

# COLUMBIA

THE MAGAZINE OF NORTHWEST HISTORY ■ SUMMER 1997 ■ \$6.00

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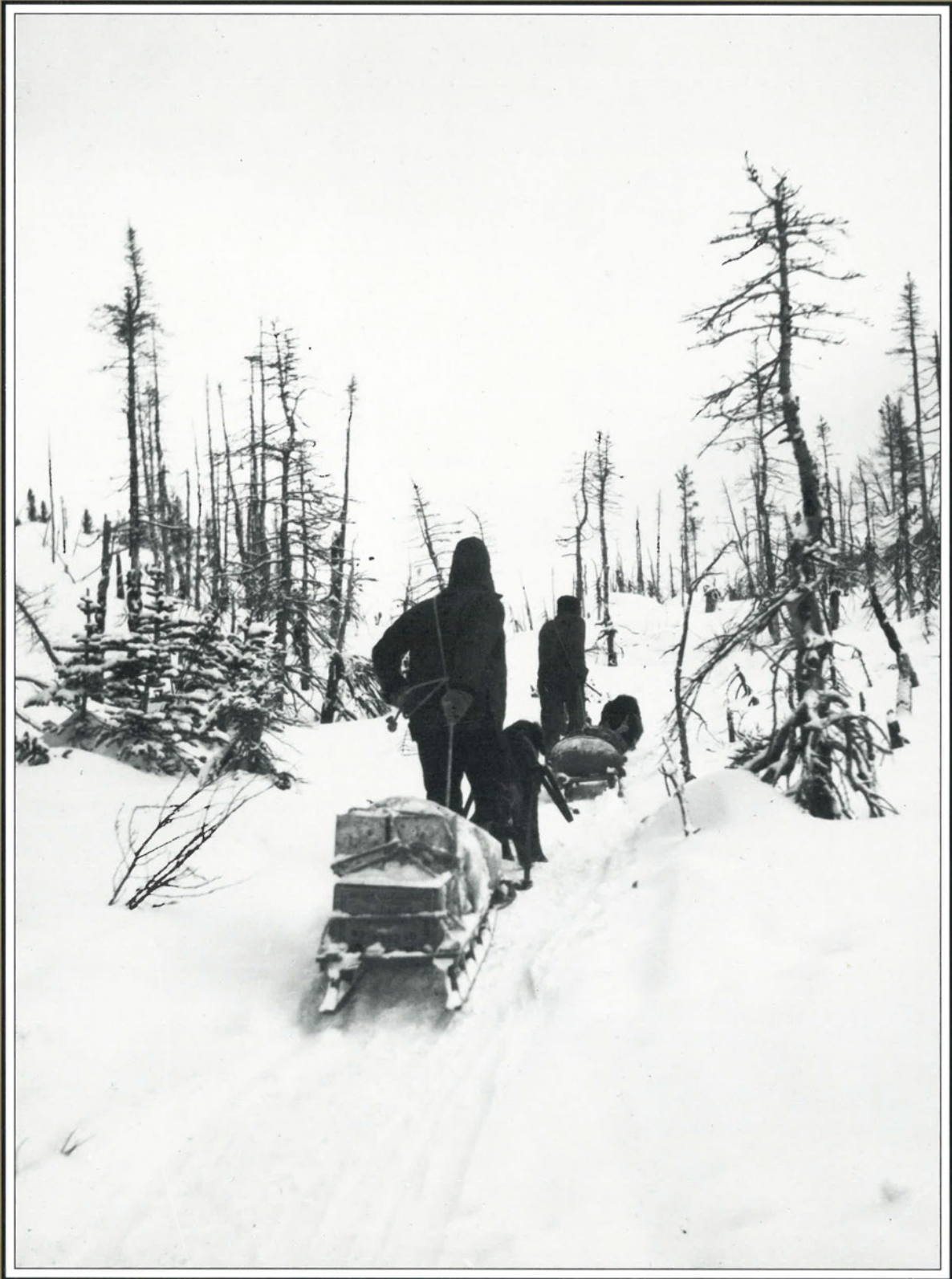
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# GOLDEN DREAMS



# RIVER

*The Impact of the Klondike Go*

By J. Kingston Pierce

**A**t another time, in another place, the captain might have thought his ship was being overtaken by pirates come to filch the fortune from its hold. But those anxious, red-faced men who tumbled across the moonlit railings of the SS Portland as it passed Washington's Cape Flattery and churned toward Puget Sound on July 17, 1897, sought a very different sort of riches. They were newspaper reporters sent to plunder the prospectors aboard of whatever information they had regarding the discovery of gold on tributaries of northwestern Canada's Klondike River.

ONLY TWO DAYS before, a second steamer out of Alaska, the *Excelsior*, had docked at San Francisco, its scruffy, sunburned passengers stumbling down the gangplank with leather saddlebags, carpet valises and fruit jars, all full of gold dust and nuggets from the Klondike fields. Among the miners was a former YMCA physical-training instructor, Thomas Lippy of Seattle. The normally level-headed Lippy had left the Northwest a year earlier with borrowed money and the vague hope of "making it" in the northland. Now he'd returned to the States "a veritable Monte Cristo," as one account put it, sharing with his wife Salome a grip that contained more than 200 pounds of gold, valued at over \$51,000. Another Seattleite, laundryman Fred Price, stood nearby but enjoyed considerably less attention, his \$5,000 in gold making him a relatively "poor" Klondiker.

