klondike often note that prostitutes concerned with concealing their trade often operated under the guise of ‘laundress’ or ‘cigar store proprietor’.<sup>166</sup>

While nearly every account of the Klondike refers to an abundance of prostitutes present in the community, it is telling that not a single woman was identified as such in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City. Despite this, cases such as the instance wherein three prostitutes who had been living in a building at Princess Street and Second Avenue in Dawson City were fined in June of 1902 for plying their trade,<sup>167</sup> serve as indisputable evidence that although these women were not recorded as prostitutes in the census documents, that they nevertheless represented an enduring presence within the community. As such and as was the case in Victoria, knowledge of the local socio-historical context proves all-important for distinguishing those entries in the census that likely represent prostitutes from the balance of ‘respectable’ women.

Porsild (1998) has previously pieced together data on approximately fifty-eight women whom she determined to be prostitutes based on their mention in documents of the North West Mounted Police, which she then cross-referenced

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<sup>166</sup> RCMP Records, vol. 1445, file, 181, pt. 6, McPhail Report, Library and Archives of Canada, Guest 1983: 9.

<sup>167</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, June 27, 1902, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

with the 1901 Canada Census. My own analysis of the census has identified forty-four women as very likely having been prostitutes and an additional 162 women as possibly having been engaged in prostitution. Along these lines, women who identified themselves as ‘tobacconists’ (n=6), almost certainly represent women who were prostitutes by trade given the proclivity of prostitutes for using this pseudonym in the Klondike.

Regarding these six women, all were identified as being ‘white’ and being between the ages of twenty-two to thirty-six years of age. One woman reported herself as married, and another as a widow, while the remaining four were single. Four of the women had been born in either France or Quebec, while one had been born in Germany and another in England. Two women neglected to specify their income, while two others reported annual salaries of \$200, while the final two reported incomes of \$250 and \$400 respectively. A striking feature of the demographic data available for these women is the value of both the personal property and real estate that they independently held. Two women each owned real estate valued at \$2000, two others each held personal property (defined as tangible goods as opposed to properties and structures built upon them) valued at \$2500, while a fifth woman possessed an astounding wealth of personal property valued at \$4000. Of all the property holders (both male and female) enumerated in Dawson City, the majority (69.99%, n=911) of real estate holdings privately held by both men and women were valued at \$1000 or less, while 54.41% (n=706) of respondents estimated the total value of their personal possessions at only \$500 or less. The values reported by the six ‘tobacconists’ therefore represent a substantial

accumulation of wealth by women almost certainly engaged in prostitution as their primary occupation. While it is acknowledged that six women do not constitute a sample representative of the total population of prostitutes in the Klondike, these cases nevertheless provide a window into the lived experiences of a group that drastically diverges from the portrait of extreme poverty commonly reported to have characterized the life of prostitutes in other historic boomtown communities (see for example, Butler 1987, Goldman 1981).

While some signifiers—such as listing one’s occupation as a ‘tobacconist’ or proprietor of a ‘cigar store’—are common euphemisms suggesting a very high likelihood of a woman having been a prostitute in Dawson City, other indicators also exist, although recognizing them for what they are necessitates more careful scrutiny. One such example is presented in the cases of women in Dawson City who reported themselves as ‘miners’. This occupation is suspect in this context since mining was nearly exclusively a male activity in the Klondike. Although some women did hold mining claims, this occupation is particularly suspect in the cases of five women who reported themselves as such, yet simultaneously responded that they did not in fact possess any mining claims from which they might have been drawing the incomes that they also reported.

In other cases noted in the census, large amounts of personal property, most notably in the range of \$1000-\$5000 in value and especially in association with no occupation or source of income having been reported raises similar suspicion. It has been noted that prostitutes who worked in historic boomtowns frequently amassed large collections of clothing, jewelry, and other personal items that were necessary

for plying their trade. In fact, the market for women's finery in Dawson City was so profitable that suppliers of these garments stood to make their own fortunes by importing these items to the Klondike. Mrs. Nellie Humphrey for example, cleared ten thousand dollars in profit from an investment of only two thousand dollars in "dainty feminine apparel" that she sold in the streets of Dawson City. After seeing how quickly her stock sold out with dresses commanding prices of no less than two hundred dollars a piece, Nellie promptly returned home to restock herself with an "assortment of lingeries, laces and silk" and returned to the Klondike to continue satiating the Klondike women's demand for luxurious apparel.<sup>168</sup>

In addition to those women previously identified as likely prostitutes in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City, another four women listed as 'convicts' and housed in the North West Mounted Police jail almost certainly represent those rare instances in which women were incarcerated on charges of prostitution. In addition to these cases, a careful eye to the local context proves paramount in detecting likely prostitutes remaining to be identified in the census. For example, I argue that a woman who reported herself as married and residing with her husband and children presents a decidedly different picture than does an entry for a young, single woman who lived alone, reportedly on her own account as a laundress, but without any reported income or other assets. Other cases that raise suspicion include single women living alone in Dawson City and identified as heads of the household who neglected to offer any details such as their occupation, source, or amount of their income, or to report the value of any personal property that they surely had with

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<sup>168</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 95, September 3, 1898, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

them since no one was permitted to enter the Yukon Territory empty-handed. Given that Dawson City was an expensive place to reside, a woman without a source of income or independent means to support herself could not get by for long. Such instances therefore suggest such women as possibly representing prostitutes who were attempting to conceal the true nature of their occupation from enumerators.

On the whole, the information provided in the census for women suspected of probably having been prostitutes in this historic community is surprisingly complete. While data was often missing or incomplete for women in documents that date to this era, responses in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City were consistently reported for these women in every category except those pertaining to occupation and income. Along this line, demographic data revealed all but one of these suspected prostitutes to have been 'white'. Twenty-four were single, while thirteen were married and four more were either divorced or widowed. Together, these women ranged in age from seventeen to fifty-seven and were relatively youthful with 56.82% (n=25) being thirty years of age or younger, while more than 81.82% (n=36) were under 40 years of age. More than a quarter of the woman had been born in France (n=13), which is consistent with the ethnic background of prostitutes found in many other North American boomtowns of this era. The preponderance of French women among the ranks of prostitutes in historic gold rush communities has been explained as an artifact of French emigration schemes orchestrated in the mid-nineteenth century to rid France of its burgeoning population of 'undesirables'. A French public lottery held in 1850 (although lotteries were technically illegal at this time) sought to raise money to fund the

emigration of individuals fitting the bill to California (Murphy 1984, Goldman 1981). While this explains the high rate of French prostitutes in west coast gold rush communities, the later representation of French women among the prostitutes present in Dawson City thus likely reflects second or even third generation immigrant prostitutes.

Interestingly, the economic status of Klondike prostitutes reveals quite a different picture than that painted of prostitutes in other historic North American mining boomtowns of this era (see for example, Butler, 1987, Goldman 1981, Johnson 2000b). While only slightly more than half (n=25) of these women chose to declare their income to census takers, the majority (68.00%) of those who did reported earnings of \$200 or less (n=17). This is in fact less than what a woman could earn if she were employed in a 'legitimate' occupation such as housekeeping in Dawson City, especially considering the fact that such positions also typically included room and board. Since only one-quarter (n=11) of these women reported owning real estate within which they could reside, most Klondike prostitutes would have had to have covered these expenses out of their reported income. With the exorbitant cost of accommodations in Dawson City in addition to food and the cost of regularly mandated medical examinations as well as the police fines that they were subject to, the significant expense of 'doing business' in the Klondike raises the question of why these women would have endured the financial costs and corporeal hardships characterizing life in the Klondike in order to barely eke out a living for themselves. Given this, it seems certain that in an effort to conceal how they earned their living from census enumerators, these women were grossly under-

representing their incomes. It is possible that previous scholars who have suggested that Klondike prostitutes were on the brink of financial destitution may have based their argument upon this data without scrutinizing such inconsistencies. In response, I argue that Klondike prostitutes stood to prosper as much from the gold rush economy as did the male miners. Support for this position is again found in accounts of prostitutes in Dawson City having regularly been rounded-up and fined fifty dollars for plying their trade (Guest 1983: 12). Given that very few prostitutes were ever incarcerated in the jail of the North West Mounted Police stationed in Dawson City, it stands to reason that these women must have had an abundant supply of cash on hand at all times in order to pay their fines and thereby avoid serving jail time.

Along these lines, there remains a great deal of disagreement regarding how much prostitutes actually charged for their services in the Klondike. Since the cost of goods and other services was exponentially inflated in the Klondike, it stands to reason that so too would have been the price charged by prostitutes given the cornered market that they enjoyed in isolated Dawson City. Estimates of the fees charged by prostitutes during the gold rush era range from three to sixty-four dollars for a brief, impersonal encounter. One prostitute even swore under oath in court that she earned between ten and twenty dollars per night—a considerable sum considering that men employed as laborers on the mine claims in the creeks were paid at a fantastic rate of one-dollar per hour.<sup>169</sup> Dunae (2009) notes that with regard to respectable women's salaries across Canada at the time of the 1901

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<sup>169</sup> Letter from a Klondiker printed in the *Los Angeles Herald*, October 19, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

Canada Census, a non-professional female employee could expect to earn \$200 per year. Housekeepers or maids were paid between \$180-200 annually, while seamstresses and stenographers averaged \$288 and \$300 respectively. Even if a prostitute's earnings were on the lowest end of the estimated rate in the Klondike, assuming that she worked an average of 22 nights a month and earned three dollars per evening, she would have netted \$792 annually. In light of descriptions of men's visits to Paradise Alley as being a hurried experience,<sup>170</sup> a more realistic estimate places the income of a typical prostitute at between ten and twenty dollars per night, as per the aforementioned testimony. This scenario would have garnered a staggering income of between \$2640-\$5280 annually. In a region where pimps were not tolerated and were regularly run out of the community by the North West Mounted Police,<sup>171</sup> Klondike prostitutes remained in control of a large portion of their earnings. This extraordinarily high earning potential compared to women working elsewhere in Canada (and even relative to the average wages of men in the Klondike) thus presents a very different picture than the one of destitution commonly portrayed for prostitutes in the American West. It seems all the more likely then that as opposed to being inflated, official reports of these women's incomes must in fact be substantially underrepresented in the census materials. Again, a Klondike woman could have had any number of reasons for misrepresenting her income, not least of which being that a modest salary would be less likely to draw the unwanted scrutiny of those whose curiosity may have been aroused by a sizable income. It is also clear that the social contract entered into by

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<sup>170</sup> Trelawney-Ansell, E.C. (1938). *I Followed Gold*. New York: L. Fruman, Inc., page 171.

<sup>171</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

prostitutes and census enumerators in other parts of Canada stretched all the way to remote Dawson City.

Understanding who the Klondike prostitutes were and what place they occupied in the gold rush society is crucial not only with regard to determining their relationship to other women, but also importantly with regard to their relationships with the men of the gold rush. The social world of the Klondike was generated from men's and women's intra-gendered relationships, but also, importantly by the interactions between men and women as they cooperatively built the gold rush community from the ground up. This involved negotiating and renegotiating the roles and reciprocal rights and responsibilities of each member of the community to one another. Thus, in order to appreciate the significance of the gendered frameworks that provided the structure for social life in this boomtown community, it is necessary to consider the nature of the relationships between women and men as co-creators of a new and shared social reality.

