

The Northerner

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**Newsletter of the Northern Canada Study Group
NWT Yukon Labrador Early Manitoba, Northern Ontario, & BC
A Study Group of the Postal History Society of Canada**

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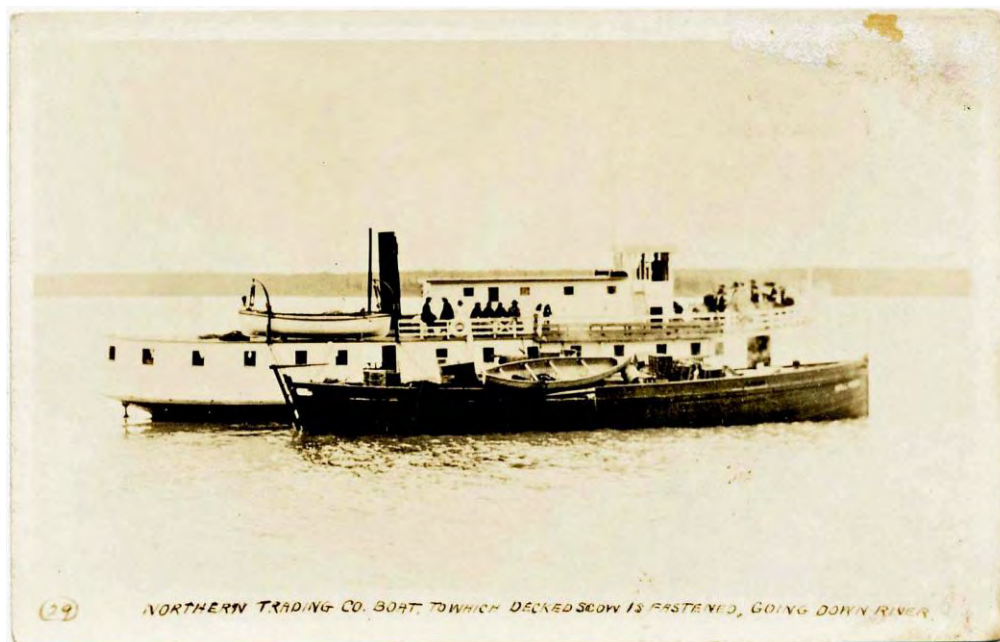
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Dr. Alan Selby (Member No. 15) passed away on August 22, 2011. Alan built a number of gold-level exhibits of Canadian and Newfoundland stamps, and a large and interesting collection of the postal history of western and northern Canada. We extend condolences to his wife Pat and to the rest of his family.

The main focus for this issue of the newsletter is a long article submitted by David Whiteley. David has collected quotes about mail service to the Klondike, mostly from the *Victoria Daily Colonist* for the years 1898 to 1900.

Northern Trading Boat.

This real photo card (Valentine, Winnipeg) is titled "29 Northern Trading Co. Boat to which Decked Scow is Fastened, Going Down River." The river would be the Mackenzie or the Athabaska. Can anyone supply the ship's name?



Item 1885.

**Tales from the Dawson Trail:
Mail Handling to Gold Fields of the Yukon 1898–1900**

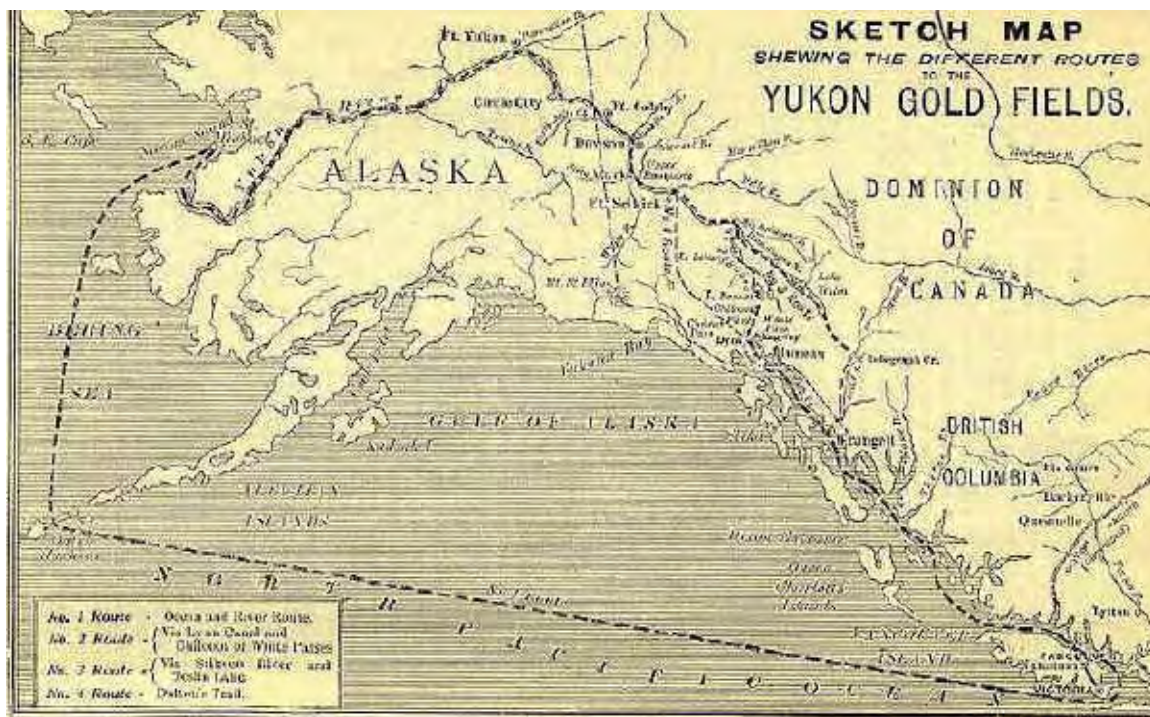
By David Whiteley.

Historical Background.

During the early period of the Gold Rush to the Klondike, there were very few post offices in existence in that region. The United States Post Office Department had opened an office at Mitchell on 24th December 1889 (Mitchell was located on the Yukon River, near the Alaska-Yukon border, just inside Canada; see *PHSC Journal*, No. 85, pp. 106–112); which was followed by U.S. post offices at Dyea 1896, and Circle City on the Yukon on the 19th March 1896. Mail was carried from Juneau via Dyea and the Chilkoot Pass to the ‘City’ and back, and from Skagway in 1897. The first Canadian post office was opened at Fort Cudahy (now Forty Mile), on 1st October 1894; and in 1896 the first Canadian postal service began between Juneau and Fort Cudahy of three round trips during spring and summer. In 1897 a Post Office was opened at Dawson City, and in May of the same year at Lake Bennett, B.C., and the first steamer, the *Bellingham* from Lake Bennett, reached Dawson on 13th June 1898.

Further offices were opened by both Canada: Tagish Lake 1897, Pelly 1899, Dominion 1899, Hunker 1899, Log Cabin, B.C. 1899, and Atlin, B.C. 1899. The Whitehorse office was opened on 1st June 1900 [for a complete list of office openings to 1905, see *PHSC Journal*, No. 85, p. 79].

Klondike Route Map



Canada, High Commissioner. *The Yukon District of Canada*. London:
Printed by McCorquodale and Co., Limited, 1897. 12.

Newspaper Clippings

Washington, August 19th:- The Canadian Government and the United States have practically agreed upon co-operation in providing postal facilities for the Klondike region, and the result will shortly be evidenced in a substantial doubling of the mail services from the coast into the district. The exact route is not outlined, but in all probability it will strike off directly Southward from Dawson City down to Dyea.

Ottawa. August 19th:- It has been decided that Mr Sifton [Minister of the Interior] will sail on the *Quadra* from Victoria for Dyea on September 20th, and will try to go over the Stickeen route on a location survey.

Both above, Victoria *Daily Colonist* August 20th 1897

Ottawa:- December 20th:- The Postmaster-General has authorized a trip to be made with mail matter from Victoria to several places on the Stickeen route, as far North as Fort Wrangel or Lake Teslin. The carrier will leave Victoria about January 5th [1898], and the mail will be confined to letters, the nature of the route precluding the conveyance of bulky matter.