Word traveled fast. And far. Within hours of the *Excelsior's* landing, there was hardly a corner of San Fran-



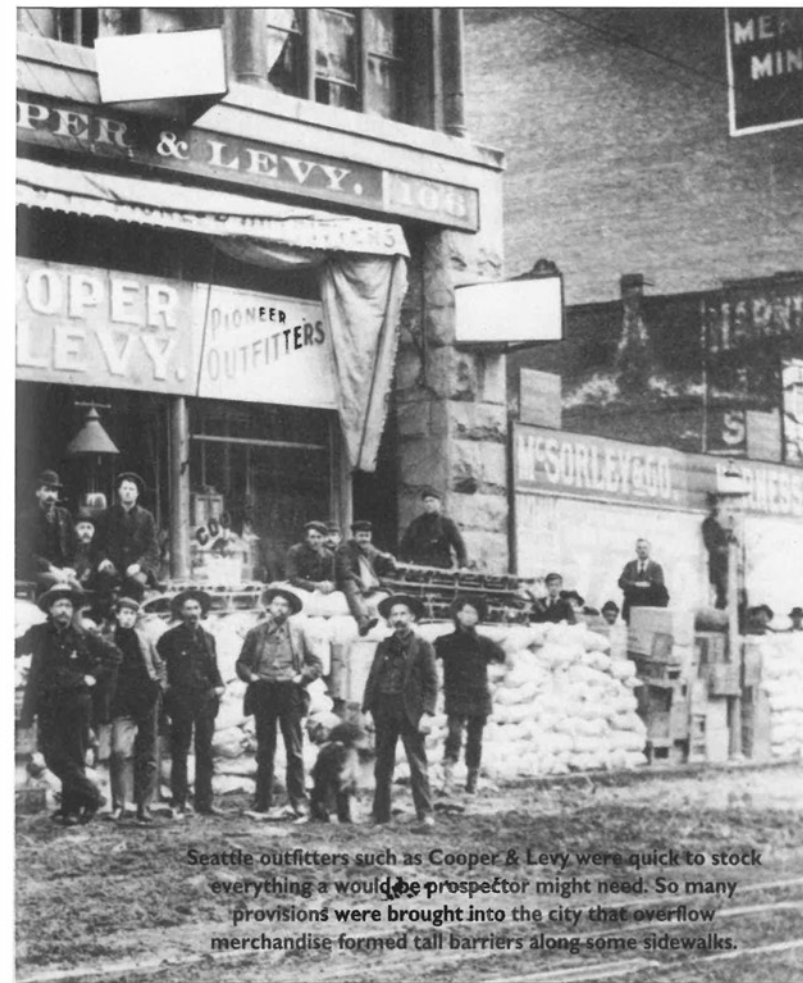
#26368, Asahel Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society

cisco where hyperbole about the subarctic mother lode wasn't being liberally exchanged, and before that day was finished telegraph wires sped the prospectors' amazing tales clear across the continent. Not since the California Gold Rush of 1849 had America's West Coast generated such widespread excitement. Demands for more and juicier news copy incited a feeding frenzy. Like their shipmates, the Lippys could not enjoy their visit to the Golden Gate—whenever they tried to stroll from their suite at the Palace Hotel, packs of journalists descended upon them, determined to capture their every comment. After a couple of days the couple fled in disgust to Portland.

Stories of mineral wealth from the Far North had been

# of GOLD

## d Rush on the Pacific Northwest



Seattle outfitters such as Cooper & Levy were quick to stock everything a would-be prospector might need. So many provisions were brought into the city that overflow merchandise formed tall barriers along some sidewalks.

heard before. Alaska's first significant gold deposits were stumbled upon in 1880, and men had roamed that territory and Canada's neighboring Yukon ever since, panning streams and digging and praying they'd be rewarded handsomely for their labors.

Yet when rumors of mammoth deposits in the Klondike region began circulating during the 1890s, they were widely dismissed as fantasy. Even a veteran dogsled driver, who in June 1897 mushed all the way down from the Yukon to Juneau, Alaska, wearing nuggets as buttons on his coat and announcing big strikes, failed to convince many folks. It was soon after that, however, that the *Excelsior* appeared, and figment became fact. Suddenly, the slogan "Klondike or

Bust!" rode everyone's lips, though few people knew where the Klondike was and fewer still were sure how to spell it ("Clondyke," "Klondyke," and "Klondike" were used interchangeably by the press in 1897).

Seattle was already contagious with gold fever by the time the *Portland's* running lights were spied off the coast of Vancouver Island. So eager were editors of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* to feed their readers' appetites for Klondike tidings that they didn't wait until the ship reached the city. Instead, they loaded their ablest scribes onto a chartered tug at Port Townsend and sent them to intercept the treasure ship as it swung abreast of Port Angeles at two in the morning on July 17. Six hours later, when the *Portland* finally nosed into Schwabacher's Wharf (in the vicinity of Piers 57 and 58), its masts aflutter with banners and prospectors waving from its deck, the *P-I* was peddling the first of three extra editions, eagerly snapped up by 5,000 envious Seattleites who'd come to watch from the waterfront.

"GOLD! GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!" trumpeted the headlines. "STACKS OF YELLOW METAL!" It all seemed too good to be true. But the 68 men who debarked from the *Portland* that day a century ago left little doubt that the Klondike provided what one Seattle editorialist termed "the 'open sesame' to a dreamland of wealth."

"They all have gold," enthused a reporter who visited with prospectors on the *Portland*, "and it is piled about the staterooms like so much valueless hand baggage." The ship carried "a ton of gold," according to the *P-I*. Yet on this rare occasion, the paper understated reality. The *Portland* actually held closer to two tons. Regardless, "ton of gold" was the catch phrase thereafter repeated in awe around the globe, enticing every thrill-seeker, every avaricious soul, and every ne'er-do-well hoping for a better life to join North America's last great frontier adventure—the Klondike Stampede.

**T**hat often frustrating, frequently dangerous three-year diaspora dramatically expanded interest in the Alaska and Yukon territories. It put lowly, remote Dawson City—the Yukon burg nearest the gold fields—prominently on the map and ended an economic depression that, throughout the mid 1890s, had kept a stranglehold on North America and Europe. And, of course, the gold rush wrought tremendous changes upon adolescent Seattle.