**CHAPTER SIX**  
**COMMUNITY AS IT EXISTED BETWEEN THE MEN**  
**AND WOMEN OF THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH**

Following close upon the heels—and in some cases actually preceding their prospective clients' arrival—prostitutes were among, if not the very first, non-First Nations women to set foot in the Klondike. Although this signals the important implications for the relationships between men and women in Dawson City, Johnson (2000a) has noted in that locating sources pertaining to the private relationships between men and prostitutes in historic gold rush communities often presents a particular challenge to researchers. This is primarily due to the fact that men have historically proven reluctant to leave written testimony of their unseemly indulgences during time spent in boomtown communities (Johnson 2000b: 156). Documents written from the women's perspectives on this topic are all the more scant given that the majority of the women who earned reputations for their involvement in the sexualized entertainment industry tended to have an even greater vested interest in preserving their anonymity than did the men to whom they offered their services.

In this vein, archival documents containing references to prostitutes working in the Klondike are primarily those that were produced for public readership and record. These include; newspaper articles, official correspondence of the Yukon Council, court records of the North West Mounted Police, and photographs taken by lay and professional photographers in the interest of

documenting various aspects of life in the Klondike. Despite the paucity of primary data sources that directly address the dynamics relationships between men and these very early women of the Klondike, it is nevertheless possible to address this topic by drawing data from the aforementioned primary source materials. In this way at least a cursory perspective into a prostitute's place within Klondike society may also be garnered from the terminology that was applied to her by the male stampeders.

When considered together, the constellation of terms commonly employed in reference to Dawson City's prostitutes gathered from archival documents carry sentimental connotations. This lexicon stands in opposition to those terms with obscene and overtly derogatory undertones that were typically employed in reference to prostitutes in other contexts. In the Klondike for example, popular slang used in reference to prostitutes included terms such as 'soiled doves', 'languorous lilies', or even simply 'hard workers'.<sup>172</sup> In this way, nuances of meaning inherent in the terms used in regard to this cohort of Dawsonites conjures a romanticized and perhaps even affectionate view of these women in the eyes of their male consorts, which speaks to the respective places that they occupied in the boomtown community.

It presents an intriguing conundrum that Klondike prostitutes were somehow viewed as being more virtuous than their contemporary counterparts in other communities. Given the fact that reaching Dawson City required a concerted effort and significant financial expenditure, the presence of these women in the

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<sup>172</sup> Yukon Sun, February 23, 1901, cited in Guest (1985: 219), Photograph: MacBride Museum of Yukon History collection, 1989-2-1908, *The Klondike Nugget*, August 1902, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

gold rush community therefore implies a blatant intent to ply their trade in a land of perceived plenty as opposed to representing women who simply fell into prostitution as victims of circumstance. Indeed, the labels applied to Klondike prostitutes carry connotations of innocence rather than immorality and as such, they imply a degree of esteem typically not afforded to this class of women in other settings. The term ‘soiled dove’, for instance, bespeaks a “fragile creature...fallen into sin” (Goldman 1981: 58), and presents a stark contrast relative to references to ‘women of easy virtue or ill repute’, ‘harlots’ or ‘whores’, all of which more directly imply unapologetic and morally reprehensible promiscuity on the part of the prostitute.

While the views of feminists and moral reformers when it came to turn-of-the-century prostitutes typically presented such women as either hapless victims of unrelenting male libidos or exploited laborers unable to earn enough through gainful employment to provide for their own survival, such views fail to recognize the element of choice that may have factored in to an individual woman’s foray into prostitution (Walkowitz 1980). In the case of the Klondike, free choice and a clear intent to engage in prostitution must be assumed considering the concerted undertaking involved in becoming a Klondike prostitute. Along these lines, a prostitute certainly would have consciously weighed the distance and expense involved in traveling to the gold fields against her options for supporting herself once in Dawson City. Given the high cost of transportation and the exorbitant costs of living in Dawson City previously established, the decision to relocate to the Klondike in order to ‘gold dig’ would seem to have represented a deliberate

and decisive act on the part of the majority of Klondike prostitutes. As such, there is an element of deliberate intention to profit upon her sexuality that is embedded in the actions of Klondike prostitutes that does not necessarily characterize prostitutes working outside of the boomtown context.

Building upon Cohen's (1989) framework for understanding the central function of symbols in the construction of community, I argue that the symbol that facilitated the affectionate view of towards gold rush era prostitutes in the eyes of the male stampeders was also that of the 'Klondiker'. This powerful icon and all that it stood for (freedom, opportunity, perseverance, and adventure) was sufficiently potent to draw men and women together through common identification as such—as belonging to a community of Klondikers—regardless of whatever differences may have otherwise divided them. This is also sufficient to explain how Klondike prostitutes came to be accepted as legitimate and necessary members of the gold rush community. Despite the fact that nearly all aspects of prostitution were illegal in Canada at the time of the Klondike gold rush, the B-division of the North West Mounted Police, government officials, and medical personnel nevertheless took a tempered stance of tolerance on the issue within their community.<sup>173</sup> Prostitution was indeed widely perceived to be a natural part of Klondike life best met with passive acceptance and supervision. In the words of Superintendent Sam Steele of the North West Mounted Police:

These girls seem to be in the eyes of the majority of the community a necessary evil. Apart from the fact that their calling is unlawful, they are

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<sup>173</sup> Clifford Sifton fonds, R7693-0-0-E, Library and Archives of Canada.

orderly and sober and in fact much less detrimental...than the large number  
of variety actresses...<sup>174</sup>

Yet despite the widespread acknowledgement of the need for prostitutes in the boomtown, little comment has actually been offered as to why prostitutes were in fact so important to life in the Klondike. The most obvious explanation is simply that prostitution could not realistically be abolished in a mining camp dominated by men without immediate access to any other class of females. This is, however, an incomplete and unsatisfactory explanation for the unusually privileged position that such ‘need’ afforded prostitutes in this time and place. While it is true that in the chaos resulting from the influx of tens of thousands of stampeders, the police certainly had more pressing concerns in regard to law enforcement than stubbornly focusing efforts on attempting to stamp-out prostitution. Indeed, the police showed a great deal of leniency towards “the boys, who broke loose with great gusto [in the company of Dawson’s soiled doves], after a long spell on their claim”, so long as they held fast to the golden rules of the Klondike: “[d]on’t cheat, don’t shoot, don’t murder”.<sup>175</sup> On the other hand, so long as the women conducted themselves in an orderly fashion they were generally left to go about their business as the North West Mounted Police tolerated prostitution in the Klondike to an extent rarely seen on Canadian soil. Only in the most grievously offensive cases (such as the infamous scene at the Bartlett house that was too

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<sup>174</sup> Report of S.B. Steele, May 1899. RCMP Records, volume 1444, file 181. page 3, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>175</sup> Klondike Scrapbook 1897-1904, Katherine MacLennan Collection, C-014474, Library and Archives of Canada.

sordid to even permit description) were prostitutes brought up on formal charges in the Klondike.

Interestingly, given that the era in which the gold rush unfolded was characterized by aggressive moral reform campaigns that advocated for the guardianship of feminine virtue, the Gaol Record of the North West Mounted Police stationed in Dawson City reveals that the police did not lay a formal charge of prostitution in Dawson City until 1898.<sup>176</sup> The dearth of prosecutions can be explained both by the informal stance of tolerance towards prostitution in Dawson City and the formal practice of regularly fining prostitutes fifty dollars during their run-ins with the law, in lieu of laying formal charges. The passive acceptance shown towards prostitutes during the early years of the boomtown is found also in the practice of the local government essentially licensing prostitutes by requiring them to submit to mandatory health examinations conducted by the North West Mounted Police Surgeon or the Medical Health Officer on a bi-weekly basis. Upon receiving a clean bill of health and paying the five-dollar fee, prostitutes were issued certificates of good health that they could display in their rooms, while infected women were detained in police custody until such time as their ailment was resolved.<sup>177</sup> Although lay individuals were well aware of the route of transmission in this era, men's participation was largely overlooked while notions of female culpability placed the blame for the transmission of sexually acquired infections squarely upon prostitutes. Women therefore bore the brunt of blame for the health threat posed by the rampant venereal disease epidemic that

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<sup>176</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>177</sup> Yukon Territorial Records, Commissioner's Letterbooks, Vol. 77, p. 744, Yukon Archives.

raged through the Klondike population. Thus it was that while female prostitutes were stigmatized and subjected to regularly mandated health inspections that further branded these women as ‘prostitutes’ in the name of public health, their male clientele were spared from such indecencies and even, as I will later argue, spared from any potential stigma as they were routinely afforded the courtesy of anonymity in medical records when they sought care for their affliction.

Given the entrenchment of prostitution at the heart of male-female interaction in the Klondike gold rush boomtown community, it is necessary to critically consider the purchase of female companionship by the male stampeders and to consider it not only as a product of biological desire but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a product of the sociohistorical context in which the transactions occurred (Laite 2009: 747). Along these lines, the men and women of the Klondike represent a microcosm of a larger societal gender ideology (albeit relocated into a context that permitted certain liberties to be taken) that prevailed in the Western world at the end of the nineteenth century.

Based on arguments about the nature of sexuality at this time, it may be possible to argue that the Klondikers’ view of sexuality would have been grounded in the volcanic theory of male sexuality. This view held that men had a legitimate, biological requirement for regular sexual release (Laite 2009: 751), and that they were ultimately helpless victims of their own virility (Goldman 1981: 35). Without frequent release, Victorian era men were assumed to experience sexual desire that would build up to the point of violent eruption in the form of “orgies of adultery, rape, physical violence, or even homosexual

embraces” (Goldman 1981: 35), all of which were considered to be deviant behaviors entirely unbecoming of a middle-class gentleman. This ideology served as a rationalization for the need for regular sexual contact, yet it also presented a conundrum within respectable Victorian society, as respectable women were simultaneously expected to be chaste prior to marriage and as close to virginal as possible while still permitting the production of children once married (Goldman 1981, Johnson 2000a, b).

Further to and following as a consequence of the view that men were captive to the biological basis of their sexuality, Victorian society held middle-class women as morally superior to their male counterparts. Although women were seen as inferior to men in nearly every other context, as the guardians of the morality, the home, and the foundation of family life (Johnson 2000a: 323, Rotundo 1993: 253), women were construed as being free from desires of the flesh and thus they were held up as moral beacons of civilization. This accolade in turn, required them to conceal and deny their sexual proclivities in order to preserve their moral preeminence.

This problem was further compounded in the gold fields by the physical absence of wives or marriageable women who might serve as socially appropriate sexual outlets. Sexual proscriptions that held dispassionate wives as the ideal among middle-class women while simultaneously emphasizing the inherent biological basis of masculine virility therefore necessitated another class of women to whom men could turn in order to meet their needs both before, and

even continuing on after their marriage to respectable women (Goldman 1981: 17).

In this framework, men and women were both understood to be participants in a contradictory ideology that touted 'passionlessness' and chastity as desirable qualities of 'respectable' women, but that was nevertheless cognizant of the need for prostitutes in order to reconcile the 'excess lust' of their male counterparts (Murphy 1984: 34). Social mores of the Victorian era therefore simultaneously condemned the existence of prostitutes on the ground of immorality, all the while fostering a sexual market that was consequently both needed and forbidden (Dyhouse 2013: 11-41).

Given that a double standard for male and female sexuality created a (albeit unacknowledged) need for prostitutes to maintain that status quo of male-female relationships within the emerging middle-class, it is not surprising that prostitution would ultimately serve a central role to social life in the Klondike. The only difference was that the need for concealment was unnecessary as long as the actions of men in the Klondike remained beyond the gaze of society back home.