Victoria *Daily Colonist* December 21st 1897

SUSPENSION OF MAILS

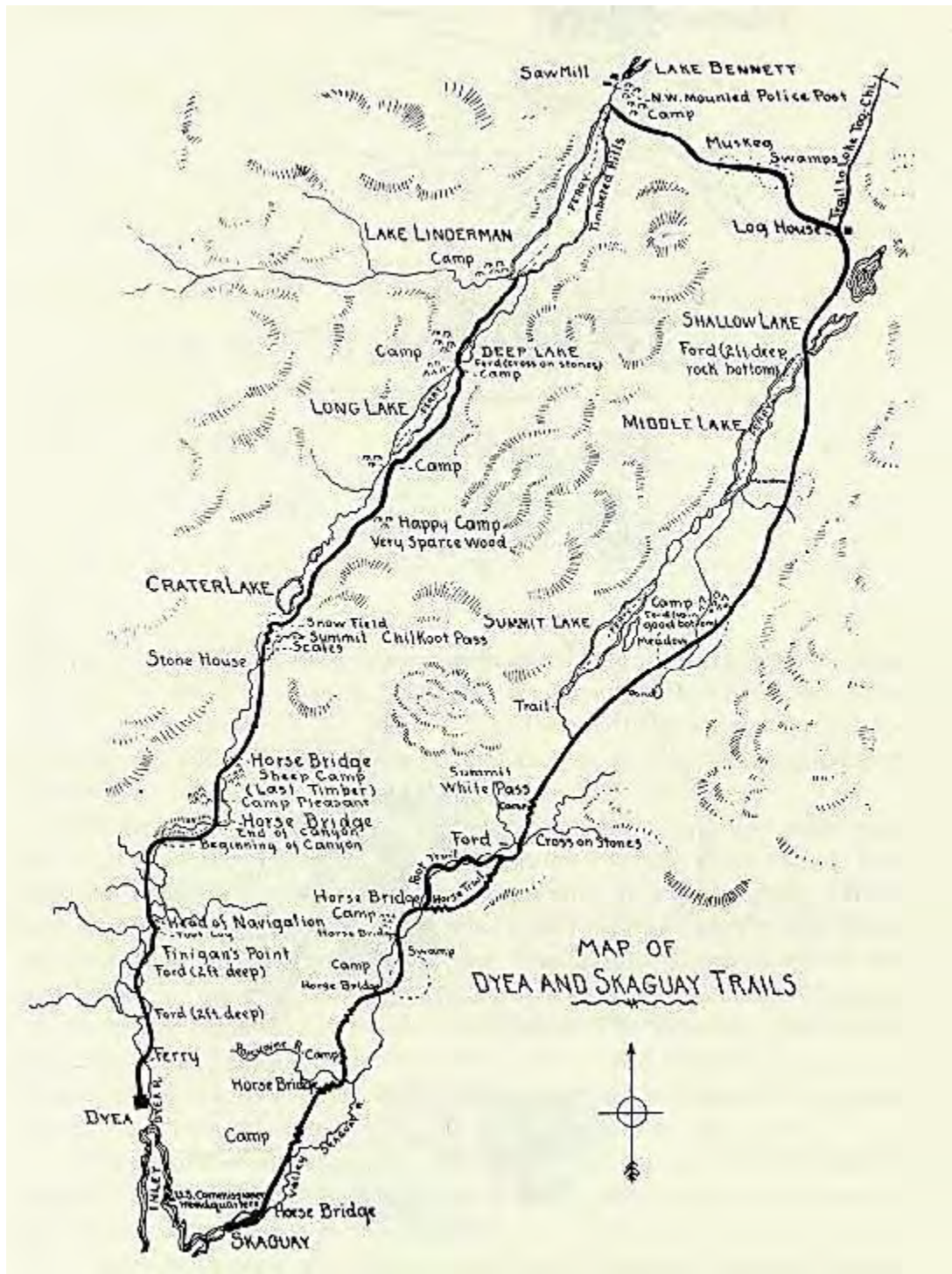
Many Thousand Letters Now Stalled Half Way.

Newspapers sold at Dawson for a \$1.50 each last September, and a man who carried an armful of New York, Chicago, San Francisco and Victoria Publications, several weeks older than they might have been, made quick profit on arrival by selling them on sight at that figure. "I would willingly have paid that price for a copy of the COLONIST," said Mr. Richard Shaw yesterday, "but the carrier had none left when I saw him." Dawson has been completely cut off from news of the world. Newspapers are refused transmission in the mails and the letters taken by the Mounted Police from the coast have got no further than Little Salmon, where there were 1,000 pounds of them when I passed out. I am told that more than a dozen letters have been sent to me from home, but I did not receive one. No letters have been received since the last trip of the United States mail carrier from Juneau, and no mail has been sent out over the ice.

The average letter weighs less than half an ounce, so that if Mr. Shaw's statements as to the weight of the correspondence stalled at Little Salmon is correct, there are about 30,000 letters there.

The isolation from the world resulting from this failure to maintain mail communication Mr. Shaw considers one of the most trying features of life in the far North. The cold of winter, spoken of most prominently in the list of Yukon privations, causes less actual suffering than do the mosquitoes, the plague of the summer months, and though the average day was about 32 degrees below zero for some time before Mr. Shaw left, and the thermometer had registered as low as 70 outdoor work had been continuously carried on with. Victoria *Daily Colonist*, December 29th 1897.

Map of the White and Chilkoot Pass Trails



En Route to the Klondike: A Series of Photographic Views, Part III.
People's Series. Chicago, W. B. Conkey Co., 1898.

S. S. Portland Arriving at Seattle, 1897

©Seattle Times file

In 1897, the steamer Portland arrived in Seattle carrying miners and the legendary "ton of gold" from the Klondike.

Speaking of the recent reduction in wages from \$1.50 to \$1.00 per hour, which latter figure leaves a very small margin for the thrifty workman to save to bring out with him, Mr. Shaw says.

"Those who don't want to work for wages can prospect for themselves. There is plenty of promising ground unoccupied, and there will be too, after the tens of thousands expected to arrive in the spring appear on the scene. There are hundreds of creeks not yet touched that ought to be just as good as those now being worked. The locations now extend perhaps forty miles from Dawson City, for distances soon become great when each mile takes in but ten claims. But it puzzles me how the coming host can possibly get their provisions."

"I left because it appeared that I might have to go hungry before spring if I stayed. I do not believe that there will be any actual starvation, but it seems impossible to avoid a shortage of provisions. When the Mounted Police cannot as they say get in even the letters how are they going

to manage tons of provisions? That is how hundreds of those who have come out have argued. There are some provisions yet in the stores, held back for emergencies, but they have run out of flour. I know what I am talking about, because I worked at the 'A.C.' store until it was closed. My partners McNeill and Dailey – who remained, with just enough provisions – are working at mining.”

“There were four in our party on the way out,” said Mr. Shaw, “and we had three dogs drawing sledges. We took the very smallest amount of outfit possible, and therefore made the trip from Dawson to Skagway in the exceptionally good time of 32 days. There was only about 4 inches of snow at Dawson, but along the trail it increased until at the summit it was between four and five feet deep. There seems to be no reason hardy men cannot travel over this trail all winter. We did not suffer from the cold except when we were pitching and striking our tents and had to work with our hands exposed. On the march and when sleeping we were comfortable enough.”

Boat Building at Lake Bennett ca. 1898



A letter dated Dawson City October 26th has been received by Joseph Heaney from his brother William who went in last summer with beef for the Yukon. He stated that flour was at the date of writing \$100 a sack and candles a \$1 each – and very little for sale at that. Beef was selling at \$1 a pound...

THE NORTHERN MAILS

Total Neglect of the Service to Lake Bennett by Post Office Department
A Victorian Tells of Scores of Letters Vainly Posted for Him.