No American rail port was closer to Alaska and the principal overland trails that led from there to the Klondike. As a result, Seattle was ripe to become an embarkation point and outfitter for would-be Croesuses. It more than lived up to that potential. In the month following the *Portland's* arrival at Elliott Bay, 1,500 people sailed north from the city, and nine fully booked ships crowded the harbor waiting to follow them. Mining schools and new hostelries opened to serve the lucre-hunting hordes who were funneling through town. Shipyards bustled with construction of ocean- and river-going craft. Stores ordered in so many provisions that the

## Gold! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools . . .

overflow merchandise created barriers ten feet high along some thoroughfares in what was then downtown Seattle (today's Pioneer Square Historic District).

As the *New York Herald* remarked, "Seattle has gone stark, staring mad on gold."

**H**ad George Washington Carmack and his two Native American friends known in 1896 what would come from their locating gold on a branch of the Klondike River, they might have covered the precious metal back up and never breathed a syllable about it.

Carmack was content with his life in the northern wilderness. Although born in northern California (the son of a 49er), since his move to the north in 1885 and his employment as a trail packer, Carmack had become increasingly like the natives he encountered. He learned their rituals and dialects, wed the daughter of a Tagish tribal chief, and dreamed of being a chief himself some day. He built a home for his family on the Yukon River, a mighty 2,000-mile-long watercourse that drains inland to the north and west from southwest Alaska's Coast Mountains to the Bering Sea. There Carmack read, composed poetry when it suited his mood, and played an organ to the howling accompaniment of wolves. Probably the last thing he would have wanted was a storm of raucous outsiders destroying his near-Edenic tranquillity. But that's exactly what he got.

The turning point came in the summer of 1896. Carmack, his wife Kate and their daughter, together with Kate's brother Keish (familiar to whites as Skookum Jim) and another native man, Tagish (or Dawson) Charley, were fishing for salmon at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike

rivers when into their midst paddled Robert Henderson. A seasoned prospector originally from Canada's Atlantic provinces, Henderson had spent the better part of that year tapping a small vein of riches on the aptly named Gold Bottom Creek, several days' travel southeast of the Klondike's mouth. Finally in need of supplies, he'd boated to the nearest trading post, at a place called Fortymile, and was now returning to his claim.

Like many fellow gold hunters, Henderson tended to share news of his latest diggings, trusting there would be enough "color" (gold) to go around and that he would be invited to partake of the next guy's luck. He'd told the Fortymilers about Gold Bottom and wanted to be equally generous with Carmack. However, as the tale goes, Henderson bore a racist streak. Disregarding the Californian's affinity toward the Tagish and other tribes, he made it clear that while Carmack was welcome on his stream, his native brethren were decidedly *not*.

This insult stuck in George Carmack's craw. By August 1896 it had festered into full-blown hatred. Too bad for Henderson, because on the 16th of that month Carmack, Jim and Charley were exploring a Klondike branch called Rabbit Creek when they happened upon some color squeezed between slabs of bedrock—like cheese in a sandwich, one would later remark. Carmack had never been a big Mammon worshipper, yet he couldn't resist the opportunity to stake a claim this promising. So he and his friends hied off to the claim recorder's office at Fortymile, telling everyone they met on the way about the Rabbit Creek prize.

It didn't take but another month for most of that stream, redubbed "Bonanza Creek," to be parceled out among "sour-doughs" (Yukon old-timers) already living in the area. Newcomers then turned to the nearby Indian River and to Bear, Hunker and Eldorado creeks, all of which, in time, gave up kings' ransoms. Small towns in the Yukon Valley were quickly deserted as miners followed the rainbow to what they believed was the Klondike's pot of gold.

One prospector was conspicuously absent from this maiden wave of the stampede: Robert Henderson. Carmack knew Henderson had resumed panning at Gold Bottom, yet his lingering resentment of the man prevented Carmack from telling him of the Bonanza strike. Henderson didn't hear until it was too late to locate there.

Fate really turned against Henderson after that. His competitors on Gold Bottom Creek, laboring downstream from where the Canadian had been for months, discovered much richer deposits than he ever had. Rather than bury his disappointment and stake a new claim nearer theirs, Henderson moved deeper into the backcountry, hoping to light upon a larger lode. Eventually, sick and bitter over the bounty he'd missed, he gave up his pursuit, took the mere \$3,000 he had to show for his years of hard work and hopped a steamboat for Seattle—only to have his money stolen during the trip.

### Coming Soon to the Washington State History Museum

#### GOLDEN DREAMS THE QUEST FOR THE KLONDIKE, FEATURING PHOTOGRAPHS BY ASAHEL CURTIS

*The love of gold and adventure drove thousands to seek their fortunes in the goldfields of the Yukon. Golden Dreams recreates the journey, as seen through the eyes of the photographer Asahel Curtis. His compelling visual images, coupled with integrated video productions using voices and the actual words of the stampedes, bring their stories to life. Recreated dioramas and stage sets work as well to transport the visitor into this most amazing journey.*

*On view at the Washington State History Museum from July 17, 1997, to June 2, 1998.*

If not for inclement weather, the Klondike Gold Rush might have been in full roar by early 1897. But the cold and isolation of a Yukon winter are daunting. Waterways freeze solid enough for dogsleds to employ them as highways, and men there used to stop shaving after October 15 because it was too much trouble to melt snow enough for a grooming bowl full of water.

