

The Klondike Gold Rush in World History: Putting the Stampede in Perspective

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When I returned to the Yukon a few years ago, I found myself engaged in a fascinating discussion with a public historian. "Why," I was asked, "were outsiders so interested in the Klondike Gold Rush?" What an odd question, it seemed to me, particularly coming from an individual living in a region that relied on tourist revenue from ersatz, latter-day "stampedeers" to support the summertime economy and whose work focussed almost exclusively on Klondike-era projects. The Klondike is famous—world-famous—and is just about the only event in Canadian history that is known around the world. The Klondike Gold Rush was big, dramatic, chaotic—the stuff of legends, mythology, old-fashioned northern yarns, and more than a little exaggeration. Few events in the last hundred years have all the elements, from exotic location, physical danger, the promise of great personal reward, and a certain touch of group madness, necessary to attract the attention of adventurers, poets, novelists, film-makers, tourist promoters, and even a few academics.

But understood from a Yukon perspective, the historian's question made sense. Many Yukoners have had their fill of Klondike lore. Reciting Robert Service's poetry never appealed much to me and my classmates when I was growing up in the Yukon. And the constant parade of "Gay 90s" costumes during the summer tourist season and the Whitehorse Sourdough Rendezvous always seemed put-on and repetitive. What is more, Yukoners know only too well the substantial gap between the rhetoric and fantasy of the Klondike stampede and the reality of the experiences of the First Nations, would-be miners and the northern environment in the wake of the "last great Gold Rush." For many Yukoners, I suspect, the Klondike Gold Rush

is properly a subject of local and regional history—the source of much of the territory's international reputation but also the origins of many of the social and political dynamics that still govern life in the region. If their impressions of the event are close to my understandings, generated during the 1960s and 1970s, the Klondike Gold Rush is an overblown, overhyped, exaggerated and fanciful episode in Yukon history, part of a far more complex tapestry of social and economic relations that the preoccupation with the stampede has overshadowed.

While recent scholarship has done a great deal to illuminate the internal dynamic of the Klondike Gold Rush and related events, scholars have, I think, given comparatively little thought to that much broader question posed by the Yukon historian. Why are people so interested in the Klondike Gold Rush? Why is the stampede to the upper Yukon River Basin one of the most widely known events in Canadian history? What place does the Klondike Gold Rush have in world history? Other papers address aspects of these questions and examine the response in various regions and countries to the Klondike sensation. I would like to consider these matters in a very general context, and to explore the place of the Klondike Gold Rush in world history. By this, I do not mean the degree to which the Klondike Gold Rush figures in historical analyses in various countries, for even Canadian historians have paid but passing attention to this regionally, and nationally, important event. Rather, the goal is to consider the influences—social, economic, and cultural—that drew people to the Klondike from around the world, that pushed the first prospectors northward toward the Yukon, that so fascinated generations of armchair stampedeers that they so enthusiastically purchased the many books spawned by the gold rush, and that ensured that this comparatively transient event has lived on in popular culture and folk memory.

Nineteenth-century gold rush towns in New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, now developed as Dawson-like attractions, confirm the global reach of both the Klondike phenomenon and the Klondike mystique. In Pilgrim's Rest, South Africa, a well-preserved gold mining town dating from the 1870s, references abound to local prospectors who, having worked through the diggings by the early 1880s, joined the rush to the Klondike a decade and a half later. Similarly, miners involved in the Otago gold fields on the South Island of New Zealand in the 1860s headed off for the Klondike when the returns fell off. At Skipper's Canyon, just outside of Queenstown, New Zealand, as at Pilgrim's Rest and Ballarat in Australia, promotional literature and local folk culture made explicit links between the lesser-known gold rush centres and the most famous stampede of all. Both in the late 19th

century and one hundred years later, the Klondike Gold Rush was, and is, an event of global significance.

The world-wide impact of the Klondike discovery is revealed in the lives of prospectors, entrepreneurs and camp followers the world over. From the time of the event itself, through to the present, observers¹ have been impressed with the magnetic power of the Klondike fields and the willingness of people from many countries and regions to join the exodus to the Yukon.² A recently established World Wide Web database (Filson's Pan for Gold Data Base) provides access to a variety of demographic and administrative records, school attendance lists, hospital materials, and the list of the dead from the sinking of the *Princess Sophia*. A very unscientific survey of these records—looking simply for “bits” that identify individuals by their nationality—generated the following results: 33 from New Zealand, 213 from Australia, 3 from South Africa, 144 from England, 35 from Scotland, 31 from Germany and 35 from France. This sample provides no evidence of the actual geographic diversity of the stampede, but does support the notion that the Gold Rush drew people from around the globe. Permit just one detailed example, selected from the dozens available, that illustrates the world-wide reach and power of the Klondike mystique.