Victoria, October 13th, 1898:-To the Editor of the *Colonist*:

Sir - Let me lay before you a serious evil, that I may ask you to use your paper and influence to counteract. I speak of the mail service for this city, and in doing so I can from what I hear from returning miners, speak also for the Dawsonians. A letter has been posted weekly from my family since my arrival here last March, and I have not yet received a single one, while those given to

private individuals have invariably reached me. I cannot understand why this should be so. A person landing at Skagway with freight, unless it be very cumbersome, can have it landed two days or two and a half days after at this place by paying extra freight of two cents a pound, and hence I do not see why the government could not easily get a contract for a weekly mail service at the current rate of freight, it being a permanent job. Were a contract called for, with the large number of freighters on hand, excellent weekly or semi-weekly service to this point could be obtained. The postmaster here is all right. He is obliging and painstaking, but he gets nothing to handle. Now the root of the evil. No post office inspector has passed over the line to see the actual condition of affairs, and hence the whole matter has been let run itself, while the accumulation of mail goes on in the Victoria P.O. or some other place, but never gets here. What has been true of my private letters has also been true of business ones, and, in fact, for some time, I have had all my business letters sent out by passing private individuals, and frequently send them out to Skagway by specially paid men, sometimes costing \$25. There is no reason why a weekly mail service should not be had here regularly. The immense amount of mail matter all along this line to Dawson demands immediate action, otherwise this winter will see tons lodged at Skagway or Victoria. This is a very important matter, and I hope you will keep up the agitation until the government will do the right thing. A newspaper here is a curiosity, particularly the Victoria papers. I may add the following Skagway is an all year round port.

From Skagway a railroad runs to White Pass, twelve miles, while from White Pass an easy trail runs both summer and winter, with numerous stopping places, a distance of twenty-eight miles, or making forty miles as a total to Lake Bennett.

I myself have walked over the pass to Skagway in twelve hours, so that you can readily understand the feasibility of a mail service, but not the neglect that has kept us from news of the outside world up to date. The condition of affairs is disgraceful to any government. If the excellent system the provincial government has in maintaining order by constables had been adopted by the Dominion government instead of the heavy expense of the mounted police and more care taken of the mail service, law and order in this God forsaken although revenue producing, country would have been just as good, while the pleasure of living would have been immensely enhanced, for what does more value than the loved ones he has left behind, and with what anxiety does he watch for news from them.

The Dyea trail is shorter but not so reliable during the winter months. During the summer the train would take it to the summit, from which point it is only twelve miles to Lake Bennett. An investigation by a post office Inspector would in a short time settle the matter. Stir up the government to get a move on and that quick.

Mike King

Manager of V.Y. Co. Ltd.

Lake Bennett, Sept.27, 1898. (*Victoria Daily Colonist*, October 13, 1898, p 8).

DAWSON MAILS

There Is Now Practically a Weekly Mail Between the Coast and Dawson

Victoria January 13th:- The following information as to departures of mail for Dawson has just been received by private letter.

“Following dates of departure from Juneau when carriers made the trip to Dawson and beyond: July 3, July, 19, August 18, August 24, September 1, September 15. During October the contractor

failed to perform service and there were no departures beyond Lake Bennett. During November and December 15, while the lakes and rivers were in process of freezing the trail was impassable, but the delayed mail is now under way, and it is the intention to maintain regular service hereafter, departing from Juneau the 1st and 15th of each month.”

“In addition the Canadian post office department has organized a service to Dawson departing from Skagway on the 8th and 22nd of each month making practically a weekly service to Dawson”. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, January 13, 1899, p 2).

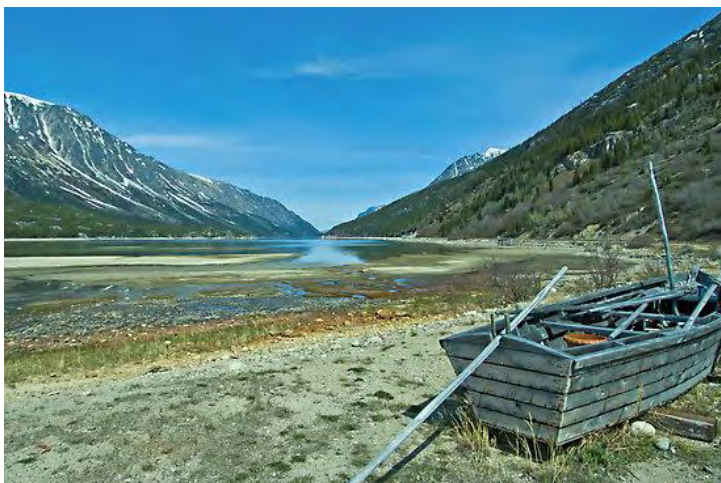
Victoria 18th February:- “A Dawson Mail reached here [Victoria] last evening. It arrived at Seattle on the *Alki*, and was brought over by the *City of Kingston*.” (Daily *Colonist*, February 18, 1899).

WRETCHED MAIL FACILITIES

Victoria February 21st 1899:-

The great majority of people who came in here last spring sought consolation in the fact that they had been made to believe that a regular mail would arrive and depart from Dawson twice a month. It was published that P.C. Richardson had received a contract for \$84,000 and had made all arrangements for the carrying out of his contract. But in this we have been sadly disappointed, for but one mail has arrived since the middle of October, and it consisted of only eleven sacks, ten of which were Canadian and English letters. It is reported that 34,000 American letters are held at Tagish, for what reason no one can tell. The latest outside paper to arrive here was dated October 27, and if none arrives soon the first to come in will command as high a price as did the Oregonian of May 5th last, when \$160 was offered for a single copy – the largest amount probably ever offered for a single issue of an American newspaper. The purchaser would have read it publicly at the Theatre building charging 50 cents admission. As long as the boats were in service mail arrived every week, but since the river closed there has been no information of any kind from the outside world. I am asked every day of the state fair, Portland exposition, special session of the legislature, who was elected United States Senator, and hundreds of other like questions from interested Oregonians, but all have to make the same reply - no news in yet.

Lake Bennett – end of the Chilkoot Trail.



In 1898, thousands of men and women who had traversed the Chilkoot Trail or the White Pass congregated at Lake Bennett to start the 1000 km trip down the Yukon River to Dawson City. They had to build water craft similar to the one seen here and navigate rapids, open water and many other obstacles to reach their destination only to find that all the good claims were gone.

We are promised mail in by January 15, and at best we should like to know by Decoration Day what took place last 4th July. It is a disgrace to the postal service of America – acknowledged to be the best in the world – that 15,000 American citizens should be denied mail facilities for months when so little enterprise or expenditure of money is necessary to correct the evil. If Mr. Richardson cannot or will not fulfill his agreement, then let the contract be taken from him and given to someone who will. No reason can be given why mail that arrives and departs every week to the government officials here cannot as well be brought in for the accommodation of the general public.

Sixty tons of mail were sent from Seattle last summer by the steamer *Seattle No.4*. but the boat was frozen in at Minook. Ten tons of mail was then transferred to the *Victoria*, which went into winter quarters at Fort Yukon. None of this mail will arrive here before the middle of next June. We will then learn full particulars of how the war with Spain is progressing, and other important news... (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, February 21, 1899, p 7)

Victoria March 16th:- “Capt. W.H. Shultz the United States mail carrier; according to his fellow passengers, made the trip from Dawson to the coast in 12 days – the record time so far as is known. He declines to say anything about his remarkable trip. According to travellers he passed on his journey he made over 65 miles on several days and showed wonderful endurance.” [Shultz had travelled from Skagway to Victoria on the regular steamer *Tees*.] (Victoria *Daily Colonist* March 16, 1899, p 3).

POST MASTER IN ERROR

No Authority to Give Monopoly of Letter Delivery in Dawson –
but Mail Too Slow for His Explanation to Reach Department.

Ottawa, April 24th:- “In the House this afternoon Mr. Gillies was told by Mr. Muloch that Frank Harper is no longer Postmaster at Dawson City; that Harper had no authority to give the exclusive right of delivery of letters in Dawson City, to the Yukon Mail and Express Delivery Company, when he held the position of Postmaster at Dawson City last August [1898] and that in issuing a circular in which he undertook to give such a monopoly, Harper acted without directions from the Department; but before taking any steps in the matter the Department would wait to see what explanation Harper had to offer.” (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, April 24, 1899, p 1).

MAIL ROUTE TO DAWSON

By Foreign Vessels to Foreign Ports With No Canadian Control

From Our Own Correspondent

Ottawa, May 17th:- In the House to-day Sir Hibbert Tupper was informed by Mr. Mulock [Postmaster General] that Canadian mails for Dawson are forwarded in the Pacific Coast waters by the steamers of the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. The department has no control over the arrangements for forwarding mails from Skagway which is in the possession of the United States, but correspondence is being carried on with Washington with a view to changing the arrangements now in force. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*: May 18, 1899, p 1)

YUKON MAILS ONLY A PRETENCE

Even Registered Packets Returned and No Newspapers Taken in Yet.

From Our Own Correspondent.

