

Policing the Boom Town: The Mounted Police as a Social Force in the Klondike

WILLIAM R. MORRISON

Canada is not a country which is overburdened with colourful legends—we seem such grey people, so law-abiding and accepting of authority. Teachers and historians plaintively insist that Canadian history is *not* boring, pointing for proof to our heroes and heroines: William Lyon Mackenzie and Louis-Joseph Papineau (failed agitators), fur traders (capitalists), the Mounted Police (authority figures), Frederick Banting (a doctor who rose above his talents)—not a free spirit in the lot. Happily, however, there is the Klondike gold rush of 1897-99, and our chroniclers have made the most of it. The gold rush, one of the few episodes in Canadian history which is known around the world, was so turbulent and so colourful that it hardly seems Canadian. Indeed, the United States has tended to absorb it into its own frontier experience,¹ and Yukon officials over the decades have become used to receiving mail addressed to “Dawson City, Alaska.”² The city of Edmonton has also found it worthwhile to parasitize the Yukon’s history; the city’s annual celebration is called “Klondike Days.”³

The gold rush, boisterous though it was, was nonetheless too tame for the popularizers, who for more than 90 years have been embellishing the whoop-it-up myth of Dawson City and the goldfields. It was not enough that the rush saw one of the most rapid population growths in the country’s history—from 1,000 to nearly 40,000 non-Native Yukoners in the space of two years, or that there was fabulous wealth in the creeks—one 500 foot claim produced \$1.5 million, in a day when gold was worth \$20 an ounce.

Not content with this, the popularizers—Robert Service was the worst offender—have transformed the Klondike into a shoot-em-up frontier, with gun-toting, hard-drinking miners consorting with gaudy dance-hall girls in the saloons; lonely men striking it rich on the creeks, coming to town, slamming down a poke filled with gold dust on the bar, buying drinks for the house, a hot bath (one hopes), and then a night with a painted lady. Even Parks Canada has been led astray by the myth. It has spent much time and money studying the history and architecture of “Ruby’s Place,” a Dawson brothel.

Perhaps the federal government considers a brothel the symbol of the gold rush, more so than, say, of Winnipeg, a city where red-light houses were plentiful enough in 1900. Since every Canadian city of any size had brothels at that time, the only excuse for commemorating Dawson's must be to inject more colour and general razzmatazz into its history.⁴ This is harmless, though frivolous; more offensive to the historian, however, is that the emphasis on the carnival aspects of the gold rush obscures important questions about its significance to the history of the Yukon and Canada.

Much of the gold rush myth is true, of course, which is why it has taken strong roots in popular mythology. The painted ladies, the gold dust, the hard drinking, striking it rich, the loneliness of the creeks—all are more-or-less based on fact, and are ably chronicled in the works of Pierre Berton, Jack London, and others.

Where the image goes wrong is in its picture of violence. Yukon gold rush mythology, like so much of Canadian culture, has been influenced by American models, in this case the tradition of frontier violence. There seems to be some need in popular consciousness for a clash between good and evil, law and lawlessness, that must be settled by the gun. It is unthinkable to purveyors of the whoop-it-up school of history that frontier disputes might be settled by a magistrate, or that an elementary school teacher could be as good a symbol of Dawson City as a dancehall girl.

Robert Service, "the Canadian Kipling", was the original, and the most successful purveyor of gold rush mythology to the world. His poetry is worth reading because, like much second and third-rate literature, it is in some ways a better guide to contemporary public taste and beliefs than more lasting works. Service had his creative finger firmly on the pulse of the public perception of the gold rush, and his verses are full of the standard colourful elements: Mounties, miners, whores, gold, dogs, the northern lights. He presumably knew the facts of the rush, but he chose to glamorize and distort it. A good example is one of his best-known poems, "The Shooting of Dan McGrew," from *Songs of a Sourdough*, his first book, published in 1907 when he was still living in the Yukon. Here is the climax:

Then I ducked my head, and the lights went out, and two
guns blazed in the dark;

And a woman screamed, and the lights went up, and two
men lay stiff and stark;

Pitched on his head, and pumped full of lead, was
Dangerous Dan McGrew,

While the man from the creeks lay clutched to the
breast of the lady that's known as Lou.

