Commentary

Dawson City in 1898—Searching for the "Paris of the North"

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Abstract: Government agencies in Canada such as Parks Canada and Travel Yukon often describe Dawson City during the Klondike Gold Rush as "the Paris of the North" and "the largest city west of Winnipeg and north of Seattle." This essay looks for proof of those statements, and shows that the phrases were actually invented in the 1950s and 1960s, following their use in books by Laura and Pierre Berton, to bolster a nascent tourism industry in the North. This sets up a conflict: use official 1898 Canadian government reports that show Dawson City was much smaller and rougher than it is often described, or continue with the unsubstantiated exaggerations of the mid twentieth century? The answer is obvious; history is nothing if it is not backed by reliable sources, and in this article the author argues for more balance and use of citations in Klondike reporting.

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Each year more than 100,000 tourists visit the old Klondike gold rush town of Dawson City, Yukon, Canada.[1] There they learn through the publications of Parks Canada, the Yukon Government, and the City of Dawson that Dawson at its peak in the summer of 1898 housed 30,000 inhabitants and was known as "the Paris of the North"—the largest city west of Winnipeg and north of Seattle.[2]

The ubiquity of the "Paris of the North" nickname in present-day government reports is curious as no use of the phrase during the 1897–1898 gold rush has been documented. This article reveals when the term originated, shows how the phrase and its attendant population-claim promote a gold rush story that sacrifices historical accuracy for sensationalism, and calls for more balance and use of citations in future Klondike reporting.

Historians today have plentiful online databases to search, and if "Paris of the North" was Dawson's nickname during the gold rush, one would expect to find numerous citations. Not so. A comprehensive search of domestic and foreign newspapers revealed zero hits for "Paris of the North."[3] Probing provincial and state archives also turned up zero leads. Finally, over 300 Klondike stampeders' diaries and letters were looked at, as well as scores of contemporary books, articles, and brochures.

Only two instances approximating the term "Paris of the North" were found. The first came from Raymond Auzias-Turenne's 1899 book *Voyage Au Pays des Mines d'Or Le Klondike*, where on page 160 he refers to the new northern city as having "the nightlife of Paris," alluding to the many saloons and dance halls on Dawson's main street: places like the Aurora, Northern, Pioneer, Pavilion, Oatley Sisters, and the Monte Carlo.[4] Nothing was particularly opulent about these places in the summer of 1898—most were log or raw clapboard with perhaps a mural or mirror inside, but a hot stove kept customers warm if the weather turned sour, and the attraction of alcohol, dance hall maids, and gambling games were sufficient to keep customers engaged. After the last call many of the saloons doubled as rooming houses for Dawson's homeless, and a feature of each saloon was a good barrel of drinking water so that a man could satisfy his thirst even if he were penniless.[5] Saloons also acted as informal mining exchanges and information centres, where the latest gossip could be heard and connections made. Auzias-Turenne's description of Dawson's nightlife as "Paris-like" was not the only foreign city he used to describe Dawson. He also said Dawson "had more dogs than Constantinople," an observation not meant to be complimentary.[6]

The second reference similar to "Paris of the North" is found in Angelo Heilprin's 1899 book *Alaska and the Klondike*, where on page 46 he refers to 1898 Dawson as "the San Francisco of the North," but this is clearly ironic.[7] Heilprin was only referring to the cosmopolitan crowds he encountered—Italians, Poles, Germans, Swedes, Aussies, Kiwis, Canadians, and so on (but in the main mostly Americans). Heilprin did not think much of the city itself—an agglomerate of unassuming architecture—but what did attract his reportorial eye were the army of prostitutes who entertained in log cabins bearing names such as "Saratoga," "Bon-ton," and "The Lucky Cigar Store."[8] Heilprin's other overwhelming impression of Dawson was mud. "The mud lay in great pools along the main street," Heilprin wrote, "dogs and goats could alone drown in it. It is true that an occasional wading burro or even a mule would find a dangerously low level, but I am not aware that any in this condition had added to a list of serious casualties."[9]

