



Dawson City (South)

Walking Tour

Introduction

The historic buildings of Dawson City have been preserved through the years by a combination of a declining population, a growth in tourism and a well-trained volunteer fire department. A rapid decline in population and economic activity after the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush led to the abandonment of buildings rather than their demolition for redevelopment. In the 1960s, a more serious decline in mining caused the community to welcome tourism and invite investment in Dawson City's built heritage. A number of heritage structures have been restored or rehabilitated by federal and territorial governments, non-profit groups, businesses and private individuals.

This self-guided walking tour focuses on the buildings in South Dawson City that represent several stages of historic development of our community. Enjoy your hike!

Historical Sketch

Gold was discovered in Bonanza Creek on August 17, 1896 and Joseph Ladue was one of the first to hear the news.

Joseph Ladue knew the riverboats would need a landing spot so that supplies could be delivered to the miners. There was one likely spot and Ladue staked out a townsite in a swampy moose pasture at the mouth of the Klondike River. By October 1896, the mining camp had a population of 500 people and Ladue and his partner, Arthur Harper, owned the first saloon, sawmill, store and warehouse in town.

The first official survey of the townsite was done in January 1897 by Dominion Lands Surveyor



William Ogilvie who was in the region to determine the Canadian/United States border. The new town was named in honour of Dr. George Mercer Dawson, Director of the Geological Survey of Canada at the time.

During the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush, people arrived from all over the world, to make boom-town Dawson the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg. In 1899, the community was a thriving town with telegraph, electricity and telephone service. Dawson City was incorporated in 1902 and was the territorial capitol from 1898 to 1953 when the administration moved to Whitehorse.

Architecture in Dawson City

The earliest Klondike stampeders built log cabins and set up canvas tents over wooden frames. The log buildings were simple in design, economical to construct and could be quickly built to provide ample protection from the sub-arctic temperatures. Efficient and attractive, they retained their appeal and many historic and contemporary log buildings can be found in Dawson City today.

Disastrous fires in the winter of 1898-99 burned many of the original downtown commercial buildings which had been updated with framed facades. Many of these structures were re-built as frame buildings with locally milled siding. False fronts gave simple wooden buildings the illusion of affluence and importance. The larger facades also allowed for advertising and store-front windows.

From 1901 through 1902, Canadian sovereignty was represented by the construction of a number of impressive public buildings. The major religions of the day also built imposing wooden churches containing elements of the Gothic Revival style.

Although many modern buildings have been added and some buildings have been lost to fire and flood or time and neglect, Dawson City continues to have a handsome collection of built history dating from the early 20th century.

1) The Old Territorial Administrative Building



The Territorial Administration Building, built in 1901, has always been important to the community of Dawson. The building originally housed government offices as well as the territorial legislative assembly. At various times it has also been home to the local post office, a radio station, and the public school. The Dawson City Museum has used the building since 1962.

This was one of six buildings designed by Thomas W. Fuller to lend an air of permanence to the community and encourage investment in the Klondike goldfields. Fuller was a skilled architect, and later worked on the national parliament buildings in Ottawa. You can see other examples of his work in Dawson at the Commissioner's Residence, the Old Post Office and the Old Courthouse.

The Old Territorial Administration Building was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 2002, just over a century after it opened to the public.

The Federal Reserve

Immediately after the discovery of gold in 1896, a 40 acre land package south of the downtown commercial core was reserved by the federal government. The land had been occupied by First Nation fishermen who moved there after their cabins at Tr'ochêk, across the Klondike River, were purchased by the early prospectors and miners.

The Federal Reserve is bounded by Front Street to the west and south, Seventh Avenue to the east, and Church Street to the north. The North-West Mounted Police



(NWMP) constructed Fort Herchmer on the reserve and in 1898 the 288 officers and men were augmented by the Yukon Field Force, a contingent of 203 members of the Canadian Militia. Two government buildings on this tour, the Court House and the Commissioner's Residence, are inside the original Federal Reserve boundary.

2) North-West Mounted Police Commanding Officer's Residence



This residence was built in 1902 for NWMP Superintendent A.E.R. Cuthbert who was in charge of Fort Herchmer from 1902 until at least 1906. The building is a simple rectangle with an attached rear kitchen and servant's quarters, a low-hipped roof and small rectangular windows. The veranda was constructed at Superintendent Cuthbert's request in the summer of 1903.