While assuredly not the only form of sexual contact practiced by the gold rushers, heterosexuality was dominant and constituted the only publically accepted form of sexual union among the Klondikers. Homosexual contact between miners likely occurred in the Klondike as it has been argued to have occurred among men of earlier North American gold rushes (see for example, Johnson 2000b: 173-174). Yet while evidence for these relationships is drawn

from only a few obtuse references in the personal diaries of a handful of miners that vaguely allude to such encounters in the context of the Californian gold rush camps, no such evidence exists from the Klondike example upon which a satisfactory discussion of this aspect of sexuality among the gold rushers could be established. In fact, the only hint of homosexual encounters having occurred among the Klondikers comes from a single complaint filed with the North West Mounted Police wherein a man that had shared a bed with another man the night before (a common practice among travellers of this era) lodged that his bunk-mate had attempted to perpetrate an act of sodomy against him. In this particular case, both of the men involved were adamant that it had been the other that had initiated the unwanted sexual advances, while the defendant further complained that the only reason that the claimant had raised the charge was because he did not “get his own way”.<sup>178</sup>

While engaging the services of a prostitute was clearly an unspoken yet expected practice as long as men’s actions were well enough concealed so as not to tarnish the reputations of those concerned, the anonymity afforded by life among strangers in the Klondike served to remove men from any stigma that may have dissuaded some from engaging in such behavior in the ‘outside’ world. As in the case of the Californian gold rushers (see for example, Johnson 2000a: 323), in the North the Klondikers found themselves far removed from latent ideas about female chastity and so continuing to repress their own desires surely would have

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<sup>178</sup> Records of the Yukon Government, YGR 1, Series 11, Territorial Court Records 1897-1950, GOV 1440, file 7, Yukon Archives.

seemed much less relevant in the far north, particularly since nobody that cared was watching.

The lackadaisical stance on the issue of prostitution displayed by the Klondikers stands in stark contrast to the view towards prostitutes in other times and places that resulted in the relegation of such women to the fringes of society. Indeed, the Klondike prostitutes evidently enjoyed a particularly privileged status that allowed them to enjoy numerous benefits of community membership contingent upon the context of this boomtown community.

Based on my reading of the published literature and primary source materials, it is significant to note that despite the social concessions granted to Klondike prostitutes (that are evident in both the epithets applied to them and the relaxed approach of the police when it came to enforcing the letter of the law), these females were nevertheless rarely, if ever, directly referred to as ‘women’ by the stamperers. This is likely simply due to the fact that in the minds of men aspiring to middle-class standing, these members of the opposite sex could never fulfill the role of ‘real’ women. In other words, the Klondikers were never in danger of confusing these prostitutes with the ‘respectable’ class of women that they had left behind back home. Indeed one miner lamented:

“the girls looked beautiful enough to men who had been isolated in this wild environment for months or years, but I guess they would have been pretty terrible compared with any ordinary women back home”.<sup>179</sup>

Although Klondike prostitutes could clearly never replace the absent wives and sweethearts of the Klondike men, the distinction nevertheless made between these

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<sup>179</sup> Allen, A.A. “Scotty”. (1931). *Gold, Men and Dogs*. New York: G.P. Putnam’s sons: 84.

prostitutes and their 'respectable' counterparts in other communities signals an interesting renegotiation of the relationships between men and those early women present in the Klondike. For example, a prostitute could never serve as a gold rushers' social counterpart given that as 'public women' they were available to all men yet tied to none in particular (Murphy 1984: 30). As such, they occupied a standing located decidedly beyond the realms of respectability and far displaced from Victorian standards that tethered 'reputable' women to the home, family life and the company of an individual man through marriage.

As utterly unmarriageable public women, the prostitutes of historic boomtowns such as Dawson City existed in a peculiar state. They were certainly not 'ladies' given that they drank, smoked, gambled, publicly announced their sexual availability and therein failed to measure up to the standard of proper 'ladies' (Murphy 1984: 31). This perception of Dawson City's 'unladylike' women is evident in the treatment of Beatrice Lorne (also known by her stage name; the Klondike Nightingale) upon her marriage to a sourdough miner by the name of George Smith. During her time in Dawson's dancehalls, Beatrice had never once appeared in vulgar performances. Rather, her repertoire catered to nostalgic ditties that reminded the audience of home and often brought tears to the men's eyes. Following her marriage, Beatrice retired from the dancehall circuit in order to cultivate a lifestyle befitting her new station in life. Nonetheless, her prior association as a dancehall girl carried a lingering stigma among Dawson City's 'respectable' women that saw both her and her husband shunned from social gatherings to the extent that it raised public outcry when she—"a woman of the

dance halls”— sang carols in front of local children at a Christmas concert organized by the Methodist Church.<sup>180</sup>

Given that these ‘improper’ women represented the majority of the few females available to the male Klondikers, the skewed gender ratio that characterized the Klondike community facilitated numerous concessions to be made in the remote boomtown that ultimately saw these women fulfilling many of the roles that were otherwise reserved for ‘respectable’ middle-class ladies in the outside world. For example, early Klondike women blatantly flirted with men in the audience while they performed on stage, partnered with men that they did not know on the dance floor, and caroused with those who could afford to hold their individual attention in more intimate settings. With few alternatives for company or companionship given that the handful of ‘respectable’ ladies tended to reside with their husbands, scattered among the creek settlements, the prostitutes of the Klondike were embraced by sentimental miners who accepted their hospitality for what it was—a pragmatic reprieve from loneliness and a temporary substitute for those women whom they had left behind. It is no great leap then, to suggest that many of the male Klondikers spent as much time as they did in the saloons and dance halls of Dawson City simply because they desired the company of women as much, if not more than they wanted to drink or gamble away their hard earned gold.

The willingness of Klondike men to pay dearly for the company of a woman is particularly evident in the premium commanded by brothel residents

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<sup>180</sup> As retold in the memoirs of Laura Berton. Berton, Laura Beatrice. (1954). *I Married the Klondike*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart., pg. 122.

relative to the fees charged by common prostitutes in Dawson City's red light district. While both scenarios culminated in intercourse, the higher rates of brothel prostitutes included a surcharge for the illusion of companionship, as the women entertained their male visitors in homey parlors on the main floor before retiring to their private rooms above (Moynahan 2008). The astounding economic success of Klondike madams attests to the fact that many male Klondikers were indeed willing to pay handsomely for the special attention that was lavished upon them in these establishments over the "very hurried entertainment" to be had in Paradise Alley.<sup>181</sup>

Evidence of the privileged status of 'un-ladylike' women within Klondike society can be gleaned from accounts of the miners lavishing these early Klondike women with extravagant tokens of their affection. Along these lines, bathtubs were filled with champagne for favorite dancehall girls to bathe in,<sup>182</sup> while gifts of jewelry and gold nuggets were regularly bestowed upon the sweethearts of the Klondike. Dance Hall Queen Cad Wilson for example, was said to have left the stage in a pout "if her shower of gold nuggets nightly did not reach \$500 in value".<sup>183</sup> While the quantity of nuggets (many of which were large enough to inflict injury when Klondikers missed their target) literally thrown at the feet of women performing on Klondike stages is a measure of the valuation of these women relative to the gold that had initially lured the men north, it is also indicative of just how lucrative the Klondike could be for women willing to step

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<sup>181</sup> Trelawney-Ansell, E.C. (1938). *I Followed Gold*. New York: L. Fruman, Inc., pg. 171.

<sup>182</sup> Rebecca and Solomon Schuldenfrei. Correspondence 1897-98, 84/87, MSS 166, Yukon Archives

<sup>183</sup> Recollection of Cad Wilson upon her arrival in Chicago, Illinois reprinted in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 19, October 19, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

beyond the line of conduct befitting a ‘proper’ lady. In just eleven short months for example, Cad Wilson amassed a personal fortune that included “a drayload of rough gold trinkets, drafts to the amount of \$40,000 and diamonds of sufficient variety and number to light the entire Great Northern hotel” in Chicago.<sup>184</sup>

Beyond the astounding wealth that passed into women’s hands in this manner, what is most striking about these stories (of which there are indeed many) is that these treasures were lavished upon a group of women that it is difficult to imagine having been the recipients of such extravagant affection under any other circumstance.

Why this should be the case can be extrapolated from an exploration of the conceptualization of masculine sexuality that prevailed in this context and within which men’s interactions with women came to be commercialized in nearly every way in Dawson City. That is to say, Klondike men happily paid not only for sexual contact, but also simply for physical proximity to women and the luxury of their company. In this way, women in the Klondike might be construed as a social resource to which men had limited access. This organization of male-female interaction that had its basis in the dance halls, saloons, gambling theatres, and brothels of the Klondike had likewise characterized male-female interaction as a consequence of the commercialized nature of entertainment in earlier boomtowns (see for example, Laite 2009, Johnson 2000b). Recall, that in the early years of the Klondike there were few opportunities for men to socialize outside of public

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<sup>184</sup> Recollection of Cad Wilson upon her arrival in Chicago, Illinois reprinted in the *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 19, October 19, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

establishments, a fact that was lamented by William Cautley in his private memoirs:

In those days there were no clubs, no private houses to which one might be invited, no place to which one could invite one's friends.<sup>185</sup>

Faced with the bleak alternative of remaining alone at night in their tents and cabins, the men of the Klondike understandably gravitated to the bristling entertainment district of Dawson City. These venues even attracted respectable gentlemen like Mr. Cautley—an employee and representative of the federal government stationed in Dawson City—who likely would have eschewed such establishments under any other circumstance.

The sentiments of the miners towards Dawson City prostitutes and dancehall girls not only translated into lining the women's pockets with Klondike gold, but also afforded them a privileged status within Klondike society. Evidence for this can be gleaned not only from the endearing terms that the stampedeers used in reference to them and the material symbols of their affection that they bestowed upon them, but also in the way that respectable wives displaced demimonde women from the center of gold rush social life and almost immediately upon their arrival in the boomtown community in the later years of the gold rush era. As increasing numbers of families began settling in the Klondike, the boomtown community began to transition from a raucous boomtown filled with transient single men and 'scarlet ladies' to a settled and established community of husbands, wives, and mothers. The resulting shift in the ethos of the community is evident in the contrasting depictions of Klondike women captured in photographs

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<sup>185</sup> R.W. Cautley Papers, MS 82/97, Yukon Archives.

taken only a few years apart. Figure 5.4 is a photograph likely taken in either 1898 or 1899, while figure 3.2 (lower) dates to 1904. The woman depicted in the latter image are positioned as guardians of the home, standing in front of wood-frame houses at the threshold of white-picket fences, while the women in the former image are depicted in the act of soliciting men to their cribs. Just as respectable women had displaced prostitutes as the benefactors of public institutions through publicly recognized charity work, they also quickly seized control of men's social activities from the hurdy-gurdy girls, shifting the venue for men's social activities from the public realm of Dawson's saloons, dance halls, and cribs to middle-class parlors in the private realm of homes demarcated by white picket fences that were rapidly increasing in number. Once the location of the social centres of Dawsonites were shifted to private homes, the influence and social standing that prostitutes once enjoyed at the center of the gold rush community declined markedly.

#### The Place of Prostitutes in the Social Life of the Klondike Community

As a consequence of the physical absence of 'respectable' women to contest the entrenchment of prostitutes at the heart of social life in Dawson City, the Klondike presented unique opportunities for a marginal group of women to become established at the center of the social world of the boomtown community. This would in turn present a point of conflict upon the arrival of respectable middle-class ladies who soon joined their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons in the Klondike, that could only be resolved through their unified efforts to shift the

axis of gender and economic relations back in line with middle-class sensibilities. For example, soon after the arrival of ‘respectable’ wives and mothers in the community, the North West Mounted Police ordered that Dawson City prostitutes cease appearing in the street or even the widows of their cribs without ‘proper’ attire.<sup>186</sup> This functioned to cloister these women from public view and subsequently withdraw them from the central role that they had up until that time enjoyed as public figures of the boomtown community.

