

Surprising Survival: The Preservation of Dawson City's
Architectural Heritage

by

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the required standard

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ABSTRACT

Few North American 19th-century boomtowns have survived. As accessible mineral reserves ran out, miners and townspeople followed. Those mining camps still extant have usually survived through government sponsorship and historic park designation, and act as outdoor museums. An exception to this is Dawson City, Yukon Territory, Canada. How has Dawson, just kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, persevered without the mining wealth that created it?

This thesis explores that phenomenon, concluding that the building of a fully serviced town in the 1890's in such an unlikely location owed much to the Canadian government's determination to resist American colonization of this country. Dawson City's preservation into this century is best explained by a combination of factors: its architectural heritage survives through major and equivalent roles of government, tourism, and the loyalty of the townspeople.

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Abstract (continued)

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Foreword

By being born in 1936, I became a somewhat unwilling witness to the death of an era, one that began near the end of the Victorian Age, survived a "war to end all wars," enjoyed a period of apparent prosperity, suffered a worldwide depression, and finally found war again. Although not particularly cohesive, so many huge changes having occurred during the fifty years between 1895 and 1945, this era nevertheless had clear connections to its preceding half-century. Following the end of the Second War, however, vestiges of the Victorian Age and all that followed rapidly disappeared--most certainly from my hometown, at any rate. By 1946, when I was ten years old, I had become aware that the physical world of my father and mother, encompassing the four decades from the beginning of the twentieth century, was dying. Its imminent demise had been precipitated by the effects of world and local events in the previous decade: the deprivations of the Great Depression; Hitler's attacks on neighbouring countries in Europe; Britain's--hence Canada's--entry into World War II; the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour; food and fuel rationing; fears of bombing raids on the North American west coast; air-raid sirens at

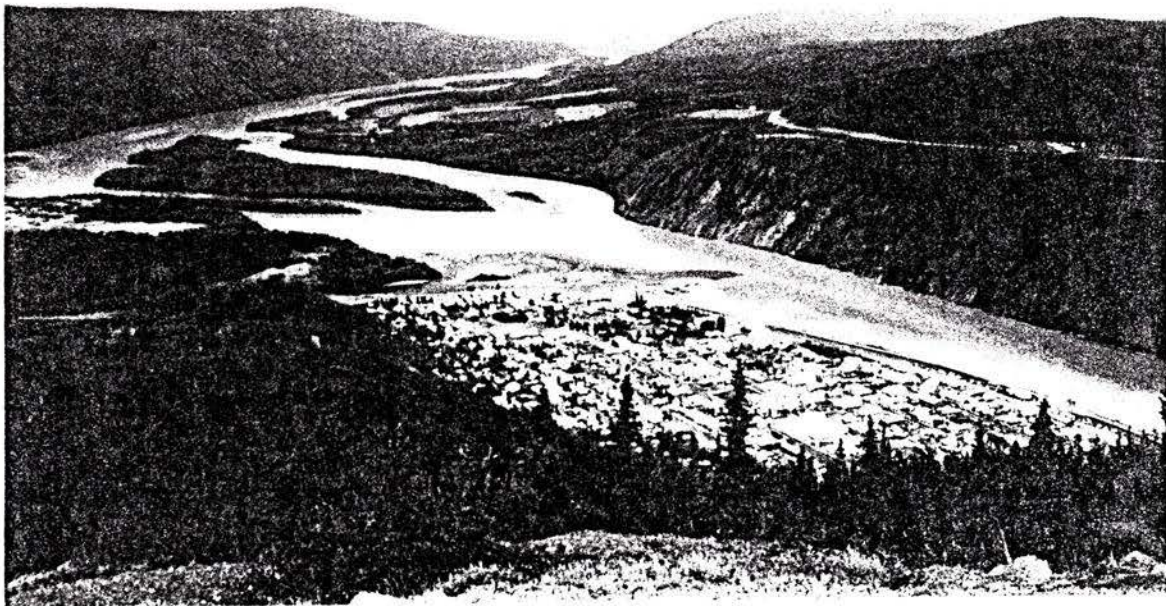
night; gas-masks at school; electric light blackouts; Hitler's defeat; the harnessing of atomic energy; the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a welcome end to the war. To those of us living on the western edge of Canada, these events seemed to signal our entry into a new epoch. Even so, we were unprepared for what lay ahead, during the following decades, when those surroundings familiar to our fathers and mothers--and to their children--would be obliterated. Those years would spell the disappearance of the westcoast environment we knew--soon gone were the electric streetcars, steam locomotives, CPR's Princess steamships, hand-cranked telephones, Packard cars, wringer washing machines, and home-made bread, to name a few. Although we never missed these things terribly, their replacements usually being improvements, we saw other developments that bothered us immensely. Clear-cutting by big timber companies, for instance, would signal not only the end of such businesses as my uncle's cottage-industry sawmill, but also the loss of unbroken forests and animal habitats we believed would remain forever.

We also saw the destruction of the houses our parents had grown up in, homes often built by their own parents. Two Victorian farmhouses in which I spent much of my childhood soon disappeared, for example, making room for more modern-looking, more heat-efficient, and supposedly more comfortable residences. Indeed, of the eight houses in

Victoria that I have at one time called home, only one now remains. All others have been either demolished or altered so drastically that I can no longer recognize them. Other familiar buildings and institutions--corner groceries, two-pump full-service gas stations, hardware stores, Eaton's Department Stores, a brickyard, cement plant, an asphalt roofing plant, furniture factory, winery--places and things within a few miles of our house that I had taken for granted while growing up--were also soon gone.

Little wonder, therefore, in this age of computers, the internet, interactive television, cellphones, SST's, hybrid automobiles, DNA tracking and genetically-altered foods, I long to see reminders from my own early surroundings, a sawdust-fired kitchen stove or glass-chimneyed coal-oil lamp, say, or to hear the distinctive sound of a Model A Ford engine working uphill. Thus, since 1956, about the time the last CNR steam locomotives were fighting their wars against the ramparts of the Rocky Mountains, I have taken every opportunity to look at things and places reminiscent of the past, not only from my own early experiences, but from other societies as well. My search has taken me from the Arctic Circle to the United States-Mexico border, from the Caribbean to central Europe, from Death Valley Scotty's Castle in California to Mad King Ludwig's castles in Bavaria, from Quebec's Citadel to Rome's Colosseum, from Montreal's Notre Dame to the Vatican.

All such places have proven fascinating. Although my nostalgia can sometimes be sated in museums, I find historic buildings or villages more satisfying, since the items there that excite my early recollections and historical interests are found in their original context. One such exciting place is Dawson City, Yukon, now a national park. Unlike many static heritage offerings, however, this goldrush boomtown of the 1890's is vibrant with life. People actually live and work here, whether or not the town's historic park designation sustains them directly. My stay in Dawson City in 1995 unfortunately lasted only three days, but the impression the old town left on me endures well, even seven years later. This thesis grew out of that impression.



Frontispiece: Dawson City, Yukon,
looking south. The Klondike River
enters the Yukon River, centre left

Chapter 1:

An Extraordinary Agenda

Rare are the survivors of early architecture from western Canada's frontier towns and villages. Entire original neighbourhoods have been demolished during the past century and a half, often under pressures of rapidly increasing populations and land values. Quite as often, however, early buildings have failed to survive because of shrinking--rather than growing--numbers of people and their economies. Thus abandonment has been as destructive as redevelopment. As a result, frontier towns with early architectural ensembles remaining even vestigially intact are uncommon. Where they do exist, survival has been almost accidental, dependent upon a number of critical elements. One town that has managed to have all these elements in place is the goldrush settlement of Dawson City, Yukon (Figure 1-1).

The object of this thesis is to examine, and hopefully to solve, the enigma of the continued existence of Dawson City and its architecture, a few of its buildings appearing new enough to be mistaken for replicas, into the twenty-

first century. The strange circumstances of this far northern town's creation, its early and apparently unearned importance, its later near-death and still-later recovery, form a puzzle of seemingly ill-fitting pieces. The town became, for instance, a capital city when none appeared necessary in a vast, mostly uninhabited region straddling the arctic circle. In addition, Dawson's climate was, and is, severe, uninviting to human habitation and the construction and maintenance of creative architecture. Its structures have always been of wood, a material that might well stand for temporariness, impermanence. The local area's main source of revenue, its gold deposits, was cleaned out early on, and most of the town's population left as a result. Finally, its far-northern location was remote from supply centres and so-called modern civilization. Why would people--relatively few, to be sure--have stayed behind during that long and quiet, almost inactive interval between the goldrush of the 1890's and the town's historic park designation in the 1960's? Why, in fact, was enough of the town still intact to justify its designation as a historic monument? This thesis, I hope, answers these and other puzzling questions.

Although I have always been interested, from childhood, in the history of Dawson City--the town was born only forty years before I was, and therefore seemed contemporary to my own early environment--it took a visit to the settlement in

July, 1995, to goad me into examining more closely its enigmatic nature.

Much has been written about the earliest days of this century-old goldrush town, notably by poet Robert Service and other observers who took part in the goldrush itself or reached the area shortly afterwards, and by the town's native son, Canadian historian Pierre Berton. Later writers, among them Janet Wright, Margaret Archibald and Christopher Taylor, have written extensively about the town's architecture and administration following its establishment as a historic park. Far less has been written about Dawson for the period between these two eras, however, leaving me somewhat at the mercy of conjecture and surmise. Nevertheless, I believe I have made progress in matching past with present.

Early in the planning of this thesis, I realized the importance of government roles in the original construction and eventual rehabilitation of Dawson City. I also recognized a parallel between Dawson City, Yukon, and Victoria, British Columbia, in the attitudes of government towards western frontier towns. Both places, for instance, were given capital city status at a time when each was no more than a remote outpost with an uncertain future. There are other parallels as well: both underwent mercurial growth from a goldrush; both played defensive roles against foreign imperialism; both have recently looked at tourism as

critical for their well-being. It seemed obvious to me that determining the survival of one required examining the history of the other. Therefore, in attempting to explain Dawson City's ultimate survival, I have devoted what might seem an inordinate amount of energy towards establishing this far northern town's place in the overall development and continuance of Canada's West.

Although its park designation is not unique among historic western mining camps, Dawson City, unlike Barkerville in British Columbia or Bodie in California, is not a museum piece. It is still a viable place to live, with a growing population.¹ This fact is surprising, certainly, but not more so than the town's original creation. Even in 1896, when Dawson was established at the junction of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers, just south of the Arctic Circle and near the Alaska-Yukon border, the site for it seems to have been improperly considered (Figure 1-2). Decades later, in the late 1950's, prominent historian Pierre Berton, no doubt drawing from his own experiences there as a child, and from those of his father, who had trekked into the Klondike region in 1898,² observed that

¹ Government of Yukon, Bureau of Statistics, Census 1996 (Whitehorse 1999), 29. According to this census, the population of Dawson City was 1287 persons, an approximate 18% increase during the previous five year period.

² Pierre Berton, The Klondike Fever (New York 1958), dedication.

Dawson City's placement at the confluence of the two rivers never offered more than a narrow "wedge of flat swampland... unprepossessing, fetid, and mosquito-infested." He continued to express surprise at the selection by adding: "An almost impossible place for settlement, yet this was to be the site of the gaudiest city in the north."³ Today, in the early years of the twenty-first century, Berton might find it even more surprising that, in such an apparently uninviting place, the town's architectural ambience still reflects its earliest years. Original factors which might have guaranteed longevity for the town and its historic buildings are no longer present, yet Dawson City lives on (Figure 1-3).

The threats against survival of this typically 19th-century western boomtown have been numerous--firestorms, floods, trade route changes, loss of an economy-stimulating seat of government, foreign political intervention, arctic weather, discontinuous permafrost, and, with greatly-depleted gold reserves, a population that during its first half-century dwindled from many thousands to a "hundred or so who stayed on amid derelict buildings."⁴ Dawson City and its architecture survive in spite of such challenges.

Even though Dawson City's longevity is surprising, the

³ Ibid., 40.

⁴ Lowell Thomas Jr., The Trail of Ninety-eight (New York 1962), 169.

establishment of the town itself, except for its strange swampy location, was not. It was built as part of an expansive process during the second half of the 19th century, at a time when hundreds of optimistic town-founders were using the name "City" for their little settlements in western North America. Mineral extraction provided the usual incentive for building these towns, with gold and silver deposits being discovered everywhere among the cracks and folds and detritus of the continent's western mountain ranges. The town-builders had little problem in realizing their development dreams, of course, since gold and silver exploitation appealed to a wide cross section of the populace. Even staid citizens from somewhat economically stable areas abandoned homes, families, and businesses to follow improbable dreams, to set out on dangerous, often death-defying journeys to the source of the latest rumour of rich discovery. A few arrivals hoped to settle permanently, intending to start over in towns springing up around gold mines and placer fields. The move to such places offered a possible escape from the deprivations suffered in a worldwide economic depression that began in the 1870's and sank desperately during the next twenty years.⁵ For these hopefuls, goldmining held the only key to a better life.

Unfortunately the dreams of the optimistic town-

⁵ Stuart Ramsay Tompkins, Alaska: Promyshlennik and Sourdough (Norman 1945), 223.

builders and their goldseeking residents usually faded quickly. Most of these so-called cities never amounted to more than a hodgepodge of canvas tents and a few temporary wooden structures. The majority of the gold--and silver--strikes would prove minor and shortlived, destined to be forgotten. But the nineteenth-century goldseeker had an indomitable spirit, maintaining, even as he saw his great plans collapsing, an almost irrational belief that if a bright future could not be found here, it would be appear elsewhere. At the first whisper of yet another rich find, men--and women⁶--uprooted and headed for this new El Dorado. But finding easily accessible pockets of gold was becoming more and more difficult, with likely prospects appearing ever further afield. One day it would even mean travelling to the cold Arctic Circle, where a surprisingly vigorous small city would grow, prosper for a time, and then fade. Unlike so many similar towns, however, Dawson City was not about to disappear altogether.

Critical to the survival of this far-northern town has been the close attention given it, from founding to present day, by the Canadian Government. Ottawa's politicians, from the town's inception, viewed this small settlement as much

⁶ Frances Backhouse, Women of the Klondike (Vancouver 1995), ix. Ms. Backhouse writes: "As I suspected, the women of the Klondike were more numerous and diverse than most historians would have us believe." Doubtless this observation could be applied to other North American boomtowns of the era, as well.

more than just another temporary boomtown with a fleeting prosperity. Even if initially established for the reaping of riches, Dawson City had an ultimate value more political than economic.

To understand Ottawa's intense involvement in the late 1880's in Dawson City--and, significantly, in its architecture--we must look at the history of the previous century, when many Americans were struggling to gain control of all of North America. With the creation of the United States of America in 1783--the result of the War of Independence--an American territorial expansionist vigour emerged. This was almost inevitable, given the founding peace agreement signed by Britain. Here was an opportunity presented to the Americans by the British, who, exhausted by the war, seemed eager to alter their imperialist attitude.⁷ Thus, with a softening of their possessive feelings towards North America, the colonial ownership of various regions in North America was left in doubt by the creation of the new republic. Disputes soon erupted over lands Britain had earlier claimed formally to be part of British North America in the Quebec Act of May 20, 1774.⁸ These were arguments Britain would surely lose. By 1791, just eight years after the British peace agreement, the country that would one day

⁷ Edgar McInnis, Canada, A Political & Social History (Toronto 1982), 198.

⁸ Ibid., 160-1.

become Canada had already lost to the United States the present-day states of Michigan, Indiana and Ohio, along with the eastern halves of Wisconsin and Illinois⁹ (Figure 1-4).

The seeds of our government's involvement in Dawson City had thus been planted by early United States politicians who, having established themselves along the eastern seaboard, now looked to plow newer fields of expansionist activity. The politicians of Upper and Lower Canada had good reason to worry; two decades after their loss of lands south of the Great Lakes, a newly elected American Congress in 1810, roused by vocal members from the new western and old southern states, decided to add all of British North America to their country.¹⁰ Unhappily for the congressmen, however, the War of 1812 proved such a goal difficult to achieve.

American hopes for eventual takeover of their northern neighbour were not forgotten, however. In 1823 American President James Monroe declared his version of his country's future power--its manifest destiny--a declaration that surely reawakened the nervousness of his northern neighbours. Although his Monroe Doctrine was intended as a warning that there would be no further colonization of North America by Europeans, the announcement must have led Canadians to a different conclusion. To them the warning

⁹ Ibid., 161.

¹⁰ Ibid., 217.

seemed to imply that all of the western continent, including Canada and Mexico, was fair game for eventual absorption by the United States.

Americans obviously had not given up their hope of removing entirely all remaining British influence from North America, and not just from those regions ceded by Britain following the War of Independence. In the far north, for example, the United States-Russia Treaty of 1824 gave control of all of Alaska to the Russians, pointedly ignoring the long-standing British occupation of the region, via the Hudson's Bay Company's trading posts. Americans, choosing between two competing imperialist countries, would deny the one with whom they had fought so bitterly in the past.

This is not to argue, however, the Russian claim to the Alaskan coast, which resulted from an expedition sent out from Yakutsk in 1786 by Empress Catherine, who had colonization in mind¹¹ (Figure 1-5). A dozen years later, in 1798, having seen the economic benefits her country derived from the expanding sea otter fur trade and concerned by the arrivals of interlopers in Alaska's rich hunting grounds, Empress Catherine engineered the creation of The Russian American Company. This fur company was to operate under a virtual monopoly along the Alaskan coast.¹² The

¹¹ Tompkins, Alaska, 83.

¹² Ibid., 69,87; Charles Lillard, Seven Shillings a Year: The History of Vancouver Island (Ganges, 1993), 32. Tompkins suggests that it was the British, rather than

Russian government-backed organization thus became the far-north's coastal equivalent of the Hudson's Bay Company's hinterland enterprise. Perhaps, because of this dual occupation of Alaska, American negotiators viewed the settlement of its territorial ownership question with ambivalence, possibly even seeing its resolution as a figurative flip of a coin. Or were the Americans, instead, charting a path to their own future in Alaska?

Although these developments may seem far removed from today's study of Dawson City's architecture, they were in fact forming a mindset among Canadian politicians that would one day greatly affect not only the Yukon town's appearance but also its longevity.

That mindset would be further hardened in the 1840's, two decades after the United States-Russia Treaty of 1824, when discussion surfaced regarding the still unresolved location of Canada's southern border west of the Rocky Mountains. Even though the boundary across the prairies east of the mountain range had been established along the 49th Parallel in 1818, by 1843, twenty-five years later,

the Russians, who ignited the highly profitable international sea otter trade when crew members of Captain James Cook's Discovery sold Alaskan furs to merchants in Canton, China, in 1779. He maintains it was the British who "fanned to fresh life the ardor of the Siberian traders."
Charles Lillard disagrees: "...Russians already knew the value of the sea otter furs, but...wisely saw no reason to inform the rest of the world about the riches in what they considered to be their private hunting grounds."

Democrats in Washington, D.C., still believed that the lands bordering the Pacific should be considered a separate matter. The American politicians were so determined the boundary between the two countries not be continued to the coast along the 49th Parallel they coined the slogan, "fifty-four forty or fight," referring to the latitude they believed should be the boundary. To back up their demand, they began preparations yet again for war with Britain. The Americans were insisting that all of present-day British Columbia lying south of present-day Prince Rupert be turned over to them.¹³ The British/Canadians, on the other hand, wanted the boundary established far to the south, perhaps even along the northern boundary of California, but definitely no further north than the Columbia River, thus claiming lands the Hudson's Bay Company had long considered as belonging to Britain¹⁴ (Figure 1-6).

Negotiations in 1846, in the so-called Oregon Treaty between the United States and Britain, finally established the Canadian border as a continuation of the 49th Parallel.¹⁵ As expected, the settlement pleased no one.

¹³ McInnis, Canada, 285-7.

¹⁴ Ibid., 285.

¹⁵ Ibid., 285. The forty-ninth parallel boundary does not cross Vancouver Island, but dips south of it along the centre line of Juan de Fuca Strait. Ownership of mid-strait San Juan Island, however, was not settled until 1871, when John A. Macdonald finally agreed to sign the Treaty of Washington. Ibid., 376-382.

Canadians felt the British had not backed them sufficiently on their claims for the present-day states of Washington and Oregon; the Americans were disappointed that the boundary the British insisted upon denied the United States complete control of the west coast from Mexico to the Russian-held Alaska Panhandle. In any case, as in the settlement of the Maine-New Brunswick boundary in 1842, the Americans seemed to have ended with most of the pie.¹⁶

One can imagine the relief Canadian politicians felt when the boundary was not established at latitude 54 degrees, 40 minutes north. If it had been, the remaining British-held territory in the west would doubtless have received even more pressure from American expansionists. Nevertheless, even some fifty years later, towards the end of the 19th century, when activity in the far north began to develop rapidly, Canadians still saw themselves as fighting against American takeover. That struggle would find particular focus in the Yukon Territory. Any presence of Americans in that far northern region, especially in large numbers and with consequent political clout, could be dangerous to Canadian sovereignty. The situation portended a repeat of the British/Canadian removal from the Oregon Territory, a situation bolstered by still-lingering echoes of "fifty-four forty or fight." This time, however, Ottawa's politicians were ready to take preventative

¹⁶ Ibid., 282-285.

measures.

To understand fully the approach taken by the Canadians--which by the 1890's was nothing new--one must review the long-standing relationships between Britain, the United States, and Canada. Following the Oregon Treaty settlement, viewed as yet another loss of so-called British territory, Britain established the habit of intervening very early in future colonial territories. The mother country's politicians realized that if they wished to maintain a foothold in North America's West, they would have to take a more aggressive defensive position against United States imperialism.

Oddly, an employee of the Hudson's Bay Company had showed them the way. He was James Douglas, who in 1843 was placed in charge of Fort Victoria, a new HBC trading post regarded essentially as a replacement for the beleaguered forts of Astoria and Vancouver on the Columbia River. Within a dozen years, from his new post on the southern end of Vancouver Island, Douglas would be obliged to show how far he was prepared to go to defend his British-style regime. The discovery of gold in 1856 in the sandbars of the Fraser River,¹⁷ just inside the Canadian border, soon brought a great rush of American goldseekers, as they would later come to Dawson City. By 1858, Douglas no doubt had become worried about the potential loss of more territory,

¹⁷ Ibid., 317.

as had happened in Oregon, from the large number of incoming Americans among the goldseekers. On the other hand, he also viewed their arrival at his trading post--the nearest supply centre to the goldfields--as an opportunity for financial reward and personal power. Without political sanction, and with no more authority than those given by his relatively minor roles as chief factor of a small Hudson's Bay fort and governor of sparsely-populated Vancouver Island, Douglas declared the adjacent mainland, which encompassed the Fraser River, also to be under his jurisdiction. He then started charging mining and other licence fees.

Seeing the logic of Douglas's outrageous declaration, Britain promptly legalized his new protectorate, complete with court and police functions, by creating the Crown colony of British Columbia in 1858¹⁸--a first application of preventative measures for the Canadian West. At the same time Britain also introduced a military presence, with the idea of defending against attack both Victoria and the new roads across the southern part of British Columbia. As possible aggressors, the British looked to the other powers of the northern Pacific--Russia and the United States.¹⁹ Thus Douglas, perhaps unknowingly, had forged the Canadian ideal of establishing political, legal and military controls

¹⁸ Ibid., 317.

¹⁹ Reginald H. Roy, The Early Militia and Defence of British Columbia (Victoria 1954), 11.

in goldrush and landboom areas before, rather than after, they were needed. James Douglas had created a new approach to boomtown activities: no vigilante or outlaw groups would control the Fraser River goldfields, as they had in California's rush a decade earlier; no large influx of immigrants would alter existing political allegiance, as it had earlier in the Oregon Territory. James Douglas's approach would again be used in the Yukon Territory, especially in Dawson City.

In the half-century between Douglas's audacious act of colonialism and the discovery of gold in the Yukon basin, Canadians had heard a stream of American expansionist proposals for Canada's West. In 1870, for example, Washington Territory's Senator Corbett and author-politician Elwood Evans proclaimed that British Columbia was actually a part of American territory usurped by unethical Britons and should be returned forthwith.²⁰ Although the push by Corbett and Evans for the annexation of its northern neighbour apparently failed to impress U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant, probably because their petition of forty-three names hardly represented the feelings of most British Columbians,²¹ the matter did not go away. Two decades

²⁰ Elwood Evans, The Re-annexation of British Columbia to the United States: Right, Proper and Desirable, Speech given January 18, 1870 (Victoria 1965).

²¹ R.D. Hilton Smith, preface remarks, Elwood Evans, Re-annexation of British Columbia.

later, in August, 1894, and just two years before entrepreneur Joe Ladue founded his Dawson City,²² a comment made by retired American Civil War veteran, General John H. Bryant, following his seagoing excursion through the inside passage from Seattle to Alaska, likely reflected the most prevalent American attitude towards British Columbia:

As an American...I think it a bad thing to be compelled to go through another man's garden to get to one's own farm. The country between Alaska and Washington should belong to this country...We'll have a president some day who will attend to this matter.²³

Interestingly, Canadians themselves soon voiced their own variation on the theme. Following the discovery of the huge gold reserves in the gravels of creeks flowing into the Klondike River, Ottawa politicians, seeking to establish a Pacific seaport for moving supplies into and gold out of the Yukon, demanded that the international boundary be re-established a few miles southerly, moving it from the ridge of the coastal mountain range to the sea coast. They insisted that the seaports of Skagway and Dyea, located adjacent to one another at the head of Lynn Canal, really belonged to Canada²⁴ (Figure 1-7). This declaration was courageous, considering that the Americans, should they have provided a Canadian access to the sea, would sever

²² Berton, Klondike Fever, 51-52.

²³ Gordon R. Newell, SOS North Pacific (Portland 1955), 41-2.

²⁴ Henry W. Clark, History of Alaska, (New York, 1930), 118.

southeastern Alaska--acquired from Russia along with the rest of Alaska in 1867--from the whole. This demand, however, was less ambitious than the earlier plan of British colonel G.F. Blair, who had suggested in 1875 that in the interests of the colony's defence the whole of Alaska be purchased from the United States and attached to British Columbia.²⁵ Neither initiative went anywhere; Ottawa's hopes to absorb Skagway and Dyea, like Blair's hope for the entire north, were to be dashed. Blair was ignored, while Ottawa's claim was viewed with complacency by one of the prime players, the British government. By 1903, years after the question had been posed, the tribunal reviewing the border dispute consisted of three Americans, two Canadians, and one Briton. The best Canada's politicians could thus hope for in the upcoming vote would be a tie--which might be open to review--but they were unable to get even that. The Briton sided with the Americans; the four-two decision left the boundary at the summit of the Chilkoot Pass, fifteen miles from tidewater.²⁶

The result, however, merely confirmed a foregone conclusion. From the earliest discussions, United States officials had refused to accept any arbitration regarding Canada's claim to a seaport giving access to the Yukon

²⁵ See footnote #29, Reginald H. Roy, Early Militia of British Columbia, 11.

²⁶ Clark, Alaska, 118-121.

region.²⁷ Thus the United States was to remain in control of all ocean access--other than the difficult-to-reach, ice-clogged Beaufort Sea--to Canada's far northwest. Americans seemed therefore to have ready ingress to the goldfields, while at the same time curtailing Canadian movement.

With the arrival of hordes of goldseekers in 1898, it became increasingly obvious to Ottawa's politicians that protection of Canada's interests in the far north must come from within the Yukon Territory itself. In truth, many political preparations had already been completed, long before the goldrush itself, for Canada's Yukon River Valley. Years earlier, mere rumours of gold discoveries had been enough to strengthen existing Canadian apprehensions. Moreover, Ottawa's administrators had already learned firsthand how prepared the United States government had been to reduce Canada's interests in the far north. American determination had become obvious with the treatment of Canadians living at old Fort Yukon, where the Arctic Circle cuts across the Yukon River (Figure 1-8).

