Yukon Heritage Inventory
Phase III, Part 2

The Mining Recorders: A Theme Study

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YUKON HERITAGE INVENTORY

THE MINING RECORDERS: A THEME STUDY

Mining has been the mainstay of the Yukon economy for most of the territory's existence. Mineral wealth attracted white settlement and this lead to a separate political identity for the Yukon Territory. During the Yukon's formative years, the public official charged with mineral development, the Gold Commissioner, was virtually the governor of the territory.

The mining recorders of the Yukon, as civil servants, were an integral part of the political structure of the Territory. They held their authority directly from the Commissioner and Gold Commissioner of the Yukon and thereby represented the law of the land in the communities outside of Dawson City. First and foremost, however, their job was to ensure the orderly staking of gold bearing grounds and to assist in settling disputes arising over such stakings. Well before the great rush of 1897 and '98, there arose a need for such regulation.

This theme study, part of the Yukon Heritage Inventory's Political/Governmental/Administrative/operational theme, examines the role of the mining recorders in the Yukon with a particular focus on the built history associated with their activities.

The Early Mining Scene

The need to enforce Canadian mining laws in the Yukon was first brought to the attention of the federal government by the surveyor, William Ogilvie. He had been surveying the border area around Forty Mile in 1888 where he noted American miners were staking Canadian ground with little attention to Canadian mining laws.[1] At the time, however, Ogilvie and the government felt it might hinder mineral development should a strong government presence appear on the frontier goldfields. So nothing was done to regulate mining in the Yukon until the 1890s. By that time, merchants, the church, and an ever increasing number of miners were collecting in the Forty Mile area. The growth in population had brought a greater number of conflicts both on the gold bearing grounds and in the community at large. The "citizens" themselves petitioned Ottawa for law enforcement and government.[2]

In 1894, Inspector Charles Constantine of the North-West Mounted Police arrived in Forty Mile with Constable Brown to assess the conditions and needs of this booming frontier community. He found a quiet and peaceful place where he did not expect to have any difficulties except perhaps in enforcing mining laws and collecting customs. Both of these things were foreign to the largely American populous.[3] He returned the following year with eighteen policemen and the authority to act for most government departments and agencies with any interest in the north. Indeed he did not have much trouble with the miners,

although there was some grumbling about the collection of customs. With the discovery of gold in the Dawson area, however, the demands for mining recording increased drastically.

The Rush and a Need for Mining Recorders

Although the police were quick to get to the Dawson area when it was evident that a rush was taking place, they did not have the technical capabilty to organize the flurry of staking about to erupt in the goldfields. Fortunately, William Ogilvie, who was awaiting orders to begin the joint boundary survey with the Americans, just happened to get stranded in the Yukon during the winter of 1896-97 because he missed the last boat down the river. It was mostly happenstance rather than good planning that there was a competent surveyor available to lay out the new townsite of Dawson, survey mining claims and settle disputes between claimants. It was also he who educated the miners in Canadian mining law.[4]

Despite the work Constantine had done in maintaining an relatively orderly Territory during the Rush of 1897-98, it was obvious that a competent surveyor was required to be in charge of the goldfields. Not only was there a huge volume of claims to be properly laid out and registered, but vagueness in the mining laws complicated the staking process and led to numerous disputes. This latter problem resulted from the accepted staking method of the day. As the Department of the Interior, responsible for mining in the Yukon, pointed out, two stakes were

planted on the creek frontage but the "width of the claim and the direction of the end boundaries are not marked and are the frequent cause of dispute among claim holders. The apportionment of water for sluicing, of firewood for thawing the ground, the construction of ditches, the drainage of claims, etc." were all matters which required immediate and personal attention.[5] Since Constantine and the police were already swamped with work, Thomas Fawcett, a Dominion Topographical Surveyor, was appointed Gold Commissioner for the provisional district of the Yukon. He began the massive job of surveying and registering the claims with his son and one assistant. Their first office, a far cry from the palatial Territorial Administration Building that was to house later Gold Commissioners, was a small building rented from the Alaska Commercial Company for $50 per month.[6]

The Gold Commissioner and his Staff

As the population of the Yukon exploded, there was not only the need for mining recorders but an entire government structure as well. Essentially, the administration of the Yukon fell under the Department of the Interior. The Yukon Act of 1898 established the Yukon as a Territory separate and distinct from the Northwest Territories. The Act provided for a local government composed of a chief executive officer, (the Commissioner), and a legislative council. The Commissioner reported directly to the Deputy Minister of the Interior throughout the entire gold rush period.[7] This made the Yukon

government, such as it was, part of the Department of the Interior.

Under the Commissioner was the office of Gold Commissioner. The powers of this position were set out in the mining regulations.[8] Under the Gold Commissioner were the mining recorders who acted for the Gold Commissioner. By 1897, the powers of these offices were established but it was not until the Yukon Placer Mining Act of 1906 that both the mining regulations and the powers of the mining recorder were truly crystallized.