What is wrong with this picture, of course, is that although there were plenty of men who ended up “pitched on their head” in Dawson saloons, it was not from being “pumped full of lead”—the law against carrying handguns was strictly enforced. There were very few murders in the Yukon Territory during the gold rush, and apparently none took place in a saloon—so much for Dangerous Dan McGrew.⁵ But presumably a poem in which the man from the creeks punched Dan McGrew in the nose and was arrested by an unarmed constable and sentenced to ten days on the police woodpile was not likely to sell.

The truth about the gold rush was that it was remarkably free of violent crime, mostly due to the authoritarian presence of the police and the almost complete absence of any effective grass-roots frontier democracy in the Yukon, once the police had arrived to nip it in the bud.⁶ The transformation of the territory from a small, compact, self-regulating community to a large, diverse community largely subordinate to a distant metropolitan power was the basic political fact of the gold rush. The agent of this transformation was the North-West Mounted Police.

The N.W.M.P. was never intended to be a police force in the ordinary domestic sense, and certainly it was not designed to police a large urban centre like Dawson City. Rather, it was a semi-military, semi-political body whose main role, on its formation in 1873, was to act as the agent of the central government’s National Policy. The N.W.M.P. was the Canadian equivalent of the forces of imperialism—the British army, the Royal Irish Constabulary, and the various colonial police forces—which brought British law and civil administration to the far-flung corners of the Empire. Ottawa invented the force to establish and maintain Canadian sovereignty over the Prairie west and later over the North.⁷

It is significant that the Klondike gold rush took place at the beginning of one of the most ebullient periods of Canadian nationalism—the period of growth and prosperity that coincided with the administration of Sir Wilfred Laurier. Yet the assertive self-confidence of this era, as reflected by the Mounted Police, was not purely Canadian, but also reflected the British Imperial spirit. Though the N.W.M.P. was the servant of Ottawa and of Canadian policy, the influence of British models was very strong in the force. Most of its officers in 1898 belonged to the Anglo-Saxon elite of eastern Canada (or were French-Canadians who held the same beliefs); many had been educated at the Royal Military College, had served in the militia or in one or both of the Riel Rebellions.

It was these officers—men like Sam Steele,⁸ who commanded the police in the Yukon during the height of the gold rush—who set the tone for the relations between the force and Yukon society. Steele and his colleagues typified the British and anglo-Canadian middle and upper middle class attitude towards American democracy. In particular, they were appalled by the American ideal of frontier democracy which was described and lauded by the historian Frederick Jackson Turner. The idea that a boisterous frontier society could or ought to be the wellspring of democratic political and social institutions was anathema to them. Rather, they wanted Yukon society, as they had earlier wanted the prairies, to become

orderly and hierarchical; not a lawless frontier democracy but a place where powerful institutions and a responsible and paternalistic upper class would ensure true liberty and justice . . . the Upper Canadian Tory tradition in its purest form.⁹

Steele's autobiography,¹⁰ fascinating because it is so ingenuous and self-revealing, is one of the quintessential expressions of this philosophy in action.

For the police, the watchword of the ideal frontier society was "orderliness." Communities on the Canadian frontier were to be orderly, peaceful, and free of violent crime. There must be no hint of vigilantism, nor should any legal or political impulse arising from the population be tolerated. In the Yukon, this impulse towards order was strengthened by the horrible example of Skagway, just across the international boundary.