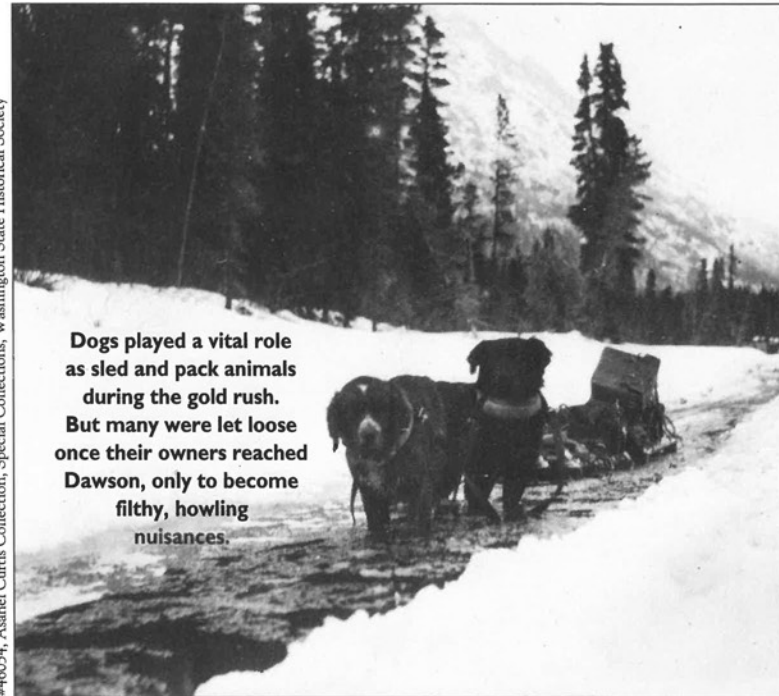
River traffic, which usually carried Yukon and Alaska news to the “outside world,” was completely shut down by ice shortly after Carmack’s discovery. The informal “moccasin telegraph” did spread the word throughout the surrounding region, and by January 1897 a few thousand veteran prospectors residing as far south as the Pacific Northwest had both heard about the gold finds and were preparing to brave the Yukon’s frigid temperatures. However, for the most part, this remained an “insiders’ rush” until the following summer, when the *Excelsior* and *Portland* reached the West Coast with their grizzled miners. After that, nothing so commonplace as snow and ice could stay the northward flood of humanity.

Renowned “Bard of the Klondike” Robert W. Service didn’t reach the Yukon until 1904, well after the excitement had died down. But in his poem, “The Trail of Ninety-Eight,” he captured well the delirium of that time:

*Gold! We leapt from our benches. Gold! We sprang from our stools.  
Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools.  
Fearless, unfound, unfitted, far from the night and the cold,  
Heard we the clarion summons, followed the master-lure—  
Gold!*

Even before the *Portland* tied up at Seattle she was booked solid for her return voyage to Alaska. Within another week bank clerks, barbers, ferry pilots and preachers from all over the city had quit their jobs and bought passage to the raw southeast Alaskan hamlets of Skagway or Dyea, from which two parallel mountain trails—respectively, the White Pass route and the more popular one across Chilkoot Pass—led toward Klondike country. The *Seattle Times* lost most of its reporters to “Klondicitis,” as the gold madness was being called, and police force ranks were equally decimated. Streetcars stopped running as drivers deserted their posts. The city’s mayor, W. D. Wood, who was attending a convention in San Francisco when the rush commenced, didn’t bother to come home. Instead, he telegraphed his resignation, raised money to buy a ship in the Bay Area, and was so excited about sailing to Alaska that he forgot to load 50,000 pounds of his passengers’ belongings and was almost lynched at dockside.

Presently, anything a prospector thought he needed could be purchased on the shores of Elliott Bay, from heavy mackinaw jackets and wide-brimmed hats to “crystallized eggs,” milk tablets and huge “portable” stoves. Bicycles—some with forward skis—were snapped up by people who’d obviously never faced mountains as forbidding as those in the



**Dogs played a vital role as sled and pack animals during the gold rush. But many were let loose once their owners reached Dawson, only to become filthy, howling nuisances.**

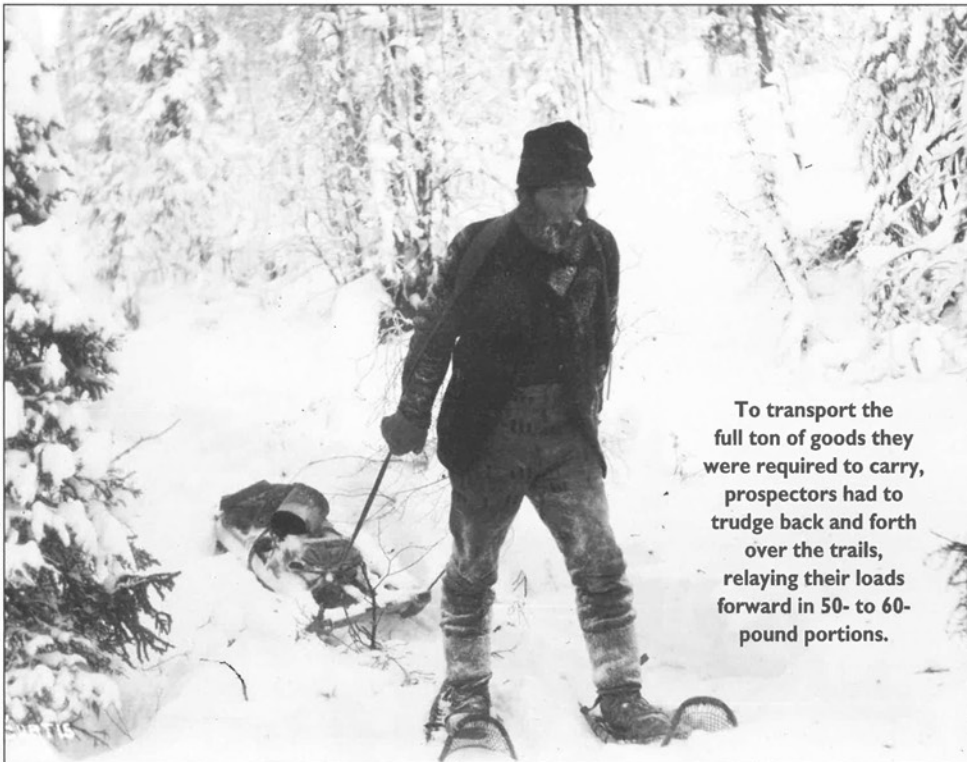
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Yukon. Horses that had once been steps away from the glue factory commanded outlandish prices on Seattle docks, and when horses were in short supply, reindeer and elk substituted. Told that dogsleds would help speed them to their pots of gold, prospectors fought over the malamutes and mutts being imported into the city on a weekly basis. They even shanghaied household pets. “Somebody stole our dog . . .,” complained young Mattie Harris, whose mother had refused to sell the family canine to a departing argonaut. “The man took him and went on. We couldn’t go after him.”