Ottawa May 27th:- The quality of the Yukon postal service was illustrated to-day by Mr. McDougal, who told the Commons that he had sent a registered parcel containing papers to Dawson, but the parcel was opened at Victoria and returned from the Dead Letter Office there with no information that the mail was not carrying papers to Dawson.

– Mr Mulock admitted that newspapers could not be sent to Dawson in the winter.

– Sir Hibbert Tupper asked if public notice had been given that newspapers could not be sent to Dawson through the mails, but Mr. Mulock was not able to answer. (*Victoria Daily Colonist*, May 28, 1899, p 1)

THE *TEES* CARRIES MAIL

The C.P.N. Vessel Will, It is Said, Handle Alaska Mail.

The *Tees*, which sailed last evening for Alaska Ports, carried her first regular mail consisting of 11 sacks. Heretofore the *Cottage City* and some other Pacific Coast Vessel has always carried the Canadian mails. In the future, however, there is to be no delays in dispatching it; for the C.P.N. [Canadian Pacific Navigation Co.] as well as the Pacific Coast Steamship Company have been engaged to carry it.

Victoria, *Daily Colonist*, June 8, 1899; From the Marine News column, p 6; illustrations of the vessels mentioned can be found in Robert Turner's book *Pacific Princesses*.)

YUKON MAIL BUNGLING

Canadian Mails Stalled by Makeshift Bunglers with Contracts.

From Our Own Correspondent.

Ottawa, June 14th:- In answer to Sir Hibbert Tupper to-day the Postmaster General explained that when the United States were desirous of establishing a mail service through Canadian Territory to Alaska the Canadian Government did not care to allow them to exercise such Sovereign Rights but agreed that the American contractor should have a nominal contract from the Canadian Government. The contractor did carry some Canadian Mails but Canada paid him nothing therefore. Mr. Mulock under cross-examination admitted that the American contractor, Richardson, did not give satisfaction to the United States and the result was that the Canadian mails entrusted to him were somewhat delayed. (*Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 15, 1899, p 1).

BIG MAIL COMING

B.L. & K. Co's Steamer *Flora* Brought It Up From Dawson.

One of the passengers, who reached Seattle yesterday on the *Al-Ki*, having just come out from Dawson, made the trip up river on the steamer *Flora*, one of the Bennett Lake & Klondike Navigation Company's steamers. The *Flora* got up as far as Labarge without any difficulty, but there found considerable ice and a passage had to be cut through to her. She brought up two tons of mail which it was expected would reach Skagway in time for the *City of Seattle*, which is due to-day (*Victoria Daily Colonist*, June 16th 1899, p 6).

Waterfront Gossip

The steamer *Derrigo* sailed North from the Sound last evening as a full fledged Alaskan mail carrier. She has a government contract for one year from July 1st 1899. The steamer *Farallon* gave up her arrangement with the government. The *Rosalie* still carries Alaska mail both ways as do three of the P.C.S. Co's Lynn Canal lines vessels; the *Orizaba*, *City of Topeka*, and *Queen*. Each of these five vessels carries a man regularly clothed with the authority of a Railway Postal Clerk. The mail is handled by the pursers of the respective vessels. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, July 7, 1899, p 7).

Actresses on the Chilkoot Trail Crossing the Dyea River 1897



Photograph by Frank La Roche

POSTAL INEFFICIENCY

Parsimony of Ottawa Government Greatly Troubling Residents of Far North

From the *Yukon Sun*:-

We are sorry that we cannot say anything kind of the postal service to the Yukon, but really it is an aggravation. When the N.W.M.P. could carry the mails last winter we had a service at which we could not grumble. And that reminds us that the N.W.M.P. have not received any pay for that work. But here in the broad daylight of a nightless month we cannot get our mails handled with reasonable dispatch.

Whole ages seem to roll around before letters mailed here get to their destination. Men become "feeble, helpless and old" before an answer comes back. They feel that all their friends have died or become blind when waiting for the long expected letters.

All winter long we yearned for letters and papers that never came. When the spring opened we expected some more. Letters did come, and later the reluctant newspapers began to arrive. Sack after sack of wet pulp was poured out here by the disgusted officials. They ploughed through the fragments and discovered that their dates were August 1898 [written in August 1899] and all the months since then. Then the official wrath arose, and they were cast out.

Then whole warehouse is full of papers which began to arrive, seventy-five and a hundred sacks at a time. They, too, were dated from about August, 1898, and so on. From them we learn that the Spanish-American war is over, and other late news.

A long-suffering public will stand much but the mail service is a vital matter, and trifling with it will cause trouble. Isolated as we are, the least the department or the government can do is to give us as good a mail service as it can. If it fails to do this, it must be held accountable.

The trouble is that the department is trying to do the work too cheaply, and it suffers in consequence. Fortunately, we can say in reference to the mail, when it does get here it is given to the public as fast as possible. But, again, the department is too economical, for it does not pay the local post office officials enough for their work. (Victoria, *The Daily Colonist*, August 8, 1899, p 4.)

DAWSON MAIL CONTRACT LET

Ottawa Government at Last Entrusts Service to Responsible Contractors.

From Our Own Correspondent

Ottawa, August 18th:- The Government has awarded a four year contract to the Canadian Development Company for the conveyance of mails from Dawson by Skagway and the Upper Yukon route. The company brought their first mails through from Dawson to Victoria in 10 days [sic]. The mail which left Dawson on July 31st reached here [Victoria] August 17th.

The Company are building Posts 20 miles apart and securing dog and horse teams for winter service. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, August 19, 1899, p 1.)

Quick Time to Dawson.

Canadian Development Company to Run Sleighs During the Winter
Four or Six New Steamers to Be Built for Next Season's Service.

When navigation opens next spring on the lake and river waterway from Bennett to Dawson, there will be on hand a fleet of fast steamers operated by the Canadian Development Company that will have no peers in Northern Pacific waters. The Company has undoubtedly done the lion's share of the transportation business of the North during the past season; have taken risks greater than any other company in the business, and established a service that was a boon to northern travel. The enterprising manager, Mr. Maitland Kersey, however, by carrying out his present arrangements, will throw what he has already done into the shade.

First of all, he has taken thought of how to lessen the time between Skagway and Dawson this winter, and how best to provide for a speedy sled service. In a letter to Mr. Richard Elliot, the Victoria manager of the company, he reports that he has arranged for the immediate construction of a road from Cariboo Crossing down to Rink Rapids to lead through the valley between the places named and avoid the circuitous route following the waterway to Dawson. The cut-off means a saving of 140 miles. Way houses will be built along the road 30 miles apart, and a first class sleigh service will be operated with horsed during the winter. From Rink Rapids to Dawson dog teams will

make the necessary connection, thus completing the final link in what at the outside is expected to be an eight-day trip from Skagway.

For the water transportation next spring the company intend just trebling their present tonnage capacity. Either four or six new steamers – there is s yet some uncertainty as to which number – will be built, of a size three times larger than any now running. Plans for these vessels have already been prepared, the details and specifications of construction being now in hand. A survey of the rivers has also been made in connection therewith, and it is proposed to make them as large as the depth of water will permit. Where they will be put together is a matter which the local office at present is not prepared to state, but the bulk of the material used in their construction will be purchased in Victoria and sent north from here. As from the commencement, the company is desirous of spending as much as possible in Victoria in this way, having only a few years ago given the contract to a Victorian for the construction of what are now the *Victorian*, *Canadian*, and *Columbian* – three of the best boats in northern service. The company is preparing to handle next season from 12,000 to 15,000 tons of freight. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, August 24, 1899, p 8.)

Winter Trails

Distance to Dawson Reduced By Over a Hundred Miles.

There will be no difficulty in getting to and from Dawson during the coming winter. The government trail, by which the distance is reduced from 600 to 442 miles, will be completed before the heavy snow fall, steel steamers will be run on the rivers and lakes, which freeze up so much later than the main river, and well provided stations have been promised along the route. When once the trail is broken horses will be able to go through, and it will be a leisurely trot for a dog team. The list of stations, with the distances one from the other and the names of the companies by which they are operated, follows:

No.	Name.	Miles From Last Station	Operated By.
1. -----	Bennett		
2. -----	Cariboo.....	38.....	C.D.Co.
3. -----	Lugrin.....	22.....	C.D.Co.
4.-----	White Horse.....	20.....	B.A.A.C. Co.
5.-----	Upper Labarge.....	25.....	C.D.Co.
6.-----	Lower Labarge.....	30.....	C.D.Co.
7.-----	Chico.....	23.....	C.D.Co.
8.-----	Montagn.....	22.....	C.D.Co.
9.-----	Carmacks.....	24.....	C.D.Co.
10.-----	MacKay.....	24.....	Wilson.
11.-----	Merito.....	24.....	Fussel.
12.-----	Selkirk.....	24.....	B.A.A.C.Co.
13.-----	Selwyn.....	30.....	Brewster.
14.-----	Tulars.....	35.....	Stewart.
15.-----	Stewart.....	39.....	C.D.Co.
16.-----	Sixty Mile.....	23.....	A.C.Co.
17.-----	Indian River.....	20.....	McDonall.
18.-----	Dawson.....	28.....	