The custom of police issuing fines as opposed to incarcerating Dawson City’s prostitutes had until this time functioned as a quasi-licensing system, thereby reinforcing the perception of legitimacy among the prostitutes and the centrality of their place in the boomtown community. The funds raised in this manner were then used to fund the care of indigent patients at local hospitals.<sup>187</sup> Their role in contributing to the financial upkeep of Dawson City’s public hospitals placed prostitutes in a peculiar position in Klondike society as indirect benefactors to the betterment of these community institutions. This in turn presents a striking contrast to the way in which similar charitable efforts typically fell to the respectable ladies of the Victorian middle class who tended to involve themselves in such projects as a way of contributing to society outside of the home. Indeed, once respectable women were on the scene in the Klondike, fundraising for the local hospitals was immediately and very publically taken up

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<sup>186</sup> Letter from Z. T. Wood to William Ogilvie dated November 5, 1900. RCMP Records, Volume 3032. Library and Archives of Canada.

<sup>187</sup> Saint Mary’s Hospital fonds, 82/266, Yukon Archives. The records of Saint Mary’s Hospital detail the on-going financial struggle of this institution which relied heavily upon the proceeds collected by the government through fines and licensing of Dawson City’s entertainment industry, including prostitutes in addition to donations and charity benefits throughout the gold rush era.

by wives and mothers who were widely praised by local media for their work hosting dances, bazars and Christmas pageants for the benefit of these institutions:

The Ladies' Aid Society of the Presbyterian church has undertaken to furnish a ward in the Good Samaritan Hospital for women. This is certainly a noble work and those ladies should receive every assistance in their labors...to assist in the good work.<sup>188</sup>

The division separating prostitutes and the newly arrived 'reputable' ladies of the Klondike is reflected in that fact that although local newspapers lavished praise upon Dawson City's middle-class wives in recognition of their charitable work in the Klondike, at no point throughout Dawson City's history were prostitutes similarly credited for their (indirect) financing of these very same institutions.

Another way to infer something about the position of prostitutes within the wider gold rush community is through an examination of the physical space that they occupied in the boomtown. As Simmons (1998:61) has observed, there is a close relationship between the physical location of place and the differential socioeconomic status of individuals that occupy that space as a consequence of the overarching community structure. Following from this, much can be inferred about the social position of prostitutes within Klondike society from an analysis of their spatial orientation within the boomtown. Throughout Dawson City's early history the terminology applied to the red light district is telling, as the labels applied to it shifted as the region itself was shuffled around the town site. Early on, the realm of the 'soiled doves' was affectionately known as 'Paradise Alley'. A few years later, the fact that prostitutes had already begun to fall out of the

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<sup>188</sup> *Dawson Daily News*, March 13, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

community's favor is evident in the subsequent nicknames applied to the prostitutes' place of residence, which came to be known as 'Hell's Half Acre' and eventually, 'Lousetown'.

That there were sections of town that were formally recognized and set aside for prostitutes to live and work in, provides further evidence of their initial acceptance and incorporation into the social fabric of Dawson City in the early years of the gold rush. During the chaotic onset of the Klondike stampede, prostitutes, like everyone else, lived scattered throughout Dawson City with the majority operating out of small tents or modest cabins signified "by a red lampshade or special color of curtains" (Berton 1958: 385). In the spring of 1899, the legendary Sam Steele of the North West Mounted Police conceded that prostitutes were still essential to the maintenance of the social order in the boomtown community, but nevertheless ordered Dawson City's prostitutes to congregate themselves in Paradise Alley, which was located at the center of social life in the Klondike in the heart of the business and entertainment districts of Dawson City. As the community began to take shape and orderliness became a foremost concern, the prostitutes who were estimated to have numbered between forty-nine and one-hundred at the time were next forcibly relocated to a strip of land stretching down Second Street between Forth and Fifth Avenues.<sup>189</sup> In doing so, Steele ushered in a new era of controlled tolerance towards prostitution in the boomtown community. Deliberately located in an area of town beyond the accidental sight of those who wished to avoid the red-light district, the goings-on

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<sup>189</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

of the demimonde continued uninterrupted and firmly entrenched in the center of Klondike social life yet just beyond the gaze of respectability.

When the prostitutes were subsequently forced to relocate from Paradise Alley to an area of swampy terrain removed from the heart of Dawson's center of commerce that came to be known as 'Hell's Half Acre', it was not due to a sudden increase in modesty on the part of Dawsonites. Rather, it had shrewdly been realized that 'Paradise Alley' occupied a sizable amount of prime real estate that local businessmen were increasingly pressuring local officials to free up for redevelopment.<sup>190</sup> It was only a year after this however, that outside influences and the increasing presence of 'reputable' women and children in the gold rush community ultimately forced Dawsonites to come to terms with their scintillating demimonde. Reflecting the concerns of middle class families and respectable women entering into the community, concerted efforts were for the first time made at this point to purge Dawson City of all moral offenses, including drinking, gambling, and vice.

The issue of Dawson's unsightly red light district was brought to the forefront of the public's attention once more when it was announced that a school was to be built on Third Avenue, just one block from the prostitutes' recently relocated residences. While the police had long maintained the position that it was preferable to keep prostitution in the public eye where a managing influence could be exerted over it, a series of escalating restrictions culminated in the forced expulsion of prostitutes from Dawson City in the spring of 1901.<sup>191</sup> Thus the

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<sup>190</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

<sup>191</sup> *Klondike Nugget*, November 25, 1900, Circulating Microfilms, Yukon Archives.

initial acceptance of prostitutes within Klondike society abruptly ended that spring when the women who had once been central to the social life of the community were pushed to the margins of the boomtown settlement. As many packed their bags for greener pastures in the Paradise Alleys of the burgeoning Alaskan gold fields, a few stragglers settled on the shore across the Klondike River from Dawson City in 'Lousetown' to glean whatever business they could still manage to muster from the community that had once welcomed them with open arms filled with gold. This final relocation of the 'tenderloin district' proved exceedingly bad for business as the only way to access this 'suburb' was by way of a long bridge that afforded little in the way of cover for men observed walking its spans (Backhouse 1995: 110). As business dwindled, some prostitutes began to creep back in to Dawson City limits, operating under the guise of more legitimate trades such as: laundress, seamstresses or cigar store owners. These façades served as a front for the services actually being providing to their customers concealed within the walls of their places of business (see figure 6.1). As a result, prostitutes were once more soon scattered throughout Dawson City, living even in the midst of the most affluent and respectable members of Dawson City's social circles. Thus it has been estimated that by October of 1901, only thirty prostitutes remained in the vicinity of Dawson City (Backhouse 1995: 111), which number is in close agreement with the total of forty-four likely prostitutes that I have identified in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City.

**Figure 6.1:** Fronts for Prostitution in the Klondike



Source: Alaska State Library Historical Collection/ASL-P41-237

## The Place of Prostitutes in the Klondike Economy

A final criterion for assessing the relative standing of prostitutes within the Klondike community is evident in the economic aspects of transactions that occurred in the sexual marketplace. The sex trade was by no means exempt from the spirit of entrepreneurship that characterized other aspects of the Klondike marketplace, and in studying these transactions from a social and economic perspective, much can be revealed regarding the esteem and status of Klondike prostitutes within the gold rush community.

While many factors influenced the relative status of a prostitute among her peers in Dawson City, when it came to transactions between men and prostitutes in the Klondike, the economic standing of the men can be understood as having subsequently structured the standing of the prostitutes that they visited in the Klondike. Indeed the primary consideration in regard to determining the social standing of a Klondike prostitute relative to her peers, was the nature of the services that she offered in her transactions with men. As in the context of other historic resource boomtowns (see for example, Hurtado 1999, Johnson 1994, Murphy 1984, Roberts 2000), the cosmopolitan Klondike demographic supported a diversified marketplace in which the prostitutes filled every niche in the heterosexual market for both companionship and physical contact between men and women. At the top of the hierarchy of the Klondike demimonde were the elite brothel prostitutes. In the boomtown brothel setting, congenial social interaction was as much a part of the transaction as was the coitus that concluded the deal (Murphy 1984: 30). An explanation for the higher social standing of these

prostitutes relative to their peers can be found in Goldman's (1981) research of Comstock prostitutes wherein it was observed that many of the attributes that contributed to the popularity of brothel prostitutes were also qualities that might be expected of respectable middle and upper-class ladies. Brothel prostitutes for example, based their business upon their marketable physique, flawless social skills and other charms cultivated by 'proper' ladies in addition to the sexual proficiencies. From such a refined skillset they in turn reaped significant financial rewards (1981: 92). In this way, the women employed in high-end brothels came the closest to approximating the lady-like demeanor characteristic of 'respectable' women, which allowed them to offer the illusion of intimate and charming companionship in addition to the other services that they provided in these establishments. It was this emphasis on social as well as sexual entertainment that set these women above the lower-order prostitutes within the hierarchy of scarlet women whose trade was limited to a much more ephemeral experience.

Entries in the Gaol Register for Dawson City maintained by the North West Mounted Police suggest that there were at least two active brothels operating within the vicinity of Dawson City during the gold rush era,<sup>192</sup> although there were probably many more that escaped the record book. On the fifteenth of April in 1902, for example, three women were arrested on the charge of being inmates of a house of ill fame. The women ranged in age from twenty-six to thirty-seven and each was sentenced to one month of hard labor and fined fifty dollars, plus the costs associated with her prosecution. Had they been unable to pay the fine, notes

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<sup>192</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

in the file specify that they could have opted to repay their outstanding debt to society by serving an additional two months on the government woodpile. Although scholars have resolutely argued that boomtown prostitutes faced conditions of extreme destitution (see for example, Butler 1987, Laite 2009), each of these women evidentially had the money on hand to readily pay their fines as they were all released from police custody having served their one-month sentences on May 17, 1902.<sup>193</sup>

A year later the North West Mounted Police raided another local brothel and arrested three French women and their macque (pimp). The charge laid on May 12, 1903 was made on the grounds of the women having been inmates of the Bartlett—“a notorious house of assignation giving exhibitions of a disgusting nature”.<sup>194</sup> In this case, each woman was sentenced to two months hard labor, which they served before being released from police custody on July 11th, 1903. Reflecting the distaste for men who lived off the avails of prostitutes within Victorian society, their macque was handed a much harsher sentence of six months hard labor in addition to a fine amounting to fifty dollars plus court costs.

A final line of evidence for the existence of brothels in the Klondike is found in Moynahan’s (2008) account of the infamous Denver madam, Mattie Silk’s ninety-day sojourn to Dawson City. After covering the costs of operating her facility staffed by eight prostitutes that had been hand-picked in Denver, Mattie netted quite a tidy profit. Over the span of three short months, Mattie is

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<sup>193</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

<sup>194</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903.R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

reported to have accumulated thirty-eight thousand dollars in profits, which by Moynahan's estimate, amounts to the equivalent of nearly five-million dollars by today's standards—a fortune by any stretch of the imagination for twelve weeks worth of work, especially since Mattie did not personally service any of her clientele.