The 1906 act provided for the appointment of mining recorders for each mining district in the Yukon. The Governor in Council was given the power to appoint a Gold Commissioner, mining recorders, mining inspectors and their deputies. The Commissioner in Council was given the authority to divide the Territory up into districts as he saw fit.[9] The "deputies" the Act refers to were men appointed to act as "agents of the Mining recorder" in the smaller mining centres. The agents reported to the district mining recorder, who reported to the Gold Commissioner, who reported to the Commissioner. It is interesting to note here that mining officials were of sufficient importance to the administrative and economic life of the Yukon that, when the fortunes of the Yukon dwindled in 1918 and the position of Commissioner was abolished, it was the Gold Commissioner who assumed responsibility for the Territory.[10]

The Job of Mining Recorder

The 1906 Act also clarified a number of staking and registry problems which had plagued miners and officials alike for many years. There had been several attempts to revise the mining regulations between 1894 and 1906, resulting in up to three sets of regulations per year. There were four main areas to be resolved:

-size of the placer claim and the fees and procedures for registering that claim.

-fees and procedures for renewing placer claims and registering their successive ownership.

-levyies or royalties on placer gold.

-registration of miners through Free Miner's Certificates.

The size of the claim allowed dictated how much gold bearing ground a miner could gain access to. This varied from 100 feet at the time of the Rush to 500 feet under the new Yukon Placer Mining Act.

Initially, a miner was charged a fee to register his claim which allowed him to work it for one year. This had to be renewed annually and cost the miner an additional fee for each renewal. This varied over the years from $15 to $100. After 1898, they were required to sign an affidavit verifying that he had done $200 worth of work. For this he received a Certificate of Work.

To clarify matters and to prevent potential abuses of the system, a detailed fee structure evolved which outlined the items

Mining Recorders could charge for. At one time they were even permitted to charge $.25 for verbal information. In 1906, the fee schedule was enacted into legislation and the items have remained largely unaltered since then.

The Mining Recorders also collected royalties. This of course did not make them popular and it was hard to collect. In 1897, the royalty was 10% with a 20 % royalty due on gold taken from claims producing in excess of $550 per week. This varied, usually downward because of its unpopularity, until 1906 when the royalty was put on gold being exported rather than that mined. This proved much easier to collect as it put the onus on the shipper.[11]

One of the major sources of revenue during the early years of the Klondike was the Free Miner's Certificate. this allowed the holder to engage freely in mining. At an initial fee of $10, this brought in an enormous amount of revenue in 1898. The fee was abolished by the Act in 1906.

Mostly, the mining recorders were to do just that, record. The Act states that a mining recorder is to keep all records relating to mining in the Yukon and that they shall keep the following books:

Record of Applications

Record of Refused Applications

Record Book

Record of Abandonments

Record of Documents Received

It describes in detail how the books are to be kept and how the information in them is to be reported. It also describes the other activity which engaged the time of a mining recorder and his agents, fee collecting. Although the 1906 legislation did away with the Free Miner's Certificate, which everyone was obliged to have and which constituted the bulk of the income derived from the recorders offices, they still collected fees for a large number of items. These included:

> placer grants, renewals, relocations, registered documents, prospecting grants, certificates of work, certificates of partnership, certificate of improvements, registered documents-quartz, payment in lieu of assessment, water grants, hydraulic grants, dredging rentals, coal rentals, office fees and, the most lucrative one, royalty export tax on gold.[12]

Of course there were forms to be filled out for each fee collection, registration and certificate issued. There was so much paperwork that it was very difficult to avoid it becoming a fulltime job. This appears to be the main reason why the police, who often acted as agents of the mining recorders, tried to avoid taking on this task. In the Dawson District, there was so much paperwork associated with the Gold Rush that the first Gold Commissioner found he could never get out of the office to survey the claims, which was what he was hired to do.[13]

The Districts and Offices

There were three major types of reports which are of some help in determining where there were actual mining recorders offices and when they were established. From the Department of

the Interior files and reports, we get very few clues about where they actually built or established mining recorder's offices. Early reports on mining and revenues came from active mining areas and referred to revenues and Free Miner's Certificates issued. Since this could be done by the police or an agent, there is no surety that a mining recorder was present. Later, after the establishment of districts, annual reports on revenue came from there but there are few references to where in a district an office was located. Finally, there are a few reports on mining recorders offices which, unfortunately, only enlighten us for a few years.(see 1904-05, Appendix 1)

Mining recorders, as with other services related to mining, moved when the miners moved. If mining activity reached an adequate level in a community, an office was opened. If the activity fell off, it was closed. This policy sometimes worked against them as when they shut the Mayo office after a slack period and moved all the records to Dawson City just before Louis Bouvette struck high-grade silver ore on Keno Hill in 1919. This set off a stampede, requiring the reopening of the office and copying all the records which had been integrated with the Dawson City files.[14]