William Nicholl was like many who joined the rush to the Yukon. He was mining in 1897, working in a newly developed field that held reasonable, if not exceptional promise. Domestic turmoil, capped by his wife's desertion of himself and his sons, seemed to have fed a wanderlust that was long a part of the man's approach to life. Although local developments were proceeding well and the value of local mining shares was sky-rocketing, William was enticed by the news. It was July 1897, and, as he later recalled,:

Everyone seemed to be Klondike mad with excitement, and the newspapers were looked for eagerly to get the latest news from the field and the number of tons of gold already produced and the number of boats that had been sent down the Yukon from Dawson City laden with gold and also the . . . gulches found and the number of tons of gold taken from the Discovery Claim. I amongst the rest was getting a bit excited, and it only wanted a few more good reports to start me going, the excitement was just about up to fever heat.

The news kept getting better and better—new strikes, more gold, and the possibility of joining the rush to the Klondike. Finally, “another flourishing report came from the Klondike” and Nicholl could restrain himself no more.

The problem, and it was a logistical problem, was that William Nicholl was living at Waihi, on the east coast of New Zealand's North Island. He was thousands of miles away from North America, to say nothing of still further away from the Yukon. Not deterred, Nicholl travelled to Auckland

where he quickly boarded a boat to Wellington. From there, he booked passage on a ship heading to Vancouver. He recorded that he was already

figuring on getting my outfit over the Chilkoot and get down to Lake Bennett and build my boat and be ready to float off with the breaking up of the ice. I had to stay in Wellington a week to await a boat to Vancouver and I thought it the longest week I had ever spent. I was Klondike mad sure enough.³

Ahead lay the long journey, expense, uncertainty, and difficult work that was such an integral part of the Klondike stampede. He was joined aboard ship by eight Australians and two other New Zealanders also heading for the Yukon. The rest of the story is familiar enough, save for their discovery that "when we arrived at Vancouver we found that there was not so much talk of the Klondike there as there was in New Zealand."

Nicholl and his mates stayed together, moving from Vancouver to Victoria, where they caught a ship headed for Dyea. From there, they made the arduous haul up the Chilkoot Pass and an unwelcome and unexpected meeting with Canadian customs officials (where, Nicholl noted with displeasure, he had to pay some \$66 in duties. He was not impressed and offered the opinion that "we all had our money in sovereigns. I think it is very little of that money went to the Government, the customs official looked quite pleased when we were handing him the gold sovereigns."). Nicholl kept his friends in New Zealand well-informed of his progress; a letter written in mid-January was published in the *Te Aroha News*, warning his country folk that the stories of Klondike wealth were grossly exaggerated and including rather unexpected comments on the northern winter: "[T]he icicles hanging to your beard nearly down to your waist. I have felt the cold worse in New Zealand. Don't let the cold frighten any one from coming to Alaska." Though not yet in the Klondike, he reported the high costs of trade goods and the fanciful accounts of opportunities to find gold and work. He concluded, "The thing is not worth the candle, and men who are in New Zealand had better stay there and put their money to some other use than spending it on a mad trip like this."⁴

The arrival in Dawson City brought only disappointment, but Nicholl was persistent. He tried several streams in the Klondike district, finding small quantities of gold but nothing matching the legendary tales that had drawn him northward. Shortly after locating a promising find a considerable distance from Dawson City, Nicholl happened to meet an old friend from Waihi, Hoaratio Walmsley. The two returned to Dawson, where they met up with Nicholl's other New Zealand mates. The group headed for the recorder's office to make their claims official. Nicholl was, according to his memoirs, to be disappointed again. Though they had seen no signs of earlier

claims, the recorder insisted that the entire creek was staked. Faced with Nicholl's accusation that the claims were faked, the recorder called in the police and Nicholl and his friends were evicted from the office and, Nicholl claimed, roughed up by the authorities.

