

# A YUKON POT POURRI



*by Roy Minter*





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Sixty years ago, in 1898, an army of men from all walks of life "stampeded" over the mighty mountain passes into Yukon, Canada. They built boats from native hand-cut lumber and floated down the tortuous Yukon River to the Klondike Gold Fields. There they founded the world-famous northern community known as Dawson City.

This 1898 Gold Rush into the Yukon triggered the greatest search for flake and nugget the world has ever known. The "Trail of '98" opened a new chapter of northern adventure and established a pattern of northern life that still exists today. Robert Service, the Bard of the North, felt the beat of early Yukon life which he penned in a style that still excites the imagination.

To commemorate this great event, Yukon will celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the "Trail of '98" during August 1958. Many events of interest will take place as Yukoners pause to salute those who opened up this great northern country just sixty years ago.

To the sourdoughs who lived and worked and laughed on the trails and creeks of Yukon - this booklet is respectfully dedicated.

ROY MINTER  
14 MAY 1958

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ROY MINTER

## WHITEHORSE YESTERDAY AND TODAY

It all started on August 17th, 1896.

On that day, George Carmacks with two Indian prospectors discovered gold on Bonanza Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River.

While Carmacks and his two companions, "Skookum" Jim and "Dawson" Charlie, are credited with triggering one of the greatest gold rushes in history, they were in fact acting on information supplied by an incurable gold seeker named Robert Henderson.

Henderson was panning "thirty cents pans" in the Klondike area before the rich strike on Bonanza. He advised Carmacks and his two friends to search along Bonanza Creek for gold in greater quantity.

They took his advice. The rest is history.

The discovery of gold on Bonanza Creek sparked a world wide stampede of men. Rich men, poor men, hungry men, brave men, disillusioned and lost men. They saw new riches, a new challenge, or a new meaning to life hidden in the icy gulches of the Yukon.

In 1898 they came in the tens of thousands. The Yukon's golden era was born.

Most of the stampeders came north by coastal steamer out of Seattle, Washington, Vancouver and Victoria, British Columbia. Anything that would float was pressed into service. Transportation was first, comfort and safety second.

The steamers landed at Skagway or Dyea, Alaska. Men poured from the ships and started the killing trek over the White Pass or the Chilkoot pass to the head of Lake Bennett. There they cut native timber and built crude boats to carry them five hundred miles north on the Yukon River.

Miles Canyon, located a few miles south of Whitehorse, presented the greatest hazard to river navigation. Many a crude boat with its inexperienced crew of gold seekers sank in the boiling waters of the Canyon. Graves along the water's edge gave mute evidence of defeated stampeders. Lives and riches were lost by a chance eddy, a swirling cauldron, a hidden rock.

Robert Service, the Bard of the North, penned his description of this murderous mile of white water. He wrote:

"We roused Lake March with a chorus we drifted many a mile;  
There was the Canyon before us - cave like its dark defile;  
The shores swept faster and faster; the river narrowed to wrath;  
Waters that hissed disaster reared upright in our path."

Undaunted - the brave pressed on. They etched the "trail of '98" deep into native rock - and the pages of history.

A wooden tramway was eventually constructed to carry supplies around Miles Canyon and the Whitehorse Rapids. Freight was loaded on to wooden tram cars riding on wooden rails. The "train" was hauled by horses from "Canyon City" at the head of Miles Canyon to CLOSELEIGH, a small tent settlement below Whitehorse Rapids. Subsequently the town was moved across the River and named Whitehorse after an Indian Chief who drowned in the swirling whirlpools of the Yukon.

It soon became obvious that if the new gold fields were to be properly serviced a more reliable means of transportation was required. Tons of equipment were needed to filch the gold from the creek beds. Tons of supplies were required to maintain the growing population of Dawson City and other newborn northern communities. This load could no longer be carried over the Passes on the backs of men, and jostled down the River in crude boats.

In May, 1898, the White Pass Railway commenced construction of a Railroad from Skagway, Alaska to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory. Building this roadbed over the fabulous White Pass was, indeed, an epic of construction. With nothing but picks, shovels, horses and black powder, the right of way was blasted and torn from mountain and gorge.



The 110 mile railroad extracted every ounce of courage, imagination and skill from its builders. They were not found wanting in any of these requirements. Their faith in the railroad and themselves was finally justified on June 8, 1900 when the first train rolled into Whitehorse.