Being an astute businesswoman, upon arriving in Dawson City in 1898 Mattie quickly rented a wood frame building on Second Street at a cost of \$350 per month. Her's was instantly the largest and most popular brothel in the community given that each of the women she employed had been selected for their striking beauty, while her competitors operated out of smaller, less lavish establishments with only two or three rather unremarkable girls for customers to choose among (Moynahan 2008). The primary reason for Mattie's overwhelming success however, lay in her aptitude for creating a surreal reprieve for her clients in the midst of all of the hardships and deprivations of the rustic boomtown. Catering to male fantasies of intimacy and longings for familiar female companionship,

the soiled doves in Mattie's house had a reputation for pretty faces, tiny waists, creamy bosoms, dainty giggles, fine conversational skills, perky personalities and very imaginative techniques. Her girls had sparkling eyes that were legend among customers. (The sparkling eyes were the result of using belladonna, which dilated the pupils.) The women working for her also possessed excellent acting abilities. They were able to make their customers believe that they really cared (Moynahan 2008: 19).

These elite Klondike brothel prostitutes prove a striking contrast then, to the image of impoverished and exploited women depicted in other accounts of historic North American boomtowns. Not only did Klondike prostitutes have large amounts of cash at their disposal (as evidenced in their ability to readily pay their fines), but they also seem to have enjoyed a nearly limitless earning potential during the height of the gold rush given that the amount that a man was willing to pay seemed to only have been limited only by how much gold he had in his possession.

The physical space within which a prostitute plied her trade was perhaps the most readily apparent factor that contributed to the determination of her rank relative to her peer group (Goldman 1981: 74-93). Outside of the brothels, the part of town within which a prostitute resided was directly related to whether she had to resort to flagrantly propositioning clients, or whether they came to her without overt invitation (Porsild 1998, Murphy 1984). Thus, below the elite members of the demimonde were the prostitutes who lived and worked out of their ‘cribs’ in the heart of Dawson City’s red-light district (see figures 6.2 and 6.3). The ‘cribs’ were comprised of approximately seventy small, wood-framed structures built side-by-side that stretched along both sides of the street (Berton 1958: 385). The cribs were typically occupied by a single woman who advertised herself by painting her name on the door and brandishing her scantily clad body in the window or doorway in an unabashed attempt to attract passerby’s (Berton 1958, Ryley 1997, Porsild 1998).

**Figure 6.2:** Prostitute's 'Cribs' Along Paradise Alley in Dawson City



Source: University of Washington Library/Special Collections/Hegg 2442

**Figure 6.3:** Klondike Prostitutes at Their Windows in Dawson City



Source: MacBride Museum of Yukon History Collection/1989-2-109

While the prostitutes employed in brothels offered the façade of charming company, drinks, and jovial entertainment in addition to the services that they provided behind closed doors, the women working out of Dawson City's cribs provided a much more brisk service to their clientele. It was not uncommon, for example, for men to be seen lined up outside of a popular prostitute's door in Paradise Alley although the only embellishment to the hurried encounter that they could expect to receive once inside was a stiff drink offered at grossly inflated prices (Berton 1958, Porsild 1998). While details concerning payment were left to the madam in the brothels, independent prostitutes tended to such matters themselves, thereby dispelling any lingering illusion of their dealing being anything more than a sex-for-money transaction, in contrast to the more romanticized moods created in the brothels.

The economic overtones of this class of Klondike prostitutes intimate dealings in the cribs would certainly have carried over into the personal lives of the women since the cribs were scarcely large enough to accommodate a bed and a sitting area, leaving no segregation between a public workplace where they could meet with clients and a private living space reserved for herself. Thus, these women can be constructed as having occupied a lower rung on the socioeconomic hierarchy of prostitutes for several reasons. First, although they enjoyed the luxury of a private residence that they either rented or owned, the prostitutes of Paradise Alley nevertheless had a reduced ability to pick and choose among potential clients who came knocking at their doors at all hours of the day. In addition to this inconvenience they also lacked the security and protection that

came from working in a brothel under the protection of a madam. Although the prostitutes of Paradise Alley did not have to venture beyond their cribs in order to solicit customers who were all too willing to come to them, they nevertheless had to display themselves as public women in their windows and door frames in order to attract additional business. The loss of private lives among this class of prostitutes, which has likewise been observed in other contexts by Murphy (1984), is evident both in the flagrant way in which they exhibited themselves in full view of the public eye, as well as in the lack of segregation that was impossible to maintain between their work and private lives given the physical constraints of the spaces that they occupied.

The number of men that a prostitute saw on a typical day also influenced her relative status. Although brothel women had to share their income with the madam, they nevertheless earned more per customer and did not have to resort to working their way through the stretch of men lined up outside her door each night.<sup>195</sup> The success of madams like Mattie Silks provides evidence of the immense profits reaped by brothel workers. Along Paradise Alley, women also stood to reap considerable profits but they had to work harder for their income. In his vein, one Klondiker recalled that the prostitutes charged as much as four ounces of gold dust for their no-nonsense services that typically lasted a maximum of fifteen minutes.<sup>196</sup> In this vein, the image of impoverished prostitutes eking out an abysmal living in North American boomtowns (see for example,

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<sup>195</sup> As recalled by Ella Martinson in her recounting of her parent's life in the Klondike. Martinson, Ella Lung (1984). *Trail to North Star Gold: A True Story of the Alaska-Klondike Gold Rush*. Portland: Binford and Mort, pg. 82.

<sup>196</sup> Trelawney-Ansell, E.C. (1938). *I Followed Gold*. New York: L. Fruman, Inc., pg. 171.

Butler 1987, Goldman 1981), is challenged by the example of the Klondike as business was evidently brisk along the line and the women were indeed well compensated for their services. In the absence of an alternative for several thousand miles, the scarlet women of the Klondike enjoyed a cornered market driven by the economic laws of supply and demand as much as any other commodity to be had in Dawson City. This afforded even average prostitutes an unprecedented earning potential, placing the financial status of even the lowest of their order well above that of the majority of male Klondikers who labored for one dollar per hour under backbreaking conditions in order to earn the money that they quickly turned over on a whirlwind visit to the women of Paradise Alley.

Another important factor that impacted the status of individual prostitutes within the local social hierarchy of early Klondike women hinged upon the socioeconomic status of the men who partook of her services. The diversity of prostitutes available for men to choose among in historic boomtowns meant that regardless of his means, most men could afford to pay a visit to a prostitute from time to time (Simmons 1989: 68). This was ultimately in the best interest of everyone involved since both the boomtown prostitutes and the men who called upon them in fact depended upon each other (Goldman 1981: 109). Along these lines, Simmons (1981: 68) has observed that in other historic boomtowns, which prostitute a man patronized was a reflection of his own social standing. That is, men tended to call upon prostitutes whose relative socioeconomic standing within the demimonde paralleled their own standing in the wider boomtown community. Whether this was simply a matter of frugality or the necessity of spending within

the limits of their means, such practices worked to reinforce class distinctions among prostitutes, which in turn not only reflected but also reinforced class associations within the rest of the community (Simmons 1989: 68). The converse of this social arrangement likewise held true for prostitutes, whose own social standing could be directly influenced by that of the clients that she associated with. In this way, the hierarchy of Dawson City's prostitutes can be construed as having been largely dependent upon that of their male clientele, and thus paralleled overarching social structures wherein reputable women of the Victorian era derived their own class status from that of their husbands.

Given that prostitutes represented a sizable proportion of the female population in Klondike society during the early years of the stampede, this positioned the prostitutes and the male stampeders in an interesting relationship relative to one another. As 'public women' accessible by any man, a prostitute's socioeconomic identity was both bound to that of the men in the local community, while simultaneously tethered to no man in particular. This stood in opposition to the prevailing social order of the late Victorian era wherein the relative standing of respectable 'ladies' of the time was explicitly bound to that of a singular man (her father or husband). In the boomtown example of Dawson City, the early women of the community openly flaunted their sexual availability as they posed provocatively in full view public gaze at a time when sexuality was typically guarded and only subtly alluded to among respectable 'ladies'. In both instances, however, sexual availability was employed as a point of negotiation by women who bartered it to varying degrees in order to secure their own economic

wellbeing as a means for acquiring access to male wealth and status, be it through the sexual commerce or through the legitimate channel of marriage (Simmons 1998: 64). While sexual access could be hinted at in exchange for a marital contract by respectable women through coy yet socially acceptable subtleties, it is an interesting twist of circumstance that when prostitutes negotiated agreements within the public realm with the terms and conditions being plainly stated and openly agreed upon, such exchanges were (and often continue to be) mired in moral condemnation as a reprehensible practice. In an era when women had limited access to economic resources outside of the marital institution and were therefore required to join her economic outlook to that of an individual man (Simmons 1998: 64), prostitutes freely accessed the capital of men without the binding arrangements that their respectable counterparts entered into. The illegitimate relationships between men and Klondike prostitutes, while fleeting, were thus in many ways reminiscent of the respectable institutions that structured male-female relationships on the 'outside' (Goldman 1981: 98). That is, in both instances, women's livelihoods ultimately hinged upon her physical attributes and interpersonal skills, both of which could significantly enhance (or detract from) her ability to achieve a desired marriage partner (or in the case of prostitutes, to attract clients from higher social strata). The stratification apparent within the realm of prostitution, which was derived directly from the men of the community, further stands testament to just "how closely prostitution was tied to the wider community" in historic boomtowns (Goldman 1981: 98), as these class lines both

defined and were defined by the emerging socioeconomic stratification of the wider boomtown community.

#### Partners in Paradise: The Male Clients of Klondike Prostitutes

Although numerous scholars have made important contributions to the study of the lives and livelihoods of historic boomtown prostitutes (see for example, Butler 1987, Goldman 1981, Gray 1971, MacKell 2004), including specifically within the context of the Klondike Gold Rush (see for example, Backhouse 1995, Duncan 2004, Morgan 1999, Porsild 1998, and Ryley 1997), it remains that little commentary has been offered on the subject of the men who were equally active participants in prostitution as patrons of the ‘soiled doves’ of the Klondike.

Largely due to discretionary concerns on the part of the historic creators of today’s archival materials, few documents exist from which anything of a remotely intimate nature may be gleaned about the men who frequented Dawson City’s ‘tenderloin district’. Thus , while the names and personal details of the lives of many of the Klondike’s more notorious prostitutes have been preserved in print, the men who partook of the services of such women have by and large been lost to the anonymity of history. The consequence of this bias is an unavoidably skewed view of the relationship between prostitutes and their male clientele.

Evidence of this can also be found in the fact that although female prostitutes were occasionally brought to trial in the local Police Court Klondike men were rarely punished by law for their part the matter. In fact, the only cases in which men were charged for prostitution-related offences noted in the Gaol Register of

the North West Mounted Police was in the case of macques. The customers themselves were spared the indignity of formal prosecution.<sup>197</sup> Despite the lack of direct reference to the men who engaged the services of the Klondike prostitutes in archival materials, it nevertheless remains possible to detect the presence of these men in historic documents through a carefully directed gaze. Much as prostitutes were decidedly present in the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City despite their inclusion not being readily apparent, so too can it be argued that men who suffered from venereal disease contracted through visits to Paradise Alley are likewise represented in local morbidity data for the greater gold rush population.

Venereal disease was a common ailment throughout the era of the Klondike stampede,<sup>198</sup> however by the height of the gold rush in 1899 it had reached ‘epidemic proportions’ among the Klondikers (see for example, Porsild 1998: 128). Despite the high incidence of the disease in their midst, it is curious to note that aside from a few veiled references in the correspondence of local officials, no other acknowledgement of the disease appears to have been made by Dawsonites in the public realm. That any discussion of the threat of venereal disease appears to have been glossed over in contemporary data sources strongly suggests that mention of the disease was deliberately curtailed due to the social stigma surrounding the route of transmission of this constellation of sexually transmitted infections in the late Victorian era. As a biological ailment however, it stands to reason that evidence of the impact of this threat to health should

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<sup>197</sup> Police Gaol Record, Dawson 1899-1903. R.C.M.P. – Yukon Records, R.G. 18.D 4, Volume 1, Library and Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario.