Nicholl had had enough. He and Walmsely sold off the rest of their supplies and quickly made their way back to Skagway. They found passage on a ship heading back to Vancouver, where Nicholl and Walmsely parted. Nicholl returned home, reaching Waihi in November 1898. He left Canada for New Zealand, he later reported, "poorer than I left it." The fanfare that had greeted the Klondike strike had faded to a whisper by the time he returned home and the prospector was in no mood to boast the reputation of the muddy, cold, unattractive gold field that had temporarily captured his imagination.⁵ Nicholl returned to the life he had abandoned in search of Klondike gold. He removed his sons from boarding school and became a miner to pay for the family's upkeep. In time, the prospector's itch consumed him again and he searched for new gold deposits in the rugged Coromandel Peninsula, suffering the hardships of a difficult, seldom remunerative life.

William Nicholl's story explains, in part, why people remain interested in the Klondike. His experience is truly noteworthy, for he was captured by fantasies sparked by the discovery of gold half the world away and, unlike the vast majority of the people of his generation, he acted upon his belief that he, too, could share in the sub-Arctic bonanza. And his stories, no doubt shared over many a pint in New Zealand pubs, had all the obligatory elements: courage, determination, hardship, personal suffering, the tantalizing feel of great wealth within one's reach, being thwarted by a corrupt bureaucracy, surrender in the face of insurmountable difficulties, a confrontation with a bear (without which no northern account was at all credible), and a safe return home. And when Nicholl's story is multiplied tens of thousands of times, to encompass all those who tried to reach the Klondike, and given such dramatically diverse settings as the Australian outback, the Transvaal in South Africa, Waihi in New Zealand, and many exotic locales around the globe, it is easier to recognize the gift of narrative and history that the Klondike Gold Rush bestowed on the Yukon and the world.

But the appeal and the relevance of the Klondike Gold Rush as a feature in world history extends far beyond dramatic stories and interesting tales of experiences on the Trail of '98. The emergence of the sub-discipline of world history over the past twenty years has drawn increasing attention to the complexities of global connections and to the value of seeing local and regional phenomena in a broad, comparative context. A world history pers-

pective does not deny the significance of local and national influences—the Klondike Gold Rush has many elements that are unique to its location and that reflect the unique combination of Canadian and American forces that shaped the development of the gold fields—but rather seeks to make connections between seemingly disparate historical events and processes. William Nicholl is an example of one such element—the movement of individuals and groups between gold fields in pursuit of personal fortune and adventure. There are, however, many more that are worthy of consideration.

The Democratic Gold Rushes

It was not the presence of gold that made the stampedes of the mid- to late-19th century so memorable; rather, it was the fact that the gold was simply there for the taking. This was no small innovation. In earlier times, ownership of land and resources was tightly locked in the hands of the powerful, and discoveries of gold typically meant hard work for the labourers and great profits for royalty or landowners. The gold rushes stood apart because, at least in theory, they offered all people, regardless of social station or economic situation, the opportunity to get rich. This situation required that certain conditions be met: mining claims had to be available on a first-come, first-in basis. Sufficient governmental authority, too, was required to ensure that the claims of poorer miners were not simply absconded with by more powerful interests, and the entry costs into the industry had to be low enough so as not to deter the relatively poor individual. This unique conjunction of circumstances existed in the colonies and former colonies of Britain in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, offering a combination of political freedom, administrative security, and rewards for individual initiative. Thus, it is no coincidence that the gold rushes followed the British flag, from California to Australia, on the New Zealand, across to South Africa, and, back in North America, north from California to British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska. The gold rushes, while capitalizing on the global fascination with gold, were wrapped up in the possibilities and limitations of political freedom, land tenure systems, and the ability of governments to manage frontier districts.

Making Money

The Klondike stampede shared another characteristic with the other gold rushes: the opportunity it presented for personal wealth. The fantasy at the root of nineteenth century capitalism was the belief that individuals could, by dint of hard work, ability and occasional good luck, strike it rich. But the

reality paled on comparison. The industrial mines of North America and elsewhere presented a mockery of the vision, as did the factories of Europe and Britain. And even the long-vaunted freehold farmers of the settler nations—the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa—provided a measure of personal security but only after requiring intense effort and exposing the producers to the vagaries of international markets and marketing systems. But the myth persisted, sustained by occasional accounts of determined workers who, through invention, marriage, luck, or speculative insight, managed to break into the ranks of the economic elite. But for most citizens in these nations professing opportunity, options were precious and few.