The Railway solved the basic economic requirements for a reliable transportation system to service the Yukon. Freight could now be carried over the White Pass and delivered into Whitehorse at reasonable cost and on schedule. Loads were transferred at Whitehorse to "stern wheeler" river boats which churned their way down river to Dawson City. Being a railroad terminus and transfer point, Whitehorse soon became the distributing centre for all the Yukon. Its future would ever be identified with the fortunes of the areas it serves.

By the turn of the century the mad stampede was over. With the introduction of machinery, gold production became a more systematic operation. The frenzied rush to the Klondike had brought more gold seekers than the creeks could ever hold. Bewildered stampeders filled the labour pools and became the unemployed.

While millions of dollars in gold were still to be taken from the creeks - the bubble had clearly burst. Populations dropped as men left the North for the "outside", to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

During the thirties the population of Whitehorse dwindled to about three hundred and fifty persons. There it remained until the Pearl Harbour disaster in 1941. The defence of Alaska from enemy attack became another military problem facing the Allies. Talks between the Governments of Canada and the United States resulted in an agreement to construct a military highway from Dawson Creek, British Columbia to Fairbanks, Alaska.

In 1942 the quiet community of Whitehorse became a military camp. Thousands of American soldiers and tons of machinery were transported by the White Pass Railroad into Whitehorse. Buildings and military establishments mushroomed overnight. The gigantic task of building 1600 miles of highway through northern mountains and jungle commenced with the arrival of the first load of equipment.

The highway was completed in the incredibly short time of nine months. Their work finished, the major construction units departed. Road equipment establishments were left to maintain the surface and to act as general caretakers.

While the highway was under construction a string of air bases was built or improved to accommodate the largest aircraft. Through this North West Staging Route, planes were delivered to Russia. It soon became known as "Bomber Road". The present airports at Fort Nelson, Fort St. John and Whitehorse were part of the North West Staging Route System. They continue to grow with to-days economic expansion of the whole northern area.

During the war the United States, by agreement with the Canadian Government, built the CANOL Pipeline from the Fort Norman Tar Sands to Whitehorse. A refinery was constructed in Whitehorse to receive the oil. Production commenced and petroleum products were produced in quantity. However, the project was a high cost war time measure and was abandoned when peace was restored. Many of the storage tanks can still be seen from "two mile hill", when entering Whitehorse by car.

It is evident that the war had a tremendous affect on Whitehorse. The Canol Project, the airports and the highway have all influenced its growth. In turn, the thousands of people who were engaged in these projects were introduced to the country and saw its possibilities. Many returned after the war to earn their living and engage in the peacetime development of the Yukon, aptly called "Canada's Treasure Chest".

In 1946 the Canadian Army took over the Alaska Highway as a peacetime engineering project. The Highway has been immensely improved under their administration.

What was once a rough military supply road is now an avenue of commerce. Trucks and tourists by the thousands drive over it each year. Its excellent surface and location make it the finest gravel road of its type in the world.

After the war many important mining companies commenced operations in the Yukon. Major developments of lead, zinc, silver, asbestos, oil and gold sparked tremendous interest in the country. This activity has again made Whitehorse a distributing centre and base of operations.

In 1950 Whitehorse was incorporated as a city with a mayor and four aldermen. In March, 1951, the capital of the Yukon was transferred to Whitehorse from historic Dawson City. A modern Federal Building was constructed to accommodate Government Agencies. It boasts Yukon's first passenger elevator.

An Army housing development for officers and men of the Canadian Army serves Headquarters, North West Highway System. A similar project has been completed for the R.C.A.F. Station which is located two miles from the City. In addition, a large Federal housing plan for Federal employees is nearing completion. Private dwellings add their share to accommodate to-days population of six thousand citizens.

Other private and public projects, including a dam and a hospital, are being erected which indicates the increased tempo of the City's business life, and its importance in Yukon affairs.

The future appears bright for Whitehorse. There is much to do to tame the Yukon and make the rock disgorge its wealth. The doing will require more and more equipment, energy, power and people. All of these will pass through Whitehorse before reaching the new mid century Bonanzas.

Fortune did indeed shine on that August day in 1896 when Henderson told Carmacks, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie, to "check Bonanza Creek".

August 17th is still celebrated as "Discovery Day" in the Yukon. This is the way it should be; for that's the day - it all started.

## THE YUKON SPIRIT

The citizens of Whitehorse, and indeed the whole of the Yukon are in a sense isolated from the rest of Canada.