The legendary mud of Dawson in the summer of 1898 was a byproduct of the late May breakup of the Yukon River that spring when ice jams forced the river to overflow the townsite. For days residents of the town had to navigate the streets by rowboat, the floodwater reaching some people's cabin tops, and only after the North-West Mounted Police dug ditches to drain the main streets was tenuous land navigation restarted. *New York Press* correspondent Frederick Palmer was in Dawson at the time, and he commented on what then passed for entertainment: "The mounted police had dug three or four ditches to drain the town. One of these was hidden by only two inches of surface water, and you never found out its existence until you fell into it up to your armpits. As you crawled out you noticed a broad grin on the faces of a small crowd of men sitting on a board pile, and one of them said: 'We've all been there, pardner. Don't tell your friends or you'll spoil the fun. But you can swear again if you want to. We like to hear that.'"[10]

Despite Auzias-Turenne's and Heilprin's passing references to Paris and San Francisco, Dawson in 1898 shared few likenesses to either city. Paris is often referred to as "the City of Light," but that was not Dawson in 1898. Electricity did not come to Dawson until late in the year, and then only in a limited way.[11] Paris has also been described as "the City of Love," but that was not the case in 1898 Dawson either. Most of the 500 women in town at the time—referred to as "creatures of shame" by Angelo Heilprin—were driven to the dance halls or prostitute cribs by the poor economy.[12] In 1898 Dawson City also did not have running water, sewer, or telegraph. What it did have, however, in abundance, was typhoid fever, scurvy, and filth. North-West Mounted Police Commander Sam Steele said that "Dawson was far from attractive in any way."[13] Stampeder Volney Rowland called Dawson "a nasty stinking mudhole."[14] And another stampeder named Jim called Dawson a scurvy ridden swamp—"a pest hole of the most pronounced type."[15]

Dawson City in the summer of 1898 was foul—not exactly tourist brochure material. But even with the dirt, the mud, and the excrement, the most discouraging aspect for Dawson City newcomers was the mail situation. No mail

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came to Dawson for weeks at a time, and when it did the post office was so crowded that it could take hours to get your letters. Women sometimes gained special admittance for mail through a back door, but for a man a dollar or more was often the required bribe to cut the line.[16] Miner C.O. Heninger commented: "The mail service here is rotten and so are the laws and the people that make them, and rotten in the lowest degree of rottenness is the whole condemnable government."[17] Heninger compared living in Dawson to living in a penitentiary.[18]

The miserable conditions in 1898 Dawson might have been tolerable if there were riches to be found, but that was not the case for most. Stampeders were stunned to find that there was almost no work to be had in Dawson City during the summer of 1898. A ten percent royalty slapped on mine production by the Canadian government, and a dry summer with not enough water to work the creeks, were the primary reasons.[19] On July 8, 1898, miner Lew Clark wrote a letter from Dawson saying, "everything looks like a funeral … Dawson is crowded like Market Street in San Francisco and everyone is broke."[20]

The result: a reverse stampede to the Outside and back home again. As early as June 23 the town newspaper *Klondike Nugget* noted: "the rush from the head of navigation has only about one-half arrived, yet the rush for the lower river is in full swing, and more people are leaving daily than are arriving."[21] Three weeks later, on July 11, 1898, stampeder Clarence Still wrote: "men are rushing out of the country like wildfire. Most of them tie up at the outlet of streams and await the news, which is nearly always discouraging, catch the disease known as 'cold feet,' sell their outfits for little or nothing, and leave the country. Fully one-third of the people are getting out."[22]

On July 19, 1898, under the direction of Yukon Commissioner James Walsh, the North-West Mounted Police conducted a tent by tent, cabin by cabin, and boat by boat census of Dawson City and counted 16,560 people.[23] Walsh estimated that if prospectors were counted on creeks and communities up to 50 km away, then the total population in the Klondike region would be about 30,000.[24]

Five months later, after the Yukon River froze, the mounted police conducted another census at Dawson, this time counting only 4,236 residents, with about another 10,000 men and women out on the creeks.[25] The Klondike's population had imploded, and the rush was over.