By 1912, the foundation had settled causing the wallpaper to split in every room. Most of the water pipes leaked, the veranda was warped out of shape and the wiring was unsafe. The NWMP used prison labour to renovate the building and NWMP officers continued to occupy the building until about 1940. It was vacant until 1976 when it was converted into two apartments by Parks Canada. The Commanding Officer's Residence now serves as administrative offices.

3) Black Residence



This upper-middle-class residence was occupied at different times by a bar-rister, a bank manager and, from 1908 to 1929, by the

manager of the Yukon Gold Company. It is named for its most illustrious residents, George and Martha Black, who purchased the property in 1929 and lived here until 1949.

The Black Residence was one of the more elaborate homes constructed in Dawson City in 1900 and reflects the period of prosperity after the Klondike Gold Rush. We can see the influence of Neoclassical Revival architecture that is also apparent in the Court House, the Territorial Administrative Building and the Commissioner's Residence. Distinguishing elements include the columns by the entry, the dormers and a hipped roof.

George Black, a New Brunswick lawyer, had an extensive political career. He was a member of the Yukon Council for three consecutive terms, Yukon Commissioner from 1912 to 1916 and Yukon's Member of Parliament in Ottawa for the terms 1921-1935, and 1940-1949. He was Speaker of the House of Commons from 1930 to 1935 and was appointed to the Privy Council in 1945.

Martha Black left her social position, her security, and a failed marriage to join the Klondike Gold Rush in 1898. She married George Black in 1901. Martha Black went overseas with the troops during the First World War and was awarded the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her volunteer work. When George Black's health temporarily failed, Martha took her husband's place in Ottawa for five years. She was the second woman to be elected as a member of the Canadian Parliament. The Blacks lived in this house during parliamentary recesses, entertaining friends and hosting social events.

In the 1930s, Martha's garden, on the south side of this lot, was among the floral showpieces of Dawson City. Her interest in domestic and wild flowers resulted in her authoring several pamphlets and one book on the subject.

The Black Residence is maintained by Parks Canada and is rented as private housing.



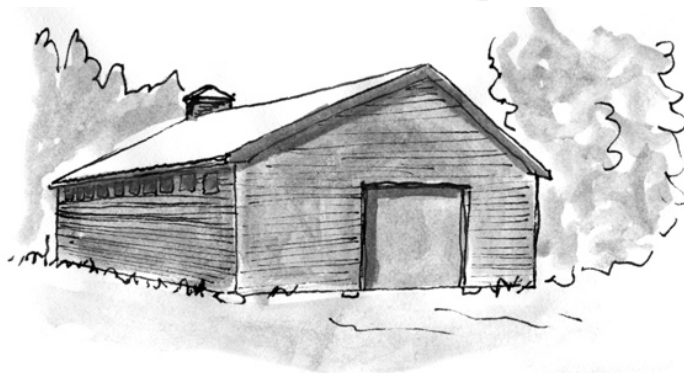
4) The Court House



The Court House was designed by federal architect Thomas W. Fuller and constructed between March and August 1901. Fuller closely followed the interior layout specified by Judge Calixte-Aimé Dugas who was appointed in recognition of the territory's 6,000 francophone residents. Although not as elaborate as the Administration Building, the Court House was also designed in the Neoclassical Revival style. In 1901, it contained two offices for barristers on the second floor. The ground floor housed the library, offices for judges and sheriffs, a judges' chamber and rooms for jury and witnesses. The construction cost was \$50,000 including a heating system, lighting, fittings, and furniture.

In 1910, the Court House was closed during the winter to eliminate the high cost of heating and its functions were transferred to the Administration Building. The NWMP headquarters burned in 1914 and the "Mounties" took over the Court House until St. Mary's Hospital burned in 1954 and it was then transformed into a 35 bed hospital, complete with operating rooms. The building's original symmetry was affected by an addition on the north side. The Court House is maintained by Parks Canada and leased as Yukon Government offices.