The Hudson's Bay Company trading post, while having been built well outside Canadian territory at the junction of the Yukon and Porcupine Rivers, had previously caused little concern to the Russians, owners of the territory until 1867. Apparently they had been too engrossed in their seacoast fur trade to worry about trading posts in the

²⁷ Ibid., 118.

hinterlands or to follow up rumours of gold being found in the gravels of Alaskan rivers.²⁸ Russian philosophy, from government headquarters in faraway Sitka Village, a thousand kilometers to the south, seemed to be that since the Yukon River was some three thousand kilometres long, there must be room along it for a great number of trappers and traders, and room even for those fools who believed gold to be more valuable than furs.²⁹

After 1867, however, this laissez-faire arrangement abruptly changed. The Canadian furtraders suddenly found themselves being driven out of Alaska by the territory's new owners. In 1869, with the final purchase of Alaska completed for some seven million dollars,³⁰ American officials sent U.S. Army Lieutenant Charles P. Raymond to Fort Yukon to demand that John Wilson of the Hudson's Bay Company remove himself and his company store from American soil. Wilson, no doubt with reluctance, relocated his HBC operation further east. Unhappily his new trading post, Fort Rampart, also proved to be within Alaska and he was forced to move again.³¹ As had happened earlier in the 1824 United States-Russia agreement, Americans had once more

²⁸ Berton, Klondike Fever, 4,5.

²⁹ Ibid., 5.

³⁰ Ibid., 5.

³¹ Tompkins, Alaska, 200.

ignored the Hudson's Bay Company's--hence Canada's--prior presence in the territory.

These expulsions had consequences, not so much for the inland furtraders and miners, most of whom seemed to be Americans anyway, but for the Canadian government. In time, memories of the forced removals of these HBC forts, along with other later incidents such as the spread of rumours about placing the Klondike gold fields under United States jurisdiction,³² would fuel the Canadian government's intense interest in the development of Dawson City.

Regardless of the strong federal government involvement in the earliest stages of the town's development, however, Dawson City's survival beyond a decade or two is surprising. Like other earlier nineteenth century boomtowns, Dawson City had a tentative air about it. Not everyone recognized that fact, of course. As in all other promising sites for gold and silver discoveries, Dawson City's town-builders--the service sector, as it were--expected a long and prosperous future. With interests depending upon but peripheral to goldmining, this group was well aware that its new town, like all similar new "cities," would require grocery and

³² Elizabeth Robbins, The Alaska-Klondike Diary of Elizabeth Robins, 1900 (Fairbanks, 1999), 350-355. Ms. Robins, in 1900, recorded strong and vocal reactions, from outnumbered Canadians living in Dawson City, to these expulsions. Comments she recorded on other topics included those on the Alaska-Yukon boundary dispute, ongoing at the time, and in Canadian minds at least, ignoring the true ownership of Skagway and Dyea.

liquor stores, entertainment outlets, schools, churches, and dwellings. These merchants intended to capitalize on the new-found wealth of Yukon miners who had been and were being successful, and to keep capitalizing on it for a long time to come. Thus it would be entrepreneurs, like land developer/merchant/sawmill-owner Joe Ladue, more than the miners, who would be the true builders of Dawson City. In 1896, as elsewhere, they were merely setting out to build yet another goldrush town, one which might survive for well over a century, as Barkerville in British Columbia and Virginia City in Nevada have done, or for a very short time, like all those other long-forgotten mining camps strewn about the West.

Nevertheless, in Dawson City's case, more than for those other places, long-term planning seemed completely out of place. Many things militated against it--the far north's climate and inaccessibility, for example. The temporariness typical of the region's settlements had already been illustrated a few years earlier by the Yukon goldmining hamlet of Circle City, so-called because of its proximity to the Arctic Circle, and the village of Forty Mile, named for being forty miles from the early furtrading post of Fort Reliance,³³ downstream of the Klondike-Yukon confluence. Circle City and Forty Mile had blossomed overnight but had

³³ Berton, Klondike Fever, 12-14.

faded just as quickly.³⁴ Dawson's fate could be expected to be similar; with the inevitable exhaustion of readily-extracted gold would come the town's abandonment.

Emigration from these towns was a natural evolution, even in areas far south of the sub-Arctic. As in every major goldrush destination, the keen competition for promising properties and the limited number of jobs usually obliged the newcomer to "move on" to better prospects--in this case, to the gold strike of 1900 in Nome, Alaska, for example.³⁵ As happened to them elsewhere, the vast majority of goldrushers coming to Dawson City arrived to find all likely spots already staked and being worked.³⁶ In fact, most had been staked before the town's "ton of gold" arrived in Seattle aboard the S.S. Portland on June 17, 1897.³⁷ It appears that the Seattle reporters chose to ignore the rest of the story--that no promising claim sites remained and no more labourers were needed. Their incomplete reports prompted thousands to make immediate plans to go to Dawson City, even though most, once there, would find neither gold nor work. As more and more goldseekers arrived in the north, a similar number, disillusioned and broke, were obliged to leave, often going

³⁴ Ibid., 33.

³⁵ Tompkins, Alaska, 248.

³⁶ Clark, Alaska, 104.

³⁷ Ibid., 102.

back, reluctantly, to their old lives.

This unstable situation, with no apparent long term benefits for the region, should have suppressed Ottawa's interest in Dawson City. Well-publicized stories of the dejected homebound returns of so many empty-handed goldseekers, usually in far worse financial straits than before their trek northwards, should have served as a gloomy forecast not only for the limited potential for further goldfield expansion, but for the town itself. There should have been, had the warning signs been acknowledged, little need for the federal government to get involved in expanding the town's accommodations or formalizing its public architecture. There should have been little reason, then as now, to bother writing about it.

Yet, thousands upon thousands of people went north to seek their fortunes in Dawson. Significantly fewer, however, would have set out on their pointless quests had they heeded the caution issued by the New York Herald in December of 1897, months before the goldrush really took hold:

Men who rush to the new El Dorado find that there are no mines for them and that under present conditions not more than half of them can obtain work...Nine out of ten of the numbers who have come to the Yukon in the rush now wish they were home.³⁸

³⁸ New York Herald, December 8, 1897, 5. This page is reproduced in Stan B. Cohen's Queen City of the North: Dawson City, Yukon, A Pictorial History (Missoula 1990) introduction, vii.

Needless to say, however, few of the goldseekers had ever heard of the Herald, let alone read it. Thus they could remain happily unaware of the tribulations they would face in their trek to Dawson City. Even fewer likely heard similar warnings from Canadian writer Charles A. Bramble, D.L.S. (Dominion Land Surveyor), whose "experiences in the Northwest Territories and Canada" obliged him to prepare his Klondike: A Manual for Goldseekers (1897). Here, Bramble was intent upon "eliminating false statements" stemming from "a flood of cheap, unreliable 'Yukon' literature...put upon the market."³⁹ If all potential goldseekers looking towards the Klondike had read this manual and used even a little common sense, most would have chosen to abandon any idea of going there. They might, for instance, have taken to heart Bramble's sombre comments about far northern winters. He advised that one should stay inside during very cold weather, since

...all the clothes the traveler could put on would not prevent his freezing to death. Even the Indians occasionally perish when caught far from camp by a sudden storm.⁴⁰

Of a less formal nature, but even more discouraging, were the personal experiences offered in To Klondike and Back by James H. Secretan, and published in 1898. An Ottawa civil engineer, Secretan had set out in the spring of 1897

³⁹ Charles A. Bramble, "A Word to the Reader," Klondike: A Manual for Goldseekers (New York 1897), 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 281.

at the head of a small expedition, whose "main object was plunder," and had anticipated "a soft snap."⁴¹ Because the true richness of the strike was still unknown, he believed the Klondike would offer diverse prospects to the relatively few arriving on site. Secretan quickly learned otherwise, his education beginning with his departure from Victoria. From observations of those moving north along with him, preceding the main crush of humanity that would follow, Secretan offered chilling descriptions of poorly-equipped and badly-manned ships and riverboats, bad weather, and a wide assortment of ill-informed and ill-prepared goldseekers, including mothers with suckling newborns. His descriptions of the difficulty in conquering Chilkoot Pass on foot, the only route available to many, should have served as a warning to the most avid adventurer. Moreover, Secretan was forced to conclude, only weeks after arriving in Dawson City, that no future lay for him or, by inference, anyone else, in the town. He packed up to leave but was to learn that his escape from the Klondike region would be as difficult as his trek in. He faced a horribly uncomfortable journey on the ill-supplied, overcrowded riverboat, Portus B. Weare, where he slept on the deck--his bunk having collapsed the first night out--down the Yukon River to the Bering Sea. The trip included a two-week stranding on a

⁴¹ James H. Secretan, To Klondike and Back (London 1898), 1-2.

river sandbar, with little enough food for the angry passengers.⁴² One can only imagine Secretan's elation weeks later, on September 12, 1897,⁴³ when from the deck of the steamer Humboldt he spied Cape Flattery at the entrance to Juan de Fuca Strait. With his destination of Seattle so close at hand, he reflected upon the six months that had passed since leaving Victoria on his trip north. His book was the result of those reflections.

Likely Secretan's warnings were no more accepted, or perhaps known, than were those from the columnists for the New York Herald, or from Charles A. Bramble. In any case, the main thrust of goldrushers still determined to head for Dawson City during 1898. Like Secretan, most left for home after a short time. In spite of their bad luck, however, it would be this large group of unsuccessful goldseekers--those initially feeling cheated--who would be most responsible, from publicity generated by their myriad stories of romance and hardship in the far north, for the ultimate preservation of Dawson City.

In spite of its later romantic reputation, however, it is surprising that Dawson City's remoteness has not led to its demise. Even more than in southern towns, where people might enjoy a local ambience and therefore stay in spite of

⁴² Ibid., 136-148.

⁴³ Ibid., 168.

deteriorating economic conditions,⁴⁴ Dawson's isolation, combined with its unfriendly climate, should have forced residents out with the depletion of the gold deposits. Yet never has its dwindling population been reduced to nothing. Equally surprising is the town's ongoing popularity with tourists. Dawson's remoteness should also, even today, discourage tourism. Yet tourists account for much of the town's economic survival, of which more will be said later.

Logistical problems related to isolation remain; many of those challenges seem not particularly different from those of a century ago. In the years before Dawson City's creation, Fort Reliance, for example, established by fur traders Leroy Questern, Arthur Harper, and Al Mayo sometime after 1873,⁴⁵ was so isolated from the rest of North American life that its existence depended entirely upon summer supply boats. Cargoes arriving upstream by paddlewheeler on the Yukon River from the Bering Sea had had to travel nearly eight thousand kilometers--five thousand alone from Seattle, Washington, via British Columbia's inland waterways and the Aleution Islands to St. Michael, Alaska, near the river's mouth.⁴⁶ Residents of Fort Reliance must have been anxious indeed for the arrival of

⁴⁴ An example would be the present-day, mineral-depleted little town of Hedley, in south-central British Columbia.

⁴⁵ Berton, Klondike Fever, 12-14.

⁴⁶ Berton, Klondike Fever, 205.

the first summer boats, whose battles upstream might take three weeks. Often a boat could make only one such trip per year. The paddlewheelers were so important that if they failed to come at all during the three or four ice-free months on the Yukon, winter starvation for the inhabitants became a probability. The countryside provided little wild food, either game or vegetation.⁴⁷ Although the river transportation has been replaced by trucks on a modern highway, winter shipments can still require dangerous haulages of foodstuffs and other essentials.

A century ago, starvation would become a spectre for those in Dawson City, as it had earlier in Reliance. Even by 1897, the year before the great rush, Secretan observed that the sternwheelers could not possibly supply enough food for the large numbers of incoming goldseekers. Moreover, many entrepreneurs had been anxious to base their shipments upon high-return items, with food being only a secondary consideration. Secretan even heard of a boatload consisting entirely of "whisky and billiard balls," which, he concluded, was "not a very nourishing sort of diet."⁴⁸

Remoteness directly affected Dawson City's future in another way. Until a few years earlier the region's huge, largely unexplored tract made it uncertain whether one lived under Canadian or American jurisdiction, the exact location

⁴⁷ Bramble, Manual for Goldseekers, 19.

⁴⁸ Secretan, To Klondike and Back, 131.

of the international boundary all but impossible to determine in the field. It mattered little since, before the Russians sold Alaska in 1867, its eastern boundary had been of no interest to fur-traders and prospectors. They had had little concern about who actually held the reins of national administration--whether Russians, Britons or Canadians--since few administrators ever came into the remote region. Later, however, it would become important to just about everyone. Suspiciously watching the Americans in Alaska, Canada's politicians recalled how their new neighbours previously had so tenaciously pursued land settlements elsewhere, and how belligerently they had claimed ownership of Forts Yukon and Rampart. Ottawa therefore determined to stake its own version of the true location of the boundary, the imaginary 141st meridian, across the unexplored lands.⁴⁹ The federal government's attitude towards territory suddenly had become the opposite of that of the early furtraders, especially after reports were heard of minor--as yet--gold discoveries in the Yukon River Basin. In 1887, Ottawa sent the Canadian Geological Survey's Dr. George M. Dawson--the namesake for Joe Ladue's later boomtown--and surveyor William Ogilvie to determine at least a tentative placement of the boundary.⁵⁰ Canada's version of the border location, considering the probability

⁴⁹ Bramble, Manual for Goldseekers, 12.

⁵⁰ Tompkins, Alaska, 217.

of more gold strikes, was extremely important, especially for future settlements such as Dawson City. Stuart Ramsay Tompkins later noted:

There was some resentment that the new gold fields were claimed by Canada, and that, at least for a time, a post of the Mounted Police (had been) established in the newly built town of Skagway (Alaska). Some loose talk about seizing the (Yukon) territory and holding it for the United States spread alarm in Canada.⁵¹

As mentioned several times before, the ubiquity of Americans in far-northern Canada greatly concerned Canadian politicians. In the decade preceding the Klondike discovery, the American population in the developing Canadian goldfields had grown steadily as prospectors came streaming north from the overworked gold deposits of California, Nevada, Arizona, and South Dakota. Many had come, and were coming, to the American coastal gold town of Juneau, Alaska, established about 1880,⁵² and used this town as a springboard to the Yukon. As early as 1883, Ed Schieffelin, the American millionaire miner who had earlier founded the notorious boomtown of Tombstone, Arizona, joined those coming upstream on the Yukon River to search for gold. Even though he left after a short time, thinking such a forbidding place could never return profits like those from his lucky mountain-of-silver discovery in Arizona,⁵³

⁵¹ Tompkins, Alaska, 226.

⁵² Berton, Klondike Fever, 6.

⁵³ Berton, Klondike Fever, 10.

Schieffelin's belief that fabulously rich ore deposits could be found in all of the western mountain ranges was steadfast among American prospectors. More and more of them would come north, as many as two hundred over the Chilkoot Pass in 1886 alone,⁵⁴ to pan, scratch, and dig for gold, even if thus far only small amounts were being recovered. Eventually, they all believed, one among them would discover a vast treasure waiting along the Yukon River.

In 1896, someone found it. The concentrations of gold sluiced out of the gravels of Bonanza and Eldorado Creeks, flowing into the Klondike River, near the future Dawson City townsite, were unbelievably rich. Charles Bramble's opinion in 1897 was that, until that time, the gravel deposits were "the richest ever discovered."⁵⁵ Little wonder, when news of the strike got out, hopefuls from all over the world, and especially from the United States, headed for the Klondike goldfields.

Ottawa's worries intensified. Needless to say, since the Americans moving into the area from Alaska were having their numbers supplemented by thousands more from a country with ten times the population of Canada, Canadians, "there being but a sprinkling" of them,⁵⁶ were to remain a

⁵⁴ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁵ Bramble, Manual for Goldseekers, 38.

⁵⁶ Tompkins, Alaska, 225.

minority in early Dawson City. Typical of comments about the outnumbering of Canadians by Americans were items in The Klondike Nugget from Dawson, illustrating not only differences in numbers but in social behaviour. The first story tells of a July 1st Canadian Dominion Day celebration:

The Canadian element...the gathering of nearly 250 men...(was) presided over by the venerable Judge McGuire...while the toasts and responses occupied over three hours in their delivery. The enthusiasm was noisy and intense, and could only be vented in hurrahs and occasional choruses of those never-to-be-forgotten college songs.

The second story, appearing three days later, tells of Americans celebrating their July 4th Independence Day. As midnight of July 3rd passed,

A regular fusillade of pistol shots broke the Sunday stillness, and noise and lots of it became the order of the day. They sprang from their thousands of tents...and proceeded to pierce the air with all kinds of projectiles from...all kinds of guns in the hands of all kinds of men.⁵⁷

Such a show would have given pause to the Canadians. Even if this latter report was coloured with an anti-American tint, either by the editor of the Nugget himself or by one of his writers, the occurrence itself, about which we should have little doubt, would have had a powerful effect. Canadians had been trying for more than a hundred years, often without success, to hang onto land they believed to be theirs against an American predominance, and it now appeared they would have to struggle against losing another piece.

⁵⁷ The Klondike Nugget, cited by Lowell Thomas, Jr., ed., The Trail of '98, 104,5.

For the fight, Dawson City would provide the battleground;
architecture would furnish the ramparts.

Chapter 2:
An Architecture Born of Politics and Geography

Joe Ladue had considered the creation of his townsite a quick way to earn a lot of money--a fruitful plan, it turned out, since two years later, in 1898, his building lots in Dawson City were selling for up to five thousand dollars a front-foot.⁵⁸ Ottawa's politicians, however, realized that the establishment of Dawson City offered an opportunity of a different sort. The unexpected founding of the town in its surprising near-arctic location gave Ottawa a chance to revitalize Canada's role in the Yukon River Valley and hence the rest of the far north. Here was an opportunity to regain some of the national prestige lost during the humilitating dismissals of the Hudson's Bay Company's influence at Fort Yukon and Fort Rampart. Now, by exaggerating the Yukon town's importance, Ottawa could lessen, for astute Canadians living in other parts of the country, the psychological impact of those losses. Dawson City could strengthen Canada's stand against what must have

⁵⁸ Berton, Klondike Fever, 51-2.

appeared irresistible American imperialism.

Much was at stake. A strong federal presence in the Yukon Territory could reassure all Canadians that Canada still had a future as a country. This was a particularly important idea to sell in British Columbia, where residents were becoming increasingly discouraged by the slow economic progress of their own new province. Vancouver Island and Lower Mainland residents still awaited the prosperity and security that had been promised in return for signing into Confederation in 1871. That prosperity was to have been borne by the new transcontinental railway, supposedly fully operational within ten years of the signing, that would connect the West's economy with that of Central Canada. The promise of a railway had been a crucial point in agreeing with the federal offer,⁵⁹ but its realization had come too late. By the fall of 1885, fourteen years having elapsed between their signing into Confederation and the driving of the railway's last spike at Craigellachie, British Columbians needed only look south of their border to see that where procrastination and scandal had plagued the progress of Canada's West, western Americans had forged ahead at great speed. The first of the United States' transcontinental railways had already been in operation for sixteen years and had brought with it a blossoming

⁵⁹ Bill McKee and Georgeen Klassen, Trail of Iron: the CPR and the Birth of the West (Vancouver, 1983), 15.

prosperity not only for its western terminus area in California but for all parts of the American west coast.⁶⁰ In contrast, the Canadian Pacific Railway, when completed in 1885, still faced an additional expenditure of some three million dollars before it could safely carry passengers through the several western mountain ranges to British Columbia's coast.⁶¹ By the end of the 1880's, when the commercial benefits of the CPR were just beginning to be realized in Canada, notably after their own trans-Pacific steamships began operations in 1890,⁶² Seattle had already become a bustling Pacific Coast seaport. In fact, the Puget Sound region during the 1880's, with railway branch lines bringing newcomers and goods from all parts of the United States,⁶³ had achieved that nation's fastest rate of growth.⁶⁴ In like manner, the economy of the American far north had been growing steadily, with every important port of call between Vancouver, B.C., and the Bering Sea, other

⁶⁰ The last spike for the first U.S. transcontinental railway, uniting the constructions of the Central Pacific eastward from Sacramento and the Union Pacific westward from the Mississippi River, was driven at Promontory Point, Utah, on May 10, 1869.

⁶¹ E.J. Hart, The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism (Banff 1983), 11.

⁶² Ibid., 61-2.

⁶³ Washington State Historical Society, Built in Washington: 12,000 years of Pacific Northwest archeological sites and historic buildings (Pullman, Wash., 1989), 38-39.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 70.

than the coal port of Nanaimo,⁶⁵ belonging to the United States.⁶⁶ At the moment the great Klondike goldrush began, therefore, Americans on the west coast had already enjoyed a sixteen-year head start over Canadians towards building a strong westcoast railway/steamship transportation industry.

It had been obvious to Canadians, as they looked south, that the Americans were prospering. Indeed, many British Columbians had answered the siren call of that apparent prosperity, becoming part of the mass migration of perhaps one and a half million people from all parts of Canada into the United States in the years leading up to 1890.⁶⁷

Adding to this perception of American wealth was their architecture, especially as seen in the temporary, but massive, classically-inspired structures built in Chicago for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Thousands of Canadian visitors stood in awe of this achievement, as did their future prime minister Wilfrid Laurier, who, from the experience, felt a need for Canada to "catch up," as it

⁶⁵ T.W. Paterson, Ghost Towns & Mining Camps of British Columbia (Langley 1980), v.1, 29. Nanaimo had become an important seaport by the mid-1880's, with Robert Dunsmuir's Wellington mines having shipped, through the port, some two hundred thousand tons of coal, mostly to San Francisco.

⁶⁶ The establishment of Prince Rupert, B.C., Charles Hayes' attempt to create the most important western gateway to the Orient, was still a decade into the future.

⁶⁷ McInnis, Canada, 407.

were.⁶⁸ Displays of impressive American architecture were not, however, restricted to Chicago. In Seattle, for instance, the downtown buildings razed by the great fire of 1889 were being rebuilt, in fashionable Richardsonian and post-Richardsonian styles, with brick and stone, materials that suggested permanence--a prosperous future.⁶⁹ At the same time, Washington Territory itself was entering statehood, with Olympia, yet another developing American seaport, as state capital. When, four years later, in 1893, a competition was held to design Olympia's grand capitol campus buildings, at least one Canadian, English immigrant John Parkinson, was among the hundred and eighty-eight architects who entered.⁷⁰ Even though Olympia's massive stone-pillared, pedimented and domed structures would wait another thirty-five years for completion,⁷¹ Canadians, especially those on the west coast, were becoming aware of

⁶⁸ Christopher Thomas, "'The Washington of the North,'" unpublished MA paper, Yale University, 1984. (Copy in possession of author.) In 1893, during Chicago's World's Exposition, Laurier, with thoughts of making Ottawa into Canada's "Washington," was already a prominent politician, although not becoming prime minister until 1896.

⁶⁹ Washington State Historical Society, Built in Washington, 39.

⁷⁰ Norman J. Johnston, Washington's Audacious State Capitol and its Builders (Seattle 1988), 16-17.

⁷¹ Ibid., 91-93. Construction of the Capitol Building, designed by Walter Robb Wilder and Harry Keith White, both proteges of McKim, Mead and White, would not be completed until 1929.

the political and economic changes occurring in the United States. It would have come as no surprise to British Columbians that Seattle, rather than the Canadian Pacific's westcoast railhead in Vancouver, would become the principal point of departure for the Yukon bonanza.⁷²

There can be little doubt that political leaders in Ottawa believed that if Canada's portion of the Yukon River Basin could be made to appear definitely Canadian, and part of a great western land stretching from the 49th parallel to the Beaufort Sea, the attentions of British Columbians would be turned northwards, and away from the influential south. In fact, as newly-elected prime minister, Wilfrid Laurier took the initiative, through his minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, "to fill up the West" with immigrants, both foreign arrivals and North Americans from other regions. He intended to reinforce, with increasing population, the connection between Canada's east and west.⁷³ Thus, in addition to being an aid in convincing British Columbians of the value of remaining in Confederation, a continuous and extensive wall of western Canadian-held territory would offer the peoples of Alberta and Saskatchewan, in 1896 still

⁷² Among those choosing Seattle rather than Vancouver, after crossing the continent on the C.P.R. to Vancouver from Montreal, was American Elizabeth Robins. The well-known (for her time) actress-writer travelled down to Seattle for her departure to Alaska and the Yukon in 1900. Her adventures in the far north, and her written accounts of them, are referred to in Chapter 4.

⁷³ McInnis, Canada, 442.

nearly a decade away from becoming part of confederated Canada, an incentive to join.⁷⁴ Thus, the discovery of gold in the Yukon Valley, and the attention it brought, aided Laurier and Sifton in their national expansion efforts.⁷⁵

As mentioned earlier, Ottawa's task of turning Dawson City into a strong administrative and political centre would result in a small minority overseeing a large, often boisterous, majority. With one group not only greatly outnumbering the other but also having infinitely greater logistical resources, the situation facing Ottawa reminds one of a comment made seven decades later by Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Eliot Trudeau:

Living next to you (Americans) is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant; no matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast...one is affected by every twitch and grunt. Even a friendly nuzzling can lead to frightening consequences.⁷⁶

Apparently a similar conclusion had already been reached by Ottawa's politicians in 1896. The building of a strong Canadian presence in the Yukon Territory, as in Britain's creation of the Colony of British Columbia in 1858, would be of paramount importance for overcoming much

⁷⁴ Alberta and Saskatchewan became provinces of the Dominion of Canada in 1905.

⁷⁵ McInnis, Canada, 441-2.

⁷⁶ Pierre Eliot Trudeau, The Best of Trudeau (Toronto, 1972), 138. (Quoted from a speech to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., March 25, 1969.)

of that American influence, however friendly it might appear. But advertising such a Canadian presence would require the overt display of a tenacious police force and the passive but equally important display of an architecture that spoke of a powerful, stable government.

In this latter regard, Ottawa would actually be following a long-standing tradition. As Janet Wright points out in Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867-1967, a policy had been created, early on, that federal buildings had to fulfill "two principal functions...necessary accommodations for government institutions...but...also an important role...as symbols representing the federal presence."⁷⁷ The numerous Canadian post office buildings erected during the 1880's and 1890's were good examples of this federal government approach.⁷⁸

The idea of creating symbolic architecture, however, even by 1867, when Canada itself came into being, was nothing new. A decade earlier, at a colonial/provincial level, the plan to use government institutions as more than

⁷⁷ Janet Wright, Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867-1967 (Toronto 1997), 5. (Wright is a Parks Canada architectural historian.)

⁷⁸ Christopher Thomas, unpublished MA thesis, University of Toronto (Fine Arts): "Dominion Architecture: Fuller's Post Offices, 1881-1896" (Toronto 1978). Thomas proves how critically important Ottawa felt it was to show Canadians a positive image of the federal government. The architecture of Canada's numerous early post offices strengthened that image.

mere accommodation had been used and had worked splendidly for the politicians building early British Columbia. They had insisted, from the creation of the Crown Colony in 1858, that government architecture be prominently displayed. As a result, the first capital city legislative buildings in Victoria were built in 1859 on sprawling, sloping grounds overlooking the capital city's attractive Inner Harbour. With lesser structures on the waterfront having been shaped by mundane necessity, the legislative site and its buildings offered a suitable first impression for those aboard ships entering the harbour. This was especially true considering that these significantly-sized parliament buildings appeared in Victoria at a time when the town itself, like Dawson City three decades later, was being hacked out of the bush. Although Victoria's colonial style "Birdcages"--nicknamed from their apparent likenesses to aviaries--soon became objects of ridicule, their presence during the 1860's reinforced British--and ultimately Canadian--occupation on the west coast. Thus, the display of a highly visible bureaucracy in Canada's frontier areas had already become a continuing strengthening and remodelling process well before the Klondike goldrush.