Merchants owed a tremendous debt of gratitude to Canada’s North-West Mounted Police. As the human tide rose in the Yukon, the Mounties swept in to maintain order, as well as to ensure that stampeders were properly equipped. One thing they absolutely insisted upon (and double-checked at border crossings on the Chilkoot and White Pass trails) was that everyone entering the territory come with a year’s stock of food—about 1,150 pounds.

Added to the tents, cooking utensils, mining tools, winter attire and other necessities on the expedition, that meant that each Klondiker had to transport roughly a ton of belongings. This was no easy task, since a man could reasonably carry only 50 or 60 pounds on his back at a time. He either had to pack his provisions atop horses or shuttle them along in portions, caching each new load as he went back for the next, eventually making up to 30 trips over the same ground. People who were coming from someplace else usually waited until they reached Seattle or Vancouver before loading themselves down with these goods.

Any money the stampeders had left before departing from Seattle generally went toward entertainments because they knew they’d not see civilization again for a long while. Thus, billiard halls, saloons and Turkish baths all did a boomtown



**To transport the full ton of goods they were required to carry, prospectors had to trudge back and forth over the trails, relaying their loads forward in 50- to 60-pound portions.**

trade. So did prominent local brothels such as those owned by Lou Graham and Rae Roberts, where virtue-challenged employees gave miners one last night of warmth to remember in chilly days to come. Especially in the rush's first year, city streets were crowded and noisy all night long, convincing a sober New Yorker named Arthur Dietz that Seattle was "more wicked than Sodom."

Not long after the *Portland's* landing, the *Post-Intelligencer* put into print what was already in everybody's mind: "Prosperity is here." This was thrilling news indeed—karmic recompense for the hardships inflicted upon Seattle over the previous decade. In 1889, 30 of its central business blocks had been leveled during a 12-hour fire. Four years later the city was hit by a nationwide depression that followed the Panic of 1893, closing banks, sending land values into a tailspin, and making suicide an all-too-common theme in obituaries. (See *Columbia*, Winter 1993/94).

Seattle desperately needed the Klondike Stampede's fiscal boost. Yet how could it beat out San Francisco and Vancouver, British Columbia, to become the principal jumping-off point to the Far North? After much consideration, the chamber of commerce decided Seattle needed a press agent. So it hired Erastus Brainerd.

Connecticut-born and Harvard-educated, Brainerd was volatile, erudite and more than a tad egotistical. Prior to reaching Seattle in 1890, he'd been an art curator in Boston, an editorial writer for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, and an editor at newspapers in Atlanta and Philadelphia. On the rebound from financial failures in managing his own papers, Brainerd signed on to edit the newly combined *Seattle Press-Times* (now the *Seattle Times*). But his concept for the daily

was several intellectual rungs above what its readership wanted. He was consequently let go, only to be named by Republican Governor John H. McGraw as Washington state's land commissioner, a position he held until a Populist political surge in 1896.

Free publicity from the *Portland's* "ton of gold" gave Brainerd a major head start in touting his city and its links to Alaska and the Yukon. He followed it up by blitzing newspapers and magazines with advertisements that detailed Seattle's convenient access to the gold fields. He penned stories about the Seattle-Alaska connection for East Coast publications, then turned around and quoted his glowing phrases from those stories

in news releases that he sent to editors. He assembled fat packets of photographs showing Alaska and Seattle, and then dispatched them to European and South American rulers. (One such folder reached German Kaiser Wilhelm II who, convinced it was a bomb, refused to crack the envelope.) Any letters of thanks that Brainerd received he copied and sent on to the papers as well, hoping always to read the names Seattle and Alaska in the same sentence.

Just how successful was Brainerd in retailing the connection of Seattle, Alaska, and the promise of Klondike wealth? Enough that he, himself, headed north in the spring of 1898.

**E**stimates are that a million people seriously considered joining the Klondike gold rush in its early days. Some 100,000, from all corners of the planet, eventually journeyed to Alaska and the Yukon, leaving behind their children, their spouses, their careers for one wild dance in the arms of Lady Luck.

No matter their preparations, they were often caught short of anticipating what the northlands might throw their way. Men, women and children faced blizzards while hiking mountain passes. Thieves took their money, frostbite and food poisoning sapped their optimism, they were attacked by mosquitoes, and some folks perished in snowslides and floods. Yet even had they known what would befall them, these people might have set off for the Klondike anyway. The tug of gold was that strong.

The routes they took differed. Thousands tried to cross Canada, a tortuous overland trek of 1,583 miles from Edmonton, Alberta, to Dawson City that few followers completed. Many others, setting off over glaciers from the Gulf of

*Gold! We wheeled in the furrow, fired with the faith of fools . . .*

Alaska, perished by falling into crevasses. Well-to-do Klondikers preferred a safer 4,722-mile ship excursion from Seattle to St. Michael, on Alaska's west coast, and then east up the Yukon River.

But the majority came first to Seattle, Vancouver or San Francisco (many traveling on special "gold-rush cars" provided by America's transcontinental railroads) and then boarded, bought or did their best to hijack anything that might float them up the Inside Passage—more than 1,000 miles—to two trails in southeastern Alaska. Both trails would take them over the Coast Mountains and the United States-Canada border, and then on to the headwaters of the Yukon River. From there they could boat all the way in to Dawson.