5) Fort Herchmer buildings



Inspector Charles Constantine established a NWMP post at Forty Mile, Yukon's first mining boom-town, in 1895. This detachment was moved to Dawson City after gold was discovered on Bonanza Creek in 1896. The government was concerned with enforcing laws and Canadian sovereignty during the anticipated influx of American miners and prospectors. The new post, named after Police Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer, had 5 log buildings constructed of local spruce with wooden slab or sod roofs. By 1903, the post included 12 log structures.

Three buildings from the original fort remain: the Jail, the NWMP Stable, and the Married Officers' Quarters. The Stable was designed by a private architect, Robert Moncrieff, and erected in 1903 to replace an earlier building. The Married Officers' Quarters was built in 1898 and occupied by NWMP officers until 1966, except for a period between 1923 to 1945 when the Canadian Corps of Signals used it as a radio station. The Married Officers' Quarters has national historic significance and is now used as Parks Canada housing.

The Jail, east of the NWMP Stable, was built in 1898 as a hospital for both the police and the public. In 1904, the hospital had a general ward, a private ward, operating theatre, dining room, kitchen, orderly's room, sergeant's room and dispensary. It was transformed into a jail in 1910 and used for about seven years for prisoners serving short term sentences and as interim housing for individuals accused of more serious crimes.

The Jail, NWMP Stable, and Married Officers' Quarters are maintained and interpreted by Parks Canada.

6) Commissioner's Residence



The Commissioner's Residence was also designed by architect Thomas W. Fuller. It was built in 1901 to present an image of elegance and confidence in order to attract potential investors to the Yukon. J. H. Ross, Yukon Commissioner at the time, wanted the significance of his position to be reflected in a building of suitable grandeur. The building started as a simple, two story structure with classical lines but was modified within two years into a fanciful Victorian mansion. A fire in 1906 demolished the Victorian trim and the building was reconstructed to the form and appearance you see today.

George and Martha Black were the last full time residents and they occupied the house from 1912 to 1916. During their stay, all levels of society, from humble miners to foreign dignitaries, were welcomed. The residence is nationally significant for the administrative and social leadership of the many Commissioners and their role in the development of the territory.

Parks Canada archaeologists, historians, architects, conservators and other specialists have worked for many years to recreate the Commissioner's Residence as it was when the Blacks held their grand garden parties and receptions. Inquire at the Visitor Reception Centre for tours of the building.

7) St. Paul's Anglican Church



Frederick Flewelling was the first Anglican missionary to arrive in the Klondike. He settled with his Hän-speaking parishioners at Tr'ochëk fish camp in 1896 and then moved to the First Nation village of Moosehide, just downriver from Dawson City. In 1897, Rev. R.J. Bowen arrived in Dawson City to hold services for the gold miners. He held his first services in a log cabin and then built a church with money from the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. This humble structure was replaced by St. Paul's Anglican Church in 1902.

The new church cost \$9,000 and had a seating capacity of 150 people. The pointed arches, spire, and tracery in the front window are in a Gothic Revival style while the tower is Romanesque. Architect Thomas W. Fuller, who was a member of the congregation, created the plans for the building. This church is owned by the Yukon Diocese of the Anglican Church and is a National Historic Site of Canada. Services are held here during the summer and tours can be arranged.



Dawson City (South) Historic Buildings

Walking Tour

- 1 The Old Territorial Administration Building
- 2 North-West Mounted Police Commanding Officer's Residence
- 3 Black Residence
- 4 The Court House
- 5 Fort Herchmer buildings
- 6 Commissioner's Residence
- 7 St. Paul's Anglican Church
- 8 Yukon Hotel
- 9 Straight's Auction House & Second Hand Store
- 10 St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and Manse
- 11 Berton House
- 12 Robert Service Cabin
- 13 Jack London's Cabin
- 14 Old Telegraph Office





8) Yukon Hotel



The Yukon Hotel is one of the oldest buildings in Dawson City. This two story log building was constructed in 1898 by J.E. Binet and was known as the Binet Block. It was rented by the second Commissioner of the Yukon, William Ogilvie, as office space for the Crown timber and land agents. The Binet Block was used as a residence before it was sold in 1909 to Henry Freeman, who opened the Miner's Rest Hotel. In 1931 the building was renamed the Freeman Hotel. The Freeman was purchased by Miss Emma Wilson in 1934 after her adjacent hotel burned. She renamed the Freeman the Yukon Hotel and operated the business until 1957.