We get a good idea of the rise and fall of mining activity in the Yukon from the Department of the Interior Annual Reports since the number of places they report from, and the revenues generated there, bear a direct correlation to how much was being taken out of the ground. Thus, over the years, we can watch

certain areas fall off the list of reporting locations and certain others appear and figure that rise and fall relates directly to the fortunes of the community or district. (see Appendix 1)

About 1906, when the new act was passed, the reporting procedure seems to change as well. The two main districts, Dawson and Whitehorse, now report for the smaller districts such as Stewart, Salmon (Livingstone), Sixty Mile, Kluane and Conrad. By 1921, this has changed again and there are separate reports from each district save Dawson which covers reports for all the creeks and northern districts. This policy was likely due to the fact that revenues were falling and mining recorders offices were being closed in the smaller centres, especially on the Klondike goldfields.

The reporting areas had changed slightly again by 1929 with Whitehorse's District Mining Recorder reporting for the south, but mentioning the smaller sub-districts and Dawson doing just one report covering all the north including Mayo. It is difficult to differentiate proper districts, where there was a mining recorder, and areas from where they merely received reports. For example, Yukon Government Records show Kluane and Carcross closing in 1916. However, the Conrad district had been moved to Carcross in 1910 and it was still open in 1917 and both Conrad and Kluane are open in 1921. Either a great deal of opening and closing was going on or what the records mean by closing an office is that a mining recorder is replaced by an

agent. Obviously, the records are not clear. Some of this confusion is cleared up when, in 1955, the responsibility for the outlying districts falls back upon the shoulders of the police.[15]

What is Left

If we were to accept agents as part of this study, we would, by and large, be examining police posts. This has been done in a separate study. We would also have to examine the domiciles and places of business of whoever became an agent since that is probably where they ran their agencies from. Unfortunately, there are very few mining recorders offices proper remaining that we can confirm.

The Dawson Mining Recorder might also be associated with the Gold Commissioner's Office which resided in the Territorial Administration Building. There is no point in extolling the virtues of that structure as it relates to any of the political/governmental themes since it was the seat all government functions for over fifty years.

The sites that can be related most suitably to this theme study are listed below.

Mayo

In 1914, a mining recorder's office opened in Mayo. Since it had been moved from Minto Bridge, it retained that name until 1918. It was closed briefly in 1919 until the news of the Keno Hill silver strike necessitated a re-opening in 1920. It has

been open in different buildings ever since.

The Mabel McIntyre Cabin is the oldest remaining office, built in 1921 by Samuel Blackmore (YHI File# 105M/12/40).

The second building, constructed in 1933, is presently used as a garage by Dick and Joan Ewing of Mayo. It was built by Samuel Blackmore as well. The office was used until 1954 when the present mining recorder's Office was constructed.

The MacIntyre Cabin was lived in until very recently and was in fair to good condition. The exact location of the 1933 building would have to be confirmed with Roland Ronaghan, former mining recorder for Mayo.

The continuous operation of this office since 1914 is impressive. The fact that there were so few district mining recorders' offices and that two survive in Mayo is also quite remarkable. The offices are closely linked to the historic mining activity of Keno Hill, Elsa, Duncan Creek and area. They are still on their original locations but the level of modification of the 1933 building should be examined to determine its integrity. While the street these structures sit on has changed, it is mostly through attrition and not incompatible infill.

Sources:

Mayo Historical Society, "District Mining Recorder's Offices", (unpublished typescript).

Carcross

This log house was built c.1900. The first Mining Recorder for Carcross was Percy Reid, who later became Commissioner of the Yukon. The office was established here in 1910 after being transferred from Conrad.

The structure is in good condition. It forms part of the Carcross Core Complex, placing it in a most compatible environment.

The use and date of this building should be confirmed through additional research, including oral history with older Carcross residents and photographic searches.

Sources:

Yukon, Department of Tourism, Heritage Branch, Yukon Heritage Inventory File# 105D/2/25.

Yukon, Yukon Archives, YRG 1, Series 6,Vol. 5, File 630.

Livingstone Creek

There was a mining recorder in Livingstone Creek on and off from 1902. The office still stood in 1980 and had been converted into a residence. The site would require a field check before making any further statements about its condition or that of its environment.

Sources:

Yukon, Department of Tourism, Heritage Branch, Livingstone Creek Site File.

Canada, Sessional Papers, Department of the Interior Annual Reports.

Fort Selkirk

There was a mining recorder's office at Fort Selkirk from 1900 until 1904-05 when the office was closed due to budget restraints. Thereafter, the police handled the function for an unspecified time. The office was located in one of the old Yukon Field Force buildings, though we do not know which one.