The more notorious of these two routes—across White Pass—was rooted in the town of Skagway. Introduced by an exquisite glacier-shaded harbor (jammed most of the time with vessels that had been abandoned by impatient argonauts), Skagway of the 1890s was a farrago of tree stumps and tents and hastily rendered wooden structures, a place attuned to the discordant rhythms of saws, neighing horses, creaking wagons, and men bargaining for goods. California naturalist John Muir likened it to "a nest of ants taken into a strange country and stirred up by a stick." He might have added that Skagway was a huckster's haven, lorded over by one Jefferson Randolph Smith—more familiar as "Soapy," thanks to his fondness for a confidence game that involved paper money wrapped around bars of soap. Smith, a mustachioed former Georgian, was a politically savvy crook, mounting a reputable front while simultaneously controlling an extensive network of card sharps, grifters, harlots, spies and murderers. From his arrival in Alaska in 1897 until a vigilante gunned him down a year later, Soapy was "the Uncrowned King of Skagway."

Prospectors who hoped that their march up the White Pass Trail would relieve them of the Smith gang's predations soon learned that Soapy's cronies were active even there, posing as clerics or gold seekers, all ready to fleece the unsuspecting. However, these criminal threats were nothing when compared with the natural dangers of that trail.

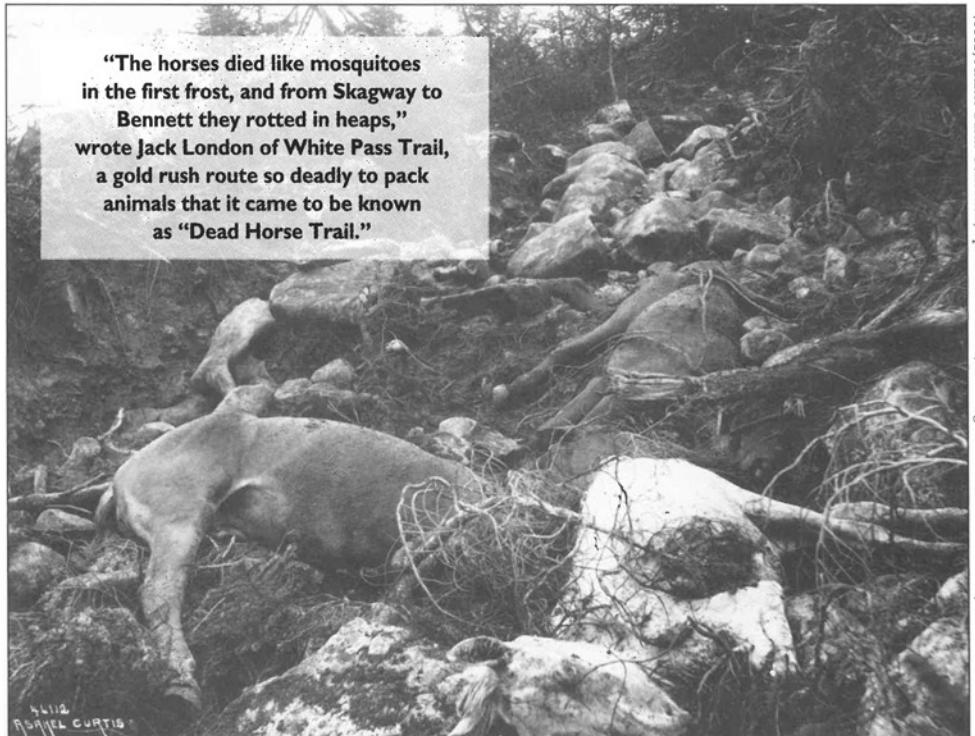
Surveyed in 1887, the route via White Pass and on to Lake Lindeman extended for about

45 miles. It was a reasonably low course, convincing greenhorns that they could tackle it with ease. That was a serious misconception. Switchbacks, deep mud holes and perilous cliffside stretches made the trail slow going—and deadly. So narrow was the trail in some places that pack animals had to stand for hours under their crushing loads, waiting for obstacles to clear ahead. And when they could move again, their owners pushed them relentlessly. One stamper recalled seeing a horse walk deliberately off the face of a cliff. "It looked to me . . . like suicide," he said. "I believe a horse will commit suicide, and this is enough to make them." In fact, few of the 3,000 steeds used on the White Pass road in late 1897 survived, inspiring its experienced travelers to nickname it Dead Horse Trail.

**A**side from the occasional avalanche (one of which killed at many as 70 people in 1898), the Chilkoot Trail was deemed comparatively free of hazards—and blessedly bereft of con men. It began in Dyea, nine miles north of Skagway on Lynn Canal. Though now only a memory (except for some rotten pier pilings and crooked cemetery markers) Dyea of a century ago was a thriving community. There men could complete their provisioning or hire native packers to help them carry their ton of supplies.

The biggest plus for the Chilkoot path was its length: only 33 miles to Lake Bennett, which lay just north of Lake Lindeman. In theory, a hiker could shave a whole day off his travel by going this more direct way through the Coast peaks.

**"The horses died like mosquitoes in the first frost, and from Skagway to Bennett they rotted in heaps," wrote Jack London of White Pass Trail, a gold rush route so deadly to pack animals that it came to be known as "Dead Horse Trail."**



#46112, Ashbel Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society



*Heard we the clarion summons, followed the master-lure—Gold!*

However, the summit of Chilkoot Pass rises 600 feet higher than that of White Pass and includes a quarter-mile-long climb that gains approximately 1,000 feet in elevation. During the summer, conquering this pass meant crawling over huge boulders and trying to find footholds in scree. But in winter it presented a particular torment. Photos show seemingly endless lines of men trudging in unison up the so-called Golden Stairs, ice steps that were carved into the ascent's steepest portion. Overdressed and out-of-shape Klondikers agonized going up this grade, some collapsing in tears. Even reaching the crest was scant cause for celebration, since hikers knew they had to turn around and do it all over again, toting yet another installment from their burdensome outfit. "It took the average man three months or more to shuttle his ton of goods across the pass," explains Canadian Pierre Berton in *The Klondike Fever*.