Left behind at Dawson at the end of 1898 were a few wealthy miners, a small society of doctors, bankers, and government officials, a large working class making wages and barely getting by, and hundreds of destitute stampeders that were either too poor or too sick to escape before winter set in. These indigents, camped out of sight in caves and rude hovels on Dawson's hillside, lived in what was called Dawson's "Unfortunates' Row." Most of them were Americans. They had gone into the Klondike in the spring with good grub stakes and high hopes, but most had never mined in their life. They could find no work and even if they did, they could not stand the strain for more than a couple of days. Subsisting on a diet of bacon and beans and charity, they simply waited for something to turn up as scurvy turned their gums black.[26]

Miner S.S. Longabaugh was one of these struggling Americans. He wrote a letter to his family: "there are many people dying in this country, even though the winter hospitals are all full. Many feet and hands frozen so as to be amputated. There is any amount of scurvy ... The Salvation Army gave a free dinner to the poor men on Christmas; there were over 300 ... I felt like taking it in myself, only I had not cheek enough."[27]

There was little glamour in Dawson City in 1898; it was not like Paris, and the population, which in town never exceeded 17,000, dropped precipitously before the winter of 1898-1899 set in. However, this is not the narrative one generally reads in stories about the Klondike. It is dancing girls and good times with high rollers. One of the problems in current Klondike reporting is that writers tend to concentrate on the tiny minority of rich stampeders at the top, those who drank champagne at $40 a pint, rather than the ordinary workers who dug for gold twelve hours a day at minus 45 degrees.[28] A good example of this biased reporting is how the Fairview Hotel is often depicted. The Fairview was Dawson's fanciest hostelry when it was opened by Belinda Mulrooney in late-July 1898, and it boasted Belgian carpets, a stove that would make a gourmet cook proud, and damask linen tablecloths.[29] Those are the details writers usually focus on. What they do not say is that the chairs at the Fairview had no legs because they were left behind at the mouth of the Yukon River, that the hotel's windows had no glass, and that the rooms upstairs were so tiny that there was no space for closets or even a dressing table.[30] It is this kind of balance that is so often missing in Klondike writing today.

Ideally, current accounts of the Klondike gold rush would disclose that Dawson did not become a modern city until the summer of 1899, and then only after two great fires had swept away most of the original town. The completion of the White Pass & Yukon Railway from Skagway to Bennett Lake in 1899 was also a factor in modernizing Dawson. Cheap, reliable transportation enabled the import of all sorts of goods and services to Dawson, and from mid-1899 through the next decade, until the high-grade gold ran out, Dawson was a stylish city with a population of up to 9,000 residents.[31] But Dawson was not like that in 1898 when the big crowd of 17,000 was there, and all too often writers conflate these two very different periods in Dawson's evolution.

According to Canadian government census figures and numerous contemporary reports, Dawson was never the largest city west of Winnipeg

and north of Seattle.[32] So where did that false claim come from? The answer is Canadian writer Pierre Berton. Berton is famous for his 1958 book *Klondike* (published as *The Klondike Fever* in the United States), the bestselling book of all time about the gold rush.[33] The book is gorgeously written and Berton was bestowed a Governor General's Award for it, but the passage of time has shown its flaws, Berton's unabashed exaggeration. While many people are familiar with Berton's *Klondike*, fewer are familiar with another book he wrote about the gold rush, this one in 1954 titled *The Golden Trail*. In *The Golden Trail* Berton cited some basic facts about the rush: that at the peak in the summer of 1898 about "eighteen or twenty thousand" men and women inhabited Dawson, and that Dawson was "a fetid-reeking swamp," which is why thousands of men and women fled the gold fields almost immediately after they arrived.[34] Facing high prices, limited work opportunities, no available claims to stake, and a rampaging typhoid epidemic, more than half the stampeders who arrived in Dawson in early 1898 were gone by the end of 1898, prompting Berton to write that as the year 1898 faded into 1899 "the great rush had spent itself."[35] These were all certifiable facts that were used in official Canadian government documents, North-West Mounted Police reports, the Dawson City newspapers, and the writings of period journalists like Tappan Adney, which is why Berton used them.[36]

Fast forward four years later when Berton published *Klondike*, and his story changed dramatically. Notwithstanding that the North-West Mounted Police conducted two systematic censuses in Dawson in 1898, Berton now claimed that "it was really impossible to estimate the true population at any given moment," thus allowing him to boost his population numbers.[37] Now Berton's story was that Dawson was only slightly smaller than the city of Seattle, and that it dwarfed both Victoria and Vancouver.[38] This is obvious hyperbole. To say that Dawson was larger than British Columbia's capital city, Victoria, and biggest port, Vancouver, defies common sense. According to the *Canadian Guide-Book* of 1899, the populations of Victoria and Vancouver were both 25,000, while Dawson's was 16,000.[39] So no, Dawson did not dwarf Victoria and Vancouver.