Sources:

Yukon, Department of Tourism, Heritage Branch, Fort Selkirk Site File.

Canada, Sessional Papers, Department of the Interior Annual Reports.

Conclusions

A major portion of the information available on the mining recorders' offices is in the Department of the Interior Annual Reports. These are rather general by design and not very useful in gaining specific information about a particular site. To gain this information would require a delve into the Departmental Records at the National Archives of Canada. Likely a more fruitful source would be interviews with older residents and former mining recorders. At present, there is too little certain

information to properly evaluate these sites.

Endnotes

1. William R. Morrison, Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1985, p. 13.

2. For more detail on this matter see Yukon, Heritage Branch, Rob Ingram, "Law Enforcement: A Theme Study", 1990.

3. Morrison, Showing the Flag, p. 21.

4. Canada, Sessional Papers No. 13, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1897, p. 8.

5. Ibid, p. 9.

6. Ibid, pp. 9-10.

7. Terry Cook, "Paper Trails: A Study in Northern Administration, 1889-1958", in For Purposes of Dominion, Essays in Honour of Morris Zaslow, ed. by Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison (Toronto: Captus University Publications, 1989), p. 17.

8. The Revised Statutes of Canada, 1906. Vol II, Chapter 64, An Act respecting Placer mining in the Yukon Territory. Sections on Mining Officials.

9. Ibid, Sections 3 to 7 on Mining Officials.

10. Canada, Sessional Paper No. 25, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1900-1901, Yukon Territory, p. 19.

11. Yukon, Yukon Archives, Northern Affairs Program, Mining Recorders Records (Placer), 1894-1972, Finding Aid, Series 10.

12. Yukon, Central Registry Files, YRG 1, Series 1, Vol. 66, File 3525, Reports for 1925.

13. Canada, Sessional Paper No. 13, Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1897, Extracts from the Reports of Thos. Fawcett, D.T.S., Gold Commissioner of the Yukon Territory, May 1897, pp. 75-77.

14. Mayo Historical Society, "District Mining Recorder's Offices", (unpublished typescript).

15. Yukon, Yukon Archives, YRG 1, Series 6, Vol. 7, File 1090, Part 5, 1955.

Appendix 1 (* = known office loc'n, P = police run)

Mining Districts and Agent Locations 1899-1929

1899 Districts
Dawson
Stewart
Pelly
Hootalinqua

1899 Agents
Dawson
Ft. Cudahy
Grand Forks
McQuestion
Stewart River
Tagish

1900 Agents
Dawson
Dominion Creek
Fort Cudahy
Grand Forks
Gold Run
Hunker
Hootalinqua
McQuesten
Selkirk
Sulpher
Stewart
Tagish

1901
Dawson
Dominion Creek
Fort Cudahy
Forty Mile
Grand Forks
Gold Run
Hunker
Hootalinqua
Selkirk
Sulpher
Stewart
Tagish
Upper Stewart

1902
Dawson
Dominion Creek
Clear Creek
Cudahy
Forty Mile
Grand Forks
Gold Run
Hunker
Hootalinqua
Selkirk
Sulpher
Stewart
Tagish
Whitehorse

1903 Districts
Forty Mile
Sixty Mile
Clear Creek
Duncan
Dawson
Stewart
Pelly
Hootalinqua
Whitehorse
Dalton Trail

1904-05
Clear Creek *
Dawson
Dominion P
Duncan *
Forty Mile P
Grand Forks
Gold Run P
Hunker Creek P
Hootalinqua
Kluahne *
Livingstone P
Selkirk P
Sulpher P
Stewart River P
Sixty-Mile P
Walsh Creek
White Horse *

1906 Districts
Whitehorse
Dawson

1906 addn's
Conrad (moved to Carcross in 1910)

1915 Districts
Whitehorse
Dawson
Duncan
Sixty Mile
Conrad
Kluane

1921
Livingston
Teslin
Kluane
Whitehorse
Conrad
Wheaton
Dawson

1929
Dawson
Whitehorse
Teslin
Kluane
Champagne
Livingstone
Wheaton

The Mining Recorders

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Yukon. Yukon Archives. YRG 1, Series 1, Vol.66, File 3525.

YRG 1, Series 5, Vol. 18, Files 1030, 1032 and 1036.

YRG 1, Series 6, Vol. 4, File 30641 and 30643.

YRG 1, Series 6, Vol. 5, File 630.

YRG 1, Series 6, Vol. 6, File 1087.

YRG 1, Series 6, Vol. 7, File 875 and 1090.

YRG 1, Series 7, Vol. 23, File 28162.

YRG 1, Series 7, Vol. 31, File 33240.

YRG 1, Series 7, Vol. 32, File 33811-2.

Yukon. Department of Tourism. Heritage Branch. Yukon Heritage Inventory Files.