

Klondike Gold Rush

National Historical Park
Seattle, Washington

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Cover: Miners' supplies are piled high on the boardwalk in front of Seattle's Cooper & Levy outfitting store. Courtesy Seattle Historical Society.

Gold in the Klondike!

"At 3 o'clock this morning the steamship *Portland*, from St. Michaels for Seattle, passed up [Puget] Sound with more than a ton of solid gold on board and 68 passengers."

When this magic sentence appeared in the July 17, 1897, issue of *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, it triggered one of the last—and one of the greatest—gold rushes in the history of North America. Before noon that day every berth aboard the *Portland* had been sold for the return trip north and telegraph wires carried details of the 68 miners who wrestled suitcases, gunny sacks, pokes, and boxes of gold down the gangplank at the Seattle wharf. When it was actually weighed, the gold amounted to more than two tons, but by then it didn't really matter; the stampede to the Klondike in northwestern Canada was underway, and the effects on Seattle would prove nothing short of astonishing.

The Klondike Gold Rush was already 11 months old when the *Portland* arrived at Seattle. Prospectors had been dribbling into that vast wilderness of the Yukon River drainage for decades, finding just enough "colors" on feeder streams to buy grub and tools. But the big strike eluded them until August 14, 1896, when a trio—two Indians and a white man—stopped to rest beside a tiny stream called Rabbit Creek, which emptied into the Klondike River. There on the creek bottom they saw glistening flecks of gold, "caught between rocks like cheese in a sandwich."

Skookum Jim, Tagish Charlie, and George Washington Carmack filled a cartridge casing with coarse gold dust. Then, leaving Skookum Jim behind to guard the discovery site, Carmack and Tagish Charlie hurried back down the Yukon River to the settlement at Fortymile where Carmack filed claims. When other miners saw Carmack's gold, they threw their belongings

into boats and headed upriver to make claims near the discovery. Immediately the town of Dawson was started at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers. By the end of 1896 all good river-bottom claims had been staked and the prospectors spent the winter and spring digging out their fortunes. When the ice left the rivers, they rode a paddlewheeler to St. Michael, then piled their gold and belongings onto coastal steamers and headed home. It was 68 of these men who, in the summer of 1897, steamed into Seattle with confirmation of the Klondike's fabulous riches.

The news came at an opportune time, for Seattle, like the rest of the Nation was still locked in the economic depression that followed the Panic of 1893. Many people were out of work and finding it difficult to feed themselves. But when that magic sentence about "more than a ton of gold" from the Klondike went out over the telegraph wires from Seattle, condi-

tions changed dramatically. Business doubled, then tripled, as thousands of gold-seekers poured into the city from all over the United States and all parts of the world to outfit themselves for their great Alaskan and Yukon adventure. Seattle's mayor resigned to organize one of many ill-fated Klondike mining expeditions. Farmers, bank clerks, teachers, doctors, firemen, policemen, ministers, con-men, missionaries, and prostitutes packed up and headed north. Most had no idea where the Klondike was; few really cared. And fewer still realized the incredible hardships they were about to face.

A Year's Supplies

"Although most of the passengers [on board the *Portland*] are returning home with plenty of gold, they all advise and urge people who contemplate going to the Yukon not to think of taking less than one ton of grub, and plenty of clothes. While it is a poor man's country, yet the hardships and privations to be encountered by inexperienced persons unused to frontier life is certain to result in much suffering during the winters. They should go prepared with at least a year's supplies."

The Seattle Post-Intelligencer, July 17, 1897.



Of the 3 routes to the Klondike shown on the map at left, most stampedees in 1897-98 used the one via Skagway and Dyea. The all-water route via St. Michael and the Yukon River was the rich man's route and only those with extensive capital could afford it. The all-Canadian route, though advertised as "easy" by unscrupulous outfitters, was so tortuous that few who started out ever reached the goldfields.

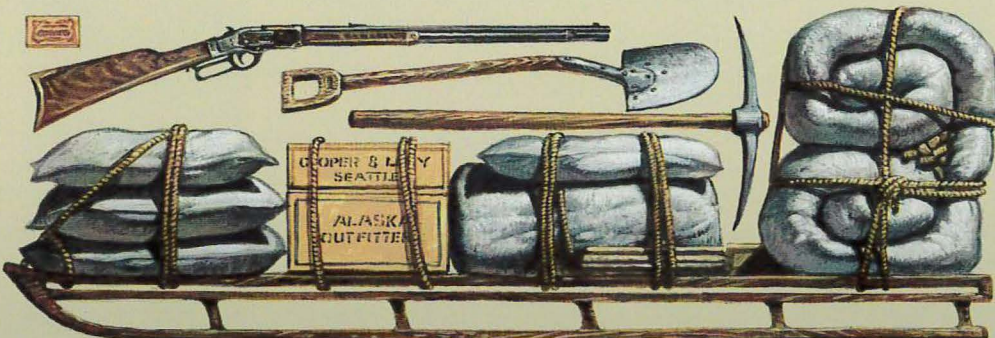


Illustration by John Dawson



Seattle merchants were quick to discover that there was as much, and sometimes more, money to be made outfitting Klondikers as there was in digging gold out of frozen Yukon muck. Because food supplies in the Yukon were limited (and toward the end of winter often could not be bought for any amount of money), the North West Mounted Police refused to allow anyone into Canada unless he carried a year's

supply of food and equipment.