Stations are also to be established at Tagish and Atlin, making twenty in all. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, October 18, 1899, p 6.)

A Victim of Northern Ice.

The news of the latest marine disaster in the hazard strewn waters of the north was brought to Victoria yesterday by the Pacific Coast Company's steamer *Cottage City*, which had herself experienced the biting severity of the northwest and southeast gales, being forced to seek safety in shelter on no fewer than five occasions during the just completed voyage.

The Mocking-Bird was a vessel of many tribulations. She had been half-wrecked, half-burned, half-sacrificed in one way or another on a dozen different occasions since her advent in the north. Since coming within and an ace of foundering on the Stikine river, she had been engaged in carrying the mails and passengers on the comparatively smooth short trip between Skagway and Dyea in the Command of Capt. Hall, an ex Seattleite.

Although her contract required a daily service, the phenomenally bad weather had rendered it impossible for the *Mocking-Bird* to go out from the safety of Skagway Bay from Christmas Day until the afternoon of the 29th, when taking advantage of the abatement of the wind, Capt. Hall determined to make a try for it, having on board the mails, his engineer and two passengers.

On rounding the point beyond Smugglers Cove it was found that the entire surface of the inlet from that point to Dyea was covered with ice – an irregular, creaking, groaning, threatening plain of whiteness. This was a condition not infrequently met with last winter, when Capt. Hall had no particular difficulty in cutting a way through - his vessel being provided with a knife-edged steel bow especially for that purpose – and acting on his past experience he therefore attacked the ice under a full head of steam.

Unfortunately the resistance was greater than anticipated. There was the expected crash and crunching but it was the armoured bow of the steamer that gave way - not the ice. A jagged gaping wound some nine inches wide and several feet long was cut in the bow... she immediately commenced to take water rapidly . . . and was ran aground in a sinking condition.

The loss of the *Mocking Bird* will increase the difficulties being experienced in maintaining an inter-port mail communication in southern Alaska. Skagway has recently been made the distribution point for all these, but great difficulty is met with the absence of a regular steamer plying between Juneau and the Lynn Canal ports during the winter months. (Victoria *Daily Colonist* January 8, 1900).

The Dawson Mail Service

Letters Delivered Every Wednesday by the Contractors.

Recent arrivals from Dawson speak in the most flattering terms of the manner in which the Canadian Development Co. of this city are fulfilling their contract with the Canadian government for carrying mail from the mail between Dawson and Bennett. They have purchased the best horses and dog teams available and have the most convenient vehicles for making fast trips. The mail from the outside arrives regularly every Wednesday at the Dawson post office, and leaves every Friday. There is no delay at all en route, at present, the mail being conveyed between Dawson and Minto by dog team, the trail not being in condition between those two points as yet for horses, sleighs. Between Minto and Bennett, however, horse teams are employed entirely, and the company have assisted in putting the road in good condition, very fast time is made. Every man engaged has had

long experience in Arctic travelling, which of course is a great advantage. Several of them are ex-members of the mounted police, and others are men who have been traveling along the Yukon for years. One team takes the mail from Minto to Upper Labarge, a second one from there to Lower Labarge, a third from there to White Horse and a fourth from White Horse by the railway cut-off via Cariboo Crossing to Bennett. The company's contract ends at Bennett, the mail being transferred to the railway company, who during the blockade employed dog teams to convey it to Skagway. From the latter port is brought to Victoria by the C.P.N. and P.A. steamers.

Mr. E. Frank, one of the arrivals by the *Danube* yesterday, stated to a *Colonist* representative that the company had the service in splendid shape, in fact he said it could not be better, and is giving every satisfaction in Dawson. Even before the trail was in good order the mail arrived and departed regularly, and on the way out all he met was on the move. The men who had charge were splendid travellers and as an incident of how particular the company were, he told of how one of the best men had been discharged for taking a little too much liquor at one of the stopping places. Every effort was made by the company to give a perfect service and they were ably seconded by their employees. When he left the company were providing their sleighs with robes intending to carry passengers, so that travelling between Dawson and the coast is now or soon will be as comfortable in summer as in winter. (Victoria *Daily Colonist*, January 18, 1900.)

N. A. Beddoe: A Mail Contractor's Perspective 1896
Written from Circle City, Alaska Territory, July 15, 1896

I have to report the safe arrival of the first mail at Circle City under the contract with this company. I personally took charge of the expedition, and had it been otherwise I could hardly have credited the dangers and difficulties of the trip. The season this year was very late, and while the snow was too soft to permit the taking of our launches over the pass, the lakes were not sufficiently open to allow of their use. I therefore did what I thought best under the circumstances – purchased lumber for two boats, intending to build them the other side of Chilkoot Pass and launch them on the lakes. This lumber I succeeded in getting halfway to the summit by Indians and they absolutely refused to take it farther, and I doubt very much whether it was possible to do so. I paid \$87.50 to pack the lumber this distance, and there I abandoned it. I pushed on with my supplies and the mail, and at the lakes I cut logs, made lumber, and built a boat, and from there down, going day and night, we met with no mishap, but the seething waters of the canyons and the terrible rapids to be passed through add years to a man's life.



Mail carrier with his dog team on the Yukon River. Photograph courtesy of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries, Cantwell 13.

Written from Juneau, Alaska Territory, September 23, 1896

If you were familiar with the conditions which obtain in the Yukon you would be in a better position to regulate the dates of departure and arrival for said service. For instance, I left this point on June 10 for Dyea; for sixteen hours it was impossible to land owing to storms, and as the landing is made in small boats the conditions must be favourable. I took with me sufficient lumber to build 2 boats; the ones I had already built could not be taken over the summit in consequence of excessive snowstorms. Upon my arrival at the base of the summit the Indian packers refused to go over with the lumber. I was compelled to abandon it there, having paid \$67.50 for packing it. The packing of supplies, etc., cost \$320 additional. However, I pushed on and upon arriving at Lake Linderman, a distance of 30 miles, I built a raft, there being no lumber in that locality, and upon this raft we journeyed to Lake Bennett, where we found sufficient lumber to build a boat. A start was made in five days after arrival, although the lumber had to be cut from the trees, and from there we traveled day and night until our destination, Circle City, was reached and the mails delivered in good order.

The question now was to get the return mail to Juneau the quickest moment. It was impossible to start up the river in consequence of the rapid water, the current averaging 8 miles an hour for 500 miles. If I remained in Circle City until July 30 it would probably take 45 days to pole the boat up the river. I therefore decided to go down to St. Michaels and come out through Bering Sea. I was fortunate in getting there in time for the steamship *Portland*, which sailed from that point to Seattle, via Unalaska – 3,500 miles. At Seattle I took the *Alki* and reached here in due course, having traveled 6,500 miles in addition to the regular trip, and saving thereby over a month of time in the delivery of the return mail; and I owe it to myself to say that I was the last man into the Yukon and the first one out this season, which is evidence that no unnecessary delay occurred.

This Yukon trip is a terrible one, the current of the river even attaining 10 miles an hour. Miles Canyon is a veritable death trap into which one is likely to be drawn without notice, and the White Horse Rapids, known as the miner's grave, to say nothing of the Five Finger and Rink Rapids, both of which are very dangerous. All of these dangers are aggravated by reason of the defective maps and reports of the country.

It is my intention to submit to the Department a map with many corrections, although in the absence of a proper survey it will necessarily be only an approximate reflection of the river's course. You are probably not aware that for a distance of 150 miles, commencing at Circle City and going north, the river is 50 miles between banks and contains thousands of islands, very few of which appear on any map.