Now that the vigorous British Canadian attitudes expressed by Steele and men like him have become unfashionable in this country, it may be well to remember that the darker side of U.S. frontier democracy which they feared was real enough. A recent study of the California gold rush points out the remarkable fact that in the four year period 1849-53, there were over 200 lynchings in California.¹¹ California in 1850 had ten times the population of the Yukon in 1898, but there was never a lynching in the Klondike gold fields; indeed, after the arrival of the police, such an event there was simply unthinkable. Closer at hand was the disorder in Skagway, a community which was ruled for a time by Soapy Smith, a thug who was vanquished not by officers of the law, but by a lone vigilante. After Smith's death, other vigilantes nearly succeeded in lynching all his followers, including the town sheriff.

Other accounts of American mining communities have also shown that the fear of disorder expressed by the police was well-

founded. A study of the eastern California mining town of Bodie in the late 1870s counted 31 murders in six years among a population which never exceeded 5,000, a rate which was 20 times that of contemporary Boston, perhaps 50 times that of Dawson,¹² and nearly four times that for Miami in 1980.¹³ On the other hand, Bodie's rate of robbery and theft was dramatically lower than that of modern cities—three per cent of Miami's—possibly because nearly all the community's male citizens carried firearms, making larceny risky.¹⁴

The first miners had entered the Yukon River valley in the late 1870s, and had found gold in quantities sufficient to attract others; by 1895 there were between 500 and 1,000 men and a few women working in the region, of whom about half wintered there.¹⁵ Because there were no Canadian officials resident in the Yukon until 1894, when the first N.W.M.P. officers arrived there, the miners, over half of whom were Americans, had in the previous decade established their own law, based on the traditions of the U.S. mining camps. The essential feature of their system was the miners' meeting, which dispensed civil as well as criminal law in accordance with the wishes of the local community.¹⁶ At first, these worked well; William Ogilvie said they were "fairly just, inexpensive, quick in results, and promptly executed. Can we claim all this for our more elaborate judicial machinery?"¹⁷ What made them work was the small size and the homogeneity of the mining community; the California camps had regulated themselves successfully before they grew too big and the professional criminals arrived in them. But by the time the police suppressed them, they had become corrupt and were in the process of collapsing. To the police, however, it would not have mattered if the miners' meetings had displayed the wisdom of Solon; they were anathema because they reflected the rule of men rather than of law, particularly the rule of frontiersmen rather than the central authority. One of the first priorities of the police was to get rid of them.

The task of stamping out frontier democracy in the Yukon was given added urgency by the perceived threat of American "manifest destiny" which reached its jingoistic peak in 1898, the year of the Spanish-American war and the climactic year of the gold rush. Controlling the miners' meeting proved surprisingly easy for the police, considering that there were nearly 1,000 miners in the region by 1895, and the police numbered only 20.¹⁸ It was done by a show of force. Two owners of a claim had leased it to a third man, who had defaulted on the payments to his workers and left the country. The workers appealed to a miners' meeting, which seized the claim, sold

it to a fourth man and gave the proceeds to the workers. Because this procedure was contrary to Canadian civil law, the original owners appealed to the police, who sent twelve armed men to the claim, gave it to the owners, and told the miners that such a thing must not happen again. That was the end of the miners' meeting.¹⁹

Yet there is another level to this than the merely episodic, nor is it sufficient simply to echo the distinctions made by the police and others between the peace, order, and good government of Dawson and the Sodom of Skagway.²⁰ For there were deep similarities between the Canadian and the American mining frontiers. In the mining camps of both countries there was an irresistible impulse for disorder to be transformed into order. The four year period in California in which there were 200 lynchings was followed by a similar period in which there were only 100, then a further four years in which there were fewer than 20.²¹ Frontier law in California, as in the Yukon, was replaced by formal law. In Canada, as in the United States, the regularization of law was part of what Christopher Lasch has called the "great bourgeois revolution" of the 19th century; the "introduction of an impersonal and autonomous 'rule of law' into all areas of national life [that] helped define a single standard of citizenship—social, economic, and political—which rests at the foundation of modern society."²² The reason why the Yukon, and other Canadian frontiers, did not pass through a lynching stage on the way to stability is that unlike California, where the local law enforcement officers were either locally elected or dependent on local support, the authority of the N.W.M.P. rested on the political power of the central government and the moral authority of the entire Empire.