A year's "outfit," as a miner's supplies were called, might range in price anywhere from \$300 to \$2,000, depending on how much an individual wanted to spend and how much cash he had on hand, and all of this money went directly into the coffers of the city's businessmen. Incredible as it may seem, in less than 2 weeks after the *Portland* docked,

Seattle merchants had already sold an estimated \$325,000 worth of goods, and miners were still lining up at the doors.

Though it is impossible to provide a complete inventory of the typical miner's outfit, the following listing and the accompanying illustration will convey some idea of the type and amount of food, clothing, and equipment stampedees carried with them into the goldfields.

Food
Bacon, 100-200 lbs.
Flour, 400 lbs.
Dried Fruits, 75-100 lbs.
Corn meal, 50 lbs.
Rice, 20-40 lbs.
Coffee, 10-25 lbs.
Tea, 5-10 lbs.
Sugar, 25-100 lbs.
Beans, 100 lbs.
Condensed milk, 1 case
Salt, 10-15 lbs.
Pepper, 1 lb.
Rolled oats, 25-50 lbs.
Potatoes, 25-100 lbs.
Butter, 25 cans
Assorted evaporated meats and vegetables

Equipment
Stove
Gold pan
Granite buckets
Cups & plates (tin)
Knives, forks, & spoons
Coffee/tea pot
Picks & handles
Saws & chisels
Hammer & nails
Hatchet
Shovels
Drawknife
Compass
Frying pan
Matches
Small assortment of medicines

Clothing
1 heavy mackinaw coat
3 suits heavy underwear
2 pairs heavy mackinaw trousers
1 doz. heavy wool socks
6 heavy wool mittens
2 heavy overshirts
2 pairs rubber boots
2 pairs heavy shoes
3 pairs heavy blankets
2 rubber blankets
4 towels
2 pairs overalls
1 suit oil clothing
Assorted summer clothing

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Seattle Then and Now

Although physically isolated from the Klondike the city of Seattle is a key point in the gold rush story. It was here that word of gold in the Klondike first caught the imagination of the world; it was through this then-small waterfront city that thousands of goldseekers poured, heading for the Yukon; and it was Seattle to which most returned.

In Seattle, stories of gold in the Far North were common for almost 30 years before the Klondike discovery. But while the thought of sudden wealth must have been alluring, few actually went north to try their luck. Indeed, a quarter-century passed before the lure of fabulous riches altered the tenor of the city and broke the economic strait-jacket in which it and the whole Northwest had been imprisoned.

"Prosperity is here," proclaimed *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer* just four days after the *Portland* docked in 1897. "So far as Seattle is concerned the depression is at an end. A period of prosperity, far greater than anything known in the past, is immediately at hand." Thanks to a lively Chamber of Commerce campaign that touted Seattle as the "only place" that stampedees could adequately outfit themselves for the gold-fields, more goldseekers left from here than from any other city.

Here, in what is now the Pioneer Square Historic District (see map), prospectors bought their supplies, boarded ships berthed nearby, and

headed north to Skagway and Dyea. So many people came to Seattle in such a short period of time that hotels and restaurants could not accommodate them all. Shopowners had so many provisions to sell that there wasn't enough room in their shops to store them, and it was common to see supplies stacked 10 feet high along many of the boardwalks. By the spring of 1898, Seattle merchants, who over the past few years had barely eked out a living, had sold some \$25 million worth of goods, and the end was not yet in sight.

The Klondike gold rush made Seattle the center of trade in the Northwest. Most companies that were established before or during the rush did exceedingly well, and some are still doing business today. So too are a few that were established in the late 1890s and early 1900s from money made from Klondike gold by successful miners. Though only a handful of stampedees found enough gold to call themselves rich, and even fewer made it home with their wealth, none of them ever forgot the grand adventure that left Seattle forever changed, stamped with a special legacy of history.