It is impossible to perform this mail contract without having at least three parties fully equipped, the distance being so great and it being out of the question for the first party to return in time to depart with the exceeding mail, and the expense of each will be about the same. I shall have made four round trips by the end of this month. The last mail in should arrive at Circle City in one week from now. The return mails I am looking for daily. At the end of this month the north end of the Yukon River will freeze and the ice will gradually form to the south, and the same, as a waterway, will become impassable and remain so until midwinter. (*U.S. Post Office Department's 1896 annual report.*)



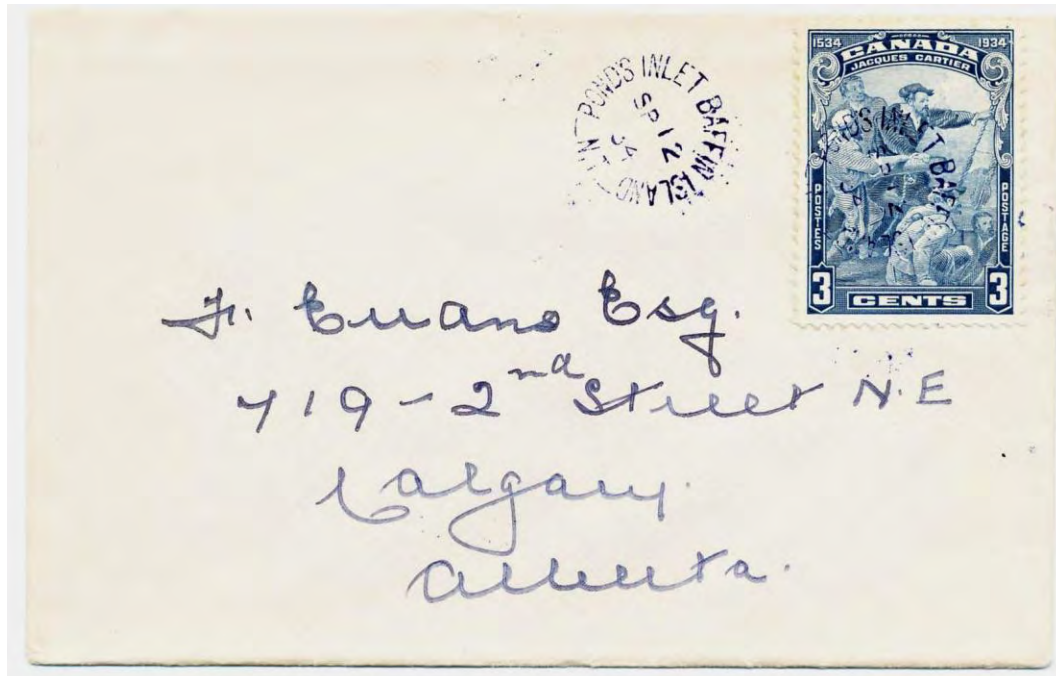
Mailbags filling the Valdez, Alaska post office. Photograph from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks



In 1898, 90-percent of the Dawson city population was American-born. Long delays in getting American mail into the city were all too common. When the mail would finally arrive, the entire town turned out, hoping for a letter from home. Photograph courtesy of Special Collections Division, University of Washington Libraries, Cantwell 42.

Reply to Item 1872. Covers from EAP Postmaster Frank Gilbert, 1934.

To augment the report in last issue, here are two more covers mailed on the 1934 Eastern Arctic Patrol written by Frank Gilbert to his father-in-law in Calgary. The first was postmarked at Pond Inlet on September 12, and the second at Craig Harbour on September 16.

**Item 1886. Nurses with the Yukon Field Force, 1898.**

Ken Ellison found the article shown on the next two pages in the *Vernon News*, October 27, 1898.

NURSES IN THE KLONDIKE.

As Described in a Letter from Col. Evans to Lady Aberdeen.

FORT SELKIRK, 1st September, 1898.

DEAR LADY ABERDEEN—On Tuesday, at noon, I returned from Dawson after a two-and-a-half day's trip—180 miles—against the powerful current of the Yukon.

On returning here, I was greeted with the dismal information that the "Anglican," en route to Teslin Lake to bring down the remainder of my Force, had been wrecked on the Hootalinqua, whose waters are now too low to permit of steamboat navigation. The Force, including Nurses Hanna and Payson and Miss Fenton, will thus be compelled to travel 400 miles in scows.

I saw Miss Powell at Dawson. She decided to remain there as soon as she visited the place and found how great was the need. She would have liked to have Nurse Scott with her, but the latter could not be spared from Fort Selkirk at present. I hope the other nurses may arrive before long. Miss Powell is in full charge of the Good Samaritan Hospital—Presbyterian—and is worked off her feet. This Hospital, although not yet completed, is overfilled with patients, nearly all typhoid cases. The Hospital consists of two log buildings about 26 feet long by 50 feet, one story, and is built on a bog ill-drained and difficult to drain. She herself lives in a small tent, and as it freezes now every night it is poor quarters for her after her day of severe and trying work. I hope they will have a cabin built before the other nurses arrive, but the Hospital is at present rather hard up.

To see and be in Dawson is to realize that house-to-house or tent-to-tent nursing is out of the question, and but for the Hospital authorities, I cannot imagine where the nurses would find a home. It costs a great deal to build a cabin; logs are worth \$10 each, and wages run from \$10 to \$15 per day. The Police Barracks are very small poor shanties, and are not large enough for the detachment there.

Dawson is the sight of a lifetime, being built chiefly on a low boggy flat and partly on the sides and nearly up to the top of a high mountain. The main street is along the river front, and is very dusty, with an occasional mud-hole. It is lined with shops, storehouses, and last but not least, saloons, hotels, and gambling-houses. Thousands of idle men seem to walk this street day and night. The street behind the main street is nearly up to one's knees in mud, and the mud and swamp becomes deeper until the foot of the mountain is reached. The sight at night would more than astonish the staid Canadians of the East.

I was too busy to run up to the mines and see the creeks being worked, but hope to do this at some future time.

It seems to be nobody's business to look after the sanitary arrangements of this town, which has grown in a year from 500 to 20,000 people, one of the greatest mining camps the world has ever seen. It is an impressive sight coming in on the boat, this city of tents and cabins covering the long stretch of bog and flats and climbing up the mountain side. Typhoid prevails in the town, and a worse epidemic may break out as the smells are awful. Wages are very high, but there are thousands of idle men who have food and are not particular whether they work or not.

To-day near camp, I picked a large bunch of ripe strawberries of good size and grand flavor. My men in their spare time pick vast quantities of cranberries, and if we could get an occasional turkey, all would be well.

My Barrack buildings are in grand shape and most of them will be fit to live in by the end of this week.

The prices in Dawson are surprising:—A glass of lemonade, 50 cents; a cucumber, \$1; slice of water melon, \$1.50; porter-house steak, \$2.50; a chicken, \$10; eggs—doubtful—\$2.50 per dozen.

The work for the Victorian Order in Dawson is a great one, and the opening of the new Hospital was providential. Their

presence with the Force has been invaluable as it has been for the past three months over a distance of nearly 600 miles. I do not know how we should have fared without them. Here, Nurse Scott holds sway, and not only the Force, but the surrounding country, realize and appreciate the value of her presence and services. At Dawson, to see Miss Powell at work is an object lesson not to be forgotten.

I trust this letter will reach Your Excellency in time to enable you to convey to the Committee of the Order the sincere appreciation which myself and all ranks of the Yukon Force feel in regard to services rendered us by the Nurses of the Order attached to the Force. As long as they

care to stay at Selkirk there will be a headquarters for them built by the Force in its own time, and as far as possible furnished in the same way.

[Signed] T. D. B. EVANS,
Commander of the Yukon Force.

NOTE.—It may be mentioned that the services which Colonel Evans mentions as having been rendered by the Nurses to the soldiers during their march consisted principally in nursing several severe cases of rheumatic fever, and also in dressing various wounds and cuts and bruises. In addition to this, other travellers and miners who were met by the way, were tended as far as circumstances permitted.

Item 1887. 1942 APO 669, Churchill, Manitoba.

Member #3 sent these two covers. APO 669 was opened at Churchill, Manitoba on September 28, 1942 and closed on November 7, 1942. Before the date stamps were received in October 1942, mail was sent through the Canadian post office at Churchill. The postmaster had been instructed to use the barred obliterator only to cancel mail from US military personnel, a form of censorship to hide their location. These covers were likely sent in October 1942 and were censored by officers at Churchill. Although rated for airmail service, the covers were likely carried by train to Chicago, where they went through the US civilian censorship system. The tapes are numbered 3123 and 3122 respectively, numbers used in Chicago.