This was particularly true during the gold rush days. From 1898 until World War II, Yukon's contact with the "outside" was restricted by both time and space. In addition, hazards of early travel and costs involved added both physical and mental barriers to the frustrated traveller's lot. These conditions imposed a restriction on movement and created a feeling of detachment from other populated areas of Canada.

This feeling was further aggravated by the absence of news. Contact with the outside world was directly related to the mail and gossip with recent arrivals.

These basic restrictions were real and formidable. They influenced the Yukon citizen's attitude toward himself and his relationship with the community in which he lived. Under these circumstances it is easy to understand the birth of a comradeship that surpassed by a wide margin the fellowships of other Canadian areas.

However, this northern camaraderie was not the result of time and distance alone. They were merely the warp and woof of the new northern fabric. The stresses and strains created by man against himself, against others and against raw nature added the design and colours.

Early life in the Yukon demanded much from those who participated in it. Those that did were good men in terms of self-reliance, physical strength and courage. They had to be. Those that didn't possess these qualities were forced to their knees early in the game. Only physical and mental strength could engage and subdue the bone deep cold, the jagged terrain and the long winter nights filled, with silence and loneliness.

In his poem, *The Law of the Yukon*, Service wrote,  
This is the Law of the Yukon, and ever  
she makes it plain:  
"Send not your foolish and feeble; send  
me your strong and your sane."

The foolish and feeble, the strong and the sane started the long trek in 1898 but only the strong and sane arrived. The misfits and failures were trampled underfoot.

The arduous journey from tidewater into the Yukon was in a sense a test. Only those who passed it became part of the original Northern Communities. Those who reached the goal could identify themselves with a very select group; a group of men and women who had proved their mettle on the Trail of '98.

These are the men and women who founded the new cities of the north. With mutual confidence and respect, a comradeship was born that still exists today. "Sourdoughs" still gather in Seattle, Washington and Vancouver, B.C. to relive old times. What better material to bind men together than a victory in which all took part.

The early days were hard days. Each man had fought his way north for one purpose - gold. The trail winners were not dreamers, for they ranged hill, gulch and creek in search of the yellow metal. Search, stake, dig and luck were the ingredients for a rich strike. Some found gold - many didn't. Those who didn't worked for those who did.

The thoughts, the plans, and the energy of every man and woman were devoted to the production of gold. Food was purchased with gold dust. It was used for drinking, gambling and for erecting churches. It bought space on the river boats or a waltz with a dance hall girl. The whole economy was fed with gold dust. Its rich yellow colour was reflected in every man's eye.

This community reliance on gold created both competition and co-operation among the early Sourdoughs. Without it the communities of the North couldn't exist. Without rich personal rewards it would not be found. Rich or poor, lucky or unlucky every citizen was in-

extricably involved in the search and production of flake and nugget.

This common interest added another pattern to Northern life. Sourdoughs drove themselves North as individuals. They soon found they were part of a large company of individuals - all inflamed with gold fever. This mutual interest added new colour and dash to what was now emerging as "The Yukon Spirit".

As the northern communities developed the social and civic systems were gradually introduced. Organization reduced the chaos created by eager men bent on striking it rich. Law and order was introduced and maintained by a small detachment of the Northwest Mounted Police. This magnificent force, in its own quiet and efficient manner handled the many types of problems usually identified with frontier towns. It was not an easy task and many men gave their lives in the performance of their multitudinous duties.

However, successful law enforcement seems to be a condition created by the co-operation of all citizens. The numbers of men who poured into the Yukon between 1898 and the turn of the century made co-operation essential. However capable the Police Force was, it is difficult to imagine them maintaining law and order without this individual sense of co-operation. The personal responsibilities imposed by the absence of normal social organization can, if accepted, make good men better. By and large this responsibility was accepted by the fifty thousand odd people who lived in Dawson City and on the surrounding creeks.

This acceptance did not grow out of sugar coated sentimentality or a nobility peculiar to the early Yukoners. They were hard and realistic men. They accepted, simply because it was the practical thing to do. As a result, an unwritten code of behaviour grew out of the general realization that to survive at all, each person must be responsible to the community for his own acts.

This code which was symbolized by the absence of locks plus a low crime rate added still another design to the growing pattern of early Yukon life.