Until gold was discovered. The gold rushes promised to be the ultimate social leveller. The rich had few advantages over the poor when it came to racing across uncharted territory and striking out for the frontier. The Klondike Gold Rush was perhaps the exemplar of this tradition, for it was a matter of speed, hard work and determination that won the race of the Klondike (although, and contrary to the mythology, having money could expedite affairs quite nicely at certain key points). On the gold frontier, social standing provided no assurance of ultimate success, and the records of each stampede are replete with accounts of folks of modest means who managed to strike it rich. The Klondike Gold Rush was fuelled by the pursuit of personal profit and by the abiding belief that this was, after all, what the emergence of the liberal state was all about: effort before privilege, hard work over inherited wealth, risk ahead of security.

Prospectors and Camp Followers

The story of the Klondike Gold Rush is only partly about mining and miners. It is primarily about the stampeders, most new to the difficult business of placer mining, who headed north in the typically vain hope that they could grab onto some of the “inexhaustible” wealth of the Yukon basin. The prospectors and would-be miners were, in the Klondike as elsewhere, followed by an eager group of camp followers, just as anxious to share in the wealth but adopting a somewhat more sure path to prosperity. This was the age of the small entrepreneur—the pedlar or trader, the boarding house operator, the cook, the madam, and the cardsharp—those indomitable men and women of the frontier who made sure that the basic needs of the prospectors were attended to, and who found themselves better off than the men who “moiled for gold.” Little is known (largely because of a continued emphasis on the individual rather than the group in the Klondike story) about the character, connections and operations of these camp followers, who were

an integral part of every gold rush and who often took part in the migrations from one discovery to the next.⁶

Fortune, Misfortune and the Age of Adventure

The Klondike Gold Rush did not create late 19th century interest in adventure, although it certainly fed the voracious appetite of western readers for tales of exciting locales, acts of courage, and examples of personal perseverance in the face of adversity. The Klondike experience fit nicely into a widespread fascination with the exotic, one with its roots in public interest in the actions of European explorers, the travelling wild west shows that started up at this time, and the cheap, accessible novels that fed the insatiable demand for tales from the distant frontier. The British were fascinated with accounts of life in Africa, Asia, the South Pacific and western North America. Across the eastern United States and Canada, exciting stories from northern latitudes competed with the outpouring of western tales of cowboys, Indians, wars and adventure. In some ways, the Klondike Gold Rush was too good to be true, a real-life version of every man's fantasy, and hence an opportunity to experience vicariously the hardships, joys, disappointments, and challenges of the young men and women who dared to venture into the great unknown.

Poets and novelists, film makers and television producers have sought repeatedly to capture the essence of the gold rush spirit. It is easy to mock in retrospect and even to see the Gold Rush as a "human tragedy," in which men and women risked all in a foolhardy and headstrong rush to the sub-Arctic.⁷ Given that so many failed to strike it rich, in the Yukon as elsewhere, and that so many returned home much poorer than they had left, it is tempting to downplay the sense of excitement and euphoria that gripped entire nations upon news of a gold strike. Douglas Fetherling captured that spirit when he wrote:

It is this element of fancy and at times self-delusion that essentially distinguishes the true gold rushes from the lesser and more recent events to which they sometimes bear a superficial resemblance. In chasing a vision, the gold crusader was hurrying away from civilization, though he often found that elements of it had preceded him to his destination; he was not seeking a job for wages, like the contemporary army of young men who work the world's oil rigs.⁸

What is appealing about the gold rushes—the Klondike best among them—is that it reveals the human capacity to be irrational, to believe in a fantasy, even of one's creation. Mass participation in a gold rush must defy the economist's explanation—much like joining in a vast pyramid scheme or succumbing to a gambling addiction. And it is this very irrationality that

makes the stamper such an attractive figure, particularly to the armchair observer, who lives out his fantasy through the life and times of one who dared to believe in the unreasonable.

The Klondike as a Global Story

The gold rush did not happen of their own accord, for an essential ingredient in sparking an international stampede is the spread of information. Again, the Klondike Gold Rush was in a class of its own, occurring at the hey-day of yellow journalism, when the newspaper empire of William Randolph Hearst vied with other newspapers for circulation and public attention. The stampede to the Yukon was tailor-made for the media frenzy that greeted any event of potential significance. In this, the Klondike fit well into a pattern extending back to the days of the California gold rush, for the excesses and uncertainty of the gold frontier meshed nicely with the promotional inclinations of the 19th century press.