In Victoria this idea had been promoted by a few dedicated individuals influenced by James Douglas's example. Likewise, three decades later in Dawson City, the idea would require great effort from dedicated people. Just as

Douglas's newly created colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia in the late 1850's had needed the symbolic presence of law and order under the stern Judge Matthew Begbie, Joe Ladue's Yukon of 1896 would need its own indefatigable Sam Steele of the North West Mounted Police.⁷⁹ And as Douglas's small settlement of Victoria was to receive designer Herman Otto Tiedeman's controversial Birdcages,⁸⁰ Ladue's little town would receive its own significant government buildings from Ottawa architect Thomas William Fuller, (1865-1951). His Dawson City buildings, if not overwhelmingly imposing due to financial restraints, would at minimum have to indicate clearly both government strength and regional prosperity. The half-dozen government structures must also be exemplary for builders of private but equally symbolically important structures--banking institutions, for instance.

Whether or not Thomas W. Fuller received specific design criteria from his superiors in Ottawa, there seems little doubt that he had been chosen to plan the Dawson public buildings because of his influential family background and considerable architectural experience in the nation's capital. Certain professional standards must have

⁷⁹ For a biographical study of Sam Steele, his term of office in the Yukon and other exploits, see Robert Stewart's Sam Steele: Lion of the Frontier (Toronto, 1979).

⁸⁰ Martin Segger, ed., British Columbia Parliament Buildings (Vancouver 1979), 43.

been expected of him, whether or not requested of him explicitly. For, unlike Victoria's Tiedeman, with his legislative buildings in Victoria being essentially a civil engineer's interpretation of the Colonial Bungalow,⁸¹ Fuller would have been expected to display in his work the skill and knowledge of a full-blown, well-respected architect.

Thomas W. Fuller's professional career had begun at age twenty-one with an apprenticeship under his famous father, Thomas Fuller (1823-1898).⁸² The elder Fuller, with partner Chilion Jones, had earlier designed the original Parliament Buildings in Ottawa, built between 1859 and 1866.⁸³ Fuller, Sr., during his early working years in England in the 1840's, had been strongly influenced by the Gothic Revival movement. After his emigration to Canada in 1857, he continued to design in the Gothic manner, his most famous example being the Parliament Buildings themselves.⁸⁴ Later, from the early 1880's until his retirement in 1896,

⁸¹ Martin Segger & Douglas Franklin, Exploring Victoria's Architecture (Victoria 1996), 47-8. Tiedemann was "a German civil engineer working in the Lands Office."

⁸² Christopher A. Thomas, "Notes: Interview with Capt. Thomas G. Fuller, D.S.C.," Ottawa, June 30, 1976.

⁸³ Harold Kalman, History of Canadian Architecture, vol. 2 (Toronto 1994), 535-7. Unfortunately, all of the elder Fuller's original structure, except for the existing library, was destroyed by fire in 1916.

⁸⁴ Jane Turner, ed. The Dictionary of Art, vol. 11 (New York 1996), 836.

the elder Fuller served in the important role of Chief Architect of the Department of Public Works in Ottawa. Although not carrying the prestige it would carry nowadays, he fulfilled the responsibilities of such a highly responsible position in a way that suggested a personal attention to detail. This characteristic doubtless was passed down to his son.⁸⁵

History would prove that between them, the two Fullers "helped establish and maintain in Canadian federal architecture a maturity and integrity surprising for such a youthful country."⁸⁶ This observation rests, of course, upon the younger Fuller continuing to follow his father's lead by also becoming, himself, Chief Architect in Ottawa in 1927. Although this achievement lay far into his future, even by 1898, when Thomas W. Fuller was readying himself for his trek to the far northwest, his talents and abilities must have been clearly evident. No doubt he was expected to do well, to design buildings that would make both Ottawa and the Yukon Territory proud.

Dawson City, however, must have appeared to many other observers unworthy of either prestigious buildings or an

⁸⁵ Architectural historian Christopher Thomas points out that, although the elder Fuller's title infers that all of his time was spent in designing buildings, much, if not most, of his work involved mundane matters such as solving drainage and other municipal works problems. (Personal interview.)

⁸⁶ Christopher A. Thomas, "Fuller, Thomas," Dictionary of Art, vol.11, 837.

elaborate legal system. The town and the region would have seemed to have little scope for future immigration and expansion. Its situation, for example, was not at all like that of its western prototype of thirty years earlier, James Douglas's new provincial capital in British Columbia. The differences between frontier Victoria and frontier Dawson City were great, especially in matters of practicality. Victoria offered a mild, almost Mediterranean climate, direct access to shipping, a wide variety of manufacturing endeavours, farming on a large scale,⁸⁷ and convenient sea-going travel to the west coast's major social centre, San Francisco.⁸⁸ Dawson City, on the other hand, offered mosquito-infested summers and bitterly cold winters, no seacoast access, limited manufacturing beyond mechanized gold extraction and small-scale lumbering, little or no farming capabilities, and extreme remoteness from the amenities of high society. With such an unpromising future, what, therefore, spurred such intense emphasis from Ottawa upon Dawson City?

⁸⁷ From Victoria's earliest days, local farming was an integral part of the Hudson's Bay Company's fort operation. Current street and district names such as McKenzie, Craigflower and MacCaulay descended from some of these early large farms.

⁸⁸ Segger & Franklin, Exploring Victoria's Architecture, 10. The cultural exchange between Victoria and San Francisco included architecture. According to Segger, both John Wright, architect in 1863 for Victoria's Richard Carr (Emily's father), and John Teague, Victoria's City Hall's architect in 1878, arrived here via San Francisco. Wright even returned there later.

The answer has two parts. First, much of the federal capital's continuing concern about law and order in the Yukon River Valley had stemmed from the ongoing uneasiness felt on both sides of the Yukon-Alaska boundary. Even the Americans, in spite of their numbers, seemed concerned about national security, viewing as threatening, for some reason, the few Canadians living nearby. In 1899, according to historian Alison K. Hoagland, Americans were busily creating a "presence on the border" of their own with the building of a U.S. Army post and customs office.⁸⁹ Their post, Fort Egbert, at Eagle, Alaska, was situated a mere dozen kilometres down the Yukon River from the 141st meridian. The military presence at the new fort certainly must have offered its own threat, whether real or imagined, to the Canadians. On balance, however, those in Ottawa probably found some comfort in the situation, since they had already established a force of their own in the area in the form of Sam Steele's North West Mounted Police.

The second half of the answer to the above question, however, seemed, and seems, less valid. Ottawa's decision to provide a classical architecture for Dawson City hardly carried the same urgency as its law-and-order preparations.

⁸⁹ Alison Hoagland, Buildings of Alaska (New York 1993), 238-9. Fort Egbert was being built just as the population of Eagle, the 1898 goldrush boomtown in which it was situated, dropped in one year from 1700 people to 300. By 1911 both town and fort were all but abandoned.

Why would the Department of Public Works send an architect all the way from Ottawa to the far northern community just to design and oversee construction of a half dozen smallish government buildings?⁹⁰

As had been the case in early Victoria, Ottawa's politicians wanted to present a certain image: officialdom, they felt, should be overtly displayed. On the surface, however, it would seem that creating a highly visible government presence in the Yukon Basin would be a waste of valuable talent. Who, in such a remote place, might be impressed by prestigious symbols either of government or of architecture? The number of American politicians who might visit Dawson City and be moved by the suggestion that this country did not belong to them, and was therefore outside their sphere of influence, would be small. Indeed, territorial Alaska was itself having great difficulty in attracting political attention from the rest of the United States.⁹¹ If not neighbouring American politicians, who could possibly be the audience for a symbolic Canadian presence in the Yukon Valley?

Perhaps the audience consisted of ordinary Canadians,

⁹⁰ Wright, 105. None of the intended buildings was to be unduly large. Even though the Administration Building as completed was of an impressive size, the structure had been envisioned much smaller.

⁹¹ Joseph Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska, 328. As late as the 1940's, the delegate from the Alaska Territory had no vote in the United States' House of Representatives.

since public acceptance is often sought by Ottawa's politicians for legislative actions they call "progressive." These decisions are touted as such even when perceived by taxpayers as neither beneficial nor economically sensible--as shown by vehement reactions to the North American Free Trade Agreement and the Goods and Services Tax. Dawson City's proposed prestige architecture may have been intended to reassure Canadian taxpayers that money for policing, administration, and especially for public works, was being well spent in the north. Or was the architecture meant to bolster self-confidence amongst Public Works administrators and politicians that their decision-making was sound?

Most likely, however, Ottawa's image-making was aimed at ordinary Americans living in Dawson City, just as it was being aimed simultaneously at those Americans living below the 49th Parallel. As in southern Canada, with its impressive public buildings sending their message to Americans that these structures, and what they stood for, represented a strong Canada, the architecture of the North would be similarly representative; Canadian law, Canadian bureaucracy and Canadian philosophy would be dominant in the visual environment. Here, even though Americans had the greater numbers, they could not expect to have legal or political powers unto themselves; unlike the earlier scattered and politically ill-defined Hudson's Bay Company forts in the Oregon and Alaska Territories, Dawson City

would be definitely Canadian. This time political affiliation, not sheer numbers, would determine the future of the region.

Dawson City's official architecture would have to reflect that interpretation of Canadianism. Indeed, within months of building the first crudely-constructed government offices in this small settlement, it became apparent to federal officials that typical boomtown-style buildings would not suffice. The standard log-built or board-and-batten wood-frame structure that had appeared countless times in every other mining camp in the West, from Tombstone to Barkerville, would not be suitable models for any Canadian government edifice in Dawson. In fact, the original two-storey log-built Courthouse had served for only two years before being superceded by Fuller's elegant replacement,⁹² of which more will be said in the next chapter. Thus, it did not matter that the earlier-styled buildings were more easily constructed using local craftsmen and materials or that these rustic structures might comfortably accomodate all expected administrative staff members for some time to come. Frontier styles simply would not fill Ottawa's needs.

Even so, sending--or agreeing to send--an architect many thousands of kilometres to be on site during the

⁹² Harold Kalman, A History of Canadian Architecture, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1994), 694.

building construction seemed unnecessary. One would think his talents would have found better use elsewhere, since there were others--non-professional and already residing in Dawson--who could have met the challenge. In the hive of activity that accompanied the goldrush there would be, as in most other mining camps, numerous carpenters skilled in constructing buildings from design blueprints.⁹³ Ottawa needed only to send out such drawings with an overseer, perhaps a foreman who would prepare necessary contracts and witness all aspects of construction. Instead, Clifford Sifton had suggested that Ottawa provide a top man for the job⁹⁴--thinking perhaps of someone with the qualifications, say, of a Fuller. This architect was to reconnoitre, plan, design and oversee the erection of all required government buildings. Obviously politics, rather than practical matters, had become the engine for architectural design in

⁹³ Geoffrey Castle, Victoria Times-Colonist, "Parishioners crafted many of church's fine fixtures," December 18, 1993. Typical of the skills possessed by frontier carpenters at the time were those of Eugene Burnham of Victoria. Upon his arrival from Ontario in the mid-1880's Burnham installed timber shoring in Dunsmuir's Nanaimo coal mines, a rough job that hardly indicated his true abilities. These were shown years later, in 1912, when he, with co-contractor Mr. Holmes and architect A. Gaunt, built St. Columba's Church on Burnside Road, Victoria. His moulding planes, most of which were still extant in 1950, indicated that he had been a highly skilled finisher, and doubtless had a direct hand in completing, among other details, the intricate framing and trim details for the church's Gothic stained glass windows.

⁹⁴ Margaret E. Archibald, Structural History of the Administration Building, Dawson City (Ottawa 1977), 9.

Dawson City.

As unusual as this action might seem, however, Ottawa was merely following a well-travelled path. The presentation of architecturally significant federal buildings was well established, as noted earlier by Janet Wright and Christopher Thomas. Although most of these buildings, "erected in almost every sizeable town across the country,"⁹⁵ would be considered minor projects by the designer of the famous Parliament Buildings, there was in them an undeniable Fuller quality during the years leading up to the founding of Dawson City. That quality would soon be found in his son's official architecture for the goldrush town, following Yukon Territory's creation as a separate entity in 1898. Ottawa apparently felt this official appearance was surely demanded for Dawson--even more so when prepared by an immediate family member trained by his famous father.⁹⁶

Still, logic should have dictated otherwise. Dawson City's buildings by nature could not be copies of the other small stone and brick federal structures being built in towns across southern Canada. They would instead have to suit the conditions imposed by the far north's unique physical geography. Any attempt to build ornate masonry buildings on the discontinuous permafrost that underlay

⁹⁵ Thomas, "Dominion Architecture," preface, ii.

⁹⁶ Janet Wright, Crown Assets, 104.

Dawson City was bound to fail. No permanent brick, stone and concrete structures like those of the same era being built in other North American mining boomtowns, such as Rhyolite (Figure 2-1), near California's Death Valley,⁹⁷ could be erected in Dawson. The north's bitterly cold winters, juxtaposed with its hot summers, exacerbated by the remoteness from suppliers of any construction materials beyond lumber and logs, negated using temperate-zone or desert-area building techniques. No real use of native stone, brick, mortar, cement and aggregates was possible. Instead, the replication of standard 19th century western boomtown structures--wooden false-fronted places of business and steep-roofed houses, all set upon timber uprights resting on large stones--would be more fitting. Thus said, was Thomas W. Fuller being sent, because of his background and training, with orders to introduce a new kind of boomtown architecture? Was he expected to produce a style, which even if built of wood must look as impressive as those

⁹⁷ Harold and Lucile Weight, Rhyolite, the Ghost City of Golden Dreams (Twentynine Palms 1980), 3, 34-42. Rhyolite had a brief but exciting history. After gold was discovered on the eastern rim of Death Valley, California in 1904, Rhyolite quickly attracted 1500 residents who busied themselves building a town of permanent masonry structures, water and sewage systems, streetlighting, telephone services, and three separate railway systems. By 1911 the dream had faded. By the 1980's, of its once numerous fine stone and poured-concrete structures, only two habitable buildings remained--a grand railway station and a house built from mortar and empty bottles. All else, from neglect, vandalism and scavenging, was in ruins.

buildings completed in stone and concrete? Should his designs resemble, say, the imposing John S. Cook building in Rhyolite, Nevada (Figure 2-2), or one of his own father's federal public buildings, say, that in Almonte, Ontario (Figure 2-3)?

Had young Fuller requested this assignment, as an opportunity to go see more of the Canada's huge territory? Was a tour of duty in the far north another chance to satisfy an interest developed from his earlier excursion in the west, at age 20 and before being apprenticed under his father in the Department of Public Works?⁹⁸ Or had he merely wanted to get out of Ottawa, to leave for a while the place where he and his father had worked so closely together, to grieve in relative privacy the elder architect's recent death?⁹⁹ For whatever reasons, the choice of Thomas W. Fuller as resident architect would be portentous for Dawson City.

⁹⁸ Christopher A. Thomas. "Notes: Interview with Capt. Thomas G. Fuller, D.S.C." Before becoming an apprentice under his father's direction in 1886, young Fuller had gone to an undisclosed location in the west in 1885, possibly staying there for a year.

⁹⁹ Jane Turner, ed., The Dictionary of Art, vol. 11 (New York 1996), 838. The elder Fuller died September 28, 1898; just nine months later, on July 3, 1899, his son arrived in Dawson City, ready to begin his duties as resident architect. (See also Margaret Archibald, A Structural History of the Administration Building, Dawson, Yukon Territory (Ottawa 1977), 9.)

Chapter 3:
A Frozen Grandeur of Sorts

In all, young Thomas W. Fuller designed and oversaw the construction of six important Dawson City buildings--post office, district commissioner's residence, courthouse, public school, telegraph office, and federal government administration building.¹⁰⁰ His first project, the post office on King Street at the corner of Third Avenue, designed in 1899 and finished by November, 1900, "was the first substantial public building completed in Dawson," and according to Stan B. Cohen, "the pride of Dawsonites"¹⁰¹ (Figure 3-1). Cohen notes the importance of the federal government decision to send Thomas W. Fuller to the new

¹⁰⁰ Wright, Crown Assets, 104.

¹⁰¹ Stan B. Cohen, Queen City of the North: Dawson City, Yukon (Missoula 1990), 81.

town: before the arrival in the north of the thirty-four-year-old designer, federal post office officials had not taken Dawson City seriously, thinking that it would be a temporary phenomenon at best. Any reasonably weather-tight structure, they believed, could serve as postal outlet. Almost contrary to their thinking, therefore, Fuller's new post office would become not only the first architect-designed federal building to be occupied in the town, but also the first government facility to be considered a permanent structure.¹⁰² This first building had proved successful in all his architectural, administrative and, subsequently, contracting skills--he acted as foreman and carpenter for his own construction crew imported from Atlin, B.C., of which more will be said later. Although the post office's two somewhat subdued Italianate facades, facing different streets, seem to be rather plain, they find expression, at least for me, in the corner octagonal tower--with its round windows and cornice brackets--that unites them. The corner tower arrangement is reminiscent of the era's federal Public Works architecture for southern Canada, as in Thomas Seaton Scott's Stratford Post Office of 1883 in Ontario and David Ewart's Vancouver Post Office of 1905.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Cohen, Queen City, 81. By 1923, Dawson City's future no longer held promise. In that year Fuller's post office closed, although the building itself remains.

¹⁰³ Kalman, History of Canadian Architecture, v. 2, 544-547.

A nice touch for the Dawson postal outlet is the pedimented doorway in the tower face that sits at a forty-five degree angle to the intersecting streets. The happy reception of the building by the people of Dawson and the administrators in Ottawa indicated they believed more in their new town than the federal post office administrators had done.

The government telegraph office, likely built at the same time as the post office, had also been designed by Fuller during the summer of 1899.¹⁰⁴ In 1901, Fuller went on to design and supervise construction of the other four federal government structures in Dawson. Among them was the Courthouse on Front Street.

This building is also of Italianate appearance, but more true-to-character than the post office. The site of the court house, facing only one street, allowed Fuller to give its primary facade a symmetry not feasible for the postal outlet's corner site. As part of the court house's harmoniously balanced appearance, the building offers gabled, pedimented wings flanking a recessed central section (Figure 3-2). A roofed, balustraded verandah stands above the entrance, while above this porch rises a square tower, complete with round windows reminiscent of the octagonal tower of the post office. The tasteful filigree in the pediments may well have been the first use of such extraneous detailing in Dawson City's architecture (Figure

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, Queen City, 75.

3-3). The building has been maintained in good condition and is now occupied by Parks Canada administrators.¹⁰⁵

Another Fuller design in 1901 was the town's public school. This building, no longer extant, displayed many of the architectural features given to the court house, such as a symmetrical street facade, a mid-building tower--which, from old photographs, appears to have had tall, arch-topped, louvered openings rather than round windows¹⁰⁶--and pediments above the ground-floor windows. The school, however, lacked the visual strength demonstrated by the court house's pedimented gables and broad upper and lower verandahs.

By far the most ornate Fuller design for Dawson was the residence for the District Commissioner. Also completed in 1901, the large house combined an Italianate structure with Victorian detailing. Here, Fuller offered a bulky square building typical of the Italianate style but decorated it with fancy filigree-bracketed posts supporting a second-storey verandah. The upper porch was overseen by a square tower at each end of the front facade. Unfortunately all of the residence's fine details, along with its twin towers, were lost in a serious fire only five years after the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 80. None of the three photographs shown in this photo study clearly shows whether the openings in the tower were louvered or left open.

building was completed.¹⁰⁷

The design of Thomas W. Fuller's last structure, the administration building, whose construction began in 1901, became Fuller's personal triumph, and one that still stands as a tribute to his tenacity (Figure 3-4). The building, as originally envisioned by the federal Department of Public Works administrators, was to be much smaller and much less elaborately presented. But, as Janet Wright points out, Fuller's intense feelings for the new town's worth dictated that he argue for a much grander structure. He insisted that the building's size and appearance be in keeping with its great importance as the palpable representative not only of the Yukon Territory but also of the federal government. His determined and successful crusade for additional funding allowed him to produce a structure twice the size of that originally planned while costing twice its original estimates.¹⁰⁸ Wright describes the result:

In contrast to the plain, serviceable quality of (Fuller's original) 1899 plans, the new administration building was elaborately detailed. Its classical style included wood pilasters across the front, pedimented doorway and window surrounds, elaborate, moulded eaves and cornices, and highly ornate fretwork in the pediments.¹⁰⁹

Like his other government buildings in Dawson City, this was no false-fronted standard boomtown building but

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 78.

¹⁰⁸ Wright, Crown Assets, 105.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 105.

rather an architecturally conceived entity. Moreover, it represented the culmination of Fuller's far-north architectural design and construction experience. By the time work on the administration building began, the architect had been able to absorb considerable knowledge about far-northern construction problems, especially those related to climate, and techniques to offset them.

Other problems, such as unexpected delays in contract bidding and awarding, could be traced back to Fuller's virtual arrival on site. Even before work could start on his first structure, the post office, he felt such disappointment at the inflated bids he was receiving that he himself had been obliged to accept, with possible dire consequences, the position of general contractor. As it turned out, he must have played this new role well, in spite of its heavy responsibilities, since it was one Fuller would assume for all his subsequent buildings.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the ease with which he had stepped forward to add to his architectural duties--which would have included ongoing inspections, but not day-to-day onsite construction supervision, hiring of crews, or preparation of payrolls--stemmed from an earlier experience Fuller had faced while still a teenager. This episode from the architect's life was given to Christopher Thomas who, in 1976, jotted down

¹¹⁰ Margaret Archibald, Structural History of the Administration Building, Dawson City (Ottawa, 1977), 21,22.

the following cryptic note during an interview with Capt. Thomas G. Fuller, D.S.C., son of the architect:

At age 16, T.W. took job with a sawmill on Preston St. in Ottawa; the owner got large contract for pre-fab houses, but ran off with the money, only 1 1/2 years later. Young T.W. insisted the contract was met & local promoters encouraged him to take over the company. But old Thomas (his father) would not be responsible for debts of a 17 year old and said 'no' to the idea.¹¹¹

Perhaps, T.W. saw the opportunity in Dawson City as a chance, previously denied, to prove himself as a contractor by attempting to save a similarly bad situation. Here young Fuller could assume the part with impunity, since neither raw youth nor nervous father could stand in his way. In the same light, who in Ottawa was going to argue with him?

Fuller had come to realize, by the time he started designing the administration building, that any structure erected in Dawson City could soon become a maintenance nightmare. He now knew that survival of any structure, whether large or small, meant a lifetime battle against the effects of discontinuous permafrost. This phenomenon results when the ground is frozen rock-solid for all time, yet yields a surface layer a half-metre or so thick that turns from ice to quagmire during the long days of summer, then freezes solid again during the dark days of winter. The freeze-thaw cycle of Dawson's ground surface, with its consequent uneven heaving and subsidence, makes

¹¹¹ Christopher Thomas, "Notes, Interview with Capt. Thomas G. Fuller, D.S.C.," (Ottawa 1976).

stabilization of a building foundation, and therefore maintenance of the structural integrity of the building itself, difficult if not impossible to achieve. Concerning the problems offered by discontinuous permafrost, Fuller complained to chief federal architect David Ewart in Ottawa in an early letter:

I tell you, it is a hard job to know what is best to do in the way of building...I can only act as I think best and hope and trust it may prove satisfactory.¹¹²

It had become obvious to Fuller that he must follow the lead of other builders of large structures in Dawson. He noted that they had given special attention to the design and execution of foundations. They believed they had discovered a means of support that would prove more resistant to permafrost's seasonal freeze-thaw movements. Indeed, Fuller would have done well to have used this large-building foundation type for his first building, the post office, which had begun to deform almost upon its completion in 1900. Within two years the post office was sagging seriously, and needed remedial action.¹¹³ Perhaps, if Fuller's sprawling administration building had been his first Dawson City structure, rather than a subsequent one, it would no longer be standing in the twenty-first century. It might well resemble those other buildings in town which

¹¹² Quoted by Harold Kalman, A History of Canadian Architecture, vol. 2 (Toronto, 1994), 694.

¹¹³ Kalman, Canadian Architecture, v.2, 694.

have settled into useless hulks (Figure 3-5).

His solution for stabilizing the foundations of his grand two-storey building, measuring nearly fifty metres long and fourteen metres wide, was ingenious, even if not of his own invention.¹¹⁴ His modified mud-sill, post-and-beam system, an improved version of the foundation design of the nearby Alaska Commercial Company store, built in 1897,¹¹⁵ was cautious. Instead of relying on the generally accepted standard depth of one and a half metres for his excavated foundation trenches, the Ottawa architect determined that his administration building's trenches should be two metres deep, and in some cases--under the furnace, for example--three metres deep. These parallel trenches were dug at right angles to the main direction of the building, at approximately two-and-a-half metre intervals. In the bottom of each trench, resting upon undisturbed permafrost soil, was placed a heavy timber mudsill. Upon each mudsill, spaced approximate one-and-a-quarter metres apart, were three-metre-tall posts. Upon these posts were placed beams to support the floor joists, upon which the remaining elements of the building were erected (Figure 3-6). The logic behind this method of foundation construction was that since the mudsills were placed deep enough to remain

¹¹⁴ Archibald, Structural History, 26,27.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Archibald, A Substantial Expression of Confidence: The Northern Commercial Company Store, Dawson, 1897-1951, Parks Canada (Ottawa, 1982), 14-15.

undisturbed by the summer-winter displacement of the surface's half-metre of soil material, considerable stability of the structure could be achieved.¹¹⁶ The method seems to have been quite effective, for although the building has undergone a number of renovations and rehabilitations over its century of existence, it still remains much as it was when built.

There seems little doubt that Fuller's stylish federal government buildings inspired other organizations to follow suit in designing their structures. A good example of such an inspired building was the municipally-owned Carnegie Library (Figure 3-7), built in 1904 on a corner site a few blocks north of the administration building. Its imposing appearance resulted from easily obtained financing as much as from a determined pursuit of architectural excellence. In accepting the application from Dawson's civic leaders for financial assistance, the Carnegie Foundation's executive had clearly been convinced of the town's future viability, along with its need for a good library. A critical point in giving library-construction money was the insistence that the townspeople do their part in the years following. For future buying of books and paying of library staffs, a local tax, equal to one tenth of the Carnegie gift, was to be

¹¹⁶ Archibald, Structural History, 26,27.

collected and applied each year.¹¹⁷

Those biting into Carnegie's apparently inexhaustible funds tended to ignore this cost-sharing restriction, which would see the town matching Carnegie's gift within a decade, and probably lavished more on the building's appearance than its long-term use warranted. In any case, the new library was to have many of the attributes of Fuller's administration building--pedimented windows, quoins, pilasters, rusticated foundation and dentil cornice. These exterior details, which certainly had the look of expensive stone and plaster work, were pure artifice, of course, for reasons already discussed. So, unlike the real stone-built Carnegie Library erected in Victoria that same year, Dawson's library had exterior details consisting of shaped and galvanized metal sheets, formed and painted to resemble sandstone. In spite of its pretense, however, the old library (maintained as a Masonic Hall since 1934) when completed appeared to be, and remains, an attractive, durable-looking building.¹¹⁸ Had the library appeared less pleasing, it likely would not have survived until the present, as nondescript buildings seem to be among the first to be abandoned or demolished, other things--such as demands

¹¹⁷ Abigail A. Van Slyck, "The Utmost Amount of Effective Accomodation: Andrew Carnegie and the Reform of the American Library," The Society of Architectural Historians Journal, Vol. 50, 365.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, Queen City, 125.

for their use--being equal. Moreover, the library had had the good fortune to have been constructed at precisely the right time. By 1904, as the building was being completed, Carnegie's funding officer, James Bertram, was pointing out to his employer that the foundation's financial gifts were being used to build civic monuments rather than practical, roomy and economical libraries. As a result, Bertram felt, formal architecture and consequently the use of architects, had no place in future Carnegie libraries.¹¹⁹ The funding officer's arguments were persuasive, for immediately the restrictions for financing these buildings became much more stringent. The result was that later Carnegie libraries tended to be drab affairs. For being timely, therefore, Dawson's library became an architectural example of civic pride rather than mundane practicality.