Item 1888. 1943 APO 737 (Churchill, Manitoba) Registered Covers.

Member #3 sent images of these two registered covers from APO 737 at Churchill, Manitoba. The double ring cancels from APOs are usually difficult to locate, as they were primarily used on registered mail such as these items. There are four known dates of this cancel while APO 737 was associated with the New York Port of Embarkation from November 11, 1942 to February 28, 1944. April 7, 1943 (lower cover) is the new latest known date, with the earliest being November 26, 1942. The rates on these covers are of interest too, as the first one (upper cover; January 5, 1943) is franked FREE as permitted for military personnel. The postage then pays for the 15¢ registry fee (no indemnity) and another 3¢ for the return receipt service. The second cover shows 21¢ postage which covers the 3¢ first class surface rate (not clear why the soldier did not claim the "Free" franking), 15¢ for registry fee and 3¢ for the return receipt service. Both covers were censored and then carried by train from Churchill to Chicago for service through the US system.

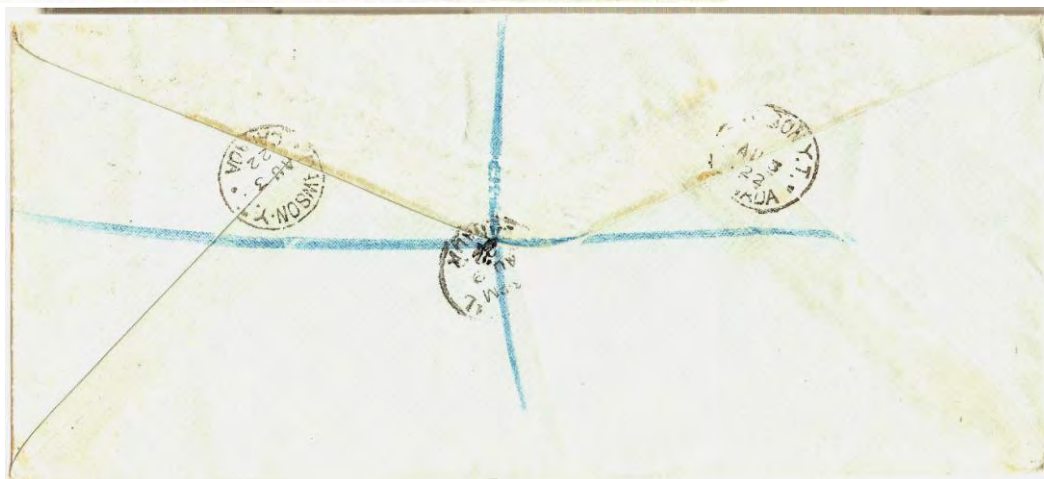


The reverses of these two covers are on the next page.



Item 1889. 1922 Dawson Registered Cover.

Member #3 sent this item. Here (top of next page) is a pretty three-colour Admiral registered cover from Dawson, Yukon to England. The docketing at left states "Lone Star Ltd./800 Shares", probably in reference to some stocks or options in this company that held placer claims in the Dawson area. There is a Montreal transit marking dated August 9, 1922 on the back showing an incredible six days from Dawson by river steamer to Whitehorse, then by train to Skagway, by ship to Vancouver, and by train to Montreal. There are no British transit or receipt markings, unusual for this period. It was rated at 3¢ for surface to British Empire, 1¢ for War Tax, and 10¢ for registry fee. There were no special Dawson registration markings as the first box did not come into use until 1925.



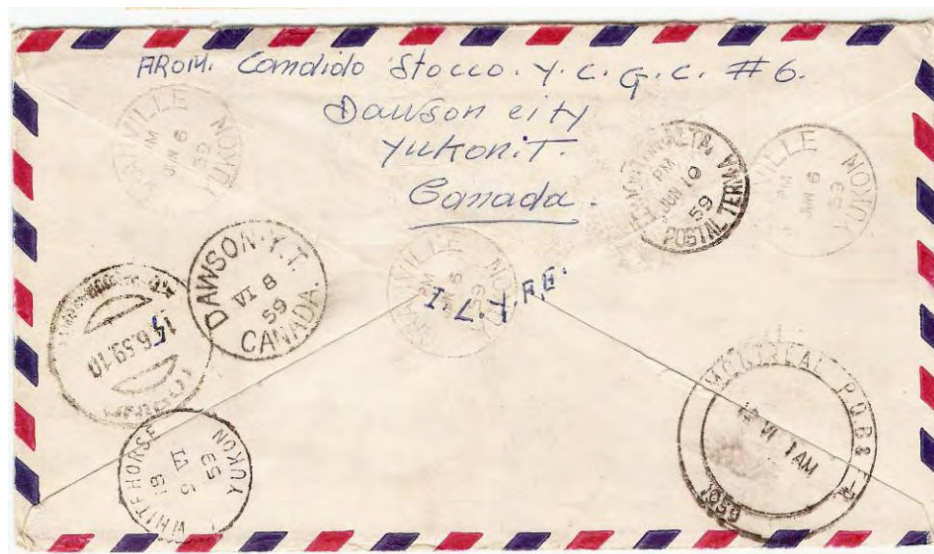
Item 1890. 1948 Fort Selkirk, Yukon Registered Cover.

Member 3 sent the scans of this overpaid philatelic registered airmail to the US (5¢ airmail for the first ounce, 10¢ registry fee) with the scarce Fort Selkirk registration box R1. This marking has only been recorded on this date (September 17, 1948). The cover may have been flown to Dawson but more than likely it was taken by river steamer and then forwarded by air to Edmonton and beyond.



Item 1891. 1959 Granville, Yukon Registered Cover.

Here is the second reported example (earliest date of June 6, 1959) of the Granville registration box R2. This is a properly rated registered airmail cover (15¢ airmail to Europe, 20¢ registry fee) sent by an employee of Yukon Consolidated Gold Company [Y.C.G.C.] who was working on Dredge #6, which operated from 1908 to 1966 (from 1936 to 1966 on Lower Sulphur Creek). The best reference for dredging operations in the Yukon is *The Gold Hustlers. Dredging the Klondike 1898-1966* by Lewis Green, first published in 1977.

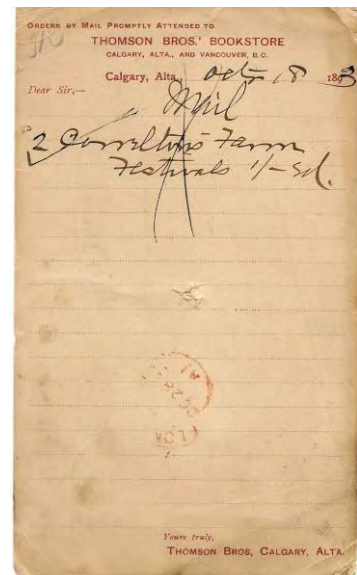
**Item 1892. 1940 Whitehorse, Yukon Registered Cover.**

Member 3 also sent these images (next page) of a registered double-rated airmail cover (6¢ for first ounce, 6¢ for each additional ounce, 10¢ for registry fee) with the earliest recorded example of the Whitehorse registration box R4, proofed in March 1938. The cover was subjected to foreign exchange control at Whitehorse (note "Passed for export/LW." on the front, likely done by a postal official in Whitehorse) and Vancouver (blue cds on the back, tying the FEBC label).



Item 1893. Thomson Brothers Bookstore, Calgary – 1893.

Member 62 wonders if the Thomson Bros. who sent this card were those in Vancouver who published picture post cards. [That was Thomson Stationery Co. Ltd.] Anyone know?



Item 1894. White Pass Summit Card; Granville 1916.