Thus there was in American mining communities, as in Canadian, a strong impulse towards law and order. If Lasch is correct, the difference between the experience of the two countries in this respect was not that America was in some way "lawless" and Canada a "law-abiding" country. There is a case to be made for this assertion, but to carry it too far is to accept what Desmond Morton has called "one of those self-congratulatory myths which bind a nation together."²³ Rather, it was that in one country the impetus towards formal law came from the community, and was therefore delayed until the community reached a certain stage of maturity in which the bourgeois element could make its strength felt. This was to be expected in a country which had a strong distrust of central authority. In Canada, on the other hand, the law was imposed from outside the community, and the bourgeois element was in control from the moment representatives of the government arrived on the scene.

The manner in which the N.W.M.P. policed and regulated this boom town community was as significant to its development as its motive for doing so. It was a mixture of leniency, severity, and improvisation, governed overall by a determination to maintain public order and to foil the menace of American manifest destiny. The improvisation arose from the unique conditions in the Yukon, which compelled the police in some instances literally to invent law to meet challenges to public order.

Two well-known examples illustrate this point. The first occurred in the spring of 1898, when thousands of men camped on the shores of Lake Bennett and Lake Lindeman were preparing to drift downriver to Dawson in jerry-built boats. When ten men were drowned going through Miles Canyon, Sam Steele began a system of registration for the boats and regulations for navigating the canyon: women must walk around the canyon, pilots were to be hired, and so forth. In his autobiography Steele proudly quoted his speech made on that occasion:

There are many of your countrymen [Americans] who have said that the Mounted Police make the laws as they go along, and I am going to do so now for your own good, therefore the directions that I shall give shall be carried out strictly, and they are these . . .²⁴

No one objected, at least not successfully, and there were no more drownings. The other example concerned shortages of food in Dawson City. Fearing that destitution would lead to public disorder, Inspector Charles Constantine, the first officer to command the police in the Yukon, announced in the first autumn of the gold rush that no one would be permitted into the Territory without satisfying the police that he had sufficient provisions or cash to see him over the winter, an order that Steele reissued in 1898. Like the navigation regulations, this policy was entirely ad hoc and illegal, as the Department of Justice eventually decreed, after the necessity for it had passed.²⁵ It is unthinkable that the use of regulations of this kind concerning food as a means of social control would have been successful, or even attempted, in an American mining community.

In Dawson, and in the smaller communities such as Hunker, Dominion Creek, and other mining camps, the police shaped the law with an eye to the avoidance of public disorder and the repression of what they called "American tendencies" among the population. The two were connected, for the police believed that disorder was an American trait, and that the Yukon was being flooded by riff-raff from the United States. Charles Constantine reported in 1897 that "a

considerable number of the people coming in from the [Puget] Sound cities appear to be the sweepings of the slums and the result of a general jail delivery."²⁶ What happened to Americans who bragged and blustered before the police is demonstrated in a perhaps apocryphal story told by Pierre Berton:

One American gambler, so the story goes, who came up before Steele was contemptuous when the policeman fined him fifty dollars. "Fifty dollars—is that all? I've got that in my vest pocket," he said. Whereupon the superintendent added: "... and sixty days on the woodpile. Have you got that in your pocket?"²⁷

It did not pay to scoff at the Queen's law in the Yukon, particularly if one was a Yankee.