Another proof of the anticipated longevity of Dawson's townsite was the money spent upon the Canadian Bank of Commerce building on Front Street, adjacent to the Yukon River. Although originally built as a boxy, plain wooden structure a few years before the library building's completion, the bank later received a metal "stone" exterior, quite like that of the Carnegie library, and probably completed simultaneously with it (Figure 3-8). Dawson's architectural evolution seemed to be following Fuller's lead.

¹¹⁹ Van Slyck, Soc. Arch. Historians, 366-7.

Carrying this probable influence even further, St. Mary's Hospital, situated at the north end of town, and completed in 1906 by the Sisters of Saint Ann,¹²⁰ made obvious reference to Fuller's Court House, having similar pedimented gables and covered porches complete with balustrades.

Another architecturally satisfying building whose design, although not patterned after his work but perhaps influenced by Fuller's demand for quality, is St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church on Church Street. When completed in 1903 by Robert Moncrief and Reverend Andrew S. Grant,¹²¹ the church suggested, with its Gothic windows and combination entrance-porch/bell tower, quiet veneration (Figure 3-9). The building ceased to be used as a church in 1932, its disuse doubtless leading to its present sad state of disrepair.¹²²

More traditional, but equally impressive places of worship were St. Paul's Anglican Church, built on Church Street in 1902, and St. Mary's Catholic Church, completed in 1904 on Fifth Avenue at King Street. The designer of the former, St. Paul's, had approached his design from a Gothic perspective, with pointed windows and an entrance porch/bell

¹²⁰ Margaret Cantwell and Mary George Edmond, North to Share (Victoria 1992), 96-98.

¹²¹ Cohen, Queen City, 74.

¹²² When I viewed this church in the summer of 1995, I concluded that St. Andrew's was probably beyond saving.

tower centred in the front facade.¹²³ Although the latter, when built, was of a rather plain Georgian style, a belltower added in 1924 gave the building stature.¹²⁴

Another building that may have taken its inspiration from Fuller's designs was the real estate/mining office building of Alex McDonald. The structure later became the Bank of British North America and, still later, the Bank of Montreal. The building probably was built in 1900 or 1901 and gains a certain respectability from its gabled pediment facing Second Avenue.¹²⁵

Although considerably more research is required for discovering names other than Thomas W. Fuller's among Dawson City's architects or designers--names which may, in fact, have been already been lost to time--it is evident that his influence was felt by most of them. His attitude towards the outward appearance of a building--that is, that it should never offer the temporariness, superficial pretense or minimalism evident in the architecture of other early-stage boomtowns--seems to have been copied for some time after Fuller returned to Ottawa following completion of his Administration Building. This is not to say, however, that

¹²³ Cohen, Queen City, 128.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 128.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 129. The original building on this site burned in 1899. Alex McDonald, who occupied its replacement until 1905, likely started its construction right after the original was destroyed.

everyone agreed with him. Many of Dawson's buildings were still built with the traditional boomtown's false front (Figure 3-10).

In any case, less than a decade after Dawson City's founding by Joe Ladue, Fuller's buildings and those patterned after them, along with earlier architecturally important buildings such as the Palace Grand Theatre, built in 1899 (Figure 3-11), and the Arctic Brotherhood Hall, completed in 1901 (Figure 3-12), had made Dawson City seem not only well-established but definitely forward-looking. Not many years later, however, the town would find itself struggling to survive.

Chapter 4:
Rescue From Oblivion

Dawson City's century-long survival has had many causes--luck, timeliness, war, political decision-making, and the growth of heritage preservation and heritage tourism. The town needed all of these factors; absence of any one of them would likely have spelled doom for the far northern settlement, making it yet another ghostly mining town, similar to those visited by T.W. Paterson in his books on British Columbia.¹²⁶ Dawson's longterm survival was hoped for, of course, as shown by the earliest political decisions for it from Ottawa, but so many events have occurred since to undermine those great plans that the survival of such a large number of the old town's buildings seems extremely surprising.

During those first years, everything appeared to favour Ottawa's decisions, Dawson City's future seeming secure by about 1905. Fuller's government buildings had been

¹²⁶ T.W. Paterson, Encyclopedia of Ghost Towns & Mining Camps of British Columbia, 3 vols. (Langley, 1980).

finished, along with many other significant structures in the town. Dawson's riverboat-railway connection via Whitehorse to Skagway's waterfront in southeast Alaska was in full operation. The drain of residents to other places seemed to be slowing and the economy stabilizing. A dark cloud on the horizon of that future, however, was Dawson's dependence upon gold mining.

Like any single-resource town, Dawson City's ultimate survival would need more than beautiful buildings and a reliable transportation system. Its situation was not unlike, say, that of its contemporary in Washington State, Port Townsend. In the 1890's, that town lost, virtually upon completion of its wonderful grouping of Victorian buildings, both its place as Puget Sound's main shipping port and the bulk of its population to the new railway towns of Seattle and Tacoma.¹²⁷ Dawson faced a similar future; as time passed, opportunities for keeping people and businesses in town eroded. Though Dawson's role as administrative centre for the Yukon Territory was not in immediate jeopardy, it could not ensure the town's continued prosperity, since that facility could be placed physically almost anywhere.

¹²⁷ Jefferson County Historical Society, Port Townsend: The First 150 Years (Port Townsend, 2001), 7. Civic leaders and citizens of Port Townsend, located at the entrance to Puget Sound, realizing their importance to tourism, have maintained or restored many outstanding examples of the town's late 19th century architecture.

Besides the threats to survival from the vagaries of mineral pricing, longterm exhaustion of nearby gold deposits, or de-emphasized roles played by local and federal governments, the town faced a number of purely physical threats. Certainly the most enduring was the annual disruptive heaving and subsidence from frost. As the last chapter mentions, many buildings had begun to come apart from their moment of completion. Like Fuller's post office, which did not enjoy the protection of his later innovative foundation design, these structures needed regular, extensive, and expensive repairs. As new and more enticing gold discoveries were made elsewhere, such as on the beach in Nome, Alaska, where gold-panning yielded good results from 1899 to about 1907,¹²⁸ Dawson City buildings deserted by departing miners and entrepreneurs quickly fell into disrepair. Many soon faced demolition (Figure 4-1).

For the remaining buildings, however, fire offered an even greater threat. Winters in this far-northern community have always presented terrible conditions for firefighting. With thermometer readings sometimes dipping below minus 50 degrees Celsius,¹²⁹ low humidity levels draw moisture out of lumber with the efficiency of dry-kilns. The over-dried

¹²⁸ Clark, History of Alaska, 109-110.

¹²⁹ Cohen, Queen City, 8. On January 15, 1901, a thermometer reading of minus 72 degrees Fahrenheit was recorded in Dawson City.

buildings provide ready fuel for the rapid spread of any fire, however small initially. With the added problem of hose-water freezing on its way to the flames, major conflagrations in Dawson have been inevitable. On April 26, 1899, for example, the Opera House on Front Street burned to the ground, taking with it the adjacent Bank of British North America. A little more than five years later, on September 23, 1904, a number of buildings on Second Avenue burned. Fortunately, in this case, neighbouring buildings, among them the just-completed Carnegie Library, narrowly escaped a similar end.¹³⁰ Two years later, on Boxing Day 1906, fire badly damaged the Fuller-designed Commissioner's residence, destroying most of its original visual intrigue, including its twin towers and ornate filigree. With reconstruction, the residence offered its present "less-austere appearance," as Cohen calls it.¹³¹ As time passed, more fires broke out, usually with terrible consequences. Typical was that of February 22, 1917, when another major landmark, the Yukonia Hotel, was transformed into ice-coated ashes.¹³² A much later fire, in 1956, levelled T.W. Fuller's Italianate school building.¹³³ The problem remains. In spite of the modern fire-fighting equipment

¹³⁰ Ibid., 12-15.

¹³¹ Ibid., 78, 123.

¹³² Ibid., 15.

¹³³ Ibid., 80.

housed in Dawson's new firehall (Figure 4-2), winter fires are still difficult to fight, since the freezing weather and the vulnerability of many of the wooden structures are much as they were a century ago.¹³⁴

Floodwaters from the Yukon River have posed another threat. Annually, in late spring, when ice on the broad river breaks up and begins to move downstream, thick frozen slabs tangle along the river's edges, where they catch the shore and set off chain-reactions with the rest of the flow. Ice dams result, causing the normal level of the river to rise by several metres. In the past, when such events occurred along Dawson City's waterfront, flood-waters laden with building-crushing blocks of ice surged inland over much of the town's flat landscape. Stan B. Cohen's photo study, Queen City of the North, illustrates some of these major floods, including those of 1898, 1920, 1925, 1926, and 1944.¹³⁵ In the late 1980's, in an attempt to lessen the probability of ice-dam floodings, an extensive dyke was built along the waterfront, separating town from river.¹³⁶ Unfortunately, because the levee is several metres high,

¹³⁴ Dawson City is not the only Canadian city to face such winter firefighting problems, of course. An ex-fireman from Winnipeg was overheard to say that he gave up firefighting in that city after he and others were forced, following the quenching of a fire, to chop their hoses out of ice formed from overspray landing on the street surface.

¹³⁵ Cohen, Queen City, 10-12.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 130.

with a broad upper surface and a wide-spreading base, its presence lessens considerably the visual relationship between the town and its once-major transportation link to the outside world (Figure 4-3).

In spite of the physical dangers for Dawson, however, the most significant threats to longevity were the early advances in extracting gold from the surrounding landscape. The most important technological change is best documented by the existing terrain at nearby Guggieville Campground (named for the famous American Guggenheim family, who once had holdings in the area.)¹³⁷ A vast field of rounded, variable-sized river stones, with little or no vegetation--all sand, silt and humus having been long ago washed out and filtered in attempts to extract every flake of gold--substitutes for a landscape (Figure 4-4). This devastation occurred within a decade of Dawson's founding, when giant mechanized dredges began crawling up the creeks.¹³⁸ These water-bound machine-buildings clawed up everything in their paths and pushed their dredgings--sand, gravel, rocks, dirt, and, of course, paydirt--along their conveyor belts to the washers and sorters working inside. The only material emerging at the rear of the machines consisted of large

¹³⁷ This was the campground's name when I visited in 1995. An employee, while giving us a tour of the grounds, explained the Guggenheim connection.

¹³⁸ Reader's Digest, Hugh Durnford, ed., Heritage of Canada (Montreal, 1978), 318.

stones, which were left behind in heaps. Because this innovative technique was more efficient than placer or hydraulic mining and could be operated year round in riverbeds protected from freezing by the waters flowing above them,¹³⁹ it early threatened the viability of Dawson City as a bedroom community. Relatively few workers were required to operate the dredges, as opposed to the hundreds of labourers who had previously dug, moved, sifted, and disposed of the gold-bearing gravels by hand. The dredges, moreover, hurried the exhaustion of the goldfields, which even by 1907 were beginning to show signs of being worked out.¹⁴⁰

Curiously, however, mining even now has not completely disappeared from the region. The recent (1996) Dawson City census included a mining category--although miners were placed among employees from agriculture, fishing, trapping, logging, quarrying and the oil industry in a broad category of "primary industries," and therefore probably did not account for many of the town's workforce of some 855.¹⁴¹ The tenuous position of Dawson's miners is being further threatened by the ubiquitous battle between mineral exploitation and wilderness conservation. Recently, CBC

¹³⁹ Government Printing Bureau, The Yukon Territory: Its History and Resources (Ottawa, 1909), 97.

¹⁴⁰ Reader's Digest, Heritage of Canada, 318.

¹⁴¹ Yukon 1996 Census, 30, 110.

News noted the struggle between a Dawson City company, United Canadian Minerals, and environmentalists over lands at Tombstone Mountain, just south of the Arctic Circle.¹⁴² The territorial government hopes to make the area into parkland, a use not sympathetic to mining operations.

In spite of early and continuing pressures to decrease the number of miners and their families, as well as workers benefitting indirectly from their incomes, the remaining townspeople, much reduced in numbers, were able to remain in Dawson into the second half of the twentieth century. Some of those residents, especially aging goldseekers who had arrived in the early days, wanted to stay, or had found no means for leaving, and were to spend the rest of their lives in the town. For survival, their meager resources often were augmented by the generosity of others, such as the Sisters of Saint Ann.¹⁴³ Doubtless other members of this small population found employment from the town's role as a distribution centre for others--loggers, prospectors, miners, and fur trappers--working in the wild country surrounding the town. There seems little doubt, however, that Dawson's survival during its first half-century depended most of all upon its role as the administration centre for the territorial/federal government. With this

¹⁴² CBC News website: "Yukon mountains centre of eco battle," <http://cbc.ca>, January 18, 2002.

¹⁴³ Cantwell & Edmond, North to Share, 99.

bureaucracy, Dawson was able to achieve some stability. The town's citizens may even have been able, because civil services traditionally carry on regardless of economies,¹⁴⁴ to escape some of the devastating effects of the Great Depression gripping the world in the 1930's.

Oddly, that era of deprivation may even have spurred a new interest in prospecting in the Yukon, especially for Dawsonites who might earlier have been contemplating leaving their old town. With rumours reaching them of breadlines and make-work relief payments for the unemployed in more populated areas of the West, such as Vancouver and Victoria, many Dawsonites probably viewed the low-paying business of prospecting and panning for gold in their neighbourhood creeks as a better alternative. As an example of this attitude, and at about the same time, depression-era prospecting was taking place in fading-goldtown Barkerville (Figure 4-5). The former boomtown had become the destination of prospectors who, although no longer chasing impossible dreams of El Dorado, hoped at least to eke out a

¹⁴⁴ This tradition is being shaken somewhat, at the time this is being written, by British Columbia's huge layoffs of civil service employees. In the past, however, it was generally accepted that working for a government usually meant taking a lower salary in return for long-term job security. This maxim was certainly substantiated by my own forty-one years in various civil service jobs. After my first few years as an apprentice draftsman, for example, I was earning something like two-thirds the hourly rate of friends who had completed their plumbing and carpentry apprenticeships. I, however, never had to rely upon housing-start statistics for employment.

living scratching for gold,¹⁴⁵ much as they were still doing when I visited the region in 1956. In Barkerville's case, the renewed interest in goldseeking in the 1930's resulted in the founding, based upon its new-found gold reserves, of the nearby town of Wells, B.C. Dawsonites no doubt hoped to find a similar--though perhaps more limited--bonanza.

Years would pass before the world's financial situation would improve, but when it did, with a possible reprieve for Dawson City's populace, the sudden improvement had more to do with the outbreak of war than with any upswing in a naturally recurring economic cycle. The deprivations of the Great Depression were now replaced, between 1939 and 1941, by countless job opportunities in the production of Canada's war machinery for Britain's battles in Europe. Unhappily, Dawson City, being outside the realm of heavy manufacturing, did not profit from those new job creations. Instead, the town's future was about to be altered by events occurring elsewhere than in Europe.

Even so, when news reached them of the bombing of Pearl

¹⁴⁵ Fred W. Ludditt, Barkerville Days (Vancouver 1969), 151. Prospector Fred Wells was responsible for bringing miners back to Barkerville during the Depression. He believed that not all the area's gold prospects had been uncovered, and in 1932, with financial help from fellow Barkerville townsmen Tommy Blair, Tommy Nichol and George Turner, he was proven right. A new gold rush to Barkerville began, with the newly-established adjacent town of Wells, named after the prospector, attracting 2000 people by 1934.

Harbour on December 7, 1941, the people of Dawson City seemed comfortably removed from its aftermath. Although the surprise raid on the Hawaiian Islands resulted in many deaths and the loss of most of the U.S. Pacific naval fleet, it had happened so far away--half an ocean away--it seemed to pose no direct threat to the landlocked, isolated Yukon Territory. But, as in the recent destruction of New York's World Trade Centre and the damage to the Pentagon, the Pearl Harbour attack was to have an enormous and widespread effect. It suddenly awakened American concerns--in the manner of the New York and Washington attacks--about their own national security. And American national security somehow involves, directly or indirectly, most of the world's countries, especially Canada.

The American reaction to Pearl Harbour was immediate and pervasive, a shock to those who had, in isolationist oblivion, ignored world developments.¹⁴⁶ In the years leading up to the bombing of their own naval ships, Americans, according to Joseph Driscoll of the New York Herald Tribune, writing in 1943, had indeed been complacent:

As late as 1939, our garrison in Alaska amounted to the comic-opera number of 297 troops, stationed inland with their guns pointed not at Japan but at Canada.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ David Brinkley, Washington Goes to War (New York 1988), 16-17. "The most strident voice" against United States involvement in World War II belonged to Colonel Robert R. McCormick, publisher of the Chicago Tribune.

¹⁴⁷ Joseph Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska (New York, 1944), 17.

During those years, Americans may have deemed Canada a threat merely because Canadians had been "difficult to deal with" in the boundary dispute forty years earlier.¹⁴⁸ It is more likely that for decades neither country had really worried about defending itself against the other. In fact, the two nations had actually come closer together by 1941, when Franklin D. Roosevelt feared "a Hitler-dominated world." The president invited to Washington all Western ambassadors--"from Canada to Argentina"--to warn them of their common danger from foreign aggression.¹⁴⁹ Canada, at least in Washington, was no longer deemed a threat. In any case, the focus of American defence immediately shifted, following the attack on Hawaii, from Alaska's eastern front to its western. Suddenly a primary objective was preventing the loss of the territory to the Japanese. Alaska could offer possible invaders a number of airfield sites for direct attacks on the continental United States--with targets such as Washington State's Boeing aircraft factory near Seattle and the naval yard at Bremerton.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Tompkins, Alaska: Promyshlennik, 276. Quote regarding Canada's Lynn Canal boundary relocation demand, 1897.

¹⁴⁹ Brinkley, Washington Goes to War, 85-86.

¹⁵⁰ I recall, as a seven year old in 1943, trying to sleep in our house near Victoria, B.C., while hearing the droning sounds of large planes low overhead. I worried they might be Japanese bombers heading for Seattle. Perspiring, I hoped they would not mistake our house, blacked out against air raids, for Boeing Field. In reality, the bombers were being flown by British and Canadian airmen from nearby Patricia Bay Airport. They

Such attacks were, in fact, quite possible. Dramatic proof of the need to protect Alaska had come on June 3, 1942, when the Japanese again bombed American targets--this time the naval base at Dutch Harbour in Alaska's outer Aleutian Islands. The Japanese also moved in to occupy the Aleutian Islands of Attu, Adak, and Kiska, which they would give up only after battles incurring the loss of thousands of lives on both sides during the following year.¹⁵¹

The Pearl Harbour attack suddenly reversed any previous American negative attitudes towards Canadians. Within weeks of the Pearl Harbour attack, U.S. government officials had already begun negotiations with Ottawa for crossing Canada with a road linking the southern United States with Alaska. This was not a new idea, having likely originated with Alaska engineer Donald MacDonald in 1928 and considered a reasonable proposal by others, at least superficially, thereafter. Even a decade later, President Roosevelt thought it a good idea when he appointed an international commission to look into it. Nothing came of Roosevelt's initial plan, since most observers believed the project would have little military benefit. The American

were practicing night-flying before being sent off to warzones.

¹⁵¹ Jonathan M. Nielson, Armed Forces on a Northern Frontier: The Military in Alaska's History, 1867-1987 (New York 1988), 139-168.

declaration of war against Japan changed their minds.¹⁵² Now Roosevelt's government argued with Ottawa's politicians about the need to cut a swath through Canada's "uncut forest primeval and the unpaved tundra and the snowed-in mountain passes."¹⁵³ The Americans were granted their request on March 16, 1942, a mere three weeks after proposing it,¹⁵⁴ and just three months after the bombs had dropped on Pearl Harbour. Canada's speedy acquiescence to the request had reversed a previous reluctance for agreeing to any such highway, from a financial standpoint certainly, but also because the road could also be used by Japanese invaders, should that country decide to occupy Alaska. Canadian officials for some time had been adamant that they would only consider such construction if the Americans proved its future worth and defensibility.¹⁵⁵ Until that time, like their American counterparts, few Canadians seemed to think that Japan's aggressive imperialism, which had shown itself during the previous decade, could ever come to the North America.¹⁵⁶ So, agreement between this country and the

¹⁵² Nielson, Armed Forces, 137.

¹⁵³ Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Tompkins, Alaska, 297.

¹⁵⁵ Nielson, Armed Forces, 137.

¹⁵⁶ Japan's invasion of Manchuria in 1931 and its war with China, beginning in 1937, offered clear signs of future trouble for the United States, the country offering the biggest stumbling block for Japanese dominance in the Pacific.

United States on any proposed road remained unresolved until the declaration of war on the heels of the Pearl Harbour attack. Now, Canadians needed the road link as much as the Americans, even though it would change forever the North's natural and human environments.¹⁵⁷

Canada, however, had remained in a bargaining position. Financing the cost of the project and providing construction personnel were to be borne by the United States.¹⁵⁸ Given the speed with which the request was met, Ottawa's politicians once again proved that the outbreak of war greatly accelerates democratic discussion. Compare that situation, say, with peacetime Ottawa's reluctance to allow a gas pipeline across a comparable Canadian landscape, the McKenzie River Valley.¹⁵⁹

A review of these events is necessary to understanding the ultimate survival of Dawson City and its architecture, because for Dawson they had far-reaching impact--unhappily

¹⁵⁷ As the coming of the railroads earlier had adversely affected the lives and environments of native peoples on the Canadian and American plains, by providing easy access for newcomers with new agendas, while at the same time interrupting the all-important migrations of their foraging foodsource animals, the proposed Alaska Highway held the same potentially devastating possibilities for northern aboriginals.

¹⁵⁸ Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska, 21.

¹⁵⁹ Dwayne Wilkin, Environmental News Network, "Where energy reserves meet nature's preserves," ENN.com, Oct. 31, 2000. Wilkin points out, among other things, that "The biggest obstacle that lies ahead for proponents of a northern gas pipeline may be miles of red tape."

essentially negative. Political and economic attention had immediately shifted from Dawson to the only other sizeable town in the Yukon Territory, Whitehorse; the new road was passing right through Whitehorse's downtown.

With construction of the massive highway project came thousands of American workers--a new stampede to the North, as it were--many of whom were stationed in Whitehorse under the engineering command of the American army's Brigadier-General William Morris Hoge. Their presence greatly influenced life in small-town Whitehorse, where previously "mangy, flea-ridden malamute dogs (slept) undisturbed, sprawling across the mud streets and wooden sidewalks."¹⁶⁰ With the arrival of the military engineers, the scene was reminiscent of the Dawson City of forty-five years earlier--a Canadian boomtown whose Canadian residents were greatly outnumbered by outsiders. Resentment among locals must have been widespread; one is reminded of the Fourth of July celebration in Dawson City a half century earlier, when "all kinds of guns" blazed "in the hands of all kinds of men." Joseph Driscoll observed in 1942:

The war has salvaged Whitehorse from the list of ghost cities and made it a boom town again, but the United States Army is helping the Canadian Mounties to maintain law and order. Still, boys will be boys.¹⁶¹

Their predominance and the large sums of their money being

¹⁶⁰ Driscoll, War Discovers Alaska, 108.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 248-9.

spent in Canada's north no doubt suggested to some Americans that they should again broach the subject of the Yukon--and perhaps the rest of Canada--becoming part of their own country, an idea which Driscoll himself came dangerously close to offering:

Not the smallest of the achievements of the airplane (in the north) is that it has brought Alaska and Canada and the United States together, uniting them in a common defense bloc in wartime and paving the way for closer bonds of friendship and prosperity when the peace is won. Outright union is out of the question, [emphasis mine] but our common perils and defences have made Americans and Canadians brothers under the skin and in the skies.¹⁶²

Any such interest in acquiring the Yukon would have been short-lived in any case, since American military attention soon shifted from North America to Asia and the Pacific theatre. Nevertheless, even if Whitehorse, as Driscoll speculated, were to return to its former status of "ghost city"¹⁶³ after completion of the "Burma Road of North America,"¹⁶⁴ the American highway builders had greatly altered the Yukon territorial status quo. Although Stuart Ramsay Tompkins, writing at war's end in 1945, considered the "prodigious" numbers of construction workers and their pieces of equipment so vast as to mean "little to the

¹⁶² Ibid., 92.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 248.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 109.

layman,"¹⁶⁵ they came to mean much to the Canadians remaining behind in Whitehorse and Dawson City, and especially for the latter's architectural heritage.

The highway construction had begun in the spring of 1942; within only a year, Dawson City's existence was completely overshadowed by that of distant Whitehorse, the new centre of activity in the Yukon. The more southerly town, straddling the new east-west highway between Edmonton and Fairbanks and home to the northern terminus of the White Pass and Yukon Railway--the critical mover of equipment and men into the region for the highway's construction--had become the new hub of Canada's far northwest. Whitehorse's role had suddenly been greatly enlarged from mere head of navigation for paddlewheelers bound for Dawson City and other points down the Yukon River. It had now become the Yukon's most important drop-off and distribution point on the new Edmonton-Fairbanks road. This shift in Whitehorse's role in the north was ominous for Dawson City. The transfer from Dawson to Whitehorse of all important political and economic decisions had been so complete they would not be returned to the old town after the war, and just six years later, in 1951, the territorial government officially moved to the southern city. Thereafter, on Whitehorse's behalf, the federal government and the Department of Public Works would undertake the construction of hospitals, schools and

¹⁶⁵ Tompkins, Alaska, 298.

other government buildings,¹⁶⁶ solidifying the town's position as the metropolis of the Yukon.

In contrast to Whitehorse's growing prosperity, Dawson's future looked bleak. It appeared that all the attention and love that had been lavished upon Thomas W. Fuller's architectural creations and upon other important town buildings ultimately had come to mean little. It seemed inevitable that none of Dawson City's buildings would survive, or even leave behind traces of their momentary glory. Being of wooden construction (Figure 4-6), they could not offer such highly visible, durable stone-and-concrete-remains as found in southern vestigial mining towns--in Rhyolite, for example (Figure 2-2). By 1957, with Dawson's population having almost disappeared--from the forty thousand or so living there in 1898¹⁶⁷ to between 100 and 300 persons,¹⁶⁸ the town seemed doomed.

In that year, however, something important happened, which, in retrospect, was perhaps the most significant event in Dawson City's ultimate preservation: John Diefenbaker became prime minister of Canada. Oddly, even now he seems an unlikely saviour for a virtual ghost town thousands of

¹⁶⁶ Wright, Crown Assets, 254.

¹⁶⁷ Kalman, History of Canadian Architecture, v.2, 691.

¹⁶⁸ C.J. Taylor, Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks & Sites (Montreal, 1990), 174. The figure of 300 was quoted for 1961, but probably had changed little since 1957.

kilometers from Ottawa. Diefenbaker, both during and after his term in office, received considerable criticism for his "for-me-or-against-me" style of political leadership. He had gained a reputation for insisting upon consensus before embarking upon any policy decisions and then, after much stalling and often too late, rushing through some kind of legislative action. As a consequence, his government seemed indecisive and eventually squandered a strong majority.¹⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Diefenbaker could well be considered the man who saved Dawson City.

Diefenbaker had a strong belief in the future of Canada's north, even though that belief hardly hinged upon his country's role in the ongoing installations for NORAD, the Canada-USA arrangement for North American Defence. In fact, John Diefenbaker was antagonistic towards the idea of nuclear-armed missiles being placed on Canadian soil,¹⁷⁰ even if they pointed at the USSR, a country whose hopes for world domination were evident enough. Instead, the new prime minister headed north, in April 1959, on a different mission. As part of his tour, "The Chief" went to Dawson City, his presence there doubtless meant to be perceived as legitimizing his earlier campaign promise to promote resource development in the north. Part of his vision for

¹⁶⁹ Donald C. Story & R. Bruce Shepard, The Diefenbaker Legacy (Regina 1998), 58,9.