Out of these thoughts, ideas, and conditions the personality of

the North emerged. Without realization Sourdoughs became aware of "The Yukon Spirit". It began to encompass the whole range of human relations. It meant guts and gold and rough justice. It meant decency where men could act their worst. It meant winning without a boast and losing without a whimper. It meant the honky tonk blare of the dance halls. It meant the quiet supplication of a boy who tried to win over whisky - and lost.

Then - there is the spirit of the land itself. There is no doubt that at times it made heavy demands of those who lived in it. It was both loved and hated. It still is. The rugged mountains with their deep locked treasures gripped the early gold seekers in helpless fascination. They still do.

Yukon cannot be ignored, for one is confronted with its beauty and cruelty at every turn. Where the temperate zones have mild changes in season, the Yukon's are sharp and abrupt. The light of summer, the dark of winter. The heat, the cold - the dust, the snow. The changes are too dramatic to ignore.

Who can live in this land and not fall under its spell? Thousands have gone "outside" only to return again, in answer to the "Call of the North".

. . . It's the great, big broad land way up yonder,  
It's the forest where silence has lease;  
It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder,  
It's the stillness that fills me with peace.

- - - Robert Service

The modern Yukon citizen lives among the echoes of the greatest gold rush in the history of the world. It is little wonder that the Yukon Spirit of old still survives today in the Land of the Midnight Sun.

Certainly life is easier now than during the stampede but the feeling of imminent discovery still permeates the air. While air travel has reduced isolation in terms of time, it still exists in terms of space. Isolation is still a Northern Social magnet that draws men together. The free wheeling uninhibited hospitality of the past is still reflected in today's social life. Yukon social barriers are flexible. They are

raised for an occasion only to be removed the following day. The banker and the clerk, the mechanic and the judge meet on common ground. It could not be otherwise in the Yukon.

Today, Yukon riches entice the prospector and adventurer. The challenge brings the builder and the doer. Northern conventions invite the dreamer and the non-conformist. History calls the writer and photographer. Profit attracts the industrialist or the engineer.

The Yukon asks only that the Cheechako learn its ways; watch the ice come in and the ice go out. If these conditions are met he may enter the northern fraternity, and call himself a Yukoner. This is safe enough; for Yukoners know that one year in Yukon will capture the heart of any man. He will never shake the Yukon from his thoughts. He will have learned and lived by the Yukon Spirit. He will never be quite the same again.



## THE YUKON INDIAN

Every corner of North America was once the home of an Indian tribe. Indian communities were established throughout the length and breadth of the Continent and in most cases reacted violently to the paleface invasion.

Northern Indians were first introduced to the white man's ways by the Russian fur traders. These hardy adventurers, who discovered Alaska, pushed inland to hunt fur bearing animals. They returned to their ships loaded down with valuable pelts. The riches to be earned from the brisk European demand for furs caused the Russian traders to seek assistance from the native population. A few trinkets and beads would bring rifle high stacks of furs and huge profits for the adventurer traders.

A little over a century ago the first permanent British trading post was established in Yukon by the Hudson's Bay Company. At the time, Yukon didn't exist as a Territory, but fur trading soon became the areas chief occupation and source of wealth. Like the Russians in Alaska, the early traders from England and Scotland established a profitable business offering trinkets to the Indians in exchange for piles of valuable pelts.

During the fur trading days there were no tribes living near the present site of Whitehorse. However, the nearby Tagish and LaBerge Indians undoubtedly ranged the Whitehorse area during their nomadic wanderings. These Indians were skilled hunters and fishermen. They devised ingenious traps to capture fish and animals for food and barter. Some of these traps can still be seen today at Klukshu, near Haines Junction on the Alaska Highway.

The early Yukon Indians were skilled in the use of bow and arrow, club and spear. Samples of early weapons are still found during industrial excavations. The art of making pottery, or weaving was never discovered by the Yukon tribes. Some baskets were contrived of animal sinews or strips of hide. As a result, knowledge of the domestic life of early Yukon Indians is not nearly as rich or complete as that of the Continental tribes that ranged the Plains and Seaboard.

The languages spoken in Yukon were Tagish, Tlinket and Dene. These languages are still spoken today, but when a mixture of Indian groups gather they normally converse in English which has become the common language for tribal communication.