The miners and others who lodged here enjoyed this location because it was quiet and provided more privacy than other downtown hotels. Heritage Canada Foundation purchased the building and converted it to bachelor suites in the late 1970s. The building was sold again in 1984 and continues to operate as a rental property.

9) Straight's Auction House and Second Hand Store



This "boomtown" structure was built in 1901 as Straight's Auction House and Second Hand Store. The building is a simple wood frame construction with false-front façade that was typical of many of the turn-of-the-century commercial buildings in Dawson City.

Ebenezer Straight sold groceries, hardware, tobacco, furniture, clothing, guns and ammunition until the late teens. The store had two paid employees during 1902 when the incorporation of the City of Dawson caused taxes to increase from \$150 to \$500. Mr. Straight was one of the 41 merchants that kept their business open after this tax increase.

"Straight's Second Hand", or the "Guns and Ammo Building" as it was also known, was abandoned for several years and slated for demolition in 1971. The building was picturesque and a favourite with visiting and local artists. Albert Fuhre, a local artist, headed a citizens group to save it and they raised the \$600 purchase price. It was donated to the Klondike Visitors Association who added temporary bracing but left it tilted to demonstrate the influence of permafrost on Dawson's structures. In 1998, Straight's Second Hand was sold to a Yukon businessman who continues to stabilize and maintain this well-known building.

10) St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church and Manse



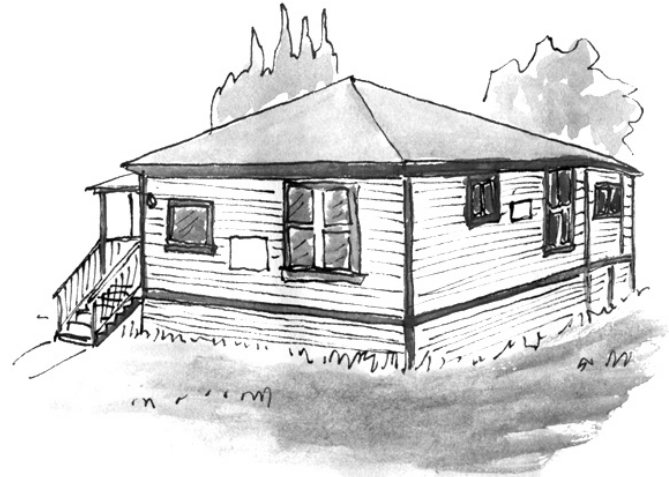
The first Presbyterian missionary to reach Dawson City arrived in October 1897 from Alaska. The first Presbyterian church and manse were completed in 1898 but the log church burned down in the same year.

The church and the manse were designed and built at a construction cost of \$16,250 by Warren Porter Skillings, an American architect who also designed the Dawson City Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce. Skillings may have used several different architectural influences to lend a sense of history to the church while making the manse more stylish and modern.

St. Andrew's Church has a massive asymmetrical appearance with pointed arch window and door openings and a corner tower with buttresses. This Gothic Revival style was associated with morality and goodness in the 1800s. The oak paneled interior had a seating capacity of 600 and the massive pipe organ was the envy of all Yukon churches for many years. In designing the Manse, Skillings used a Second Empire style mansard roof, dormer windows in the second floor and ground floor bay window and Neoclassical Revival columns, trim and stairway.

In 1925, the Presbyterian Church amalgamated with the Methodist and other churches to form the United Church of Canada. This church building was closed in 1932 but the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire continued to use the Manse as a meeting place and office. Both Church and Manse are maintained by Parks Canada and the Manse serves as staff housing.

11) Berton House



The Berton House is named for Pierre Berton, a noted author of fifty Canadian history books, who donated his family home to the community as a year-round writer's retreat. The house was built in 1901 and became home to the Berton family in 1920, the same year Pierre Berton was born. The family lived here until 1932.

The Berton House was rehabilitated in the early 1990s to provide housing for the Writer's in Residence program operated by the Yukon Arts Society and the Klondike Visitors Association. Since Berton House opened in 1996, authors from as far away as Japan have lived and worked here for periods of a few months to a year. Two major interior renovations were undertaken to accommodate the needs of visiting writers but the exterior remains true to the Berton era.