¹⁷⁰ McInnis, Canada, 660.

the region included a highway, beginning near Dawson City, that would give access to oil and mineral exploration areas much farther north, the road perhaps eventually reaching the Beaufort Sea. His vision, and his visit, were bearing fruit; construction of the all-weather road, later named the Dempster Highway, would begin in early summer, 1959.¹⁷¹

While still in Dawson City, however, Diefenbaker had observed that the recent creation of the State of Alaska would entice many Americans north to see their country's latest political creation. Why not, he thought, encourage them to cross the 141st Parallel into Canada? Dawson City's gold rush history could be a strong magnet. His suggestion, possibly given while gazing upon the dilapidated building itself, that the Palace Grand Theatre be preserved as a starting-point in making Dawson into a tourist-oriented historic site was taken, rightly or wrongly, as an official order to get started on the project.¹⁷²

Did the prime minister's interest in tourism come merely from a desire to create prosperity for the north? Or did his plan to save a piece of heritage architecture stem from a romantic view of Dawson City's turbulent first years? Was he acting upon the notion, for instance, that the heights to which a civilization may rise can only be

¹⁷¹ William G. MacLeod, The Dempster Highway (Ottawa 1979), 9.

¹⁷² Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 171.

measured after it lies in ruins?¹⁷³ Did he think this notion should be shared by visiting, money-spending, Americans? Did he hope to save for posterity a potentially valuable ambience, rather than an old building in need of extensive renovation? Or was Diefenbaker, by preserving a little of his country's architectural heritage, merely acknowledging a developing trend, in which many Canadians--voters, incidentally--were reacting angrily to a prevalent urban renewal mentality?

The last of these possibilities seems the most plausible. Concerned Canadians had already observed the recent demolition of many historic structures, among them Ottawa's old Supreme Court Building (replaced by architect Ernest Cormier's design in 1938-9). At the same time they were aware that the federal Department of Public Works "seriously considered" tearing down another great historic Ottawa monument, the west block of the parliament buildings.¹⁷⁴ By the 1950's the widely accepted belief, that the current "new" architecture was good and the "old" was bad, was considered by many to be wrong, and they set out to change it. C.J. Taylor explains:

¹⁷³ John Brinkerhoff Jackson, The Necessity for Ruins, and Other Topics (Amherst MA 1980), 100-102. Jackson refers to a society looking back "not to a specific event, but to a golden age when it was at one with its environment." He concludes, "ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins."

¹⁷⁴ Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 154-5.

Despite this massive impulse to eliminate the built heritage, or perhaps because of it, isolated pockets of resistance gathered during the 1950's to oppose the trend. The Architectural Conservancy of Ontario... continued to be an important lobby in the province. Across the country, local groups mobilized to save period houses and historic neighbourhoods. Some of these groups looked to federal and provincial governments for support. And in 1959 the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada formed a preservation committee chaired by (respected architectural writer, teacher, editor) Eric Arthur.¹⁷⁵

No doubt, as Canada's chief executive, Diefenbaker was well aware of this national trend towards conserving heritage buildings. Because of it, he made the suggestion that at least one of Dawson's significant original structures be saved for posterity.

Five years later, in 1962, that building, the Palace Grand, re-opened, but not as a refurbished original structure (Figure 3-11). Six decades of wear and neglect had made rehabilitation of the building impractical, making it logical to everyone that the existing theatre be torn down and replaced with a replica, one which, at three hundred thousand dollars, would cost only a little more than repairing the old structure but one which would meet modern building and fire-safety codes.¹⁷⁶ Stairways wider than original, along with a fire-dousing sprinkler system-- unheard-of in the heyday of the earliest town conflagrations --would make the Palace Grand much safer for modern theatre-

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 155.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 173.

goers.

Unfortunately, this building may well be exemplary for the great problem faced by the heritage preservation movement: how to ensure authenticity. Even rehabilitation alters a building's integrity--structurally, surely, but also in subtle visual aspects. Aside from prominently placed substitutes for unobtainable replacements--such as period wallpapers and fixtures--unseen, underlying changes may include the use of, among other things, plywood, contact cements, and air-powered industrial staple guns, items not available a century ago. Thus, the presence of vinyl wallpapers and absence of squeaky floors undermines the authenticity of a building's presentation. Sometimes, where heritage financing seems more plentiful--as in the eastern United States--strict adherence to traditional materials and techniques may be possible. An example is Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, where tradesmen reconstruct buildings using hand-forged square nails and hand-sawn lumber.

This example may be the exception, however; other projects in Virginia are not well financed; in at least one centuries-old house being refurbished in Virginia Beach by volunteers using public donations, gypsum board has replaced the original lath-and-plaster walls and ceilings, the costs

for authenticity in this case being exorbitant.¹⁷⁷ In another nearby heritage house, Lynnhaven, air conditioning has been installed--even though electricity to operate such a system was not available two centuries ago--to ward off the aging effects of damp and mould, both problematic in that hot, humid climate. Finding money for any needed renovations, repairs and equipment is, of course, a problem. Although needed for different purposes, lack of adequate funding also threatens Dawson's future, as we will see later in this paper.

An entirely different situation arises with demolition and replacement, the route taken for the Palace Grand. This process distorts reality, since it really involves the creation of a facsimile, an imitation which often bends to modern construction methods and safety regulations. Although the new theatre benefits somewhat from the fact that the original was still more or less intact and was able to provide invaluable references for sizes and finishes, it is still a replica, its design somewhat modified from the model. Luckily, however, it benefitted to a great extent from the original's period. When built in 1899, the theatre was served by electricity and telephone, both in use in

¹⁷⁷ This, the Ferry Plantation house, was among several heritage buildings I visited in Virginia in May, 2002. Others, besides those in Colonial Williamsburg, included the Lee Mansion, a few miles south of Williamsburg, and Lynnhaven, a historic farmhouse within the City of Virginia Beach.

Dawson before 1900.¹⁷⁸ The installation of electric lights and other equipment, therefore, is less jarring than it might be in a building from an earlier period.

Nevertheless, one entering the Palace Grand today is not walking on floors once trod upon by the miners of old.

Heritage philosophy aside, the replica theatre, with its live shows, was a hit, both as a tourist attraction and as a representative of Dawson's new heritage movement. Accompanying the opening of the new-old theatre was the establishment of the Dawson Festival Foundation, envisioned as a Stratford-style "Gold Rush Festival" bringing large numbers of visitors annually. To provide accommodations for the expected onslaught of tourists, government officials suggested that many of the existing, unused buildings be considered for renovation into hotels and restaurants.¹⁷⁹ Unhappily for the joint venture between the townspeople and the federal Parks Branch, however, the festival failed.

The place was just too remote, the attractions too limited, and the tourist services too primitive for it to succeed like a Stratford or Niagara-on-the-Lake.¹⁸⁰

In the 1960's the townspeople tried, this time without government assistance, to develop tourism further, but their attempts failed, too. Dawson City's future began to darken again.

¹⁷⁸ Cohen, Queen City, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Taylor, Negotiating, 174.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 174.

By 1967, it was obvious that keeping alive John Diefenbaker's dream of saving the town and its period architecture would require that the federal government take a much more aggressive preservationist stance. In that year, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada urged the federal Parks Branch to buy several Dawson City buildings, to protect others, and to offer a Yukon goldrush history commemorative program to educate the visiting public. Shortly afterwards the federal organization began research and development for the "megaproject" that became Dawson City National Historic Park. Administration of the park removed from the local residents any responsibility for saving the town for posterity,¹⁸¹ a move which ultimately may have been detrimental, as will be seen below.

In the following years the Parks Branch designated as monuments some of the more important pioneer buildings, including those remaining Fuller-designed structures. Among the significant buildings the branch purchased and preserved was the log cabin once occupied, between 1909 and 1912, by poet Robert Service. While residing there, Service wrote his first novel, The Trail of Ninety-Eight: A Northland Romance.¹⁸²

The owners of some private structures, possibly

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Harold Kalman, History of Canadian Architecture, v.2, 694.

following the Parks Branch's lead, saved other period buildings. Some of the most important buildings have been maintained in exceptional condition, as has the Carnegie Library of 1904 (Figure 3-7). Its later owner, the Masonic Lodge, which purchased the building from the town in 1934, doubtless was bolstered in its efforts to preserve it by the example set by the federal government's conservation program. Some of the early private homes have similarly been maintained, adding to the century-old architectural flavour of the town (Figure 4-7).

The sustained interest by building owners in Dawson seems somewhat surprising, however, since the example set by government soon faded. By the late 1970's, rehabilitation of Dawson City's old buildings by the Parks Branch, due to budget restraints, came to a virtual standstill. The last government-funded reconstruction project was, fortunately, Fuller's administration building, which was restored by the Iredale Partnership of Vancouver for use as government offices and a large museum.¹⁸³

To be fair, Dawson City's conservation and building program had not been singled out for abandonment. The national park/town was merely one among a number of large historic park projects--including Lower Fort Garry, Louisbourg, and Halifax Citadel--the Canadian government

¹⁸³ Ibid., 692.

curtailed during the 1980's.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the withdrawal of active funding was the reason many of Dawson's buildings, through disuse or lack of money, fell into sad states of disrepair (Figure 3-5). Thus, however far the preservation movement has come in protecting the important far-northern architecture of Thomas W. Fuller and the works of others who believed in attractive, functional buildings, the federal government is no longer its main financial backer, even if the Parks Branch remains its guiding spirit.

What, therefore, sustains Dawson City? It cannot be primarily the mining of gold, the impetus for the town's creation in 1896. Nor can the town's main financial support come from the other heavy industries, important as they are. According to the Yukon's 1996 Census, primary industries--including mining--account for only 105 jobs. Other businesses combined hire a total of about 240 employees, while education, health and social services, hire 90. Government--federal, territorial and local--with a total of 180, remains a significant employer. The number of civil servants might seem surprisingly high, given the move in the 1950's to Whitehorse of the capital and most of its administrative staff, but even a small town needs a bureaucracy--mayor and council, fire chief, tax collector, building inspector, public works crew members. The remainder of this category is made up of territorial and

¹⁸⁴ Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 189.

federal employees.

"Other service industries" hire about 90 workers. Surprisingly, the "accommodation, food and beverage service" hires an additional 150,¹⁸⁵ an unexpectedly large number considering the smallness of the town. Is it possible that one in eight of the town's residents of about 1300--men, women and children--is needed for providing hotel beds, food, drink for the remainder? Obviously, this cannot be the case; the town's employment rate must rely heavily upon the regular arrival of outsiders. So, it is tourism, essentially, that sustains Dawson City. Without it, few, if any, of the other employers would really need a town in which to base their enterprises; small, localized construction camps--say, at sawmill, logging, or mining sites--would suffice.

Although the tourist industry must now account for much of the fresh money coming into town, it is not a new phenomenon for Dawson City. The curious began trekking to the "gaudiest city in the north," as Pierre Berton calls it, as soon as word of its existence reached the outside world. The town's proximity to Alaska certainly helped to bring them in. Although the modern-day expectations of visitors--of which more will be said later--to the Yukon developed much later, interest in the North really blossomed among

¹⁸⁵ Census '96, Community Profiles, Yukon Bureau of Statistics (Whitehorse, May, 1999), 30.

Americans after 1867, when they became the new owners of Alaska. Although they were not yet about to give it the status of "state" among their own United States of America, many believed it prudent to visit their new possession. As a result, excursions to the Alaskan seacoast were offered at an early date, well before, say, the momentous northern holiday cruise, in August, 1894, of steamship passenger General John H. Bryant (retired).¹⁸⁶ Even though his time aboard the Queen of the Pacific involved a grounding on Cormorant Island (near the northern tip of Vancouver Island) and a week of repairs to the steamship's bow in the village of Alert Bay, B.C., Bryant obviously enjoyed the journey enough to write glowingly of it. His only regret, as Chapter 1 mentions, was that his surroundings in British Columbia's inside passage--their enjoyable "woods, the wild scenes, and the sea breeze," as well as delightful weather--did not belong to the United States.

Only a short time after the establishment of Dawson City itself, the northern coastline had already become familiar to many tour-oriented travellers. They now seemed ready to venture inland. Thus, among the desperately determined goldseekers arriving at the Dawson townsite in its earliest years were the merely curious. Jack London, a wanderer by nature, was there in 1897-8, later working his

¹⁸⁶ Gordon R. Newell, SOS North Pacific (Portland 1955), 40-1.

experiences into novels and stories, among them The Call of the Wild.¹⁸⁷ Calamity Jane, the devoted friend of "Wild Bill" Hickok of Leadville and Deadwood, South Dakota, came to look around in 1898 or 1899.¹⁸⁸ About the same time Joaquin Miller, "The Poet of the Sierra Nevadas," spent time collecting background Klondike stories he would deliver, while dressed in furs, before large audiences at New York's Palmer's Theatre. The Klondike Nugget, a newspaper as young at the time as the poet was old, referred to Miller as probably Klondike's most eccentric resident. In any case, the poet served to introduce Dawson City to the "millions of readers" who followed the accounts of his journey over the Chilkoot Pass and down the Yukon River.¹⁸⁹ His stage presentations and his writings helped to encourage interest in tourism for Dawson City even while the town was still building its first permanent structures.

A Miss Elizabeth Robins also paid a visit in 1900, even though ostensibly she was in the far north on another errand--to forge a reunion with her brothers, Raymond and

¹⁸⁷ Jack London, Jack London on the Road: The Tramp Diary and Other Hobo Writings, Richard W. Etulain, ed. (Logan 1979), 8,25.

¹⁸⁸ Berton, Klondike Fever, 370.
Calamity Jane was more than a casual friend of "Wild Bill," as shown in her request, which was posthumously granted, to be buried next to his grave on the hillside overlooking Deadwood, S.D. (From a sign at the gravesite in the 1980's.)

¹⁸⁹ Lowell Thomas, Jr., Trail of '98, 105,106.

Saxton. Although the sum of her written experiences leaves an impression of hardship and deprivation reminiscent of the negative comments of Charles A. Bramble and James A. Secretan, Miss Robins' reflections, with their dramatic flair, intrigues the patient reader. As a well-known professional actress who moved in the circle of such notables as George Bernard Shaw, George Eliot, and Samuel Clemens,¹⁹⁰ Robins had turned to profitable fiction-writing to fill the intervals between stage engagements. By 1900, at age thirty-eight,¹⁹¹ Robins' reputation was broad enough to attract a large number of readers, to whom she delivered romantic touches, complete with the "attitudes and biases characteristic of the time,"¹⁹² of Alaska and the Yukon. Those attitudes and biases doubtless had much to do with the intense interest tourists had, and have now, a hundred years later, in Dawson City.

But today's tourists are apt to differ from those of a century ago. They are often less intent upon satisfying their curiosities than in trying to make sense of their own pasts. The pursuit of heritage knowledge now plays an important role and has become a vitally important aspect of any tour. In 1959, when John Diefenbaker proposed saving a

¹⁹⁰ Victoria Joan Moessner and Joanne E. Gates, eds., The Alaska-Klondike Diary of Elizabeth Robins, 1900 (Fairbanks 1999), 2.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., ix. Robins was born in 1862.

¹⁹² Ibid., x.

piece of Dawson's old architecture to lure Alaska's visitors into the Yukon, he probably was not thinking of the likes of curiosity-driven Ed Schieffelin, Jack London, Calamity Jane, or Elizabeth Robins. Instead, the prime minister likely had in mind those American individuals who were not only curious about Alaska but eager to add to their perceived history of their entire country and its neighbours, and consequently, to their own personal histories. Nearly a half-century later, in the twenty-first century, tourists visiting Alaska--and hence the Yukon--are still looking for their roots, their pasts before their remembered pasts. They are no longer willing to settle for those snippets of information about the environment that early nurtured them--influences from their parents and their grandparents, say. David Lowenthal, in his essay, "Identity, Heritage and History," explores this thought:

...heritage is still the term that denotes our inescapable dependence upon the past. What we inherit is integral to our being. Without memory and tradition we could neither function now nor plan ahead...heritage distills the past into icons of identity, [emphasis mine] bonding us with precursors and progenitors, with our own earlier selves, and with our promised successors.¹⁹³

This search for self-identity can be difficult. Until relatively recent times, individuality, or the documenting of personal histories, was not widely promoted. In other

¹⁹³ David Lowenthal, "Identity, Heritage, and History," Commemorations: the Politics of National Identity, John R. Gillis, ed. (Princeton, 1994), 42-3.

words:

In communities where individuals largely remember in common and gaps in shared memory are few, mutual lifelong familiarities and daily gossip leave little space for the presentation of self...¹⁹⁴

One might think this idea--the search for self-identity--hardly fits those tourists from countries that supplied few, if any, miners for the goldfields of nineteenth-century Alaska and the Yukon. These visitors could be expected to find little information about their own personal pasts there. But, on the contrary, the awareness is strong everywhere today that a people's own society has not lived in total isolation during the past century. Whatever happened, or happens, in one part of the world was and is felt by all others. When, therefore, a Japanese tourist, say, arrives in Alaska--and ultimately in Dawson City--he is aware that at least some of his past is connected to the bombings in 1942 of the outer Aleutians, or to the lure of new gold discoveries in the late 1800's, or to the movements of people from one place to another during the intervening years. Thus, Dawson's past is part of his past. As Lowenthal writes, "Heritage has always obsessed those fortunate to have it...(but) few...past societies could hope to be so rich or powerful."¹⁹⁵ The world is now full of such societies.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 42.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 43.

All fear the disappearance of the palpable past. Patrick Wright, in A Journey Through Ruins, refers to a "forty-year period of destructive modernism," paraphrasing Prince Charles's comments on the sad loss, both physically and inspirationally, of historic architecture in England. The author, again paraphrasing, writes, "either (the destruction) continues until everything is lost or the nation rallies to its senses and the tide of destruction is reversed."¹⁹⁶ Charles's apprehensions may well be felt by people in almost every other city or town in the world. All understand that old buildings often occupy expensive land, and that replacing them with larger, more efficient structures makes economic sense. But out of this, longterm residents see a new and unfamiliar city emerging. With thoughts of lost neighbourhoods in mind, visitors coming to Dawson City, a town all but frozen in time, can say to themselves while walking the gravelled streets, "Ah, but at least one such place remains."

Perhaps its extreme remoteness has a strong appeal for many.¹⁹⁷ Although Dawson City's attempts to attract

¹⁹⁶ Patrick Wright, a Journey Through Ruins: A Keyhole Portrait of British Postwar Life and Culture (London 1993), 360.

¹⁹⁷ This idea was offered by Dr. Christopher Thomas and Martin Segger of the University of Victoria. Mr. Segger, Director of Maltwood Museum, Uvic, maintains a strong interest in the remote town, having been Governor, B.C. & the Yukon, Heritage Canada Foundation, in the 1980's. Pierre Berton, Dawson City's native son, acted as Chair, Board of Governors.

tourists in the 1960's failed, proving, as Bruce Prideau points out, that an "old building, unique event or historic site is no guarantee that tourism will flourish in peripheral areas,"¹⁹⁸ the tourists of the 21st century are more prepared to look further afield. While Prideau suggests that only true uniqueness can pull tourists away from more easily accessible attractions, it would be difficult to find any place in North America more unique than Dawson City.

For many years, tourists wanting to reach Dawson from tidewater in Lynn Canal had a relatively easy time of it. During the year that author-actress Elizabeth Robins visited Dawson an alternate means of travel--from her steamboat journey upriver--was completed. Thereafter, any tourist interested in getting to the goldrush town could ride in relative speed and comfort on the new White Pass & Yukon Route narrow-gauge railway to Whitehorse, and from there drift downriver--rather than fight upriver from the Bering Sea--to Dawson. By 1900, a mere two years after the great goldrush began, the WP & YR started carrying freight, miners, families, business men and women--and the merely curious--up through the precipitous White Pass from Skagway's waterfront, through the northwest tip of British Columbia, and on to Whitehorse's riverfront. The trip

¹⁹⁸ Bruce Prideaux, "Building Visitor Attractions in Peripheral Areas--Can Uniqueness Overcome Isolation to Produce Viability?" (West Sussex Sept-Oct 2002).

downriver to Dawson City was still not without its perils, of course. Adrenalin likely still flowed when the paddlewheelers surfed down the Yukon River's currents, but the railway meant that travellers were no longer faced with the desperate struggle on foot up the Chilkoot and White Pass Trails, or with a long and expensive ocean-river journey.

The narrow-gauge train still carries the curious up through the White Pass, although unhappily it no longer traverses the entire distance from Skagway to Whitehorse. By 1982, following the loss of a sustaining ore freight business upon closure of the Keno Hill mines, southeast of Dawson,¹⁹⁹ the White Pass & Yukon Route was forced to cease operation, its roadbed and equipment left to languish in decay. The line lay abandoned for only a half-dozen years, however, before the Tri-White Corporation, seeing the potential of the old railway, in 1988 purchased the WP & YR rolling stock and about one third of its 110 miles of track. When brought back into service, the line had a new role as a tourist service aimed at cruise-ship passengers.²⁰⁰ Since then the train has been offering a shortened sightseeing journey of some forty miles from Skagway to the top of White

¹⁹⁹ White Pass and Yukon Route, All Aboard! (Seattle 2002), 4.5.

²⁰⁰ Stan Cohen, The White Pass and Yukon Route: A Pictorial History (Missoula 2000), v.

Pass, stopping at the Alaska/British Columbia border.²⁰¹ While riding in antique railway cars, even if now hauled by diesel locomotives, one still finds the imagination stirred by the vastness of this rough terrain. While swaying along rails set less than a metre apart²⁰² on ledges carved from sheer rock faces over deep crevasses, through dark tunnels or past the stark webbing of the Dead Horse Gulch trestle,²⁰³ bypassed and abandoned since 1969,²⁰⁴ the train offers passengers alarming glimpses of steep, unforgiving and precipitous trails, littered with hundred-year-old cast-off articles from long-ago goldseekers.

²⁰¹ Halting at this point, the train crew, with their load of passengers from all over the world, still inadvertently concur with the conditions enforced by Sam Steele's Northwest Mounted Police at this same crossing a hundred years ago: without a year's supply of food and supplies with you, you cannot go further.

²⁰² Howard Clifford, Doing the White Pass: The Story of the White Pass & Yukon Route and the Klondike Gold Rush (Seattle 1983), 28. The width between rails in this case was three feet, rather than the standard four feet, eight-and-a-half inches. This reduction allowed considerable savings over the standard gauge, for clearing, rock removal and gravel basing, as well as requiring shorter wooden ties.

²⁰³ Stan Cohen, The White Pass and Yukon Route: A Pictorial History (Missoula 2000), 4,44,45,90. The name of the deep crevass came from the deaths of some 3000 overloaded, overdriven and underfed horses here during the gold rush.

²⁰⁴ Howard Clifford, Doing the White Pass (Seattle 1983), 40. the old trestle remained in use until 1969, when it was superceded by a new bridge and tunnel further upstream. When constructed in 1901, the original cantilevered trestle, at 215 feet above the floor of the ravine, was reportedly the highest of its type in the world.

Before embarking on this excursion, many of these WP & YR passengers often enjoy being pampered aboard decadently comfortable giant cruise ships docked in Skagway. Out of that protected environment, they are thrust into an awareness of a very different world, where they are invited to imagine the sacrifices and hardships of those trekking to their El Dorado a hundred years ago. What, most must ask themselves, could have been the driving force for so many doomed seekers in this rugged, unforgiving land?

To find the answer, some of those staring out the traincoach windows conclude that they must return someday, to journey the rest of the way to the old town of Dawson City. There they might discover for themselves what the excitement was all about, and perhaps relive it for a few days in a place which, according to the photographs they have seen, looks much as it did a century ago. While there they might also add the experience to their own personal histories.

The lure of Dawson City for tourists is reinforced by the cruise industry itself. Holland America, for example, in the 1990's invested heavily in one of the region's major attractions, the Yukon Game Farm, as well as in hotels in Dawson City, Beaver Creek and Whitehorse, under the guidance of the company's subsidiary, Westmark.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Gary Duke & Associates, Ltd., The Alaska Cruise Industry: Benefits to Canada (Victoria 1994), 42.

Although the trek to Dawson can no longer be made by way of the WP & YR to Whitehorse and down the Yukon River by paddlewheeler, one can now cover the distance--and visit points of interest along the way--on paved roads connecting Skagway with Dawson. Or, if coming from elsewhere, one can use other highways to reach Whitehorse--and hence Dawson--from the cities and towns of British Columbia, Alberta and Alaska, by way of the Alaska Highway. A time-saving way to get there, however, is by scheduled airline from Vancouver to Whitehorse and by small plane or rental car the remaining distance north along the Yukon River.

It seems that all these modes of travel are well-used, judging by the large number of activities that welcome tourists to Dawson City throughout the year. The published Calendar of Events for 2002, for example, begins with the "City of Dawson Birthday Party" on January 9 and ends with the "Dawson City Old Fashioned Christmas Party" on December 14.²⁰⁶ Between these two dates are listed many other activities, including the "Klondyke Centennial Society Casino Night" in February. The "Dawson City Curling Club 103rd International Bonspiel" takes place mid-month February, coinciding with the "Trek Over the Top, Destination Tok, Alaska" snowmobile race.

When the days begin to lengthen, emphasis shifts from

²⁰⁶ Tour Yukon: Calendar of Events, <http://www.touryukon.com>, 2002, 1-3.

winter activities to those needing or being satisfied by long arctic days. Mid-March is set aside for the "Thaw-di-Gras Spring Carnival." By mid-May, Diamond Tooth Gertie's Casino opens its doors for the summer in the old Arctic Brotherhood Hall on Fourth Avenue, built in 1901 and restored in 1983²⁰⁷ (Figure 4-8). On any night a month later, in the hours past midnight, after the gaming tables close and the stage shows end, patrons visiting from southern latitudes are invariably surprised to see, as they go outside, the streets bathed in broad daylight. In the Dawson summer, night becomes day.

In June, Parks Canada opens its "National Historic Sites of the Klondike," which include Thomas W. Fuller's original administration building, now housing, among other things, the Dawson museum.²⁰⁸ "Aboriginal Day Celebrations" follow a few weeks later. July brings the "Dawson City Music Festival," which since 1979 has been drawing large crowds to the grounds adjacent the administration building to see such acts as The Crash Test

²⁰⁷ Cohen, Queen City, 79.

²⁰⁸ Adequate financing from governments, in this case the Yukon Government, for caretaking such national sites is hard to get, judging by the removal in January, 2002, of the Museum's director due to "a funding shortage." Source: CBC North News, "Dawson museum lays off director," <http://north.cbc.ca>, January 7, 2002.

Dummies and Bruce Cockburn.²⁰⁹ In August, young people have a chance to excel in the "Dawson City Youth Triathlon." By the end of September, however, cold weather has already warned of its advance, and symbolically, with the closing of the casino, Dawson takes a rest in preparation for December, when the round of tourist-oriented activities begin anew.²¹⁰ Thus, the value of tourism for the preservation of Dawson City and its heritage architecture cannot be overstated. What will become of this vital resource as a result of the chilling effect on tourism from the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001? Those events have reduced air-travel--virtually the only means for tourists from abroad to reach the region, whether through Vancouver to Whitehorse or Seattle to Alaska, or even to departure points for Alaska-bound cruise ships visiting Skagway. It seems that Dawson City, at least for the time being, may have to rely more upon the personal automobile to bring in visitors. There may be a long recovery period required before overseas tourists again arrive in those previously large numbers at West Coast destinations. In the long run, however, barring some new catastrophe, I expect that the travel/tourism industry will rebound handily and continue to help preserve Dawson City's

²⁰⁹ Dawson City Music Festival information sheet, website <http://www.dcmf.com>, 2001, 1.

²¹⁰ TourYukon's 2002 "Calender of Events" has no entries for Dawson City between September 21 and December 14.

heritage architecture.