The early Yukon Indian culture was not as advanced as the Southern Canadian and American Tribes who had Gods or Dieties, with rich religious attitudes superimposed on their societies. Yukon Indians placed their greatest importance on the power of magic. If the magical rites were properly performed then success was insured in their hunting ventures. There are many myths and stories dealing with their great mysteries of life. While they might sound unreasonable to the modern mind they cannot be ignored. These colourful hair bristling legends are still told and enjoyed by the present day Indians of the Territory.

The intrusion of the white man into the Indians' domain has robbed him of much of his early customs and colour. The modern Indian is as acquainted with twentieth century gadgetry as his white brothers. As a result the Indian has not developed his own culture, he merely accepts the historic aspects of the past as he tussles with the complexities of a white man's society.

Today there are about 2,000 Indians located in Yukon. They are administered by the Indian Affairs Branch of the Dept. of Citizenship and Education. The Department maintains one day and three residential schools. There are approximately five hundred Indian pupils under instruction.

The modern Yukon Indians still devote much time to trapping and fishing. They maintain "fish-wheels" in the Yukon River to ensure an adequate supply for winter as well as supply fresh fish to Yukon markets. During the summer months many of the skilled young Indians obtain employment on road maintenance. This includes truck driving, heavy equipment operating and general construction work. Employment on big game hunting parties also provides incomes for expert Indian guides and hunters.

The older men have not kept pace with the young. The new skills cannot be learned after years of native life and habit. The

senior Indians maintain a quiet aloofness and continue life in their traditional manner. There are many elders who remember seeing their first white man at the time of the gold rush in 1898. The influx of thousands of gold hungry men was an alarming sight to Indians whose lives had been lived in the solitude of the forest. This epic event is still used to mark the passage of time and a reference point in tribal history.

The Yukon Indians clothing, both practical and ceremonial was never as colourful as that created by the Indians of the Plains. The feather headdress was unknown. Colour was confined to coats of beaded hides, moccasins and gloves. In comparison with the traditional dress of Southern Chief and Brave, the Yukon Indian dress is colourless. However, when the harshness of the land is considered, the development of practical warm clothing instead of colourful feather bedecked dress, is easily understood.

Some distinctive Indian art was created by using porcupine quills to decorate clothing. However, this skill was gradually lost when the traders introduced beads as a medium of trade. When silk thread was introduced by the traders Indian women became highly skilled in embroidering colourful designs on the Indian Parka. The Old Crow Indians, inside the Arctic Circle, have developed this art to an extremely high degree.

The future of the Yukon Indian is the concern and responsibility of every Yukon citizen. A practical program of Yukon Indian development has been formulated under the auspices of the Indian Affairs Branch and The Yukon Indian Advancement Society. By imagination and patience, interest and guidance, the young Indians of Yukon are being helped to develop new skills and to broaden their understanding of life and society.

It is the earnest hope of many responsible people that one day an Indian voice of authority will give voice to wise thoughts, and that many will listen. On that day, Yukon Indians will emerge from the past to a life of richer meaning and productivity.

Let the voice speak soon.

## THE PEOPLE - AT WORK

The people of Whitehorse and all Yukon are determined to succeed in their great frontier adventure.

There are metals to find, mines to develop, bridges to erect and buildings to build. The design, construction and financing of development projects are in the hands of men with courage and vision. They are supported by a skilled industrial work force of proven capacity and performance.

The citizens of Yukon are intensely proud of their past accomplishments. There is an abiding faith in the present and future of Yukon. If this was not so, the people would not continue to live in it, for life in Yukon, with its long cold winters is hard. There are easier places to live, but certainly none better.

There is a highly developed spirit of community responsibility in Yukon. There has to be, for the isolation and climate combine to create a tremendous feeling of interdependence. This condition exists in the field of development and business as well as in social life.

An examination of progress over the past ten years shows that giant strides in transportation, including railroad facilities, roads and equipment have been made. To obtain full use of vehicles and rolling stock, road and railway crews keep the main Yukon Highways and Railroad open all year round, despite the ravages of winter and the most rugged terrain in the continent.

Mineral development has taken a sharp rise since the end of World War II. Vast ore bodies have been located throughout the Yukon by the ever searching prospectors. The short summer season is full of feverish mining activity as the prospectors and geologists map the country's riches.

Among the more important mineral developments over the past two years, United Keno Hill Mines Ltd. in the Elsa Calumet area is the most successful. One of the oldest mining operations in Yukon is that being conducted by Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation whose

gold dredging activities take place in the historic creeks around Dawson Creek.