Berton also changed his story about the "fetid, reeking swamp" that was Dawson in 1898. In *The Golden Trail,* the sanitary conditions of the town that summer were dreadful, but four years later when *Klondike* came out Dawson in 1898 had magically transformed itself into "the San Francisco of the North," with "running water, steam heat, and electricity."[40] Berton should have known better. Most of these amenities, along with sewer and effective fire protection, did not arrive in Dawson until well into 1899.

Berton also changed the end date of the rush. Where before, in *The Golden Trail*, the rush "was spent" by the end of 1898, in *Klondike* the rush continued until August 1899, when news of gold in the beach sands at Nome, Alaska, hit town. In the space of a single week in August, Berton wrote, "eight thousand people left Dawson forever."[41] Unfortunately, there is no primary evidence that supports that claim. Nothing from the Dawson newspapers, nothing in any stampeder's letter or diary, and nothing from Nome.

Pierre Berton died in 2004 so it is impossible to ask him about these discrepancies, but a couple of reasons may have been at their root. First, by exaggerating, Berton may have hoped to sell more books. At the time he was writing he was only in his mid-30s, he had four young children to care for, and his wife Janet was doing much of his research work. Money to raise a growing family was a priority, and Berton, who was still more of a journalist than a historian at this point, may have felt that a tall tale from the past was good enough to print even if it could not be corroborated. Notably, Berton did not use citations in *Klondike*, and he was not above making things up. According to his biographer, A.B. McKillop, Berton invented the entire opening passage in *Klondike*, a "conceit and a deception" which "would have been unthinkable for a university-based historian."[42]

Another source of Berton's aggrandized spin on the gold rush may have come from his upbringing in the Yukon Territory. He spent the first twelve years of life in Dawson, and Berton always had a soft spot for his old hometown. When the capital of the Yukon moved from Dawson to Whitehorse in 1953, the decaying gold rush town lost a good portion of its economy and the population teetered at less than 900.[43] Boosting Dawson's morale with a few embellishments about its glorious past may have felt like a worthy cause to Berton.

Given Pierre Berton's monumental influence on Klondike history, it should come as no surprise that Berton was also involved in the first known use of "Paris of the North" to describe early-day Dawson. The term appeared in the 1954 book *I Married the Klondike*, a memoir written by his mother Laura Berton describing the Berton family's life in Dawson City from 1907 to 1932. In her foreword Laura Berton thanks her son for his "professional assistance," and on page 42 a sentence reads: "In Dawson's golden days, when the town was full of newly minted millionaires, the city had been the Paris of the North in every sense." Laura Berton gives no sources for this nickname and no dates for when it might have been used. Instead, she quickly pivots back to the 1907 to 1932 time frame she was familiar with, and the phrase is never mentioned again.

It wasn't until 1962 that the term "Paris of the North" to describe Dawson seems to have been used in a sustained way. That year an inaugural gold rush festival was held in Dawson. The Progressive Conservative Party of Canada led by John Diefenbaker had first been elected four years earlier, and one of the party planks had been an enhanced vision of Canada's possibilities in the North. In partnership with Dawson's Klondike Visitors Association, which had been

established in the early 1950s, the federal government restored the town's 1899 Palace Grand Theatre and made plans to celebrate Dawson's history with events that they hoped would attract thousands.[44]