What about the future of the buildings themselves? Will Dawson be able to present its current architectural image into perpetuity? Or will all of the original buildings become time-worn enough, like the first Palace Grand Theatre became, to be not worth saving? The lives of these representatives of nineteenth-century boomtown architecture are unfortunately rather short, especially in such a harsh environment; when maintenance costs become prohibitive, replacement will be almost inevitable. In Dawson City's case, since all these structures are made from wood, building anew seems both practical and economical. Replacing them would not be like trying to replace, for example, Francis Mawson Rattenbury's magnificent stone Parliament Buildings in Victoria, an improbability given today's costs and scarcity of 19th-century skills. In Dawson, skilled twenty-first century carpenters and cabinet makers could replace the most complicated original wooden structure. The danger in such thinking, unfortunately, is that shortcuts could be taken and particulars ignored, with the result that replicas could end up as poor imitations, revealing nothing of the lives of the designers, carpenters and users of the originals a century ago. These new-old heritage structures might be no more than steel warehouses with weak references to their original facades. They need, in fact, only meet the requirements of the local and federal

building codes, since the Yukon's Area Development Ordinance of 1971 is "not binding on heritage owners."²¹¹ A replica, therefore, could offer no more than a "cowering, merely camouflaged architecture," as Patrick Wright puts it.²¹² Although Wright is referring here to Prince Charles' views on England's modern architecture and planning--for public housing particularly--the author's concerns could well apply to heritage architecture in Canada. Although John Diefenbaker obviously had preservation in mind for the Palace Grand Theatre, a "camouflaged architecture" was the result of his "interference." In this case, however, camouflage was cleverly applied, resulting in a nearly exact copy. One hopes therefore that the theatre stands as a model for the town's future heritage restorers.

Who or what might ensure a future faithfulness to the intents of heritage preservation--and hence heritage tourism--in Dawson City? Will it be government, townspeople, or private societies and charities? The state of current government spending cutbacks almost guarantees that the saviour will not be a federal representative--a

²¹¹ E. Neville Ward, Heritage Conservation--The Built Environment (Ottawa 1986), 136-7.

²¹² Patrick Wright, A Journey Through Ruins, 352. His comments bring to mind the Douglas Street facade of the Eaton's Centre in Victoria. Although the building contains several nostalgic references to the period of the original, such as the large pediment above the main entrance, it has no connection--at least for me--with the century-old building that it replaced.

second Diefenbaker. Should Dawson's architectural heritage survive, it most likely will be through the efforts of those who live and work there.

Whether or not the town's life continues far into the future, there is no doubt about how it has endured thus far. As this thesis has shown, Dawson's longterm existence has had to satisfy many requirements. Unlike, say, its contemporary boomtown of Bodie, California (Figure 4-9), a museum piece languishing in "arrested decay"²¹³ in its dry, treeless, high-desert location, Dawson could not have lasted long unattended. Its survival required the combination of major and minor events, each one of which painted a significant scene in the overall picture of Dawson City as the far-northern representative of a western North American mining boomtown of the 19th century. Although a major gold discovery created the opportunity for Joe Ladue's entrepreneurial endeavours on the mudflats of the Yukon-Klondike confluence, it would be other matters--imperialism, nationalism, border disputes, paddlewheel steamer and narrow gauge railway operations, world war, historic park status, wanderlust and tourism--all coming together to promote longevity for the old town. No less important in ensuring a lasting interest in Dawson is the universal fascination with magnificent ruins. Although not offering the antiquity of

²¹³ Sunset Magazine, Guide to Southern California, "'Big, Bad Bodie'"--a True Ghost Town" (Menlo Park 1974), 124.

such places as Rome's Colosseum, Egypt's Great Pyramids, or Peru's Machupicchu, Dawson City can still satisfy a common curiosity about a more recent civilization, one that belonged, in that short interval between 1840 and 1910, to the goldseekers, those obsessed with the promise of sudden wealth and willing to risk their lives to find it. My conclusion is that the essential ambience of Dawson City has remained as it was a century ago, and will continue to draw the attention of the curious, the restless and the searchers for personal identity. Their interest will fade only when the last vestiges of Dawson's architectural creations have rotted away into the unstable and unsettling ground from which they arose.

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Appendix

Photographs and Drawings

(Note: Photos for the following were taken and generously offered for reproduction in this thesis by Rod Stevens of Victoria, B.C.: Frontispiece; Figures 1-3; 3-1; 4-1; 4-4; 4-6; and 4-8. All other photos and drawings shown on the following pages have been supplied by the author.)

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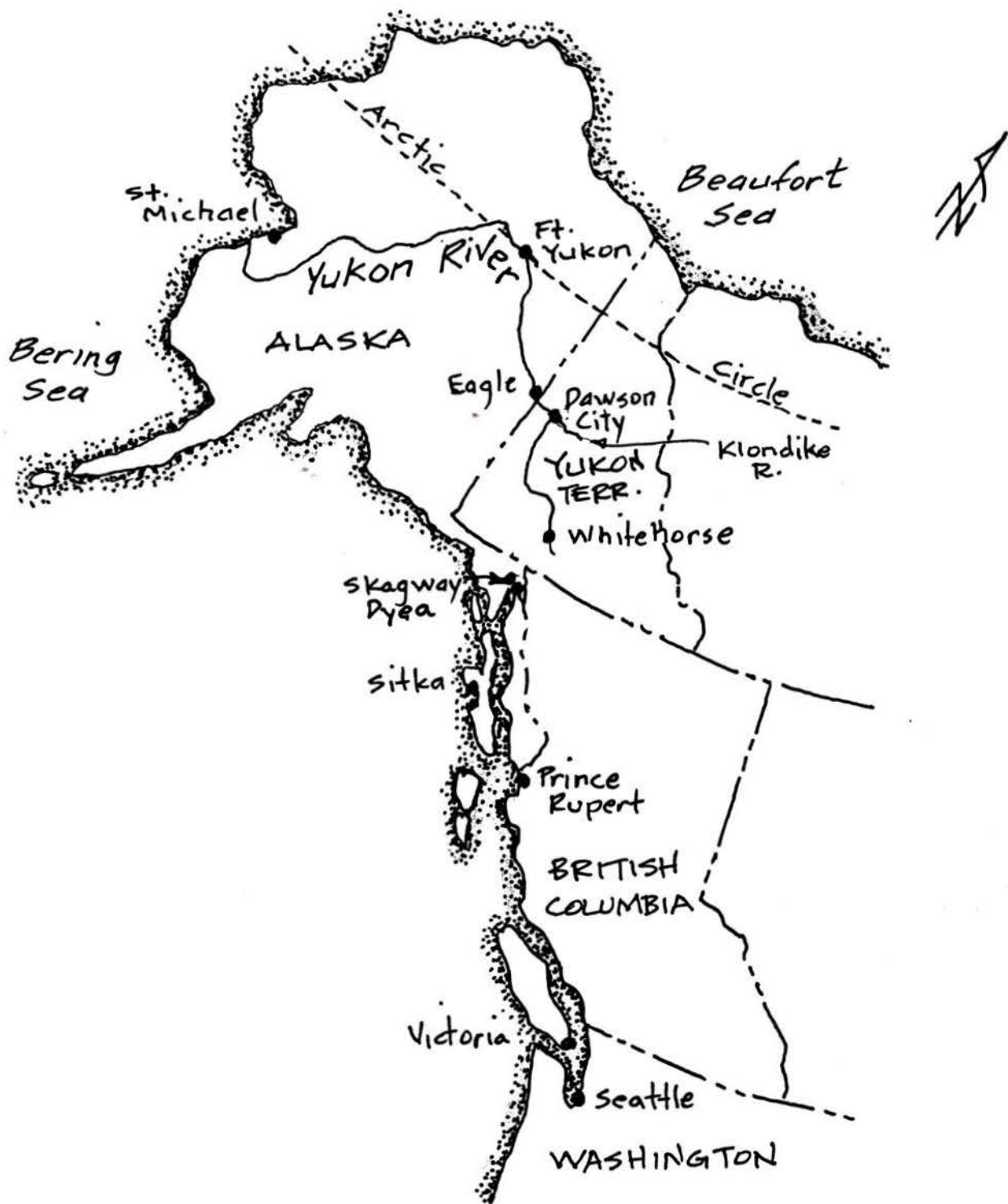
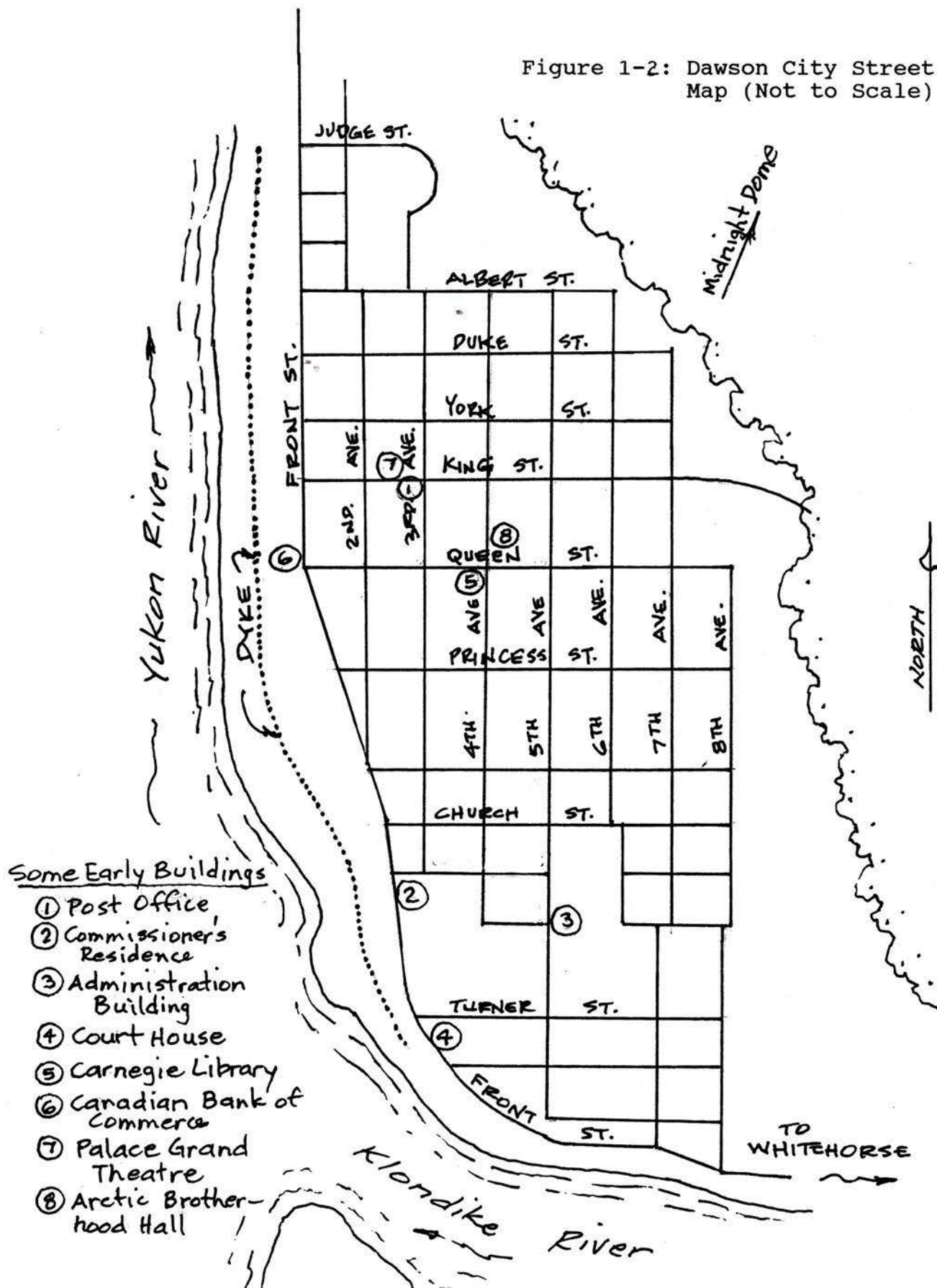


Figure 1-1: Location of Dawson City

Figure 1-2: Dawson City Street Map (Not to Scale)



Some Early Buildings

- ① Post Office
- ② Commissioner's Residence
- ③ Administration Building
- ④ Court House
- ⑤ Carnegie Library
- ⑥ Canadian Bank of Commerce
- ⑦ Palace Grand Theatre
- ⑧ Arctic Brotherhood Hall



Figure 1-3: Dawson City in 1995.
View from Midnight Dome

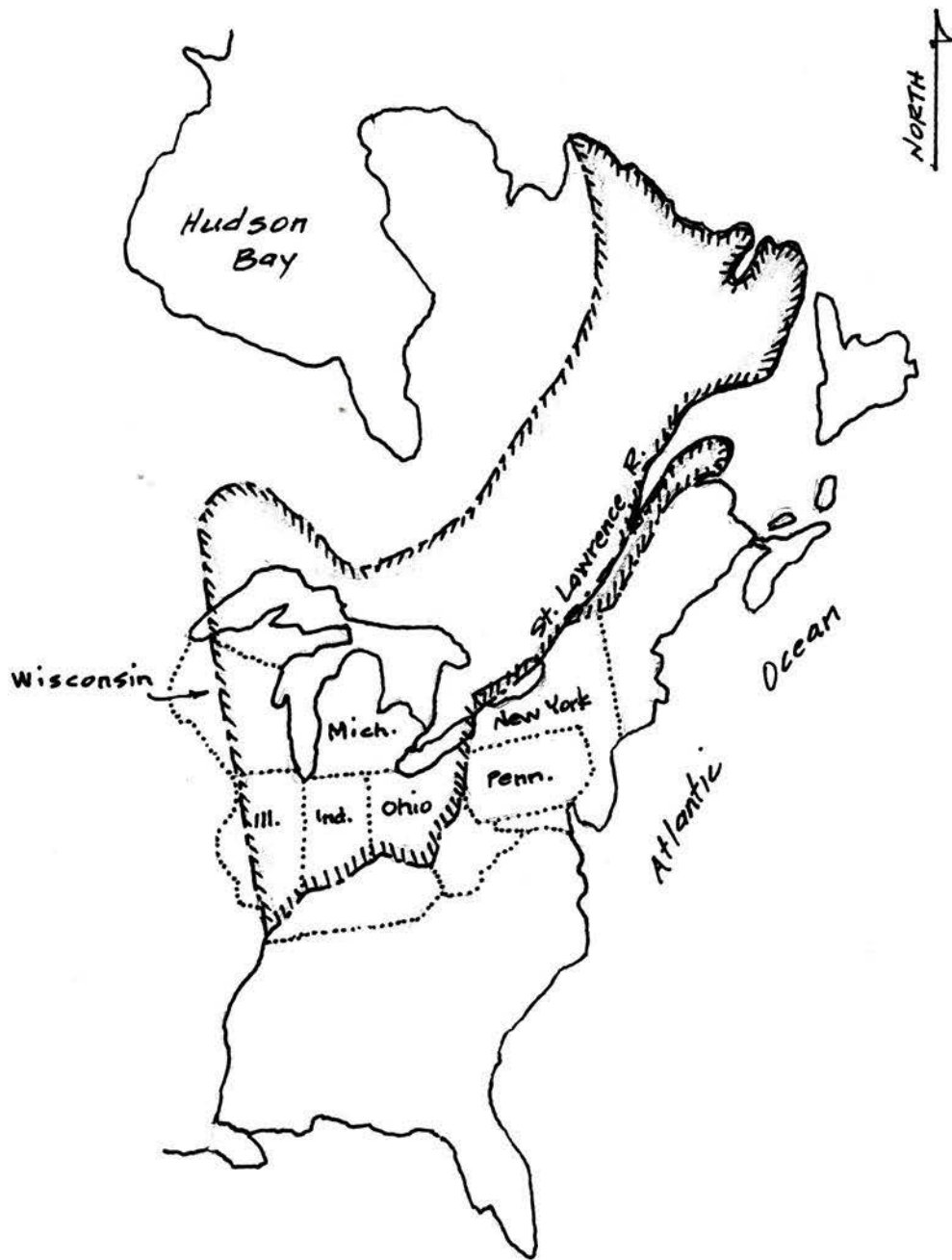


Figure 1-4: Lands covered by the Quebec Act of May 20, 1774

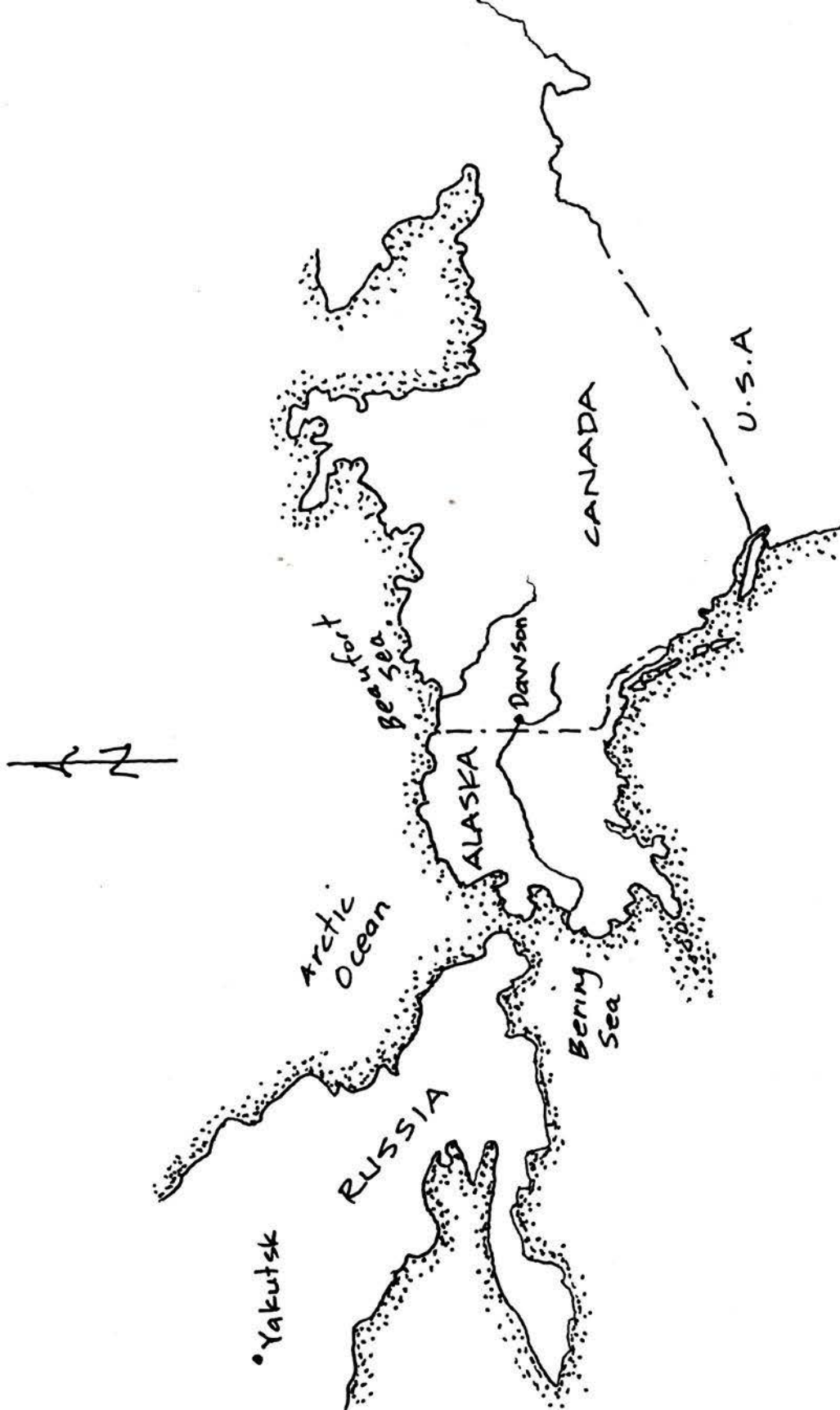


Figure 1-5: Physical Relationships Between Russia, Alaska & Canada

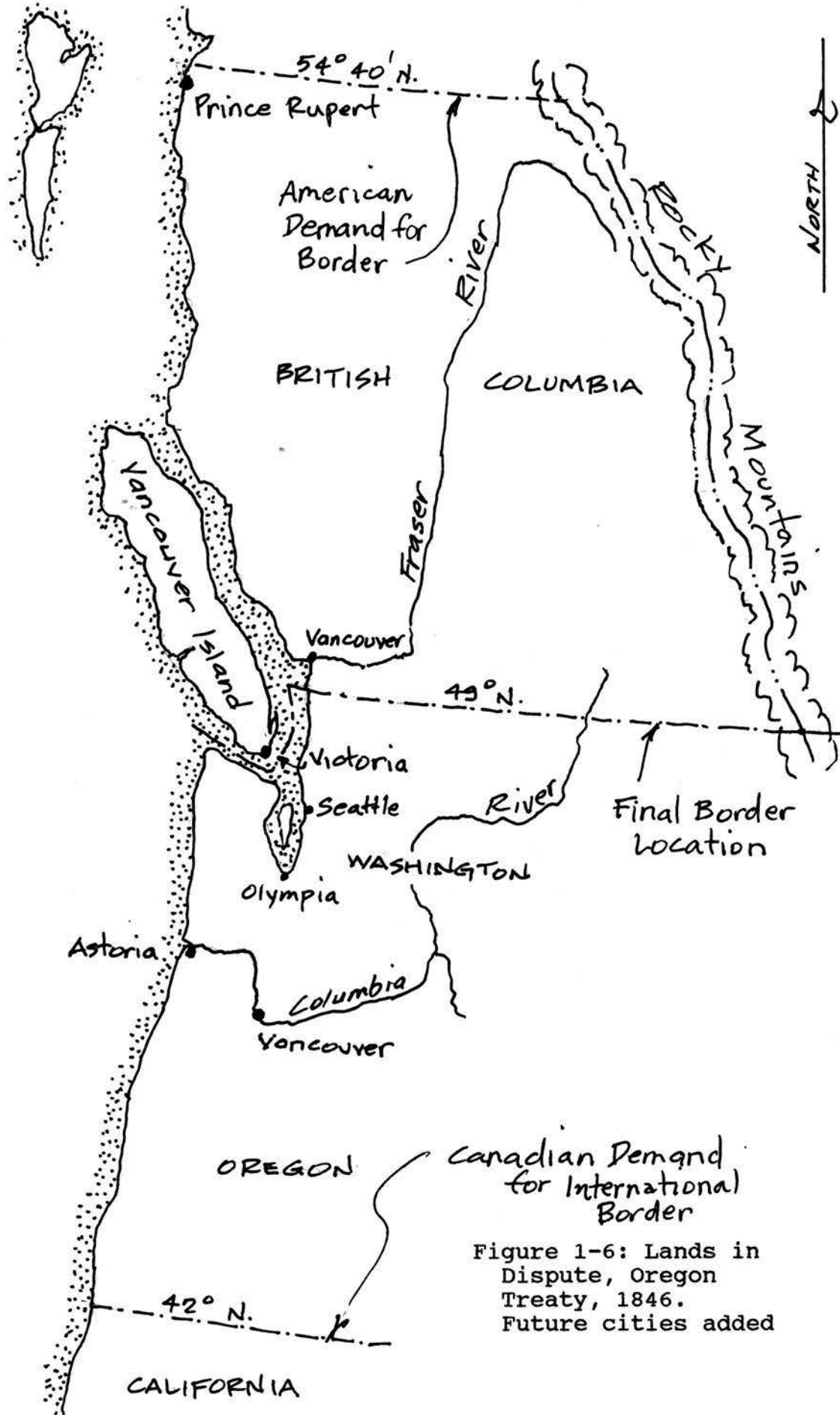


Figure 1-6: Lands in Dispute, Oregon Treaty, 1846. Future cities added



Figure 1-7: Locations of Skagway, Dyea, Juneau & the Chilkoot Pass

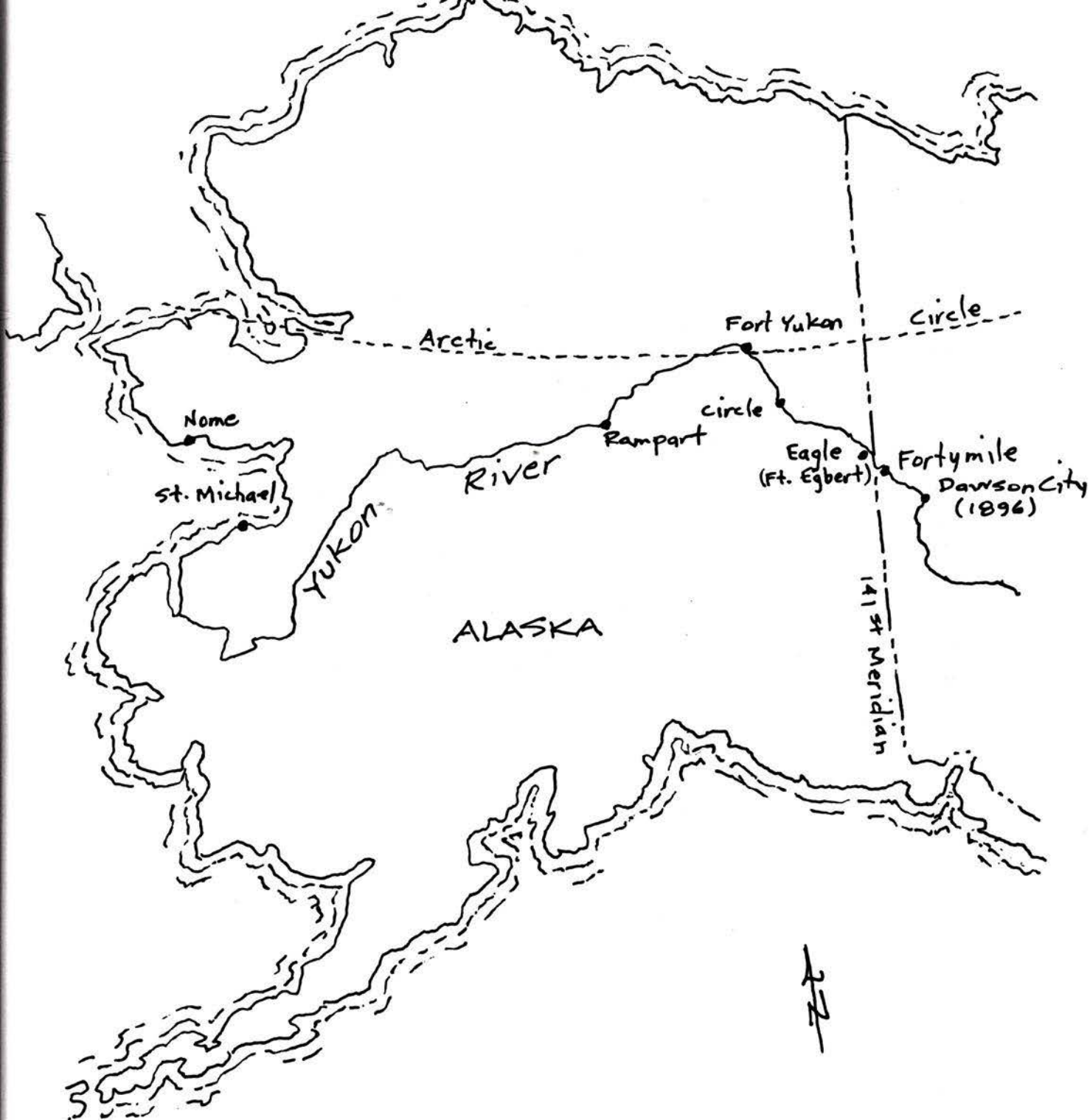


Figure 1-8: Locations of Early Trading Posts & Forts on the Yukon River

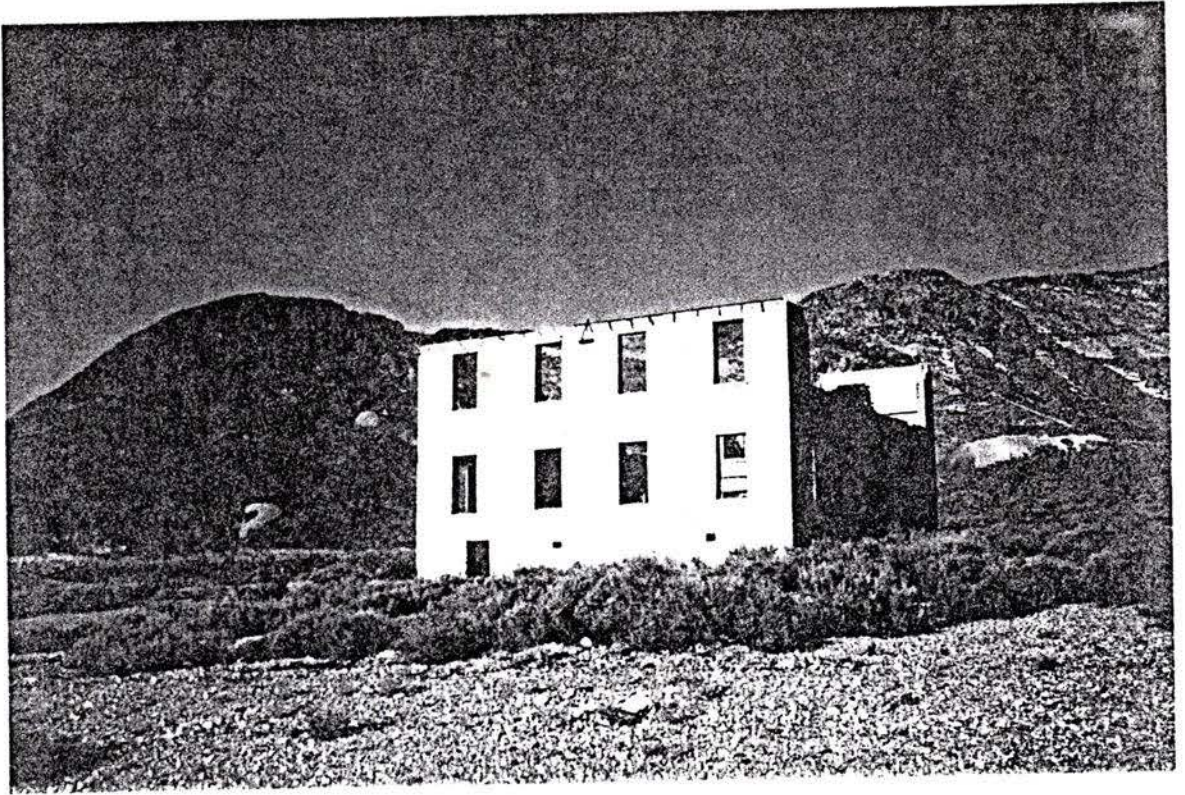


Figure 2-1: Boomtown Rhyolite, California. This derelict example from the early 20th century is of concrete and stone construction, its survival against all odds proving the durability of the material under the right geographic conditions.