Some of the newer operations show signs of real promise. Ceaseless work in the Clinton Creek area has opened a valuable asbestos property. The primary work on this mine has been carried out by Con-west Exploration Company. The underground development is being carried out by Cassiar Asbestos Corporation. The property will subsequently be operated by this organization.

A silver-lead property at Mile 706 on the Alaska Highway is being developed by Dale Mountain Mines Ltd. Considerable mining activity is being carried out in the Watson Lake area, which is beginning to grow into a major Yukon prospecting centre.

The Carmacks area and the Ketsa River District are scenes of important gold activities. While the Gold Rush Days have long passed into history, the magic of the word "Gold" still stirs the imagination and prods men to action - new exotic metals notwithstanding.

Extensive exploration is being carried on by Prospectors' Airways Ltd., Newmont Mining Co., Canex Ltd. and many others. Great Northwest Investments recently opened an office in Whitehorse to assist in financing Exploration companies which are working in the vast reaches of the Yukon. In addition to base metal development, extensive oil exploration has been undertaken in the Eagle Plain and Peel Plateau area within the Arctic Circle.

Cal Standard are at present carrying out seismographic and geological surveys west of the Peel Plateau. The possibility of discovering a sea of oil under the domes of Northern Yukon is creating feverish activity throughout the North.

Oil is the blood of the century. It pulses through our engines by the billions of barrels. Will the shadowy deeps of Yukon yield some billions? The new network of exploratory roads east and north and west out of Dawson will help to supply the answer.

Equipment to locate and develop these rich mining areas is brought overland by Railway from the sea or via the Alaska Highway by truck.

The maintenance of the Alaska Highway is the responsibility of the Canadian Army. This work requires a large civilian staff of supervisors and technical men. The Headquarters Northwest Highway System is in Whitehorse and the majority of the military and civilian personnel are located there.

Every one hundred miles or so an Army Maintenance Camp has been established to maintain the Highway. Considerable competition prevails between the various Camp crews with respect to maintenance standards.

Loiselle Transport and Northern Freightways have established scheduled freight runs into Whitehorse, using heavy tractor trailer combination units. Some transport drivers have logged over a million miles on the Alaska Highway without serious mishap.

Canadian Coachways Ltd. maintain a bus schedule on the Alaska Highway between Whitehorse and all the major terminals in Canada.

A unique diesel-powered narrow-gauge railway is operated by the White Pass and Yukon Railroad between Skagway and Whitehorse. One train a day brings sealed container loads of freight which originate in Vancouver, B.C., and are brought North to Skagway on the White Pass Ship, "Clifford J. Rogers". This operation employs a large working force which must constantly overcome the challenges of the sea and the awesome four per cent mountain grades.

Canadian Pacific Airlines and Pan American Airlines serve Whitehorse and Yukon by providing regular freight and passenger service. Private light aircraft concerns provide air service at all major points including Whitehorse, Dawson City, Watson Lake and Atlin, B.C. The personnel of the airways continue to provide and expand the air services, pioneered by Canada's famous bush pilots during the twenties and thirties.

Yukon businesses are providing all the services required to promote sound economic expansion. That they have succeeded despite

the burden of higher Northern costs and operating difficulties, attests to their ability and determination.

The Yukon businessman has a tremendous stake in the future of Yukon. He is demonstrating that faith by building new facilities and expanding old ones. These expanded services will provide the citizens of the North with many of the basic comforts enjoyed by citizens of large Canadian cities. They will also assist the investor, who approaches Yukon with plans for development.

The economic future of Yukon depends on the planners, the financiers and the workers. If the teamwork of the past is any criterion - the future of Yukon is assured.

## THE PEOPLE - AT PLAY

Life in the Yukon is fun. It could hardly be otherwise for it contains the greatest conglomeration of characters, oddballs, side-winders and wonderful people, than any other place in Canada, and perhaps the whole world.

Whitehorse has contributed its fair share of Yukonese to the record. It's written on the faces of the old timers who have all seen and done a thing or two. Their informal dress, their beards, their boyish antics, their easy gait suggests a flair for living peculiar to a special breed of men. They have endless tales to tell of derring do, stakes lost and whiskey galore. While time has deepened the lines on their faces their hearts are still full of youthful optimism and an overwhelming zest for life. Their horizon searching squints create myriads of crows feet which narrow the eyes to slits, but they don't hide the twinkle that's in them. They transmit generosity, humor and a thundering capacity to create a lot of glee.