The principle of preventing public disorder was carried a step further when the police made a distinction between crimes to be tolerated and those deserving of punishment. What would nowadays be called victimless crimes or crimes of social control were often tolerated. Prostitution, which was illegal, was condoned by the police as long as the gold rush lasted, despite pressure from some of the middle class element in Dawson to have it stamped out. Gambling was similarly permitted, so long as it was orderly. The officer commanding the police in Dawson in 1901 wrote that the policy towards gamblers and prostitutes was to ignore them unless they "openly infringe the laws."²⁸ By this was meant not practising their trade, which was already illegal, but making nuisances of themselves and disturbing public order. In the Yukon, as in boom town communities on the Prairies, the "social evil" was viewed as inevitable, and perhaps as beneficial, since it diverted energies that might otherwise be channelled into more disruptive activities.²⁹

On the other hand, crimes involving theft, violence, or disturbance of public order were generally severely punished; there were, for instance, a great many prosecutions for public drunkenness, assault, and larceny, and the penalties could be severe. The records of the Dawson jail show many cases in which men were sentenced to from two to seven years for simple theft—and they often served every day of their sentences (the longer sentences were served in provincial penitentiaries, generally in B.C.). One man served a year at hard labour for stealing \$10 worth of gold dust. All the murders that occurred during the gold rush period were solved quickly. It was not a good country for fugitives; those who lacked the Native peoples' survival skills found it impossible to live off the land, and there were only a few practical means of exit from the Territory, all of which

were closely guarded—a significant contrast to American frontier communities. And, as the English mining promoter A.N.C. Treadgold put it, the police were “rapid, simple, severe in their methods.”³⁰ Recalcitrant prisoners were put in irons and fed bread and water until they learned to behave themselves, and most put in long hours on the enormous woodpile behind the police barracks. “That woodpile” wrote Steele, “was the talk of the town, and kept 50 or more of the toughs of Dawson busy every day.”³¹

Through an examination of statistics issued by the federal government, it is possible to offer a closer analysis of law enforcement in the Yukon boom towns. As might be expected, the Yukon had a higher crime rate than the rest of the country. The first year for which good figures for the Territory are available is 1900, a year after the rush ended and people began to leave. But even then the crime rate in the Yukon was three and a half times the national average.³²

Crime Rates in Canadian Provinces and Territories

Convictions per 10,000 population

<i>Province</i>	1900	1901
Prince Edward Island	2.6	1.6
New Brunswick	4.2	3.8
Nova Scotia	7.1	7.2
Manitoba	11.2	7.9
Quebec	9.1	9.6
Ontario	12.7	12.7
N.W.T. (incl. Sask and Alta)	11.7	13.0
British Columbia	29.4	25.6
Yukon	35.2	14.7
Canada	10.9	10.5

Statistics for the actual gold rush period of 1897-99 are unreliable (they are not printed in the Sessional Papers in usable form), but based on a population of 30,000 in late 1898 and the number of convictions for that year, the crime rate for 1898-99 would be about twice what it was in 1900, or 70 per 10,000 of population.

There are two things to note about these data. First is the high figure for the Yukon in 1900, though it is not much higher than the figure for British Columbia. Second is the very much lower figure for 1901. The government report attributed this decrease to the fact that

the "reign of law there is fairly well established." In fact the reign of law was well established by 1896; the decrease was due to the large loss of population after 1899, particularly those who had come north to "mine the miners," and in doing so were responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime.

These figures are about what might be expected. More surprising are the results which emerge when the statistics for crimes are broken down by individual offenses, and the number of people charged and convicted is studied. The basic fact is that although the Yukon had the highest crime rate in Canada during the gold rush, as measured by the number of convictions for criminal offenses per capita, it had at the same time the lowest rate in the country for criminal convictions, expressed as the percentage of people charged with offenses who were actually convicted. Examples of charges and convictions arising out of various crimes committed in 1900 reveal an unexpected pattern:³³

Charges and convictions

	<i>Ont</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>NWT</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
Larceny					
Charges	2314	222	128	254	160
Charges per 10,000 population	106	87	140	143	593
Percent convicted	70	86	57	68	45
	<i>Ont</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>NWT</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
Assault and Battery					
Charges	161	7	82	96	18
Charges per 10,000 population	7.8	2.7	52	54	66
Percent convicted	60	86	33	76	11
	<i>Ont</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>NWT</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
Obstructing a Peace Officer					
Charges	101	6	9	14	4
Charges per 10,000 population	4.6	2.6	5.7	7.9	14.8
Percent convicted	60	83	100	93	25