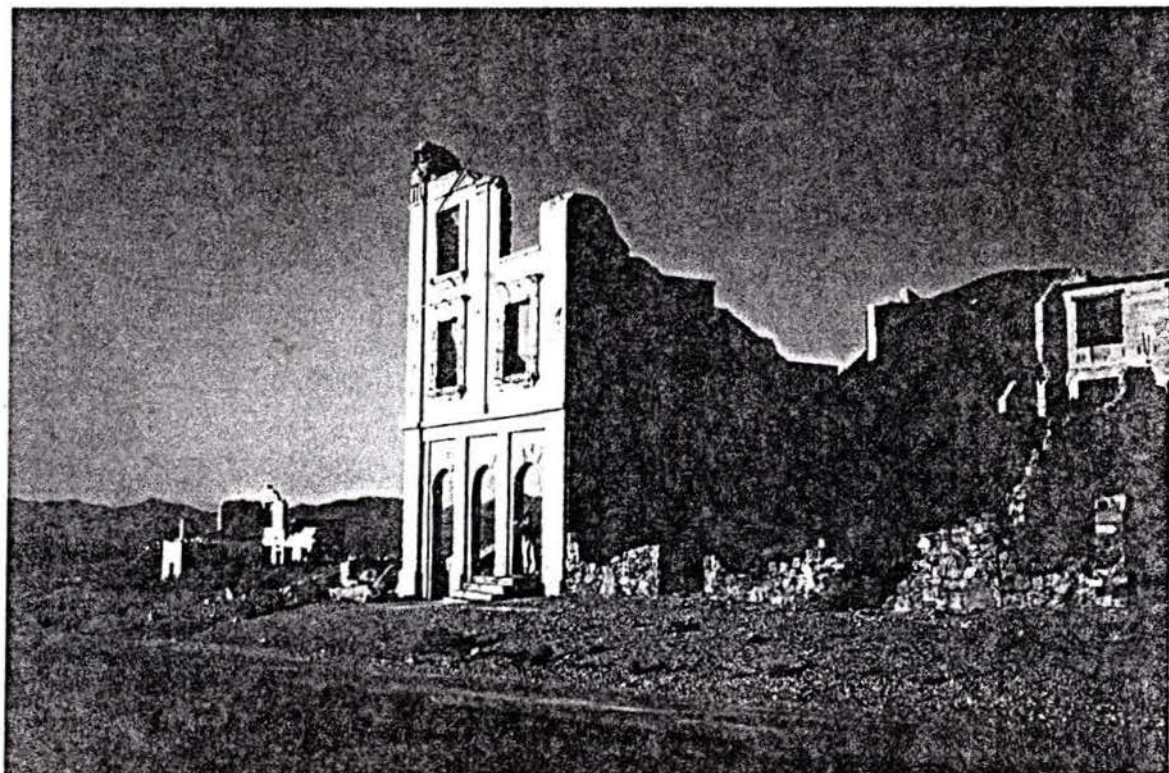


Figure 2-2: The John S. Cook Building in Rhyolite, California. Upon its completion in 1908, the structure's classic lines--pilasters, rusticated lower floor and dentil cornice--suggested a permanence not anticipated for most boomtowns.

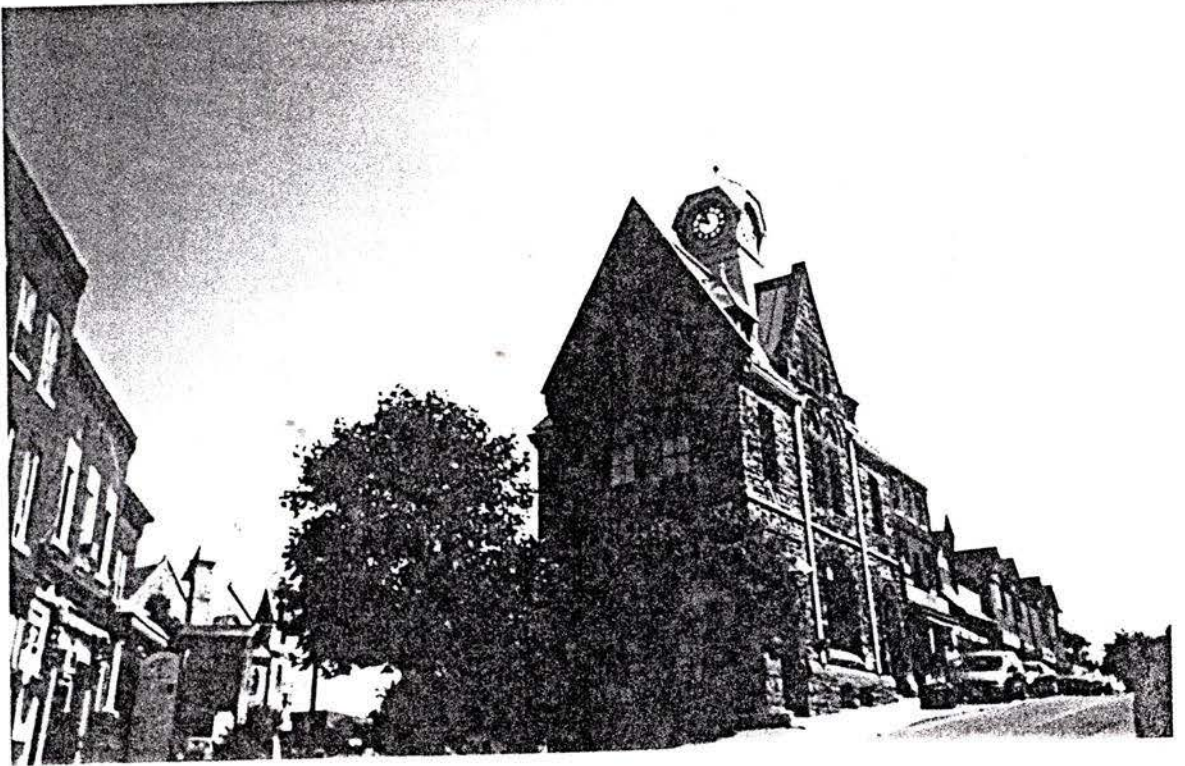


Figure 2-3: Post Office, Almonte, Ontario, southwest of Ottawa. This building, designed by Thomas Fuller, Sr., was one of many such Canadian public buildings erected in the years leading up to Dawson City's founding in 1896.

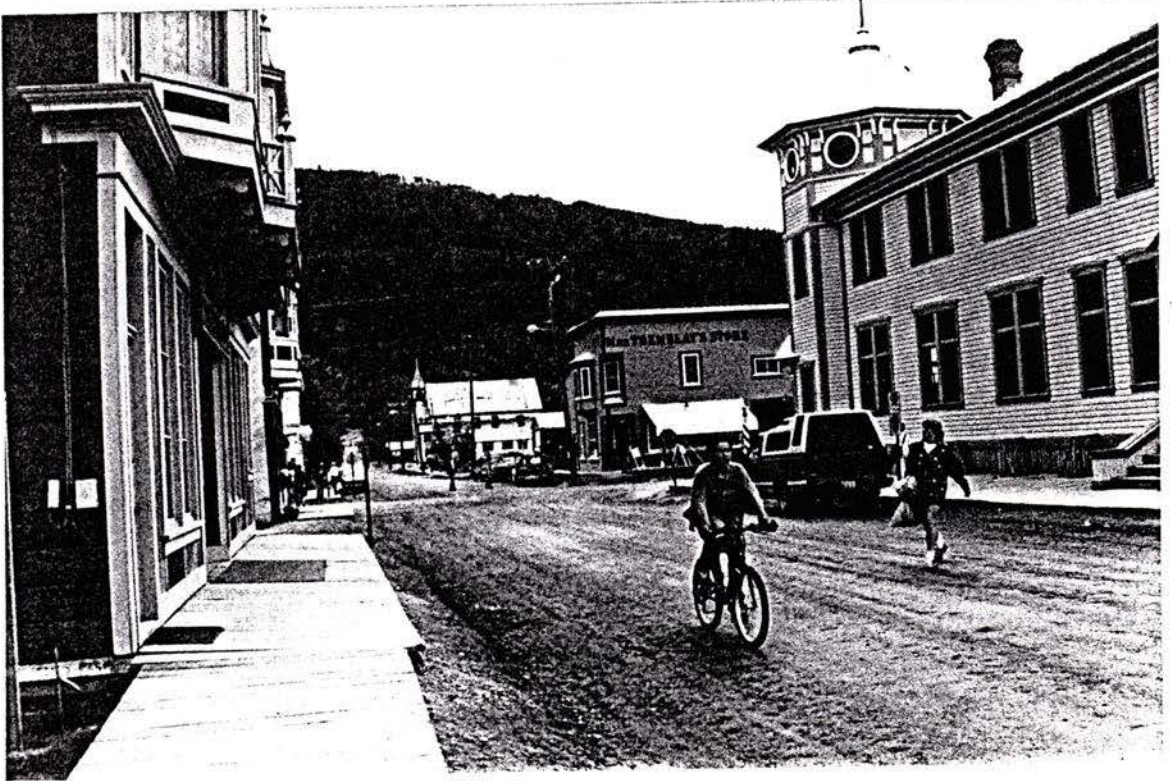


Figure 3-1: King Street, looking east,
July, 1995. Fuller's Post Office,
with octagonal tower, on right



Figure 3-2: Fuller's Court House



Figure 3-3: Court Pediment Details

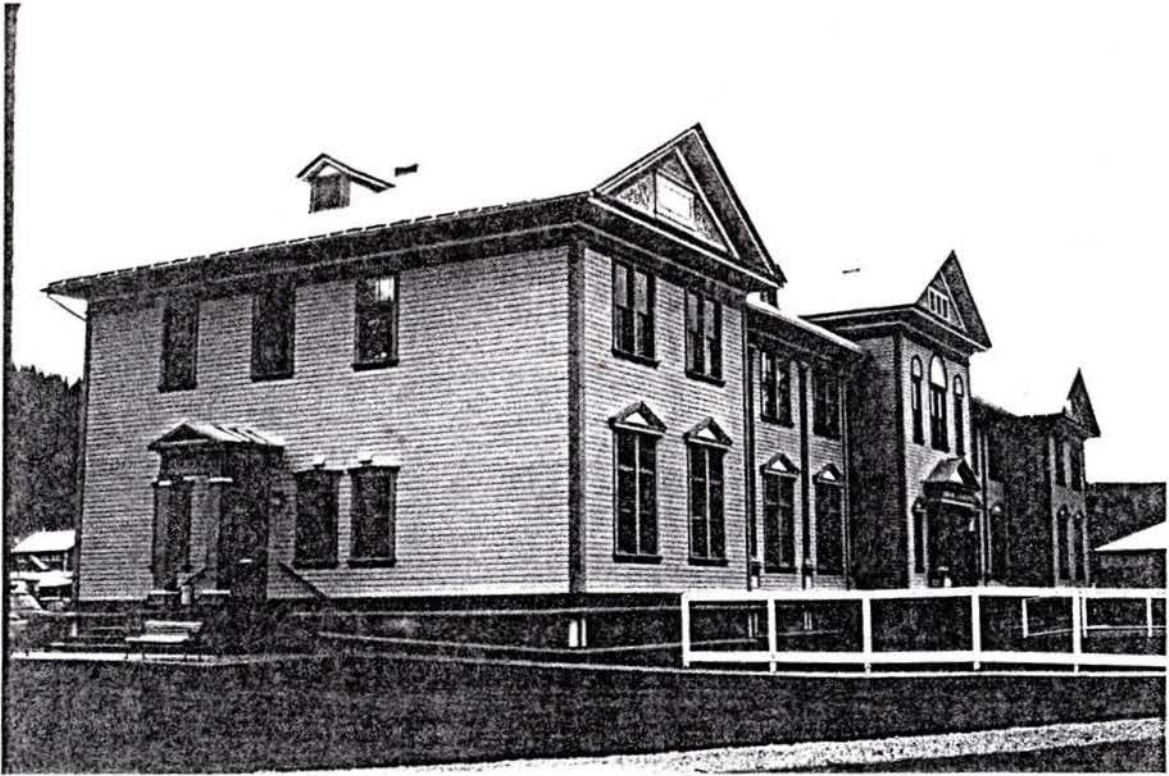


Figure 3-4: Fuller's Administration Building

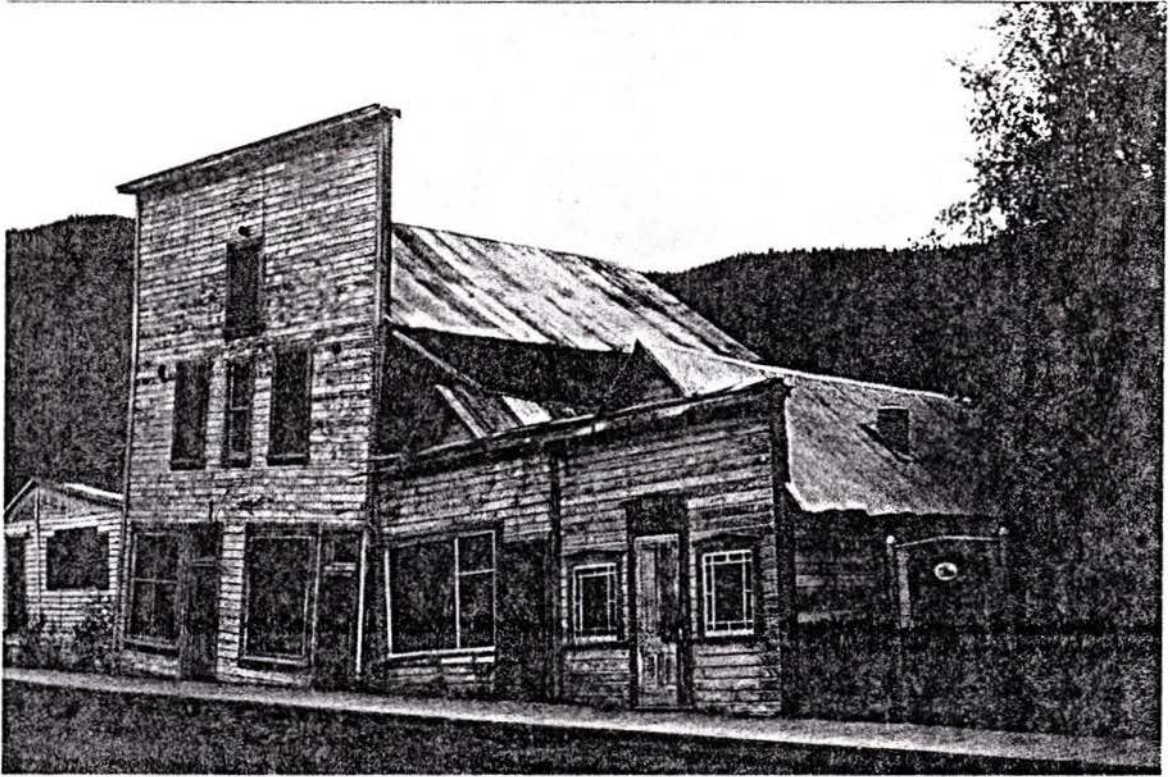


Figure 3-5: Dawson City buildings rendered derelict by the freeze-thaw movements of discontinuous permafrost.

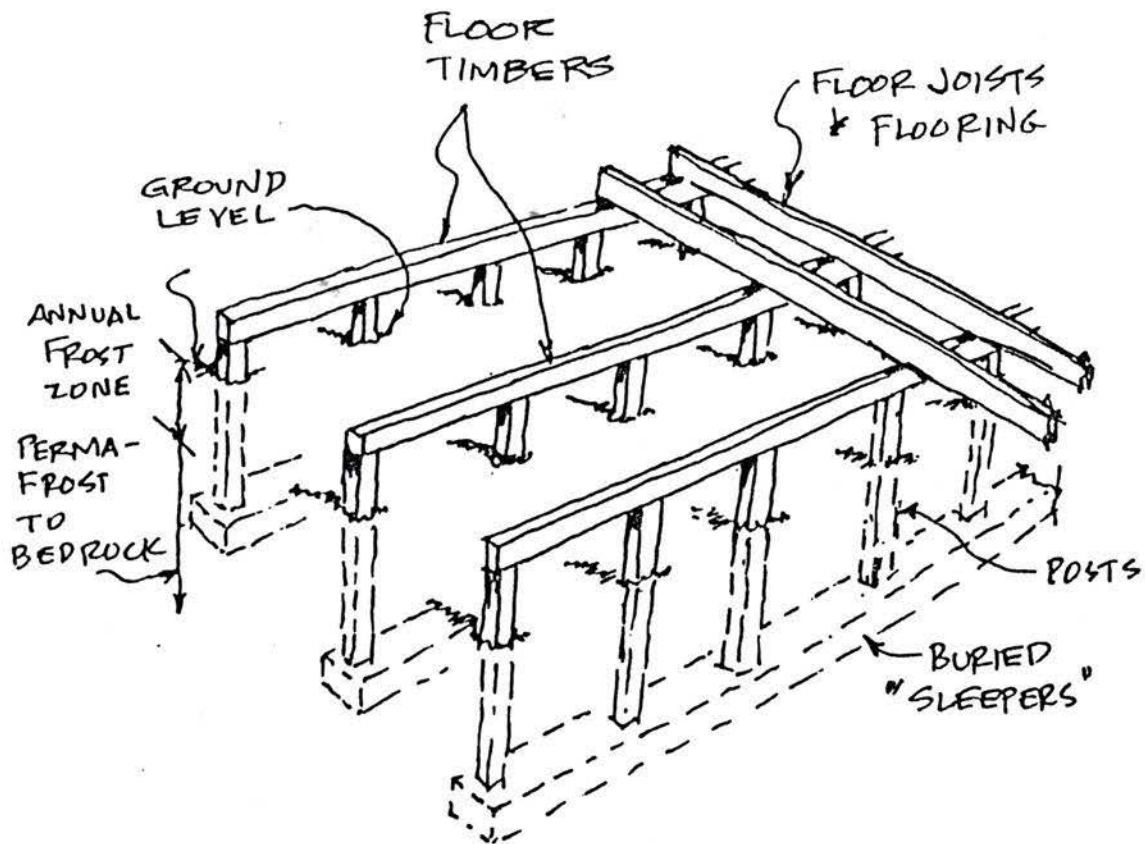


Figure 3-6: Fuller's Administration Building.
The architect's foundation solution for
discontinuous permafrost conditions.

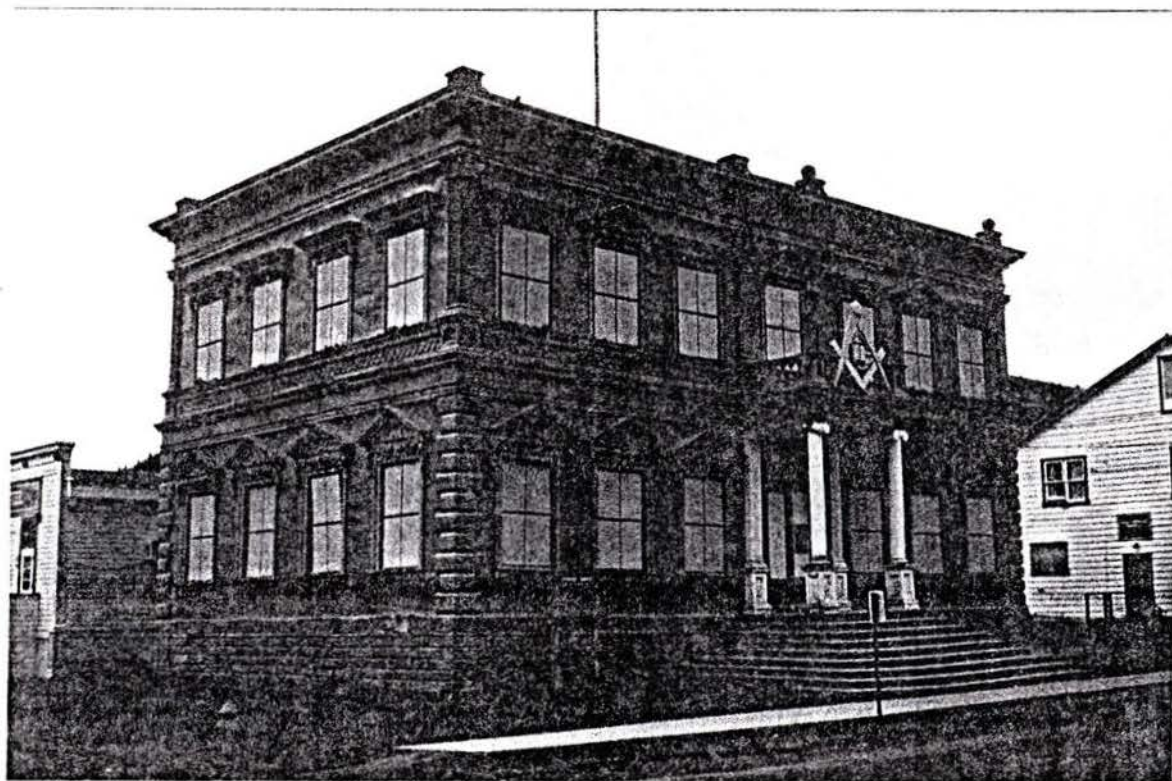


Figure 3-7: Dawson City's Carnegie Library, 1904



Figure 3-8: Canadian Bank of Commerce on Front Street,
with later-added metal "stone" exterior



Figure 3-9: St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church,
as it looked in 1995. Years of neglect
has taken a toll on the structure

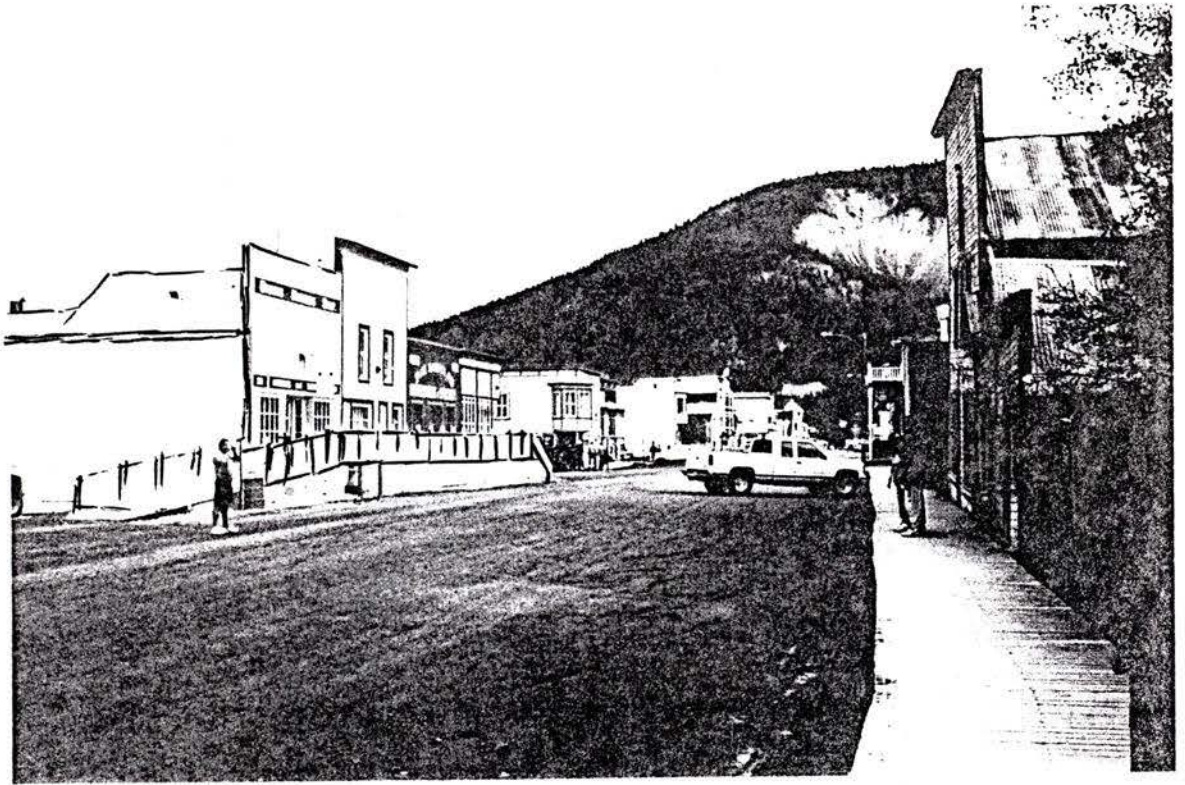


Figure 3-10: In spite of architect Fuller's influence, many Dawson City buildings still offered the traditional boomtown false front