Much had changed between the discovery of gold in California and the Klondike strike. The development of transcontinental telegraphy, for one, ensured that the Klondike story whipped around the world with rapier-like speed. The story, grabbed and embellished by local newspapers and given a regional twist whenever possible, swept through country after country, passed by word of mouth and subjected to the inevitable exaggerations. The Klondike was followed with a sense of immediacy that was unusual in world history, with newspapers following the story with rapt attention, books rushed into print to guide stampeders on their way, and memoirs produced as soon as the miners and journalists had a chance to write. The gold rush itself was an example of the growing interconnection of the world's media and of the continuing fascination with both the precious metal and those who threw their bodies and resources into the pursuit of personal wealth.

Keeping the Asians Out

The gold rushes were democratic in the sense of providing opportunities for men and women regardless of their social and economic condition, but they were not colour blind. In each of the major stampedes, efforts were made to keep Asian labourers and miners out of the diggings, actions that conformed to the racist attitudes of the 19th century and to the exclusionist preferences of the miners themselves. The Chinese, in particular, did come into some of the fields after the prime claims had been worked over—they mopped up in California, British Columbia, New Zealand and Australia—but only a handful of Asians made it into the Yukon basin.

Asian labour was of fundamental importance to the 19th century development frontier, and played a crucial role in the construction of railways in particular. But countries like Canada, New Zealand and Australia held out little hope for prosperity or equality of opportunity. The gold rush, seemingly one area where hard work and perseverance were, with good fortune, the prime determinants of success, was not actually open to all comers. Asians had a carefully circumscribed role in the exploitation of the gold fields, and it did not include full participation in the early, more lucrative stages of the rush. In the case of the Yukon, high entry costs, great distances, the active discouragement of migration, and the extreme cold combined to limit Asian participation in the gold fields even after the rush had peaked.

The pattern did not hold in South Africa, where the nature of mining and the ready availability of tens of thousands of able and inexpensive black workers meant that the miners quickly transformed their operations from personal diggings to highly structured operations. Although Maori were, on occasion, involved in the North Island New Zealand mines, no other gold frontiers made as active and intensive use of indigenous labour as did the South Africans. In the case of the Yukon, much like Australia, New Zealand and California, indigenous peoples were largely excluded from the mining aspects of the rush, although they did find employment on the periphery of the stampede.

After the Stampede: Technology and the Corporate Frontier

One reason that few Asians may have migrated into the North related to the rapid expansion of corporate interests in the region. Even as the Klondike stampede hit its peak, officials in Ottawa and business people were seeking company advantage. In the earlier rushes, the corporate frontier came along a while later, as technology raced to catch up with the opportunities for dredging, hydraulic mining and large-scale sluicing activities. By the last years of the 19th century, the companies were on the stampede's heels, moving swiftly to buy up claims, control water rights, and to secure the appropriate government concessions. In the Yukon case, the corporatisation of the gold fields capped the era of the individual prospector, and, by the second decade of the 20th century, large scale operators had gained control of most of the paying claims.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the corporate frontier figures less prominently in gold rush lore than do the days of the individual miners. Prospectors hunkered over gold pans, teams of miners working the first sluice of the spring, and underground diggers slaving away at the face of the permafrost present more dramatic images than company officials negotiating water

rights deals with government officials, meeting with bankers and investors to raise money to purchase equipment, or arriving in the Yukon to set up a company town to house the wage labourers recruited to operate the dredges. But in the Yukon, as elsewhere, the dredging companies produced more gold than the first wave of stampedeers, as they built huge dredges to scour the creeks for the gold missed by the initial mining operations.