Is it any wonder that miners breathed a great sigh of relief when they finally reached Lake Lindeman or Lake Bennett? Yes, they still faced 550 miles of boat travel, through fierce winds and tumultuous rapids. But they also knew that this was the start of the last leg of their pilgrimage. Once they made it over the lakes and onto the broad, strangely shallow Yukon River—either by handbuilt raft, as many of the first stampedees did, or later on the deck of a small stern-

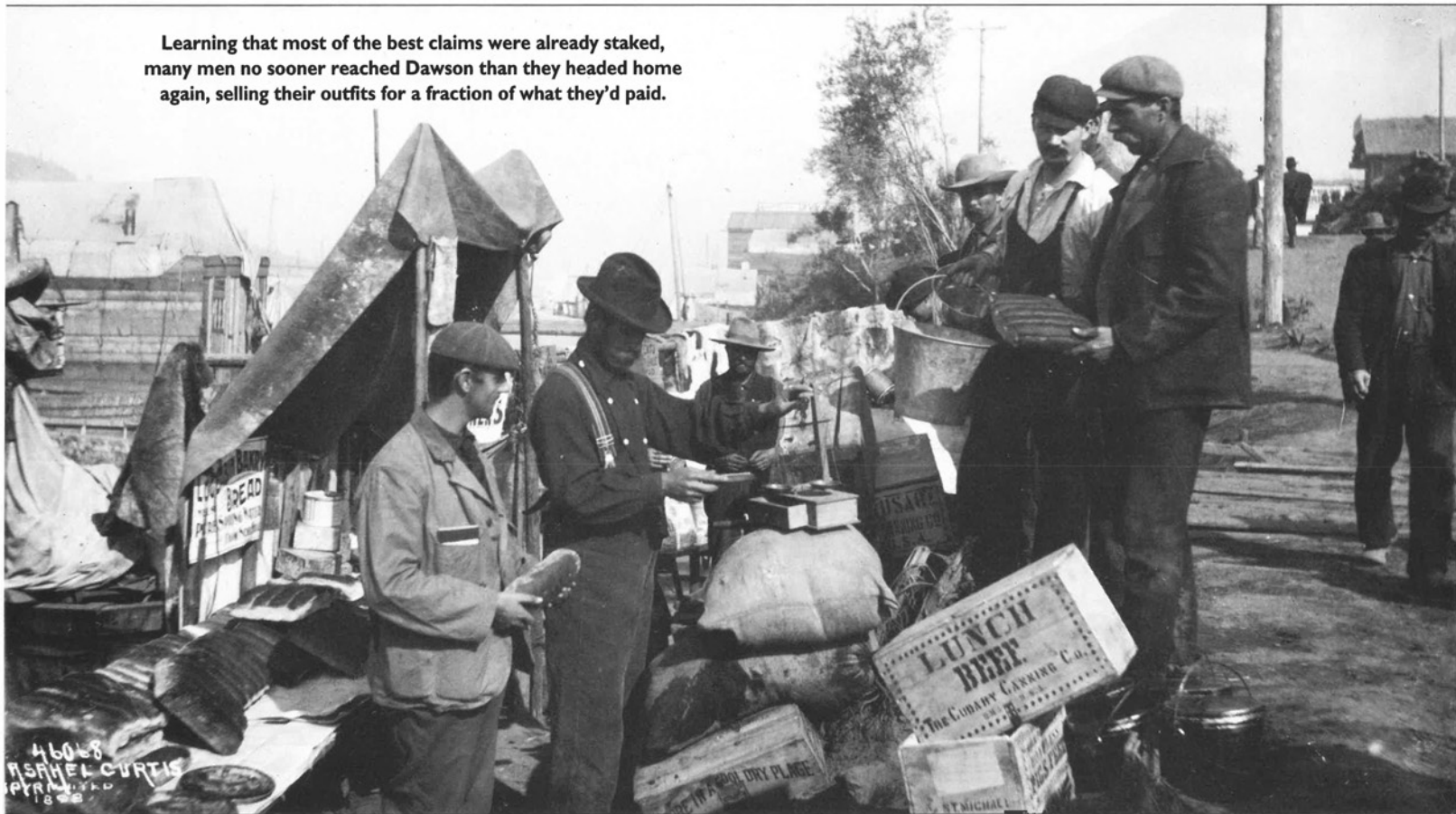
wheeler—they figured they were home free. Next stop: Dawson City and riches beyond imagining.

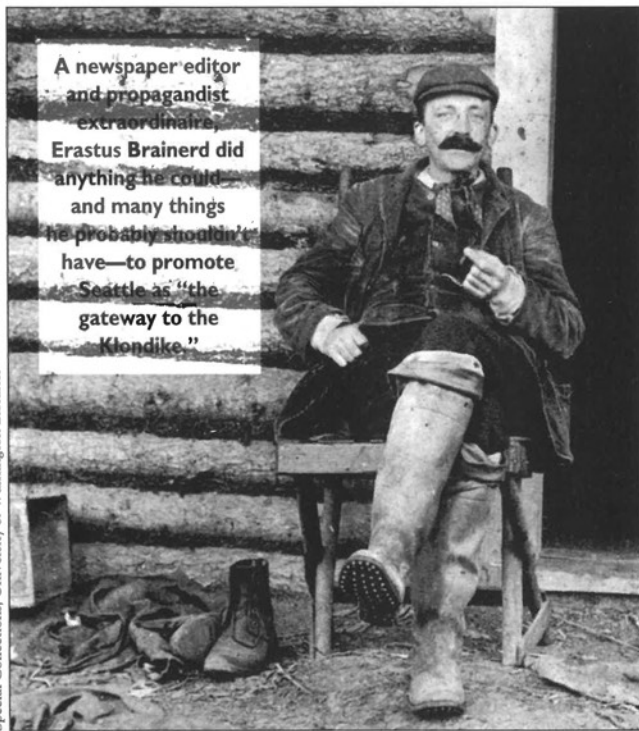
**E**dwin Tappan Adney, a newspaper correspondent who followed the Klondike stampedees, described the crowds that reached Dawson at the height of the gold rush:

*It is a motley throng—every degree of person gathered from every corner of the earth, from every State of the Union, and from every city—weatherbeaten, sunburned, with snow glasses over their hats, just as they came from the passes. Australians with upturned sleeves and a swagger; young Englishmen in golf stockings and tweeds; would-be miners in mackinaws and rubber boots, or heavy, highlaced shoes; Japanese, Negroes—and women, too, everywhere.*

The city itself was a hodgepodge of banks and hotels, warehouses and opera houses. Trail packers raced their dogsleds down the then-flashy waterfront drive, and world's record-breaking lines snaked from each of the town's only two public outhouses. Mounties guarded against serious crimes like murder but turned a benignly neglectful eye to saloons and gambling halls. Almost anything a man desired

**Learning that most of the best claims were already staked, many men no sooner reached Dawson than they headed home again, selling their outfits for a fraction of what they'd paid.**





was available in booming Dawson, be it beaded moccasins or locally unearthed mammoth tusks, pink lemonade or Paris gowns or champagne enough to bathe a hard-to-win lover.

Perhaps the only thing that couldn't be easily had was what these men wanted most: gold. Newspaper accounts had erroneously implied that wealth awaited anyone who could reach the Dawson gold fields. Paul T. Mizony, a 17-year-old from San Diego who landed at Dawson in 1898, noted that “hundreds . . . expected all they would have to do was to pick the nuggets above the ground and some even thought they grew on bushes.” Only when the starry-eyed prospectors finished their trip did they understand how hard mining was—and that the best claims on Bonanza and Eldorado creeks had been staked back in 1896, *a full year before the rush started!*

**B**y one reckoning, only about 4,000 people actually found gold during this epic stampede. Most, including veterans of other mineral pursuits, didn't recoup so much as their travel costs. “This is a country of contradictions,” Jonas B. Houck, a resident of Detroit, wrote his wife from Dawson in the summer of 1898. “It puzzles old miners to know anything about where to dig for gold. They will come here and dig where they think gold should be if it is anywhere in the country and not find anything and give it up in disgust; and some ‘greenhorn’ will dig where a person who knows anything about mining in other places would never think of looking and strike it rich. . . .”

Like Houck, many of the disillusioned no sooner reached Dawson than they left again. Others went to work for the “Klondike Kings” who had found gold and stayed to bleed their claims dry. Some, their passions satisfied by having made the mere chase after chimerical fortune, struck off for

the next great adventure at Nome, a puny outpost on Alaska's cold Bering Sea coast, where gold had been discovered in 1898. Or they joined the Spanish-American War, which erupted in that same year.

George Carmack and his wife Kate tried to ride their notoriety beyond the north country. They traveled to Seattle, but the press there treated them as curious savages, remarked on their disorientation among the city's tall buildings, and reported at length on Kate's disorderly conduct under the influence of alcohol. Carmack eventually disowned Kate and parted ways with Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley, never returning to the Yukon after 1900.

Thomas Lippy, the YMCA instructor and star of the *Excelsior* landing, took some two million dollars out of his claim on lower Eldorado Creek before selling it in 1903. He used the money to erect a grand home in Seattle and contribute to various philanthropic enterprises. But he died bankrupt after a series of bad investments.

Rather than join the ranks of prospectors, Erastus Brainerd served in Alaska as a “mining consultant” before returning in 1904 to Seattle where, as editor of the *Post-Intelligencer*, he railed against the multiple vices (gambling, prostitution, drunkenness) that were part of the city's Klondike legacy. When he died in 1922 his obituaries failed to mention that he had made Seattle “the gateway to the Klondike.”

In great part due to Brainerd's lobbying during the gold rush, Congress awarded Seattle a government assay office in 1898, ensuring that a larger measure of the \$174 million in Klondike gold that was flushed through the city between 1898 and 1902 would remain there. Many of the people who chose to stay on Elliott Bay and supply the Klondike prospectors made out better financially than the miners themselves.

By the first decade of the 20th century Seattle was expanding, flattening its hilly topography to make streetcar travel easier and improving its waterfront services. Many of the people who'd once passed through Seattle on their way to the gold fields were returning to live in the city, driving its population precipitously upward—from 55,752 in 1896 to over 237,194 by 1910. There was the sense that the city had shed its frontier vestiges, gained not only fame but stature through its participation in the Klondike insanity. To celebrate, in 1909 Seattle mounted something of a “coming out party”: the elaborate Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. While previous American fairs had commemorated the anniversaries of area discovery or settlement, this one, as historian Norman H. Clark once contended, celebrated only the fact that “in the story of civilization there is probably no record of more astonishing growth than occurred in the region around Puget Sound.”

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*J. Kingston Pierce, a Seattle writer, is author of San Francisco, You're History! (Sasquatch Books) and America's Historic Trails with Tom Bodett (KQED Books), the companion volume to this spring's PBS-TV series.*

# COLUMBIA

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FRONT COVER: Alaska gold rush poster, 1899. One of a series of posters advertising ships departing from Puget Sound for Alaska, collected by Washington State Historical Society secretary Edward N. Fuller. (Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society) BACK COVER: The Klondike gold rush lured some 100,000 people from all over the globe. Pictured are stampedeurs and their dogs hauling supplies along the trail from White Pass to Lake Bennett. It's likely the supplies, as well as the dogs, were acquired in Seattle, which became known as the "gateway to the Klondike." (Asahel Curtis Collection, Special Collections, Washington State Historical Society) See related story beginning on page 24.