As part of the publicity for the Gold Rush Festival the Department of Northern Affairs produced a "Special Klondike Issue" of the department magazine *North*. In their May-June 1962 issue, "Paris of the North" is the title for an article written by a Dawson woman named Athol Retallack.[45] Retallack was a long-time Yukoner, a nationally known radio broadcaster, and sat on the Gold Rush Festival Board. In her article Retallack described early-1900s Dawson and argued that because of its grandeur Dawson "was entitled" to be named the Paris of the North, but she made no claim that the term was actually used during the 1897–1898 gold rush.[46] Nor did Retallack say where the term originated, although by this time Laura Berton's *I Married the Klondike* was well known locally and a likely source. The exact details of how "Paris of the North" came to be an article heading in *North* magazine remains a mystery. Nevertheless, the term was so admired by the Klondike Visitors Association that it was inserted into their tourist brochures starting in 1962, going one step further than Retallack and declaring that Dawson was historically known as the "Paris of the North."[47] This type of boosterism was common during the 1950s and 1960s—many northern cities invented nicknames for themselves: Anchorage was "The Chicago of the North," Fairbanks "The Golden Heart of Alaska," Valdez became "The Switzerland of Alaska," and Whitehorse adopted "Capital of the Yukon."[48]

The slogan "Paris of the North" for Dawson appears to have been invented in the 1950s and then popularized in the 1960s to promote tourism, with no evidence existing that the term was ever used during the gold rush years. Similarly, Pierre Berton's population figures for Dawson at its peak in 1898 have been shown to be grossly inflated. Which begs the question, why do Canadian government agencies continue to use them? In 1978 Parks Canada historian Hal Guest wrote an excellent monograph about Dawson titled: "Dawson City, San Francisco of the North, or Boomtown in a Bog: A Literature Review." Guest knew that any historical view of Dawson had to be nuanced; the city changed too fast and had too many luxuries and privations at the same time, to peg in any one square. But one thing Guest was sure of is that "Dawson hardly rivaled San Francisco," and that "the gaiety and excitement of its early years has been exaggerated out of all proportion."[49]

In 1981 Parks Canada published another monograph about Dawson and the Klondike, this one written by the historian Margaret Archibald. This illuminating paper about the evolution of Dawson's supply chain from 1897 to 1907 is another wonderful resource that does not get cited enough. Archibald was one of the first to publicize Commissioner James Walsh's 1898 Dawson census of 17,000 people, a tally Archibald agreed with.[50]

In 1985 historian Ken Coates, now senior editor of the *Northern Review* at Yukon University, also weighed in on early Dawson City, calling it a ramshackle town of 16,000 that "hardly rated the comparisons sometimes made to San Francisco."[51]

More recently, in 2022, Story Laureate of Yukon Michael Gates wrote in his book *Hollywood in the Klondike* that Dawson's population in 1898 was 16,000, and though carnival-like in many aspects, the city also smelled of "shit and sawdust" and struggled with sanitation and disease. Gates, who worked as curator of collections at the Klondike National Historic Sites in Dawson for many years, is another historian who understands that balance is important in Klondike reporting.[52]

Over the years much of what we thought we knew about the Klondike has been contradicted by official period sources such as Commissioner of Yukon records, 1898 Dawson City censuses, and North-West Mounted Police reports. At some point government agencies have a decision to make. Do they continue to promote slogans from the 1950s and 1960s based on obvious exaggerations—Dawson City in 1898 enshrined as "the Paris of the North" and the "largest city west of Winnepeg and north of Seattle"—or do they make historically accurate corrections? There is reason for optimism. Lately both Parks Canada and the Yukon Government have done a remarkable job incorporating First Nations viewpoints into Canada's history, something that has been long overdue. There is no reason to think Klondike history cannot be upgraded as well.

Notes

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2. Parks Canada, "Dawson City 'Paris of the North,'" accessed March 20, 2023 https://parks.canada.ca/lhn-nhs/yt/klondike/activ/dawson; Travel Yukon, "Klondike," accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.travelyukon.com/en/discover-yukon/regions-communities/klondike. Dawson City, "Klondike Gold Rush," accessed March 20, 2023, https://dawsoncity.ca/discover-dawson/klondike-gold-rush.
3. Databases investigated included the United States Library of Congress website "Chronicling America," Newspapers.com, NewspaperArchives, PapersPast (New Zealand), Trove (Australia), British Newspaper Archive, The British Colonist Archives (Victoria), and Alaska Digital Newspapers.
4. Raymond Auzias-Turenne, *Voyage Au Pays des Mines d'Or Le Klondike* (Paris: Calman Levy, 1899), 160.