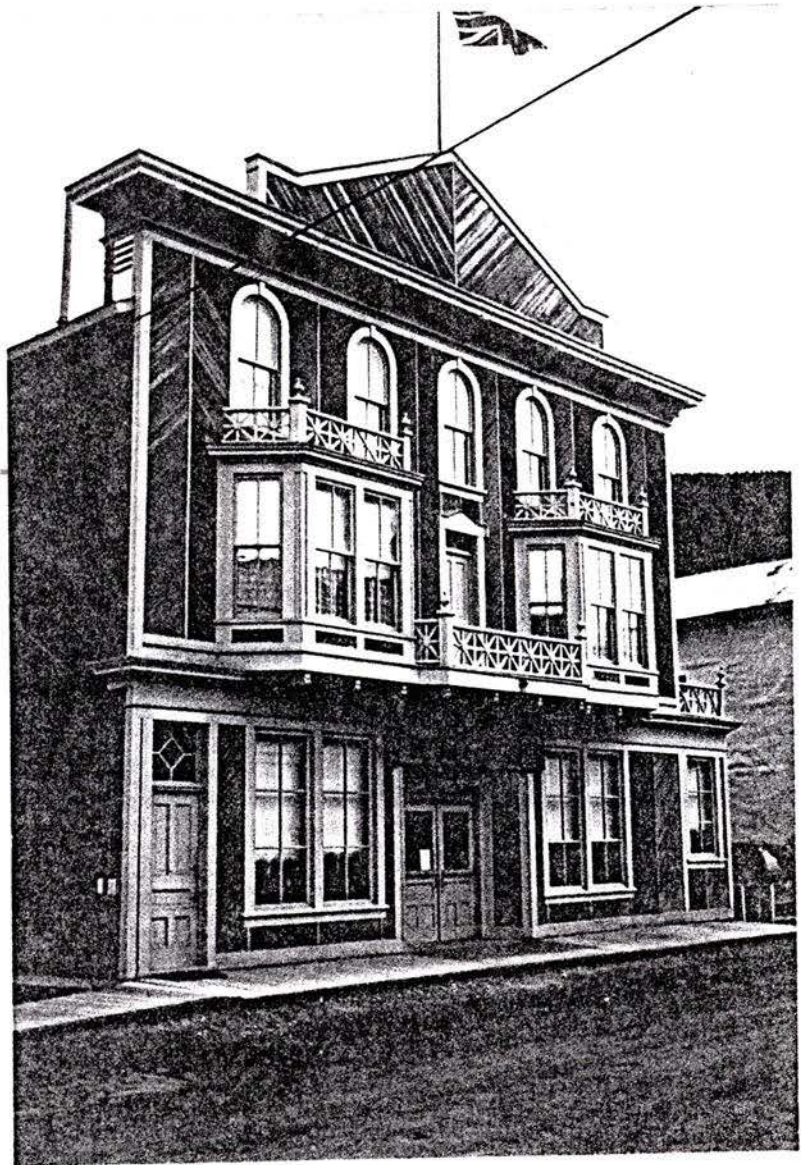


Figure 3-11: The Palace Grand Theatre. Although built in the 1960's, this building is almost an exact replica of the original of 1899

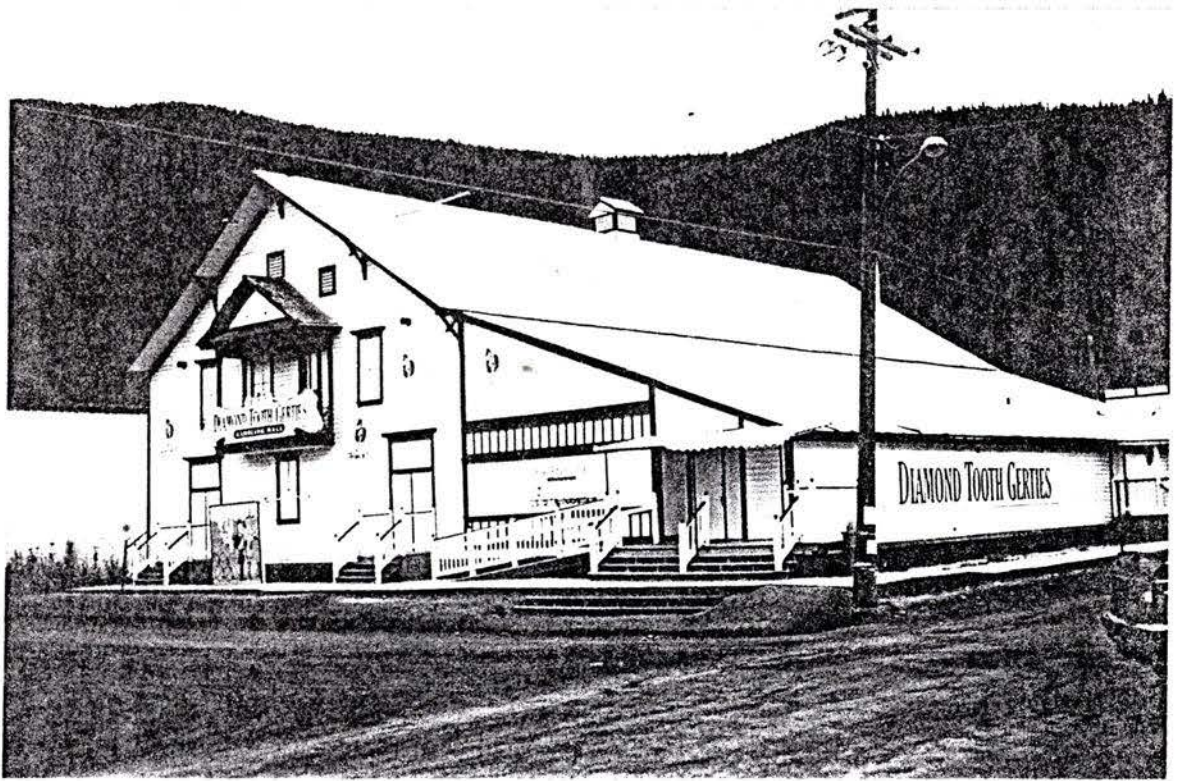


Figure 3-12: The Arctic Brotherhood Hall,
built in 1901. Now housing a casino

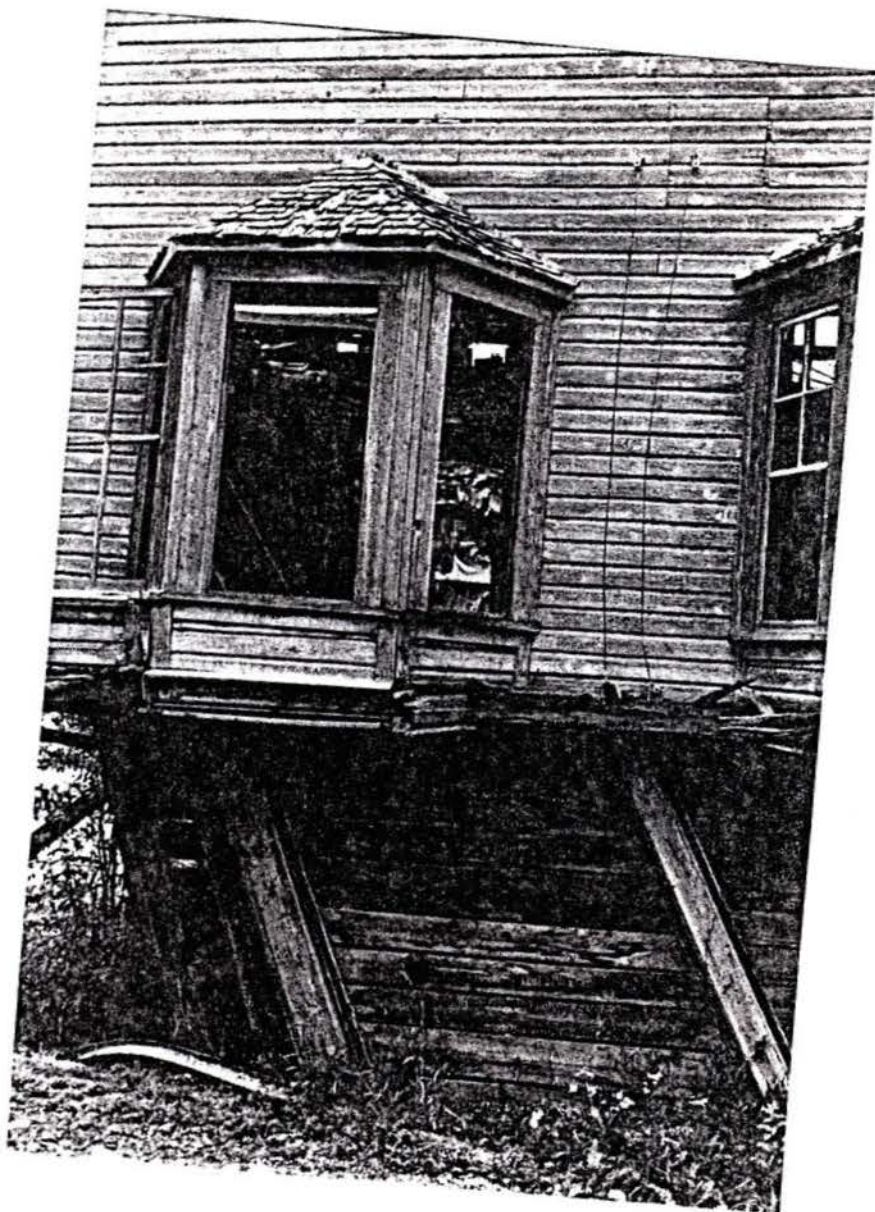


Figure 4-1: Strait's Auction House,
ruined by frost upheavals

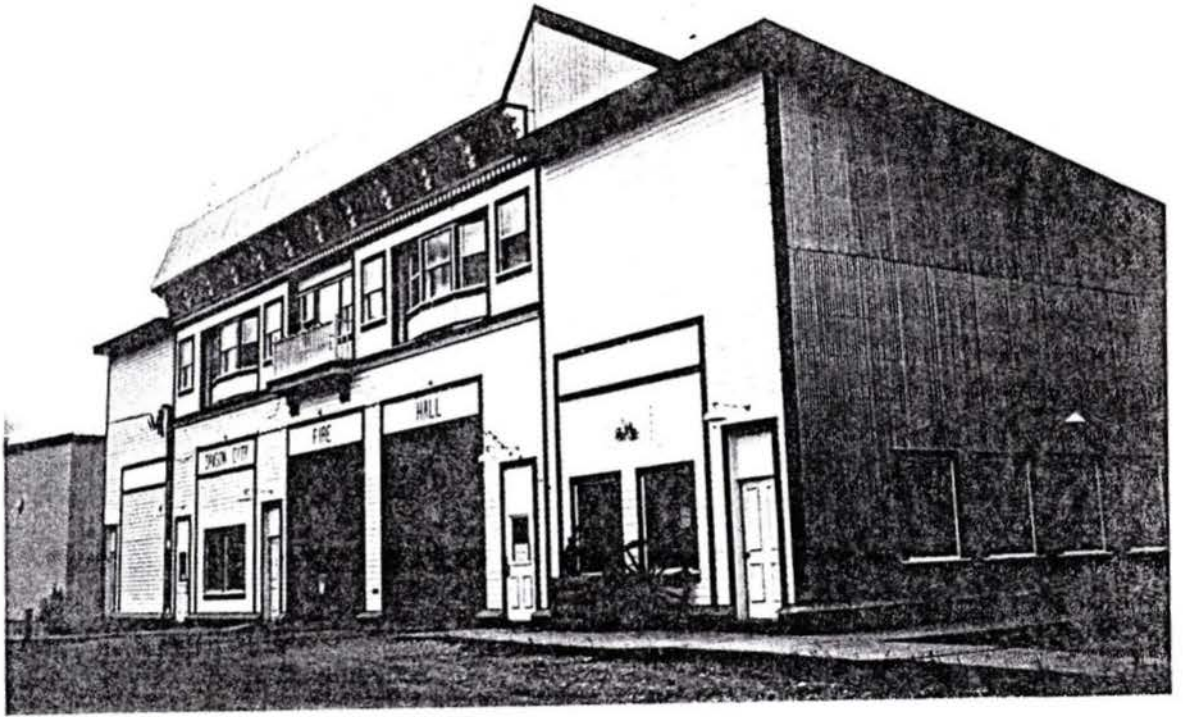


Figure 4-2: Dawson City's Modern Firehall

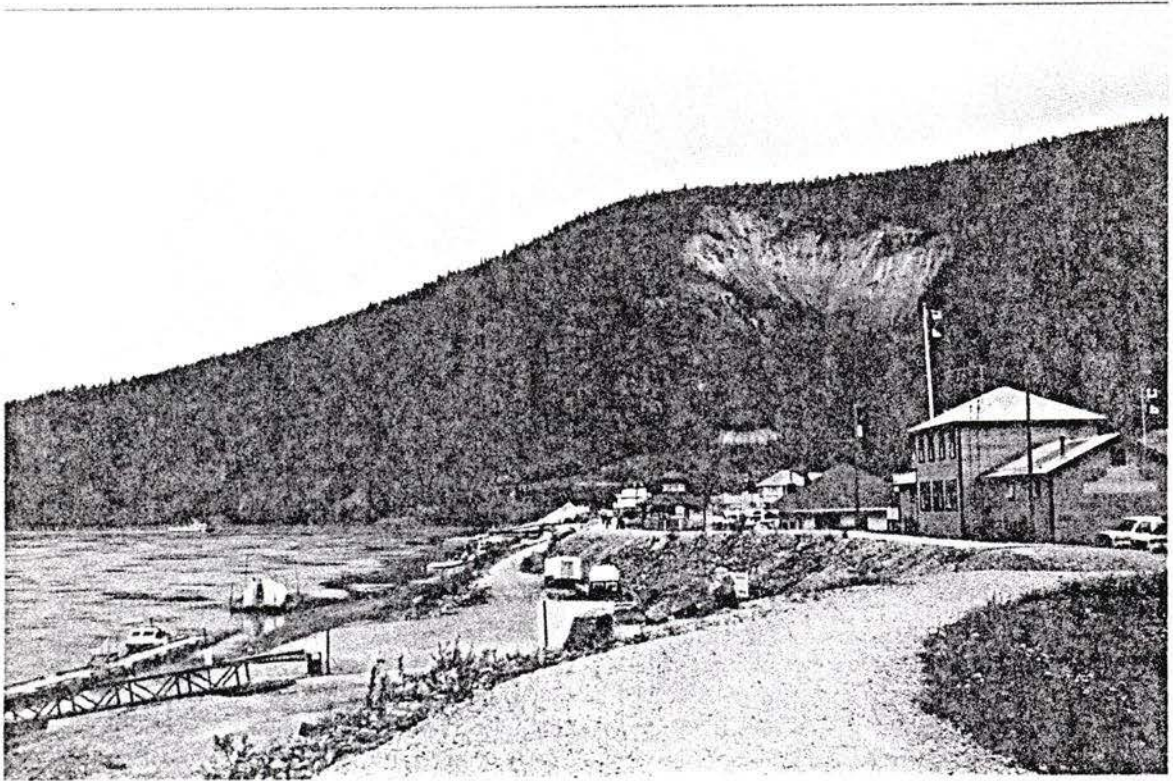


Figure 4-3: Flood control dyke, built in the 1980's.
Its presence, although essential for protection
against spring ice flows, visually separates
the town and its riverfront

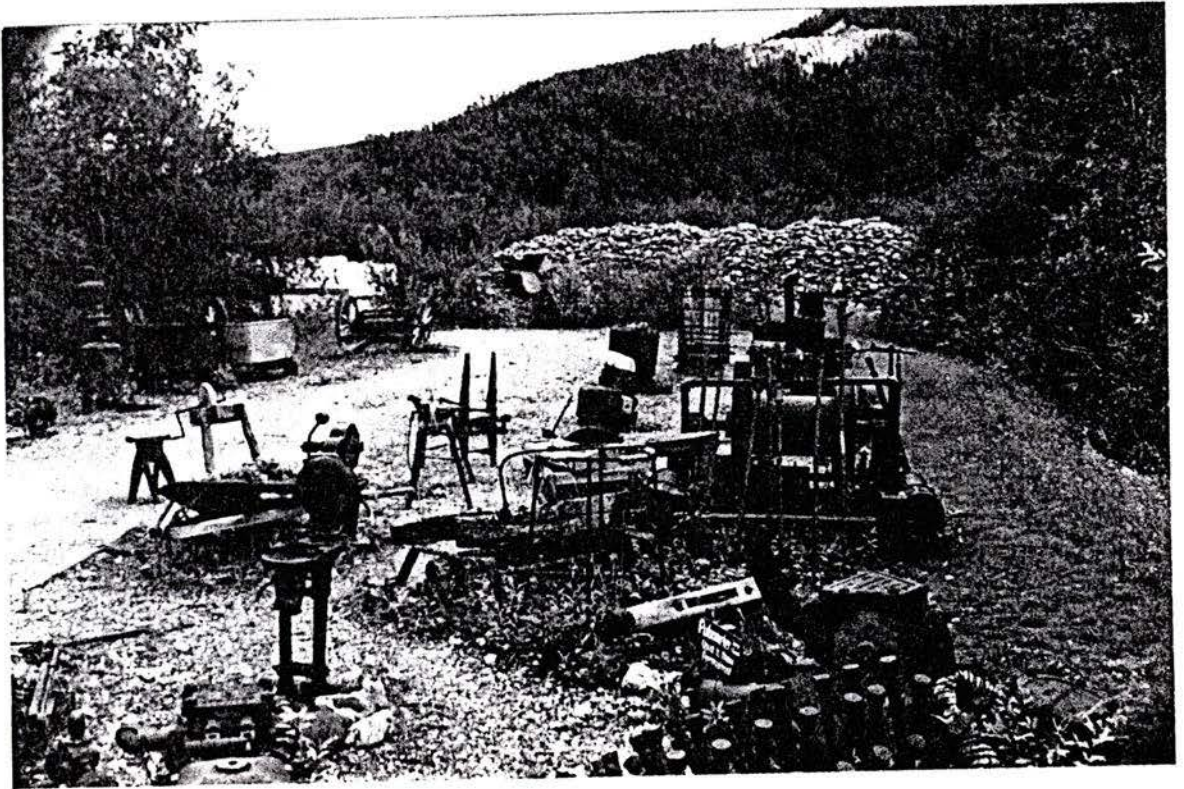


Figure 4-4: Guggieville Campground, on the outskirts of Dawson City, in 1995. Displays of old mining equipment in the foreground with, beyond, one of the huge rock piles left by the dredging operations of a century ago. Evidence of a more recent mining operation is seen on the hillside in the distance

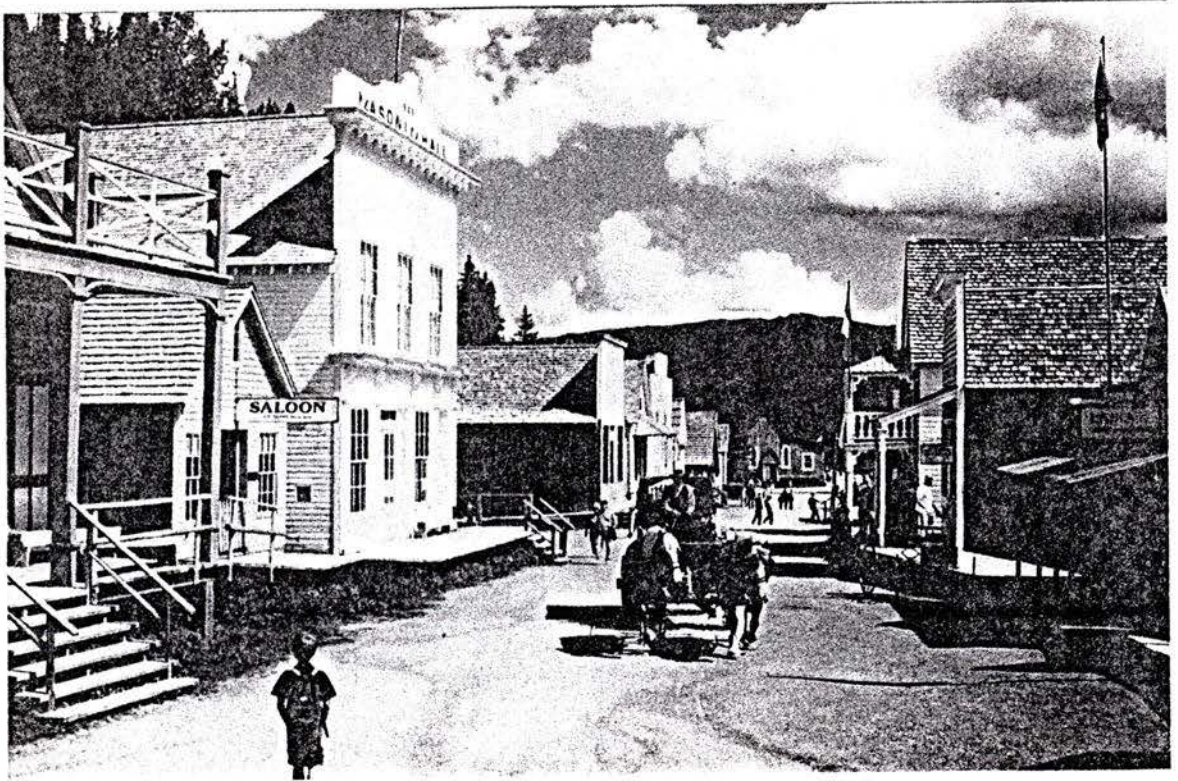


Figure 4-5: Barkerville, British Columbia, today.
Another heritage gold boomtown of the 19th
century, but maintained as a museum piece

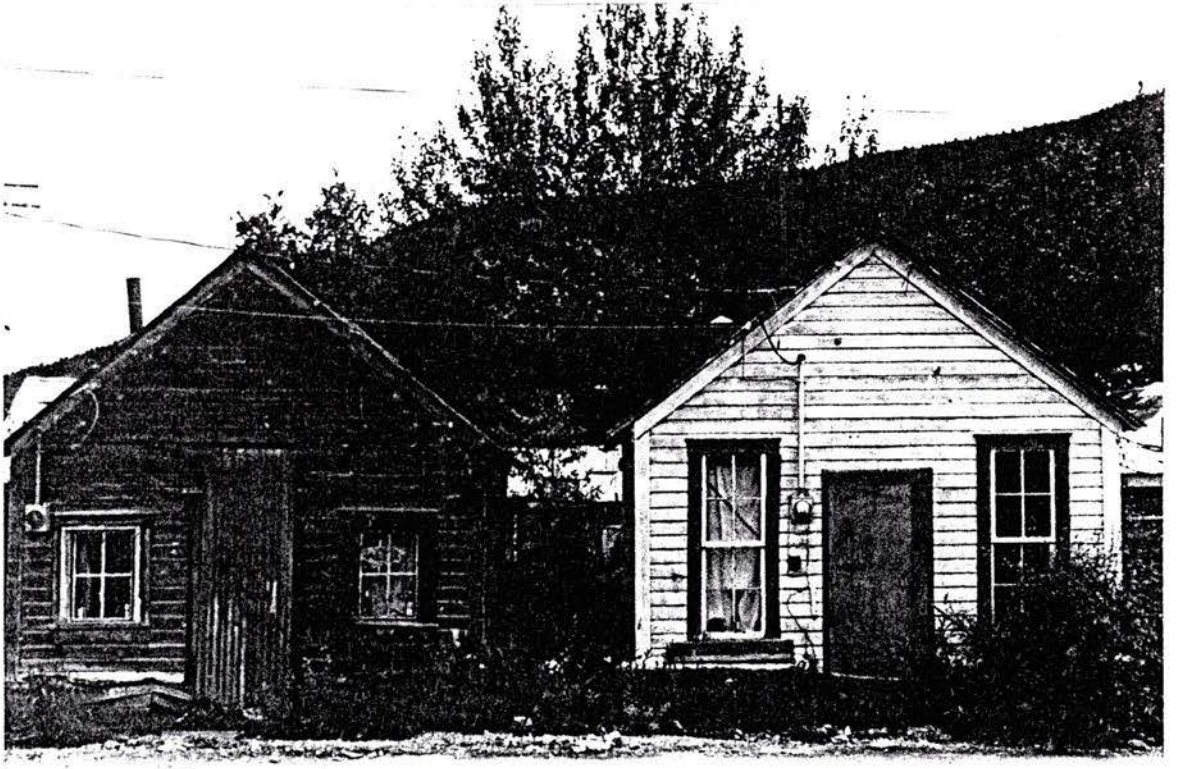


Figure 4-6: Wooden structures facing an uncertain future in Dawson City's harsh environment



Figure 4-7: A Dawson City Dwelling,
a survivor from the early days



Figure 4-8: Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall, formerly the Arctic Brotherhood Hall. This photo was taken long after midnight, early July, 1995

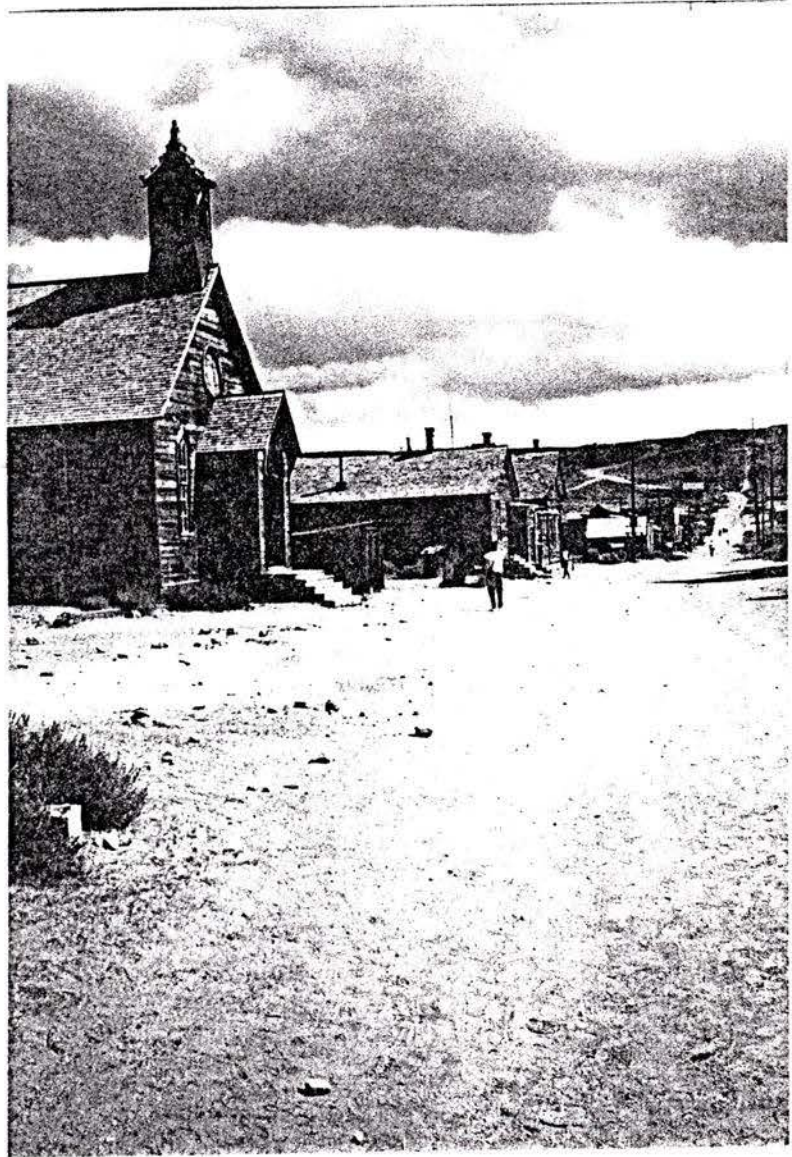


Figure 4-9: Bodie, California in the 1980's. A 19th-century boomtown now protected as a State Park museum in "arrested decay"

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