Charges and convictions continued

	<i>Ont</i>	<i>Man</i>	<i>NWT</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Yukon</i>
Fraud and Conspiracy to Defraud					
Charges	114	9	9	na	23
Charges per 10,000 population	5.2	3.5	5.7	na	85
Percent convicted	61	78	44	na	35

Four kinds of crime common in the Yukon have been chosen here, two of a violent and two of a non-violent nature. All the other serious crimes listed in the statistics show a similar pattern.³⁴

There are several conclusions to be drawn from these statistics about the nature of policing in the gold rush boom town communities. In the first place, it was to be expected that the Yukon in 1900, a frontier society just a year or two past its greatest days of growth and turbulence, would have a crime rate significantly higher than other parts of Canada. But why should the conviction rate in the Yukon be so much lower than elsewhere in Canada? Since many cases, particularly less serious offenses, were tried before a stipendiary magistrate, and since during the rush the magistrates were N.W.M.P. officers, the police acted on many occasions as arresting officers, judge, and jury—an arrangement which might be expected to produce a very high rate of conviction.

Nor was it a matter, in instances where the accused were tried before a civilian judge, of conflict between police and courts leading to a lenient judge letting criminals off out of hostility to the police. The N.W.M.P. maintained cordial relations with the Dawson bench; Sam Steele said that he had “great support from Judge Dugas, who made Dawson a hot place for evildoers.”³⁵ Nor did the police take bribes.

Another possibility is incompetent police work leading to charges being thrown out of court. Since many members of the N.W.M.P. who served in the Yukon during the gold rush had been recruited in a hurry and sent north with a minimum of training, the calibre of the men there was often not up to the force’s regular standard. There were many derelictions of duty among the police—particularly sins of the flesh, the records of which fill the police files for that era. But this was not an age when authority needed to be careful of an accused’s civil rights lest their case founder on constitutional objections, and if a constable arrested someone on some ill-founded

grounds, there was no need for the case to go to court; the commanding officer could simply not proceed with it. One contributing factor to the low conviction rate was the high transiency rate of the Yukon's population. Some cases must have been dismissed when the witnesses left the Territory, but since trials generally occurred soon after charges were laid, this could not have been the main reason.

The most reasonable explanation for the fact that the conviction rate for those accused of assault and battery in the Yukon was only 11%, as against 60% in Ontario, or for larceny 45% as compared to 70%, is that the police used criminal charges as a means of controlling what they considered the undesirable element of society through a kind of legal harassment. One technique the police used to keep public order was to arrest people they considered bad characters and tell them to leave the Territory, a practice known as giving out a "blue ticket." This was of course illegal, but people seemed to have changed their ways or obeyed the command to pack up and leave. An example of the process, which incidentally casts light on the social and political attitudes of the police, and the state of free speech in Dawson, is given by Steele:

Some of the people objected to Royalty in general, did not like monarchs, and would speak slightly of ours. One of those was an actor in the theatres in Dawson, and when his conduct was reported by the sergeant he was given an opportunity to say he would sin no more or take his ticket for the outside. This had the desired effect.¹⁶

The fact that the per capita rate of charges laid for fraud was sixteen times greater in the Yukon than in Ontario, yet the conviction rate for fraud only half can reflect only one thing: the process by which police arrested bunko artists and confidence men and gave them 24 hours to leave the Yukon, then had the charges dismissed when they agreed to do so, or perhaps mend their ways.

The irony of this policy, which never seems to have occurred to the authorities in the Yukon, was that there was a degree of similarity between miners' meetings, Soapy Smith's Skagway, and Dawson City controlled by the N.W.M.P. In all three cases there is evidence of the rule of men rather than of law; it was much less marked in the case of Dawson, but it comes out clearly in the matters of social disorder and control. Sometimes the law was simply what the police said it was.