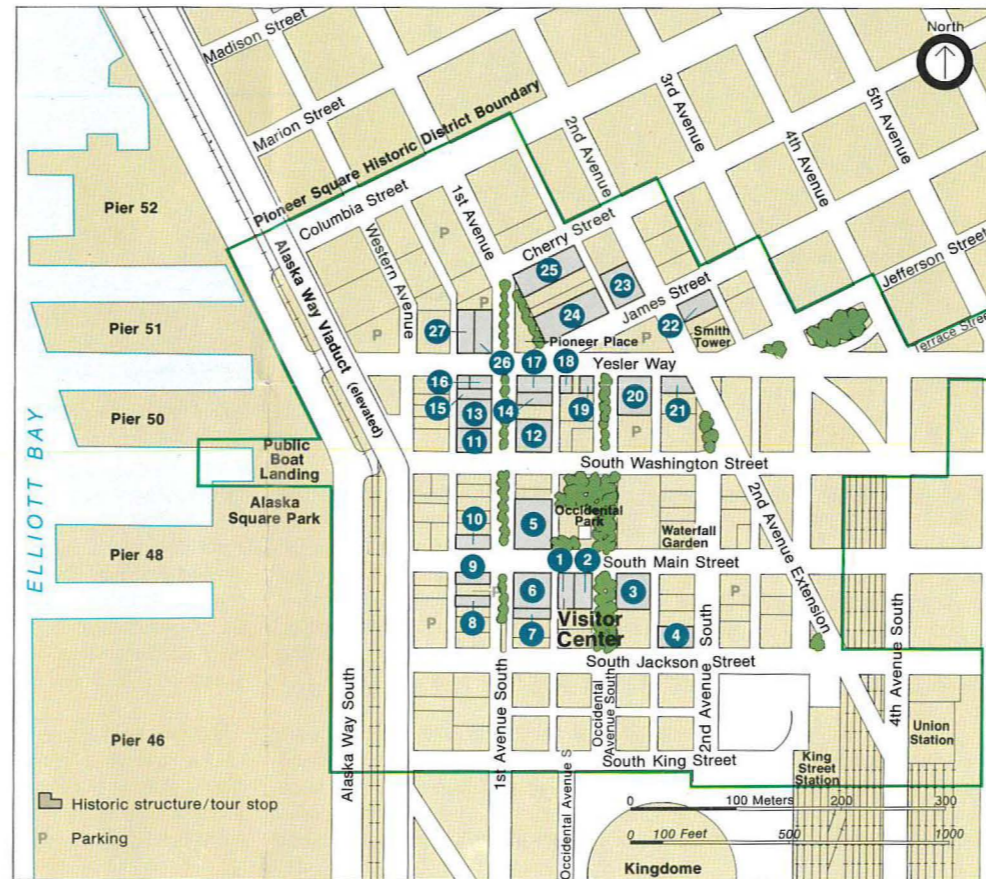
Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park was created to help preserve this legacy and, along with units in and around Skagway, Alaska, and Canadian sites in Dawson and Whitehorse, try to evoke a sense of the atmosphere surrounding the gold rush days of 1898.

Visiting the Park
The Seattle unit of Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is located in the Union Trust Annex at 117 S. Main St., about 2 blocks north of the Kingdome and 1½ blocks east of the waterfront.

Visiting hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, with extended evening hours in summer. The visitor center is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Parking is available at several nearby locations. Bus stops are also close by, and the train station and both local and Alaskan ferry systems are within walking distance.

The park commemorates the important role that Seattle played as the staging area for the 1890s gold rush. This story is depicted in exhibits and audio-visual presentations.

Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 117 S. Main St., Seattle, WA 98104, is in charge of the Seattle unit.



About Pioneer Square
Pioneer Square, the heart of gold rush Seattle, has been restored, in part, to its former appearance with dozens of distinctive shops, art galleries, restaurants, book stores, and antique dealers. Nearby is the Seattle waterfront, an equally lively and interesting place to shop and stroll. The city's Waterfront Park, with its scenic vistas, fountains, and aquarium, is located between Piers 57 and 60, the same place where the *Portland* docked with the 68 prospectors who launched the Klondike gold rush.

Many gold rush-era buildings still stand within the historic district. The following are some of the more prominent ones. Their locations are keyed, by number, to the map. Where known, the date of construction follows the building's name.