<sup>198</sup> Bramble, Charles A. (1897). *Klondike: A Manual for Gold Seekers*. London: Forgotten Books, p. 309.

nevertheless be detectable in morbidity data sources, such as the patient register for Saint Mary's Hospital, which received both paying and indigent patients in Dawson City. If a sample of male patrons of Dawson City's 'scarlet ladies' can therein be identified, it would not only offer a more complete picture of the biosocial impact of prostitution in this particular time and place, but it would also provide another (and until now entirely missing) perspective in regard to the dynamic relationship between men and women in the Klondike.

Despite the severity of the venereal disease epidemic among the Klondikers, only four deaths attributable to sexually transmitted infections were recorded in the Yukon Territorial Death Register throughout the period of study (1898-1904).<sup>199</sup> The first such death was attributed to a forty-four year old man who died from the effects of syphilis in 1901. Little personal information was noted in association with this individual though, aside from the fact that he was Roman Catholic, had no known occupation, and that he died from his affliction in hospital. Given the chronic and slow-progressing nature of syphilis that can take years to manifest (Arrizabalaga 1993), it is likely that this man contracted the disease prior to having set off for the Klondike as opposed to having acquired the ailment during a visit to Dawson City's 'tenderloin district'.

The three remaining deaths attributed to venereal disease in the Yukon Territorial Death Register were all women. Given the socio-historical context, it is indeed likely that these women were engaged in prostitution during the gold rush era. Of these three cases, two women died in 1902 from the effects of salpingitis—an inflammatory condition of the fallopian tubes that commonly

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<sup>199</sup> Death Register for the Yukon Territory, Vital Statistics, Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

presents as a complication of chronic gonorrhoeal infection (Rothenberg 1993), while the third woman died from an unspecified complication of venereal disease in 1904.

Despite the very low mortality burden experienced by the Klondikers in association with the outbreak of venereal disease in their midst, it must nevertheless be assumed that morbidity incidence was exponentially greater given the concern displayed by contemporary health officials, as well as those, such as the Yukon Council and the North West Mounted Police who commented upon the rapid and wide-ranging spread of the disease that had resulted in a large number of sufferers within the community.<sup>200</sup> Given the rapidity with which the venereal disease epidemic infected the Klondike population, it is likely that the disease responsible for the outbreak was in fact, gonorrhoea (which manifests symptoms in under a week), as opposed to syphilis which has incorrectly been suggested as the disease responsible for inflicting so much suffering among the Klondikers (see for example, Ryley 1997).

Syphilis is a chronic bacterial infection that primarily infects the body through mucous membranes during sexual contact. Following an incubation period of two-to-six weeks after infection, skin lesions (chancres) begin to appear at the site of contagion (Arrizabalaga 1993). The chancres resolve within a six-week period and the sufferer then enters a symptomless period of latency that lasts for another six to eight weeks (Arrizabalaga 1993). Following this, the second stage of active syphilis begins with symptoms including rashes, fever, enlargement of the lymph nodes, and general malaise, all of which spontaneously

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<sup>200</sup> RCMP Records, volume 3055, Library and Archives of Canada.

resolve within the span of another two to six weeks time (Arrizabalaga 1993). The final stage of syphilis then only follows in approximately one-third of untreated patients and only after a lengthy period of dormancy that can span as many as twenty-years or more. It is in this stage that the characteristic symptoms of the syphilis sufferer emerge, including extensive skin lesions and tumors, neurological impairment, cardiovascular dysfunction, and insanity (Arrizabalaga 1993). Given the extremely slow progression of syphilis in an infected person, I argue that this particular disease was not (despite popular assumption) the culprit responsible for the epidemic of venereal disease among the Klondikers.

Support for this position can further be found in the sick reports filed by the Assistant Surgeon for the North West Mounted Police stationed at the Barracks Hospital in Dawson City. These reports note numerous cases of gonorrhea having been treated at the Barracks Hospital, while no mention is made of any other form of venereal disease having been seen by the doctor throughout the period of study.<sup>201</sup> For the year ending November 30<sup>th</sup> 1899, five of the one hundred and forty-nine patients that came under the care of the Assistant Surgeon were treated for gonorrhea. During the same period the following year, two more cases were diagnosed among the two hundred and thirty-one patients treated at this facility, while this number rose to thirteen out of two hundred and thirteen patients admitted to the hospital in 1901. Six more cases of gonorrhea were treated by the Assistant Surgeon throughout the 1902 period, with an additional eight such patients being attended to in 1903, while no new patients sought

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<sup>201</sup> These reports were published as part of the official reports submitted by the officer in charge of the "B" Division of the NWMP stationed in Dawson City between 1899-1904, and are published in the Sessional Paper of the Dominion of Canada, University of Alberta Libraries.

treatment for this illness at the police facility during the final year in the period of study.

Well into the modern era, gonorrhea has remained an extremely common and rapidly progressing infection that has in fact been described as “the most prevalent bacterial infection on earth” (Brandt 1985: 3). With an incubation period of just three to five days, the sufferer becomes infectious immediately upon contracting the bacteria, which rapidly infects the genital tract (Rothenberg 1993). The rate of progression observed among gonorrhea patients would therefore be much more closely in line with the extremely rapid spread of venereal disease among the Klondikers.

Although the unpleasant and uncomfortable symptoms associated with gonorrhea undoubtedly compelled many stampeders to seek medical attention it remained that there was little that any physician could do to alleviate the suffering of his patient during the gold rush era since no effective treatment for gonorrhea existed prior to the discovery of sulfa drugs in the 1930s (Brandt 1985). Interestingly, in each instance of gonorrhea reported by the Assistant Surgeon, the patient was noted as having recovered from their ailment upon being discharged from the police hospital. This is peculiar given what is known about the etiology of the disease—namely, that no intervention could effectively resolve gonorrheal infection prior to the advent of antibiotics. This also raises questions regarding the motive of the physician in reporting his patient as cured; specifically whether he truly believed that their case was resolved, or whether being aware of the limits of western medicine at the time, he simply discharged and labeled them as ‘cured’.

The fact that certain liberties were clearly taken in regard to the official reporting of patients' health statuses fits within the framework of medical nomenclature of the era, which being inexact and flexible, facilitated a culture of concealment among medical practitioners. Along these lines, physicians in times past were often inclined to refrain from directly labeling their patients with embarrassing diagnoses due to a professional desire to protect the reputation of patients found to be suffering from socially stigmatized ailments. This explains why few historic institutions maintained records or statistical information pertaining to incidence of venereal disease, including the keeping of records detailing the actual complaint that led their patients to seek medical attention in the first place in the case of sexually transmitted infections (Brandt 1985: 12). Yet with knowledge of the practices of contemporary health care practitioners and with attention paid towards contextualizing these materials within their sociohistorical milieu, it nevertheless becomes possible to detect likely cases of venereal disease in public hospital records despite the physicians' concerted efforts at concealment. This in turn affords researchers the opportunity to shed light on the personal lives of some of those suffering from sexually transmitted infections in Dawson City who had in all likelihood acquired their ailment while consorting with Dawson City's prostitutes.

The patient register for St. Mary's Hospital affords just such an opportunity. Although this facility was one of two public hospitals operating in Dawson City during the gold rush era, only records from this facility have been preserved. Given that the outbreak of venereal disease peaked during the earlier

years of the gold rush, it is unfortunate that the patient register dates back only as far as 1900 as it is likely that the incidence of gonorrhoea within the community is under-represented by the available medical records. Shortcomings notwithstanding, this reality makes the available data all the more valuable, as it offers the singular opportunity to draw together a sample of men that is most certainly constituted of clients of Klondike prostitutes. By identifying these individuals in historic data sources, it becomes possible to shed light on the male counterparts of the 'red-light ladies' of Dawson City's demimonde for the first time.

#### 'Male Trouble' in the Klondike

Of the 1258 cases noted in the patient register for Saint Mary's Hospital between 1900-1904, 3.26% (n=41) of the admissions were made for treatment of a constellation of treatments termed as 'male trouble' (n= 17), 'health trouble' (n=1) and 'indisposition/indisposed' (n=23). Given the socio-historical context and the proclivity of doctors for concealing patients' sexually acquired ailments, it is no great stretch to read between the lines of these diagnoses and to understand them as representing men who sought medical attention for gonorrhoea acquired during escapades with Klondike prostitutes. While it is acknowledged that terms such as these are characteristic of the medical nosology of the era, given the historical context and in light of the infectious diseases known to be active in the Klondike community at this time, these terms nevertheless likely represent acts of discretion on the part of Klondike physicians.

Focusing upon the sample of patients who can be interpreted as likely suffering from gonorrhea contracted as a result of liaisons with Klondike prostitutes, the patient register reveals that 85.54% (n=35) of these men were admitted as patients with the means to pay for their hospitalization, while only one individual was listed as indigent and therefore under the financial responsibility of the local government. The financial situation for a further five patients was not provided. However, given that the government only subsidized the care of officially documented indigent patients, these five men likely had the means to pay for the cost of their stay in hospital. This finding is also in keeping with the interpretation of these men as suffering from gonorrhea, as is evidenced by the fact that they were able to finance their own medical care, and so by extension, they would also have had the means required to pay for the services of a prostitute in the first place.

In keeping with the general demographic constitution of the greater gold rush population, of those patients determined to be likely suffering from gonorrhea for whom an age was provided (n=31), the majority were relatively youthful considering that 61.29% (n=19) were 35 years of age or younger, while 93.54% (n=29) were 45 years of age or younger. In regard to marital status, 63.41% (n=26) of these patients reported themselves as unmarried. While information regarding the occupation of these patients was largely incomplete with nearly 30% having no documented occupation (n=12), 39% (n=16) of patients reported themselves to be 'miners' by trade. These figures are also in keeping with the picture of the 'typical' Klondiker who was youthful, unattached,

and set off for the Klondike with the intention of mining but often fell into other lines of work upon reaching the gold fields.

Given that biases in the creation of primary and secondary data sources which focus exclusively upon female prostitutes (Goldman 1981: 153), this data represents an important first step towards reaching a more inclusive understanding of the relationship between the men of the Klondike and the prostitutes who represented the female majority of the Klondike population during the boom years of the gold rush community

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY IN THE BOOMTOWN CONTEXT

My research set out to gain a better understanding of the dynamic influence of gender and socioeconomic status upon the establishment and experience of community in the context of a historic gold rush boomtown. This subject has been approached through an ethnographically informed case study analysis of the population of gold rushers residing in and around Dawson City around the turn of the last century. Drawing upon and working intensively with archival data sources, I have established that although few of the formidable number of men and women who took part in the stampede to the Klondike ever returned home with sacks of gold, that many were nevertheless successful in finding what they had set off in search of. That is to say, a community was successfully forged by the stampeders who rushed north in their quest for adventure, freedom and social mobility.