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5. Wallis R. Sanborn and Wallis R. Sanborn III, ed., *The Klondike Stampede: As It Appeared to One of the Thousands of Cheechacos Who Participated in the Mad Rush of 1898-1899, by Wallis R. Sanborn* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017), 165.
6. Auzias-Turenne, *Voyage Au Pays*, 160.
7. Angelo Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike* (New York: D. Appleton & Co, 1899), 46.
8. Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike*, 56.
9. Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike*, 47, 48.
10. Frederick Palmer, "When Dawson Was Flooded," *The New York Press Sunday Magazine*, August 21, 1898, 14.
11. Michael Gates, *Hollywood in the Klondike* (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing, 2022), 79, 80.
12. Angelo Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike*, 55; Jeremiah Lynch, *Three Years in the Klondike* (London: Edward Arnold, 1904), 29. The 500 number for women in Dawson comes from several sources. In the *Kansas City Journal* of August 2, 1898, a stampeder named Townsend gave this number. R.H. Kirk, in his book *Twelve Months in Klondike* (London: William Heinemann, 1899), 106, said in 1898 there were "several hundred" women in Dawson. The town newspaper *Klondike Nugget*, in its August 6, 1898 issue, agreed with Townsend and Kirk, citing "the comparative scarcity of ladies in Dawson." Finally, on page 52 of an undated North American Trading and Transportation Company brochure "Alaska and the Yukon Gold Fields," at the close of navigation in 1898 "about 500 women" were said to be in Dawson.
13. Samuel B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada: Reminiscences of the Great North-West with Some Account of his Service in South Africa* (London: Herbert Jenkins Ltd, 1915), 321.
14. Helen Rowland Kelly, *Volney Rowland's Letters from the Klondike* (Stockton, CA, 2002), 41.
15. Letter from the Klondike, August 1898, accessed March 18, 2023, https://explorenorth.com/klondike/klondike_letter-189808.html.
16. Angelo Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike*, 51; Samuel Hall Young and John A. Marquis, *Hall Young of Alaska: "The Mushing Parson"* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1927), 362–368; Frank Wadelton letter, July 12, 1898, published in the United States National Park Service Yukon-Charley Rivers brochure, accessed August 23, 2023, https://www.nps.gov/yuch/learn/historyculture/frank-wadelton.htm.
17. Letter from C.O. Heninger to "mother, sister, and all," January 6, 1899, published in the *Clarinda Herald*, Clarinda, Iowa, February 28, 1899.
18. Heninger letter, January 6, 1899.
19. G.B. Drummond and Anna T. Siig, eds., *The Klondike News: The Adventures of Livermore Area Residents from 1897 to 1906 during the Alaska Gold Rush* (Livermore, CA: The Livermore Heritage Guild, 1998), 74, 75.
20. Drummond and Siig, eds., *The Klondike News*.
21. *Klondike Nugget*, June 23, 1898.
22. Drummond and Siig, eds., *The Klondike News*, 79.
23. Department of Indian Affairs: Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch, Central Registry files T13243, Library and Archives Canada, accessed March 19, 2023, http://heritage.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.lac_reel_t13243/1285?r=0ds=1.
24. "Report of Major J.M. Walsh," in *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for the Year 1898* (Ottawa, 1899), 329, 330.
25. "Report of S.B. Steele, Commanding North-West Mounted Police in the Yukon Territory," in *Report of the North-West Mounted Police, 1898* (Ottawa, 1899), 21, 22.
26. M.A. Mahoney letter, *Thames Star* (New Zealand), March 15, 1899.
27. Joyce L. Alig, *Old Gold Rush to Alaska Diaries of 1898-1900* (Cathagena, OH: Messenger Press, 2001), 105.
28. William Haskell, *Two Years in the Klondike* (Hartford, CT, 1898), 376.
29. Mary E. Hitchcock, *Two Women in the Klondike: The Story of a Journey to the Gold-Fields of Alaska* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 100, 102.
30. Hitchcock, *Two Women*, 102.
31. Yukon Bureau of Statistics, "Yukon Census Historical Population 1901–2016," accessed March 19, 2023, http://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/ybs/fin-yukon-census-historical-population-1901-2016.pdf.
32. Besides the NWMP July 1898 census already quoted in Note 23, the following contemporary sources also indicated the peak 1898 population of Dawson was around 17,000 people: Tappan Adney, *The Klondike Stampede of 1897-98* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900), 386; Angelo Heilprin, *Alaska and the Klondike*, 49; Samuel B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada*, 321; M.D.K. Weimer, *True Story of the Alaska Gold Fields* (n.p., 1903), 100; A.A. Hill, "The Klondike," *Munsey's Magazine*, February 1899, 731; *Klondike Nugget* (Dawson), August 13, 1898. See Note 39 for sources showing that both Victoria and Vancouver 1898 populations were much higher than Dawson's 17,000.
33. Pierre Berton, *The Joy of Writing: A Guide for Writers, Disguised as a Literary Memoir* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2003), 155, 159.
34. Pierre Berton, *The Golden Trail: The Story of the Klondike Rush*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1954, 1974), 97, 101.
35. Berton, *The Golden Trail*, 109. Another source showing the Klondike rush dissipating in spring 1898 was the 1898 British Columbia Board of Trade Report, which on page 27 stated that Klondike traffic after April was "almost nil."
36. The argument in this paragraph and the three paragraphs following about Berton's *Golden Trail* was used previously almost verbatim in a book review of Berton's *Klondike* on Amazon's website. Then, as now, the words are solely the work of this writer.
37. Pierre Berton, *The Klondike Fever: The Life and Death of the Last Great Rush* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), 300.
38. Berton, *The Klondike Fever*, 300.