- 1 Union Trust Annex (1901). Presently serves as the Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park visitor center.
- 2 Union Trust Building (c. 1898).
- 3 State Building (1890).
- 4 Cadillac Hotel (1890).
- 5 Grand Central Hotel (1889). One of the first buildings constructed after the 1889 Seattle fire,

- 6 Globe Building (1898).
- 7 Nord Building (1890).
- 8 Maud Building (1889).
- 9 Matilda Winehill Block (1889). Originally a hotel, later converted to a mission. This was also the site of Seattle's first general store in 1852.
- 10 New England Building (1889).
- 11 Maynard Building (1890). One of the handsomest buildings in Pioneer Square.
- 12 Delmar Building (1895). Known as the State Hotel during gold rush days.
- 13 Terry-Denny Building (c. 1895).
- 14 Lippy Building (1900). Built by Thomas Lippy, who made \$2 million digging Klondike gold.
- 15 Schwabacher Building (1890). This building once housed the major wholesale and retail mercantile firm north of San Francisco. It became a prime outfitter to stampedees on their way to the gold fields.
- 16 Yesler Building (1890).
- 17 Olympic Block. Site of Cooper & Levy Company, one of the major gold rush outfitters.
- 18 Merchants Cafe (1889).

- 19 Korn Building (1890).
- 20 Interurban Building (1890). Considered one of the finest structures in Pioneer Square.
- 21 Metropole Building (1895). Location of the drug firm operated by G. O. Guy who, when news of the gold strike hit Seattle, designed a special waterproof and unbreakable medicine kit for prospectors. He also wrote "Klondike Doctor," a book of practical advice for miners.
- 22 Collins Building (c. 1893).
- 23 Butler Block (1890). Location of the Butler Hotel, whose reputation as one of the best places to eat and room made it the center of Seattle's social life.
- 24 Pioneer Building (1892). The most historically important building within Pioneer Square. Tours of Seattle's Underground begin here at Doc Maynard's.
- 25 Lowman Building (1900).
- 26 Mutual Life Building (1897). A classic example of Victorian Romanesque architecture. Original location of Henry Yesler's cookhouse.
- 27 Post Hotel (1893). This hotel has served the Pioneer Square population since before the days of the gold rush.

Seattle's Historic Legacy

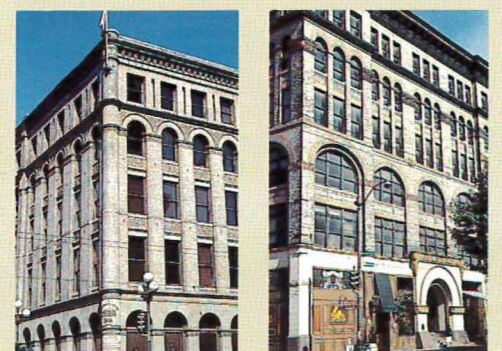
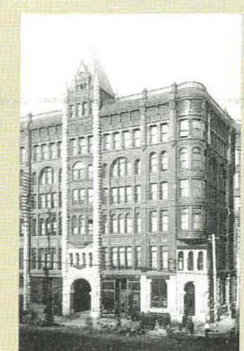
Seattle is a modern bustling metropolis; the city of the Klondike gold rush no longer exists. With a little imagination, however, and the willingness and patience to search them out, today's visitor to Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park can still locate many tangible and fascinating reminders of those grand and glorious turn-of-the-century days. A few are suggested in the photographs reproduced here; many others can be found by following the map of the Pioneer Square Historic District provided above.

When the steamer *Portland* (right) arrived at Seattle on July 17, 1897, thousands of local residents jammed the waterfront and cheered as more than 2 tons of gold were unloaded onto the dock (right center). At far right, the steamer *Australia*, loaded with hopeful miners, prepares to depart Seattle for Alaska. Even today, the waterfront area retains much of the flavor of early Seattle.



The Pioneer Building (right) was Seattle's grandest structure and the city's most prestigious address at the time of the Klondike gold rush. Between 1897 and 1908, at least 48 different mining firms were located here. Hundreds of miners and would-be miners came to these auspicious surroundings with ideas for raising money to finance their dreams of gold and glory. Doctors, lawyers, manufacturers' representatives, and insurance

companies also maintained offices in the building. Designed by Elmer Fisher in an architectural style called Victorian Romanesque Revival, the Pioneer Building dominated Pioneer Square then as it does today. It was (and still is) the datum point from which all elevations were measured.



The Maynard Building (far left) and the Mutual Life Building (left) are only two of the many structures that stand today as mute witnesses to the days when Seattle streets echoed the sounds of excited miners. The Maynard Building also stands on the site of Seattle's first bank.



The small triangle of land known as Pioneer Place (far left) has been a public park since 1893 and its Pergola symbolizes the charm of old Seattle. The Grand Central Hotel (left center) started out as a heating and lighting supply business. It was converted into a hotel in 1897 to accommodate the large influx of goldseekers. Left, a lion's head adorns an entrance to the Interurban Building.

The Merchants Cafe (right) is the oldest standing restaurant in Seattle. Its interior is little changed from the days when Yesler Way was still called Mill Street and Yukon miners bought beer here for 5¢ a glass. In its early history, the upstairs contained a high-class brothel.