Drawing upon insight gained into the community of Klondikers centered upon Dawson City facilitated by archival materials, it has been found that many of the most significant differences characterizing boomtown communities relative to their established and enduring counterparts arise from social peculiarities and particularities that are innate to these settlements. For example, as evident from some of the written sources both of the experiences of the miners themselves as well as others in the Klondike at the time, boomtown residents can be understood as having entered into a limbo-like state wherein previous gender roles and

cultural expectations governing self-conduct and interpersonal relationships ceased to exert a restraining influence over the lives of such individuals. Along these lines, Dawson City represented a unique social environment in which an underclass of women (prostitutes, dancehall girls and variety women) who were typically relegated to the fringe of society in established communities, were able to occupy a station typically considered to be the exclusive domain of ‘respectable’ middle and upper-class ladies. Thus while prostitutes are not usually afforded consideration as figures central to the maintenance of social institutions, the erasure of class distinctions among the Klondike stampeders would seem to have offered women—almost as much as it did men—the opportunity to transcend social barriers in a way that could not have achieved under any other circumstance. Given that women are often celebrated for their presumed role as provisioners of civilizing influence, the effect of there being a dearth of ‘reputable’ ladies in historic boomtowns such as Dawson City is understood to have privileged a particular cohort of females (allowing them to integrate and stabilize themselves in positions central to the social life of the community) by substituting in for positions typically held by their higher-status respectable counterparts. Lauded as a counter influence to what was widely considered by many observers to be the rampant and unremitting masculinity that Dawson City was steeped in, the fact that these early women of the Klondike typically fell well below the threshold for ladylike decorum in wider North American society was largely overlooked by men starved for the companionship of the ‘fairer sex’.

Consequently, men and women who relocate to boomtowns should anticipate encountering a disconnect between expectation and experience as the social matrix of these places is simultaneously “more complex and less predictable” than is characteristic of established communities (Freudenburg 1984a: 689). This is because gendered socioeconomic relationships among and between men and women must be renegotiated ‘from the ground up’ at the same time that a new community is itself being forged upon a novel terrain.

Beyond providing an opportunity for unadulterated amusement and carefree living, the Klondike also offered men an increasingly rare opportunity (in the context of encroaching civilization in late Victorian era North American society) to embrace their masculinity and adventurous spirit in a manner that was free from the constraints of a ‘civilized’ middle-class persona. In doing so, they could also experience first-hand the rapidly receding rugged landscape as they set off to test themselves in the north and to try their luck in the remote Klondike gold fields. Despite their best efforts, most men never saw their dreams of gold nuggets materialize. Rather than the fabulous wealth that men had imagined for themselves upon departing for the Klondike, the actual experience of most stampeders more closely resembled the picture painted by returned Klondiker Sam Wall, who reflected upon his time spent in Dawson City:

Nine-tenths of this big crowd that is camped and idling here does not know what it is going to do. Being asked they will plainly tell you so. They came into this faraway, isolated country with vague notions of what they were to do and how they were to do it when they got here: arrived and face to face with the hard conditions and the tremendous struggle for fortune that is going

here, their uncertain plans are dissipated and they sit in their tents and cook their meals and sleep, drawing their blankets a little closer about them as the nights grow colder and wait and wait.<sup>202</sup>

Although many were forced to abandon their hope of returning home with sufficient capital to solidify their middle class aspirations, many men nevertheless found that the Klondike offered other avenues for socioeconomic maneuvering that although less glitzy, nevertheless presented bona fide opportunities that were for some, a realistic possibility only in the boomtown context.

Thus men who were equalized through their mutual inexperience and shared hardships along the trails to reach Dawson City, found themselves in the position to renegotiate their standing in the boomtown community whereby the measure of a man was based upon his reputation in the eyes of his peers as opposed to the prestige of his job title, the social currency of his surname, or the balance of his bank account. And so, even if the Klondike did not make wealthy men of all those who joined in the stampede, it nevertheless remained that all that stood between the man that set off as a stamper, the 'Klondiker' that he could become while in the gold fields, and the man that he aspired to live up to upon his return, was the strength of his conviction and the merit of his resolve to strike out and forge a new life for himself in Dawson City.

The opportunities that proliferated in the social world of the Klondike were not limited to men though, as women also found that a variety of opportunities awaited them in Dawson City. Similar to the experience of male stampedeers in this context, many women were able to gain access to a higher

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<sup>202</sup> *San Francisco Call*, Volume 84, Number 83, August 22, 1898, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

echelon of society in the boomtown context than they had been able to achieve in their communities of origin. For some, this came in the form of providing for their own economic independence through employment opportunities that allowed women to capitalize upon their feminine charms and domestic skill sets, while others sought to a higher social standing among the rungs of Dawson City's emerging society ladies. Regardless of the reason for their sojourn, a commonality among all female stampeders was that once in the Klondike, they inevitably found themselves outnumbered by their male counterparts. The skewed gender ratio characterizing the gold rush population factored overwhelmingly in women's favor. As "[g]old dust pour[ed] into Dawson" City from the surrounding creeks, carried there in the pockets of men,<sup>203</sup> early female stampeders found that the 'city of gold' offered them greater opportunities for accumulating wealth as it did men given that most never needed to lay hand to a pickaxe in order to line her pockets with Klondike nuggets. This point is exemplified in the reminiscences of a stampeder who recalled of his visits to Dawson City's entertainment establishments saying: "I just couldn't say no to those fresh Cheechako dance hall girls...(the girls) were very charming, pretty and fast workers. I was sure easy picking for them".<sup>204</sup>

It is widely accepted among social scientists that discussion of contemporary societal problems can often be illuminated by analyses of historic populations. Although Dawson City is distanced from modern boomtowns temporally by more than a century and spatially by hundreds, if not thousands of

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<sup>203</sup> *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 279, July 6, 1899, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>204</sup> Davis, Henry. 1967. *Recollections In Sourdough Sagas*. Heller, Herbert (ed). Cleveland: World, page: 79-80.

miles, parallels may nevertheless be drawn between this and later boomtown communities. My work has contemporary relevance for Canada as many parts of the Canadian North (including the Provincial Norths) are on the verge of a boom in resource extraction, as well as more generic significance for the anthropological understanding of boomtowns in other parts of the world, particularly in regions of the Circumpolar North. Beyond this, there are possibilities for this work to relate to and inform anthropological concern on the topics of movement, mobility, migration and cosmopolitanism, as well as with modern resource frontiers. At the same time, further research on the Klondike could explore the possibilities of engaging with this literature. In this regard, the Klondike presents a prime opportunity to benefit from the lessons of the past given that this particular gold rush was extraordinarily well documented. The veritable treasure trove of vital statistics information, government documents, police records, and other archival materials affords researchers an invaluable opportunity to gain a great deal of insight into life in the context of this historic community.

With regard to the concept of ‘community’ in particular, the intent of this study has been to explore community in the Klondike ‘*as it was*’. This has provided several striking insights into the nature of community in the boomtown context that diverge markedly from expectations regarding how community ‘*ought to be*’. As such, my research has not only provided a window into the unique qualities of community life in the boomtown setting, but it has further contributed to studies of community by providing an example of the diversity that in fact characterizes human communities throughout time and across place.

Beyond the immediate goals of this study, a further ambition has been to demonstrate the theoretical, methodological and practical efficacies of ‘doing ethnography in the archives’. The approach taken in this regard has followed in response to the previous impossibility of conducting ethnographic research in past populations given the temporal disconnect between the researcher and the population being studied. In this vein, I have demonstrated that while the voices of informants may no longer be audible in historic communities, that these people and their stories have not necessarily been lost to researchers. Indeed, a chorus of voices can be heard in reading a variety of archival materials, particularly those of a more personal nature including letters, diaries and manuscripts.

During the process of working with these historical accounts, I have engaged with the people who authored them in much the same way as anthropologists work with their informants and research partners in contemporary settings. As I read their letters, diaries, articles and other accounts, I have participated in a series of conversations with the men and women who went North and created lives and homes for themselves in the Klondike. I have listened to their accounts of leaving home, climbing the Chilkoot Pass, seeking out places in lonely creeks, of their winter solitude in isolated cabins, of gaining and losing fortunes, creating businesses, and of their yearnings for home. From this kind of engagement, I have come to understand what people themselves thought about the kind of community that they were creating, nurturing, and entering into. The utility of further employing documents such as archived copies of newspapers, government correspondence, and police records has further provided insight into

the daily lives and foremost concerns of the people living in this particular time and place.

Rather than representing a divergence from ethnography as a standard of anthropological research, the argument made for this approach throughout my research in fact aligns, I would argue, with the goals of historical anthropology—a developing area of specialization within a discipline that itself has a well-established record of ongoing evolution and diversification both in regard to subject matter and methodology. In addition to extrapolating from observations of past populations for applications in contemporary scenarios, the value of a case study approach to an historic population can also be found in the insight therein gained into the human condition in another time and place. This is, of course, a central tenet of anthropological research. In this manner, many anthropologists would consider that community studies and studies of community represent a cornerstone of social or cultural anthropological research, allowing one to not only to view the world through the eyes of another, but also facilitating a more complete and complex understanding of ourselves in the cross-cultural perspective. Thus it is anticipated that observations regarding community and social organization in the historic example of the Klondike gold rushers residing in Dawson City may inform future analyses of boomtown communities, both past and present. In any event, it is clear from this exploration of the human condition that Dawson City and the surrounding goldfields must have been an extraordinary place for the Klondikers in the late 1890s and it my hope that I have provided the reader with a sense of the adventure that characterized the ‘last great rush’ along

the journey into the lives and community of the men and women what I have written about here.

### Future Directions

While this study has provided new insights with regard to a variety of topics of concern to anthropologists, it has also offered an opportunity for reflection in regard to my own understanding of where my research is situated within the discipline of anthropology and how I understand myself as a researcher. Historical anthropology is an area of expertise within anthropology that is situated at the intersection of numerous areas of specialization that also border and cross over the terrain of other disciplines. It can be an uncomfortable and sometimes lonely place to find oneself at a time when one is expected to begin establishing oneself in their field and grounding their research in a specific sub-discipline in order to chart a path for their ensuing career as a researcher. Nonetheless having struggled with numerous questions regarding how the end product would ultimately be framed, this experience has bolstered my own confidence in the strengths and utility of this emerging area of specialization, as well as my own certainty in my ability to explore the potential of this paradigm by both building and expanding upon this study in future research endeavors.

Along these lines, future research situated in historic communities is surely needed in order to continue to develop the methodological approach of ‘doing’ ethnography in the archives. This approach has been demonstrated as representing an important source of insight into past populations, especially those

that cannot be directly observed by the ethnographer. Further, it has been shown that the passage of time does not necessarily preclude ethnographic research, which can sometimes still proceed even following the demise of informants. To enter the texts produced by people who lived over one hundred years ago is to enter an unfamiliar social world. Such work constitutes an exciting area for exploration by cultural anthropologists who have previously limited their investigations to the temporal spans of living communities, leaving the study of past populations to archaeologists, and for the most part demarcating the study of historic settlements as the exclusive terrain of other disciplines. Of course, many cultural anthropologists do contextualize their work on contemporary issues with reference to history, but my work has focused exclusively on the past and has required a different kind of immersion into a particular place and time.

Like much ethnographic work, this thesis is a provisional piece of work that I see as being a strong foundation for future research. I feel it has opened the door to further analyses aimed at discussing the nature of the parallels that exist between Dawson City and subsequent northern boomtown communities. In doing so, it will become possible to find practical applications for the insight gained into boomtown communities that are drawn from the case study provided here. Like many of the Klondikers, I have been a miner of sorts too. I have unearthed a rich vein of archival material that can provide a basis for future research.

The most poignant defining feature of a boomtown—its exponentially increasing population base—has been suggested as representing the root of the majority of problems encountered by residents of these communities. Along these

lines, the Klondike, like the numerous other North American boomtown communities that preceded and followed it, was characterized by an extraordinarily high cost of living, long hours of labor-intensive work, and limited opportunities for entertainment and socialization. As boomtown migrants typically leave family and friends behind when they relocate, they often also face the compounding influences of the isolating losses of social support (Cortese and Jobes 1997, Moffic et al. 1983, Sharma and Rees 2007). Given that women are typically credited with maintaining “social integration and stabilization” through interpersonal relationships that they nurture within a given community (Moen et al. 1981: 6), the skewed gender ratio of men to women in resource boomtowns may be felt all the more severely by the primarily male boomtown residents given that few women are present to function in this role. Combined with the lack of familiar kin and extended social support networks that normally act to buffer against some of the negative influences of stressful life events (Weisz 1979), the consequences for boomtown residents isolated in a community of strangers can be particularly devastating. Along these lines, Weisz has reported a “positive correlation between levels of stress and the incidence, intensity and duration of mental and physical health problems” among residents of numerous historic North American boomtowns (1979: 32).