In this sense, the Klondike represented the merger of the individual gold rush and the corporate frontier; subsequent gold rushes would, with few exceptions, be largely oriented toward company operations (as had some of the earlier ones). The Klondike was the last real chance for the self-financed individual to break in on the ground floor. The Yukon experience had been foreshadowed by the South African gold rush some twenty years earlier, for in this field the nature of the resource (typically in large, underground reefs, and a very fine gold), investor interest sparked by earlier diamond discoveries, and the availability of British speculative capital ensured that South Africa gold mining made a quick shift to labour- and machine-intensive enterprise. In Australia, California, New Zealand and British Columbia, individual miners had a longer run before the corporate interest shouldered them aside. The relationship between prospector and company was, as one historian has suggested, symbiotic:

In each case, individuals were forced to push on not only because the excitement died down but because big business moved in once the easiest pickings were exhausted. The prospector was thus the stalking horse for the financier, to whom he stood in opposition but with whom he nonetheless had a certain quality in common—call it adventurous self-determination.⁹

Gold in the Modern Era

World-wide fascination with gold remains, and the metal has lost little of its capacity to send pulse rates soaring and to tease otherwise rational people into seemingly irrational actions. When, in the wake of the OPEC-inspired oil crisis, the price of gold rose dramatically in the early 1970s, the Klondike diggings themselves attracted renewed interest. And even though the price subsequently fell dramatically, new techniques and the inexhaustible optimism of the prospector has kept miners in the field ever since. And so it continues around the world. A few hardy souls still hang on in Skipper's Canyon in New Zealand. The Waihi mine, which was not strong enough to hold William Nicholl in place, remains in operation and the search continues for new properties. Much of the prospecting zeal has spread to new locales, such as the controversial discovery and development of Bre-X property in Indonesia by Canadian entrepreneurs. Gold rushes outside the

western nations tend to attract little attention. Hence, relatively little is known about a reported stampede in western China that supposedly drew tens of thousands of would-be miners into the region in the last decade. The situation in Brazil is better known, and is much more notorious, largely due to the impact of the Brazilian gold miners' actions on the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin. But in Brazil, as in the Yukon one hundred years ago, the miners have pressed on ahead of government, beyond the limits of effective social control, and into harsh and often dangerous territory, drawn by the prospect of personal wealth.

Conclusion

The Klondike Gold Rush was a unique event, as befitted its unusual location, uncharacteristic richness, and the intriguing composition of the stampede community. But the Klondike did not stand alone. It was part and parcel of an important 19th century belief in the frontier, a determined search for adventure, a widespread glorification of the individual and of individual initiative, growing corporate interest in the systematic exploitation of mineral resources, government concerns about the integrity of national boundaries and the potentially disruptive influences of immigrants, and a global interest in vicarious frontier experiences. "In harsh, practical terms," wrote one historian of the world's gold rushes, "the Klondike . . . was not one of the greatest gold rushes, but . . . in terms of the human spirit it was the greatest of them all."¹⁰

There has never been another gold rush to match the "last great gold rush" and, hence, it is hardly surprising that the public remains fascinated with the Klondike experience. The search for a comprehensive understanding of the Klondike experience and phenomenon rests in combining the understanding of the nuances of the specific event with an awareness of the global context within which the Yukon gold rush occurred. The Klondike Gold Rush will always be a crucial element in Yukon history and historians will need to continue their efforts to explain and analyse the regional impact. But the writing of history has, for too long, been bound within fairly narrow national boundaries, leading historians (including myself) to engage in fairly simplistic debates about the degree to which the Klondike gold rush is a Canadian or an American story. And so it is with New Zealand, Australia, South Africa and the United States of America, where regional gold rushes are explained in local and national terms, and with only occasional reference to the personal, economic, psychological, administrative, and corporate thread that weave these intense, site-specific events into a broad global phenomenon.

The Klondike Gold Rush, then, illustrates the importance of understanding global influences on regional development and also reveals the utility of the world history perspective. The gold rush is, at once, a local, regional, national and international phenomenon, shaped by influences that extend far beyond the boundaries of the Yukon and by factors unique to the Klondike. In a world history perspective, historians might be better able to answer the question with which we began: Why are people interested in the Klondike Gold Rush? Because it reveals, in its scale and majesty, in the nuances of personal accounts, and in the disruptions that hit the regional order, the complexity, urgency, dynamism, callousness, adventure, greed and uncertainty that was so much a part of the emergence of the western industrial order, that animated late nineteenth-century capitalism, and that drew European peoples with such force and impact into the furthest corners of the globe. Here in one story—William Nicholl's account written forty thousand times—lies many of the features, attractive and repugnant, that have so influenced life in the 20th century.