12) Robert Service Cabin



This log cabin, built with local spruce logs and a sod roof, is typical of small residences built in Dawson City in the early 1900s. Many of these cabins were rented to the clerks and officials who were stationed in Dawson for a brief time.

Robert Service is heralded as the “bard of the Klondike” and wrote many famous poems including “The Spell of the Yukon” and “The Cremation of Sam McGee”. Service was a teller for the Canadian Bank of Commerce and lived here from November 1909 to June 1912. When Service left Dawson City he wrote “Good-Bye Little Cabin” as an ode to his Dawson City home.

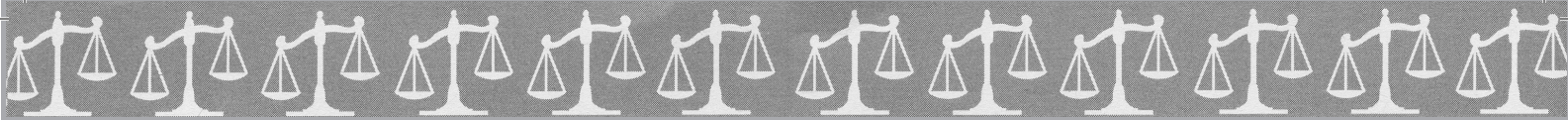
Robert Service was a war correspondent and a driver for the American Field Service during the First World War. Back in Dawson City, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire used his cabin for their fund raising events. The Robert Service Cabin is a National Historic Site of Canada, maintained and interpreted by Parks Canada.

13) Jack London's Cabin



Jack London was born in California and climbed over the Chilkoot Pass into the Yukon River drainage in 1897. He stopped to guide other stampeder's boats through the treacherous Miles Canyon and White Horse Rapids and then set out for the Klondike to prospect for gold. Disillusioned with gold mining and afflicted with scurvy, he returned to California in 1898. London wrote two very successful novels about the north, *White Fang* and *Call of the Wild*. They are still in print and have been translated into 50 languages.

This cabin was originally located on Henderson Creek, in the Klondike goldfields. One half of the cabin was taken to Pioneer Square in Oakland, California and the other half, the half with Jack London's inscription on the wall, was re-located here. The Jack London Interpretation Centre is operated by the Klondike Visitors Association.



14) Dawson City Telegraph Office



This small-scale Neoclassical Revival building was designed by the Canadian government architect Thomas W. Fuller and constructed in 1899. The building was originally located just east of the Court House, in the Federal Reserve. Telegraph services operated there for 15 months before operations were moved to the telegraph annex of the Post Office, a more central location in town. The Telegraph Office became Fuller's construction headquarters, office and residence.

In 1908, the McLaren family bought and moved the Telegraph Office from the Federal Reserve to its present location and it continued as an upper-scale family residence for the next 75 years. During the 1980s, the building was used for artifact storage by the Dawson City Museum but has now been rehabilitated by Yukon Government Historic Sites to its former use as a residence.

The Dawson City Telegraph Office is a designated Yukon Historic Site and its principal values lie in the architect and the architecture. It was one of six Dawson City public buildings designed by Thomas W. Fuller and was the first project where he was given sole responsibility for design and construction. This telegraph office is the only architecturally designed telegraph office in Yukon and illustrates the Canadian government's confidence in the continued prosperity of Dawson City. The Telegraph Office also represents a major communications system connecting Yukon to the south and the extraordinary development of the historic 2700 km Dawson-Ashcroft Telegraph Line.

Conclusion

We hope you extend your self-guided walking tour to include other interesting buildings in the downtown core and north end of Dawson City. Stop at the Visitor Information Centre to find out about guided walking tours and other interpretive events around town.

Staff at the Dawson City Museum's Klondike History Library welcomes those who are interested in learning more about the built heritage of the Klondike, mining history, or the Yukon experiences of their ancestors. Interesting books on the history of this region are on sale in the Museum gift shop. The Dawson City Museum is a non-profit organization and we gratefully accept donations to support our operations.

Enjoy your stay in the heart of the Klondike!