The daily life of Whitehorse is busy and productive, but never so frantic that a moment can't be stolen for refreshment. Here is a place where a fellow can stop and talk. The amount of conversation can be judged by Yukon's per capita consumption of nut brown ale and other liquid concoctions - it's the highest in Canada. Yukon is neither proud nor depressed by this honour. When this satisfying accomplishment was first announced there was only a slight pause by the participants to acknowledge the fact. In that fleeting second new lines of determination formed on the faces of Yukon's merry men. Observers who know and understand this look, were filled with confidence and pride. They knew that the record would be maintained and even increased by superior Yukon performance. It has been said that Yukoners never break under stress. This is so; they merely bend - at odd angles. This is an occupational hazard enjoyed by Yukoners who have quaffed themselves into statistical history. No other Territory can make this statement.

Yukoners are generous people. Their doors are always open to the stranger. Meat and drink in lavish portions and jolts are placed before the traveller. The food serves two purposes. First, to re-



furberish. Second, to so glut the stranger that he'll be unable to talk, thus leaving a clear field for his host to regale him with tales of Yukon lore. When the stranger departs in the wee small hours, he is usually convinced he has met a man with a mission. It is conceded that all the better Texans, are soundly Yukon trained.

Yukon social gatherings are informal and easy going. All the normal conventions are respected - that is if they make sense. If they don't, they are eliminated by the unspoken consent of all present. For instance, shoes are often removed out of regard for the host's clean floor. This is important; not out of consideration for the host, but because the floor is where people sit. There are also many followers of a cult (established by a Yukon oddball) who stoutly maintain that feet breathe, and thus suffer mild strangulation when encased in cured leather. Whichever school of thought is supported the results are the same; either the floor gets dirty or feet turn blue. The only possible solution is to remove one's shoes; and carry on.

To avoid misunderstanding it should be recorded that there are affairs where shoes are worn throughout the evening. However, these are mostly public functions, such as dances, where shoes are regarded as armour.

There are traditional social functions that are one hundred per cent formal. This includes the wearing of white tie, tails and, of course, black socks. On these formal occasions cigarettes are held with the arm slightly bent, the hand delicately curved with the palm up. If the traditional Yukon cigar is smoked, it is jammed in the mouth as usual.

An air of mild boredom adds to the charm of the "Formal" evening. It's all very lovely and all very stiff. This state of affairs has been known to last half an hour. Then - sixty years of Yukon history comes to the rescue. By midnight, the dam bursts with no possible chance of immediate repair.

There are other aspects of Whitehorse life worthy of consideration. There are writers with the seats out of their trousers. There are frustrated artists who paint and frustrated artists who don't paint. There is a competent pianist who has a great future on the

concert stage and several budding sculptors .

Whitehorse is an active town. During the cold winter months Yukoners are either curling, pounding pieces of copper into pots, rehearsing the fall drama production, operating model trains or practising the Choral Society's Christmas presentation. They will be found organizing a club for some worthy cause, or for perhaps no cause at all. There are cubs, scouts, guides and brownies plus teenage groups to engage the interests of restless youth.

Name it - and Whitehorse has it. The jumble of social activities creates a lively conflict of interests and, occasionally, the most delightful arguments. Everyone belongs to at least one organization that is devoted to the enlightenment of the rest of the town.

It's a town of committee men and fund raisers. The people build, correct, guide, proclaim and denounce. Each one of these projects requires a chairman, a committee and a sub committee. With so much building, proclaiming and guiding going on there is often a shortage of live wire builders, proclaimers and guiders. It's not unusual therefore to find the same live wires on all the committees. Unless all projects are carefully examined, live wires are liable to find themselves advocating a project on one committee and denouncing it on another. This is considered bad form - not because it's wrong to have two diametrically opposed opinions, but because it wastes so much beastly time. This is important, because Yukon libation vendors close at midnight and there is little rest sleeping on an empty stomach. Any live wire who persists in time consuming arguments is considered persona non grata, and to be avoided at all costs.

Yes - there is no doubt about it - life in Yukon is fun. It boils, it stretches, it shakes and sometimes almost totters, but it's never, never dull.

The people of Whitehorse love their town. They love it because it's full of other people who love it too. It has no false fronts nor inhibitions. There are all sorts of wrong things and a lot more right things. Right or wrong, they are there for all to see in the glittering northern sunlight which conceals nothing, but reveals - all.