And so the tourists come north every year, absorbing the essence of the Klondike (as packaged by local entrepreneurs and Parks Canada), strolling along the streets and claims that the men and women of fiction, history and legend walked a century earlier, and giving visual life to the images conjured up by great writers and personal imaginations. Because the fantasies that animated the Klondike Gold Rush live on: is Bill Gates of Microsoft fame not really a latter-day Swiftwater Bill Gates, discovering his Eldorado on the Internet.¹¹ And is the Klondike, and the other gold rushes of the 19th century, not a powerful metaphor for the dreams and aspirations that animate modern capitalism—the belief in that odd combination of hard work, determination and pure luck that explains why the developers of pet rocks and Trivial Pursuits make huge sums.

The Klondike continues to capture the public's imagination precisely because the story does not belong solely to the Yukon Territory or to Dawson City, because the experience and the phenomenon that so captivated the world in 1897-1898 contains so many elements of international significance and interest. Douglas Fetherling argues that, despite the strong American presence and history in the gold rushes, they were "an outcrop of British liberalism, related to both free trade and home rule. They were another product of the industrial revolution and another reaction against it; the expression of some impossibly arcadian ideal."¹² American historians, like Paula Mitchell Marks, tend to see the gold rushes in American terms: "The rushes created a gold frontier that, in its constant movement and renewal and in its rejection of the old and established, maintained the just-

born vitality, the democracy, diversity and individualistic spirit that characterized America's beginnings and its Jacksonian period."¹³ For Pierre Berton, the Klondike tale is a uniquely Canadian one, representing struggle between Canadian order and American liberty.¹⁴ The truth is that the Klondike story belongs to all and to none; part American, part Canadian, the history of the Klondike fits into a pattern of adventure, development and expansion that is global in scale and impact. As the effort continues to explore and explain the Klondike Gold Rush, it seems imperative that we recapture a key element of the late 19th century experience, and remember that the Klondike phenomenon reached across the globe, both reflecting and affecting countries near and far. In so doing, in placing the Klondike stampede in a broader, world history perspective, historians will be better able to understand why this event retains its interest and why this event is of continuing significance.

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Endnotes

1. Many of the early accounts of the Klondike experience highlighted the exploits of men and women who travelled great distances to participate. Pierre Berton's *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1958) is a good example of this emphasis on the quixotic, which remains a feature of Klondike popular culture.
2. The interest in globe-trotting stampeders has, of course, largely obscured the extent to which the Klondike rush was primarily a Pacific Northwest event, with most of the prospectors, business people and hangers-on drawn from Washington, Oregon and British Columbia.
3. W. S. C. Nicholl, "The Thames Today and as it Opened 60 Years ago," typescript, n.d. [1927], Auckland Public Library, NZ MSS 512, p. 9. The Nicholl material was made available by Dr. Philip Hart of the Department of History, University of Waikato. Dr. Hart's assistance is gratefully acknowledged.
4. *Te Aroha News*, 8 March 1898.
5. This summary is drawn from "The Thames Today." Dr. Hart is completing a major study of the Thames gold field and has prepared a careful, critical analysis of Nicholl's memoir, in which he points out the many inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the account.
6. One of the more interesting examples is documented in Don Chaput, *I'm Mightly Apt to Make a Million or Two: Nellie Cashman and the North American*

Mining Frontier (Tucson: Westernlore Press, 1995).

7. This perspective was offered by a Canadian scholar at a conference on Boomtowns in North American history, held at the University of Victoria in 1991. Her observations sparked tremendous debate, particularly among the Americans present, who rejected the notion of the Klondike story, admitted hardships and all, as a great tragedy.
8. Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades: A Social History of Gold Rushes, 1849-1920* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1988), p. 6.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
10. Robin May, *The Gold Rushes: From California to the Klondike* (North Sydney: Macmillan, 1977), p. 117.
11. In a 1995 essay, Gates announced that the "Internet Gold Rush is underway. Thousands of people are staking claims" (www.microsoft.com/corpinfo/bill-g/1995essay/12-6-95.htm). Coincidentally, Bill Gates' pronouncements have been issuing forth from Seattle, Washington, the same city where, 100 years ago, Swiftwater Bill Gates delivered news of the fabulous fortunes to be won in the Yukon.
12. Fetherling, *The Gold Crusades*, p. 3.
13. Paula Mitchell Marks, *Precious Dust: The Saga of the Western Gold Rushes* (New York: HarperCollins West, 1995), p. 377.
14. Pierre Berton, *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899*. Revised edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986).