39. *The Canadian Guide Book, 1899* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1899), 306–309. The Victoria *Daily Colonist* of September 25, 1898, estimated Victoria's population at 30,000, and the Vancouver *Daily Province* in their 1898 souvenir edition "Vancouver, the Queen City of the Wonderful West," declared their city's population to be "over 30,000."
40. Berton, *The Klondike Fever*, 369.
41. Berton, *The Klondike Fever*, 412.
42. A.B. McKillop, *Pierre Berton, A Biography* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2008), 302–307, 324.
43. Yukon Bureau of Statistics, "Yukon Census Historical Population 1901–2016," accessed March 19, 2023, https://yukon.ca/sites/yukon.ca/files/ybs/fin-yukon-census-historical-population-1901-2016.pdf.
44. Michael Gates, "History Hunter: The Dawson City Festival," *Yukon News*, July 10, 2022, https://www.yukon-news.com/opinion/history-hunter-the-dawson-city-festival-7003423.
45. "Special Klondike Issue," *North*, Vol 9, No. 3, May-June 1962, a bi-monthly publication of the Northern Administration Branch, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, Ottawa, 22.
46. "Special Klondike Issue," *North*, 22.
47. Klondike Visitors Association brochure, c. 1962, author's collection.
48. Northern promotional brochure, c. 1960s, author's collection.
49. Hal Guest, "Dawson City, San Francisco of the North, or Boomtown in a Bog: A Literature Review," National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Manuscript Report #241, 1978, 73.
50. Margaret Archibald, "Grubstake to Grocery Store, Supplying the Klondike, 1897–1907," Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History 26, Ottawa, 1981, 38, 63.
51. Kenneth Coates, *Canada's Colonies: A History of the Yukon and Northwest Territories* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1985), 7.
52. Michael Gates, *Hollywood in the Klondike*, 56, 58.

The Northern Review
Exploring human experience in the North

Commentary

George Black and the Wuksonovich Trial: Finding the Truth in History

Michael Gates[1] and Kathy Jones-Gates[2]

Abstract: Inaccurate historical details often become embedded in the narrative because of frequent repetition. Such was the case with a murder trial that involved prominent Yukon lawyer George Black in 1922. This is a cautionary note for those gathering historical accounts to dig deep and evaluate the content carefully, or risk perpetuating historical myths.

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