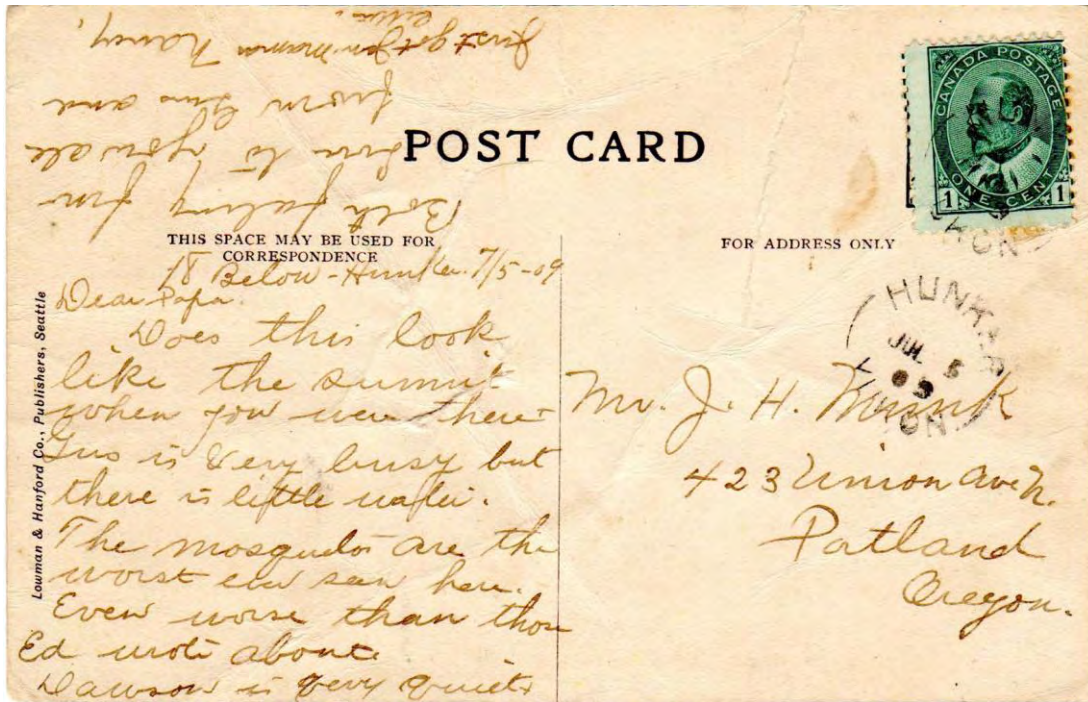
Member #87 sent the next two items. The first is a picture post card of White Pass Summit, looking Across Summit Lake, March, 1898. It has the number 254. at the lower left. It was written at Granville on December 8, 1916, and postmarked three days later.



I have not seen this card before. It looks like the image may have been half of a stereo pair. Does anyone know anything about this card?

Item 1895. Card Mailed at Hunker, 1909.

This is another card showing the summit at White Pass—a much more common view. However, it was written “18 Below – Hunker” and postmarked at Hunker on July 5, 1909. The message reads, “Does this look like the summit when you were there?”



Item 1896. Esquimalt to Cayley, Alberta – 1904.

This cover is a bit of a mystery. It was mailed at Esquimalt, B.C., site of the naval base, on July 02, 1904. It is addressed to Mrs. William Cochrane, Cayley, Alberta, N.W.T. A Victoria duplex (also July 2) was applied in transit, as was a Calgary c.d.s dated July 5. The cover reached Cayley on July 05, 1904.

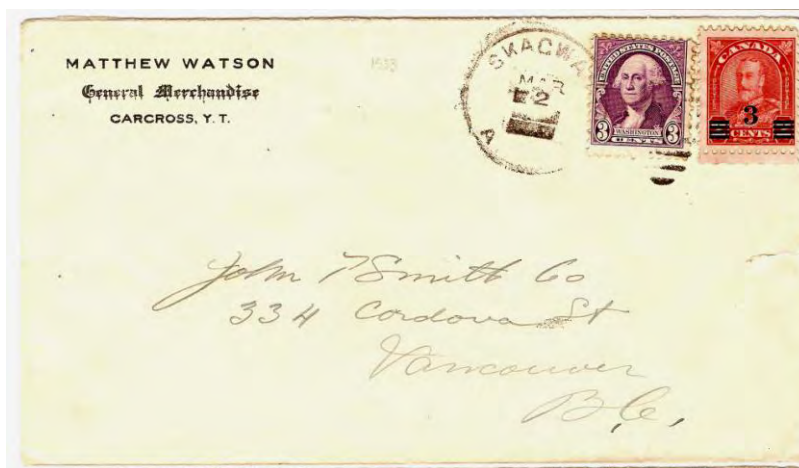
The Cochranes were a well known Alberta pioneer family. William Edward ‘Billy’ Cochrane (1858-1929) was a rancher. He ran the Little Bow Cattle Company. He married Evelyn Lamb (1887-1908). They had one son. Joe Smith thinks the son was a sailor.

The cover bears a British 1d Edward stamp, which has not been cancelled. Why was it not cancelled? I suspect that the letter was mailed by a British sailor (perhaps the Cochrane son) who did not have any Canadian stamps. It was a holiday (Dominion Day weekend), so the Esquimalt post office probably was not open. Could this be classed as paquebot mail? I don’t think so. I have never seen any from Esquimalt. The *Daily Colonist* for that weekend gives little help, other than noting that the Fifth Regiment and at least two British Navy ships—the *H.M.S. Grafton* and the *H.M.S. Bonaventure*—were in B.C.

All suggestions gratefully received.

Item 1897. 1933 Carcross, Yukon

This cover (top of the next page) from Member 3 was mailed from Matthew Watson’s store in Carcross bearing Canadian postage. It likely was mailed on board a passing White Pass and Yukon Railway train that was heading for Skagway, where American postage was added. A pencil marking at the top “1933” indicates the item was mailed in 1933.



Item 1898. 1928 Herschel Island – 1928.

This cover has the earliest reported Herschel Island broken circle date stamp, August 3, 1928. Interesting purple barred obliterator was used to tie the stamp and then a smudgy black one too (like the ink and postmarking done at Aklavik). The date stamp is poorly struck but appears to be in a different ink again. The cover likely was taken by small RCMP schooner to Aklavik for onward transmission. Bill Robinson had a similar cover with the same date and a transit marking of Aklavik on the back dated September 28, 1928. Does anyone know who or what the addressee, S.D. Johnston at Prince Rupert, was all about? There seems to be a fair amount of correspondence around to that address.



Item 1899. Arctic Bay, NWT via Eastern Arctic Patrol – 1952.

Here (next page) from Member 3 is a QSL card from a radio operator at Arctic Bay, NWT for a radio contact made on April 27, 1952. The first opportunity to send it out came with the stop of the Eastern Arctic Patrol ship *C.D. Howe* on September 2–3, 1952. The card was not postmarked until September 10th, when the ship was at Padloping Island, NWT. It is a properly rated post card for the British Empire. Commercial mail from on board the Eastern Arctic Patrol in the 1950s is hard to find.



Item 1900. Churchill, Manitoba, 1941.

Here is post card dated at Churchill August 18, 1941 and mailed the next day at the Churchill post office. It appears that this Hudson's Bay Company post card was likely mailed by a passenger on board the *Nascopie* during its call at Churchill August 14 to 19, 1941.



Item 1901. Yukon Ship Marks, 1938 and 1939.

Member #2 supplied these images of three covers with Yukon ship purser markings used as cachets. The upper cover shows a cover from the *Nasutlin* dated July 19, 1936 (corrected to 1938) mailed at Whitehorse on July 25, 1938.



The second cover is from the *Tutshi*, dated July 24, 1939. It entered the mail steam at Carcross on July 27, 1939.



The final cover, from the *S.S. Whitehorse*, is dated August 12, 1938 by both the purser mark and the Whitehorse, Yukon c.d.s



Item 1902. The Barren Lands Digital Collection.

The University of Toronto has set up a web site entitled "The Barren Lands Digital Collection.

<http://link.library.utoronto.ca/Tyrrell/index.cfm> . The site uses material from the Tyrrell material at U of T., and it describes the 1893 and 1894 treks through the Barrens of the N.W.T. by J.B. and J.W. Tyrrell. It also includes material on the 1885 expedition to Hudson Bay and the 1900 expedition to the area between Great Slave Lake and Hudson Bay. Maps and reports are included. Over 1,000 Tyrrell photographs are available at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/thomasfisherlibrary/> . Included are photos of northern Ontario and the Yukon.

Item 1903. Banff, Alta. Railway Pictorial Post Card - 1898

I watch for western Canada CPR pictorial post cards used at the location shown in the card. I have few. Recently though, I was fortunate to buy this card mailed at Banff on March 23, 1898. In the Covert-Walton catalogue, it is listed as card CPR 1b because of the serified lettering in the lower left. The card was sent by Boston travel agent H.J. Colvin, with his advertising on the reverse.