Following from this, a future direction for my research program will include an in-depth exploration of social-psychological wellbeing in the context of a remote boomtown. This next step will commence with an investigation of deaths resulting from suicide, in addition to incidence of incarceration on the charge of

‘insanity’ in order to explore the use of these indicators as gauges for assessing mental health and wellbeing within the boomtown context. To this end, archival materials including vital statistics data, records maintained by the local North West Mounted Police, and individual case histories of ‘insanity’ compiled by government authorities will provide the necessary insight into the compounding problems of stressful life events and the lack of social support networks upon mental health and psychosocial wellbeing among the Klondikers. The significance of social support networks will feature prominently, particularly in regard to the role that fraternal associations play in a community built by relative strangers. The manner by which membership in these organizations may substitute for familiar support networks based on extended kinship ties will likewise be possible to explore in some depth given that these organizations maintained extensive records that have been preserved in various archival collections.

My research, then, rather than representing the definitive and final word on life as a stamper in Dawson City—boomtown community of the Klondike gold rush—in fact represents the beginning of an enquiry both on the subject of the social world of the Klondikers specifically, as well as life in the context of North American boomtowns more generally.

## APPENDIX A

### Description of Data Contained Within Primary Data Sources

Completeness of Information Contained Within Primary Data Sources:

	<b>1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper</b>	<b>Yukon Territorial Death Register (1898-1904)</b>	<b>Patient Register for Saint Mary's Hospital (1900-1904)</b>
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	6695	754	1258
Biological Sex Affiliation	99.91% (n=6689)	100% (n=754)	--
Age	98.70% (n=6608)	78.25% (n=590)	70.67% (n=889)
Marital Status	98.91% (n=6622)	--	70.03% (n=881)
Skin Color	98.81% (n=6615)	--	--
Religious Affiliation	92.01% (n=6160)	58.49% (n=441)	88.08% (n=1108)
Profession/Rank/ Occupation	86.21% (n=5772)	52.79% (n=398)	65.74% (n=827)
Place of birth	96.50% (n=6461)	73.61% (n=555)	72.97% (n=918)
Nationality	95.21% (n=6374)	--	67.17% (n=845)
Years in the Yukon Territory	93.11% (n=6234)	--	--
Diagnosis	--	--	90.06% (n=1133)
Attending Physician	--	100% (n=754)	96.42% (n=1213)
Date of Admission	--	--	99.52% (n=1252)
Date of Discharge	--	--	97.14% (n=1222)
Condition Upon Discharge	--	--	93.33% (n=1174)
Indigent or Paying	--	--	87.44% (n=1100)
Date of Death	--	98.41% (n=742)	--
Cause of Death	--	97.61% (n=736)	--
Criminal Offense	--	--	--

\*Excludes stillbirths (n=5).

Frequency of Charges Resulting in Incarceration in the N.W.M.P. Gaol in Dawson City

<b>Reason for Incarceration</b>	<b>Entries in the Gaol Register</b>
Theft	40.45% (n=89)
Assault or Murder	12.27% (n=27)
Insanity'	10% (n=22)
Vagrancy	8.64% (n=19)
Public Drunkenness or Disorderly Conduct	7.73% (n=17)
Fraud	5.45% (n=12)
Supplying Liquor to First Nations People	5.00% (n=11)
Prostitution / Living off the Avails	4.01% (n=9)
Other	6.36% (n=14)
<b>Total</b>	<b>(n=220)</b>

## APPENDIX B

### Primary Data from the 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper

#### 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Age Distribution

Age Range	Males	Females	Total
Under 1 year	16	16	32
1-4 year(s)	59	52	111
5-9 years	80	84	164
10-14 years	66	38	104
15-19 years	108	52	160
20-24 years	491	181	672
25-29 years	902	240	1142
30-34 years	1119	225	1344
35-39 years	985	172	1157
40-44 years	765	89	854
45-49 years	399	49	448
50-54 years	221	29	250
55-59 years	92	7	99
60-64 years	44	5	49
65-69 years	11	0	11
70-74 years	4	1	5
75 years	2	1	3
Missing Cases	--	--	90
<b>Total</b>	5364	1241	6695

\*Excluding stillbirths (n=5).

#### 1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Marital Status

Marital Status	Males	Females	Total
Single	3719	465	4184
Married	1572	689	2261
Divorced	81	73	154
Widowed	13	10	23
Missing Cases	--	--	73
<b>Total</b>	5385	1237	6695

1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Time Spent in the Yukon Territory

<b>Years in the Yukon Territory</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Under 1 year	672	277	949
1-1.9 year(s)	895	349	1244
2-2.9 years	759	210	969
3-3.9 years	1924	200	2124
4-4.9 years	718	71	789
5 or more years	148	9	157
Missing Cases	--	--	463
<b>Total</b>	5116	1116	6695

1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Occupations

<b>Occupational Category</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
Miner / Prospector	1997	15	2012
Skilled Labour	814	77	891
Unskilled Labour	820	181	1001
Professional	879	73	952
Hospitality	455	141	596
Missing Cases	--	--	745
<b>Total</b>	4965	487	6197

\* Limited to males and females fifteen years of age or order at the time of the census.

1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Value of Personal  
Property

<b>Value of Personal Property</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Gender Not Reported</b>	<b>Total</b>
\$0	11	1	0	12
\$1-\$100	2377	332	3	2712
\$101-\$200	976	230	0	1206
\$201-\$300	290	60	0	350
\$301-\$400	96	22	0	118
\$401-\$500	284	86	0	370
\$501-\$600	30	4	0	34
\$601-\$700	15	2	0	17
\$701-\$800	25	4	0	29
\$801-\$900	2	1	0	3
\$901-\$1000	109	34	0	143
\$1001-\$2000	80	24	0	104
\$2001-\$3000	26	1	0	27
\$3001-\$4000	6	1	0	7
\$4001-\$5000	19	6	0	25
\$5001+	26	3	0	29
No Value Reported	1063	442	4	1509
<b>Total</b>	5435	1253	7	6695

1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Value of Claim

Holdings

<b>Value of Mining Claims</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Gender Not Reported</b>	<b>Total</b>
No Claims Reported	3779	1127	6	4912
\$1-100	117	22	0	139
\$101-\$200	292	22	0	314
\$201-\$300	87	9	0	96
\$301-\$400	63	5	0	68
\$401-\$500	244	17	0	261
\$500-\$999	50	3	0	53
\$1000-\$1499	237	16	0	253
\$1500-\$1999	44	2	0	46
\$2000-\$2499	146	8	0	154
\$2500-\$2999	29	0	0	29
\$3000-\$3499	50	6	0	56
\$3500-\$3999	3	0	0	3
\$4000-\$4499	30	0	0	30
\$4500-\$4999	1	0	0	1
\$5000-\$5999	99	5	0	104
\$6000-\$6999	15	0	0	15
\$7000-\$7999	11	0	0	11
\$8000-\$8999	8	1	0	9
\$9000-\$9999	2	0	0	2
\$10,000-\$24,999	87	6	0	93
\$25,000-\$49,999	14	2	0	16
\$50,000-\$99,999	21	2	0	23
\$100,000+	7	0	0	7
<b>Total</b>	5436	1253	0	6695

1901 Canada Census for Dawson City Proper: Reported Real Estate Holdings

<b>Real Estate Value Held By an Individual</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
Under \$500	539	52	591
\$501-\$999	167	31	198
\$1000-\$1499	133	12	145
\$1500-\$1999	50	8	58
\$2000-\$2499	83	8	91
\$2500-\$2999	18	5	23
\$3000-\$3499	36	6	42
\$3500-\$3999	6	1	7
\$4000-\$4499	23	1	24
\$4500-\$4999	5	0	5
\$5000-\$5499	32	8	40
\$5500-\$5999	2	0	2
\$6000-\$6499	7	2	9
\$6500-\$6999	2	0	2
\$7000-\$7499	5	2	7
\$7500-\$7999	2	0	2
\$8000-\$8499	9	0	9
\$8500-\$8999	1	0	1
\$9000-\$9499	1	0	1
\$9500-\$9999	0	0	0
\$10000+	40	8	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>1161</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>1305</b>

Age Distribution of Likely Prostitutes Reported in the 1901 Canada Census for  
Dawson City Proper

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Probable Prostitutes</b>
Under 1 year	--
1-4 year(s)	--
5-9 years	--
10-14 years	--
15-19 years	7
20-24 years	10
25-29 years	8
30-34 years	7
35-39 years	4
40-44 years	2
45-49 years	3
50-54 years	--
55-59 years	1
60-64 years	--
65-69 years	--
70-74 years	--
75 years	--
Missing Cases	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

Reported Place of Birth of Likely Prostitutes Reported in the 1901 Canada  
Census for Dawson City Proper

<b>Place of Birth</b>	<b>Probable Prostitutes</b>
USA	17
France	13
Canada	7
Other	7
Total	44

Reported Annual Salary of Likely Prostitutes Reported in the 1901 Canada

Census for Dawson City Proper

<b>Annual Salary</b>	<b>Probable Prostitutes</b>
\$0-\$100	1
\$101-\$200	16
\$201-\$300	5
\$301-\$400	2
\$401-\$500	0
\$501-\$600	1
No Salary Reported	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

Reported Real Estate Holdings of Likely Prostitutes Reported in the 1901

Canada Census for Dawson City Proper

<b>Value of Real Estate</b>	<b>Probable Prostitutes</b>
\$0-\$500	5
\$501-\$999	--
\$1000-\$1499	1
\$1500-\$1999	--
\$2000-\$2499	3
\$2,500	2
No Real Estate Reported	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>

## APPENDIX C

### Primary Data from the Patient Register for Saint Mary's Hospital

#### St. Mary's Hospital Patient Register 1900-1904: Financial Status of Patients

##### Likely Suffering from Gonorrhoea

<b>Ill-Defined Diagnosis</b>	<b>Paying Patient</b>	<b>Indigent Patient</b>	<b>Missing Cases</b>	<b>Total Number of Patients</b>
Male Trouble	13	0	4	17
Health Trouble	0	1	0	1
Indisposed	22	1	0	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>41</b>

#### St. Mary's Hospital Patient Register 1900-1904: Age Distribution of Patients

##### Likely Suffering from Gonorrhoea

<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Likely Gonorrhoea Cases</b>
<15 years of age	0
15-20 years of age	1
21-25 years of age	10
26-30 years of age	3
31-35 years of age	5
36-40 years of age	3
41-45 years of age	7
46-50 years of age	1
51+ years of age	1
Missing Cases	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

St. Mary's Hospital Patient Register 1900-1904: Occupation of Patients Likely  
Suffering from Gonorrhoea

<b>Reported Occupation</b>	<b>Likely Gonorrhoea Cases</b>
Miner	16
Skilled Labour	3
Unskilled Labour	5
Professional	3
Hospitality	2
Missing Cases	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

St. Mary's Hospital Patient Register 1900-1904: Marital Status of Patients  
Likely Suffering from Gonorrhoea

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Likely Gonorrhoea Cases</b>
Married	7
Not Married	26
Missing Cases	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>41</b>

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