The question of why the population of the Yukon did not resist the authority of the police is easily answered: indeed, given the history of the Canadian attitude towards central authority, it need hardly be asked. Not only the police, but the entire power structure of the

Territory—the merchants, the bankers, the professionals, the teachers, the civil servants—all wanted a peaceful and stable community. So did most of the miners, particularly the successful ones, the Americans among them included, since the security of property which the police guaranteed was to their advantage as well. The miners' meeting had guaranteed this security before the arrival of the police, but it could not have done so in the large, turbulent society of the gold rush. The police leaned heavily on the criminal element of society, and during Dawson's most turbulent period they had the 200 well-armed men of the Yukon Field Force, based nearby at Fort Selkirk, to back them up in case of trouble. The American mining communities in the south eventually became stable; the police took the Yukon through to this stage without the intervening period of disorder.

The evidence also lends empirical support to some of the theories about the administration of law in the Yukon advanced by Thomas Stone, who argues that bringing law and order to the Yukon was not the only reason the government sent the Mounted Police north. Since the police fulfilled the "symbolic function of publicly affirming social ideals and dominant norms" as well as enforcing the law, they had the dual purpose of law enforcement and of "symbolizing class dominance" in the Yukon.³⁷ The harassment by means of a blizzard of criminal charges of people who transgressed the quasi-legal standards set by the police shows that simple law enforcement was not their only mission. Certainly the incident in which the actor, presumably a Yankee, was told to stop denigrating the Queen or leave the country, says a good deal about how the police perceived their role, and about official class attitudes as well.

Such a theory fits well with the nature of police operations in the Yukon. Officers of the police were accustomed to inventing law to fit circumstances and interpreting it arbitrarily as conditions warranted; as Steele said, "we were not tied down by foolish precedent, the situation was before us and had to be faced."³⁸ This interpretation casts a good deal of light on the mechanism by which the police were able to enforce their idea of social order in the Yukon, and reinforces even more the picture of the remarkably authoritarian, paternalistic, and sometimes arbitrary way in which the central government, through the police, controlled and manipulated the boom town society that existed in the Yukon at the turn of this century.

William R. Morrison is Professor of History and Director of the Centre for Northern Studies at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay.

NOTES

- ¹ There is a family entertainment park near San Francisco called "Great America," where the Yukon is included as one of five "historic American areas."
- ² In the file of letters to the Yukon government during the first World War asking for information about employment possibilities in the Territory, nearly half are so addressed. Sometimes the officials irritably suggested that the correspondent consult an atlas. Yukon Territorial Archives, YRG 1, Series 2, f. 3204-3.
- ³ Edmonton's tenuous connection with the gold rush stems from the attempt of civic boosters in 1898 to tout the town as the starting point for an "all-Canadian route" to the Klondike.
- ⁴ Ironically, Parks Canada's research turned up evidence that Ruby's Place was merely a boarding house during the gold rush, and only later became a brothel.
- ⁵ It is difficult to be exact about the numbers, but it seems that there were only three cases of robbery-murder during 1897-99, not many for a turbulent frontier of nearly 40,000 people. The most notorious was an incident in which three miners were murdered by Indian youths, who were convicted and hanged. There were also a number of killings which could be called "crimes of passion."
- ⁶ On the suppression of frontier democracy, see W.R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925* (Vancouver, 1985) and Thomas Stone, *Miner's Justice: Migration, Law and Order on the Alaska-Yukon Frontier, 1873-1904* (New York, 1988).
- ⁷ On the genesis of the force, see R.C. Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement, 1873-1905*, (Toronto, 1976).
- ⁸ Sir Samuel Benfield Steele, 1849-1919, had a model imperial military career. He served in the Fenian troubles in 1866, the Red River Rebellion of 1870, joined the Mounted Police on its formation in 1873, served in the Boer War and the South African Constabulary, and was a major-general in World War I.
- ⁹ R.C. Macleod, "Canadianizing the West: The North-West Mounted Police as Agents of the National Policy, 1873-1905," in R.D. Francis and H. Palmer, eds., *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton, 1985).
- ¹⁰ S.B. Steele, *Forty Years in Canada* (London, 1915).
- ¹¹ David A. Johnson, "Vigilance and the Law: The Moral Authority of Popular Justice in the Far West," *American Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 5, Winter 1981.
- ¹² This is only a rough estimate, based on three murders in the Yukon, and a population of 25,000. The American statistics are based on an FBI "conversion factor" which is difficult to apply to the Yukon.
- ¹³ Roger D. McGrath, *Gunfighters, Highwaymen and Vigilantes: Violence on the Frontier* (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 253-254.
- ¹⁴ McGrath, p. 250.
- ¹⁵ For the early history of mining in the region, see Allen A. Wright, *Prelude to Bonanza* (Sidney, B.C., 1976), and William Ogilvie, *Early Days on the Yukon* (Ottawa, 1913).
- ¹⁶ On the miners' meeting, see Thomas Stone, *Miners' Justice*.
- ¹⁷ Ogilvie, pp. 245-246.

- ¹⁸ This ratio of police to population, better than one in 50, is of course considerably higher than that of a modern small city. Today in Brandon, Manitoba, for example, there are 50 uniformed police for a population of 40,000 or one in 800. But the two places are not comparable; in the Yukon the police were the sole representative of authority in a population with a preponderance of single men. Furthermore, they were doing more than just enforcing the law; they were changing the social and legal structure of an entire community.
- ¹⁹ The episode is described in M.H.E. Hayne, p. 124.
- ²⁰ The best example of the distinction is in Harwood Steele's *Policing the Arctic* (London, 1936), p. 22, where he describes the Chilkoot Pass as the "gates of Paradise."
- ²¹ David A. Johnson, "Vigilance and the Law."
- ²² David A. Johnson, quoting from Christopher Lasch, "The Origins of the Asylum," in *The World of Nations* (New York, 1973), pp. 3-17 and 313-316.
- ²³ Desmond Morton, "Cavalry or Police: Keeping the Peace on Two Adjacent Frontiers, 1870-1900," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 12 no. 2, Spring 1977.
- ²⁴ S.B. Steele, p. 311.
- ²⁵ National Archives of Canada, R.C.M.P. Paper, RG 18, A-1, Comptroller's Correspondence, vol. 159.
- ²⁶ N.W.M.P. *Report, 1897* (Ottawa, 1898), p. 309
- ²⁷ Pierre Berton, *Klondike Fever*, (New York, 1958), p. 308.
- ²⁸ Superintendent Z.T. Wood, quoted in Morrison, p. 45.
- ²⁹ Morrison, pp. 45-46.
- ³⁰ A.N.C. Treadgold, *Gold Fields of the Klondike* (London, 1899), p. 69.
- ³¹ S.B. Steele, p. 328. The Mounted Police and the government used 1,000 cords a year, equal to a pile of wood 4 feet high, 4 feet wide, and a mile and a half long.
- ³² The statistics which follow are taken from "Criminal Statistics," issued annually by the federal government, generally as *Sessional Paper* no. 7.
- ³³ These figures are also taken from "Criminal Statistics." For reasons of brevity, only the provinces and territories from Ontario west have been included. The figures for Quebec are lower than for Ontario, and for the Maritime provinces lower still.
- ³⁴ Because of the way the statistics are presented, it is not possible to make a similar comparison for lesser offenses, such as infractions of municipal bylaws—the number of convictions is given, but not the number of charges. The grand totals for Canada, which include these offenses, show that taking them into consideration as well, the Yukon still has the lowest rate of conviction, closely followed by the N.W.T.
- ³⁵ S.B. Steele, p. 323.
- ³⁶ S.B. Steele, p. 327.
- ³⁷ T. Stone, "The Mounties as Vigilantes: Perceptions of Community and the Transformation of Law in the Yukon, 1885-1897," *Law and Society Review*, vol. 14, no. 1 (Fall, 1979).
- ³⁸ S.B. Steele, p. 329.