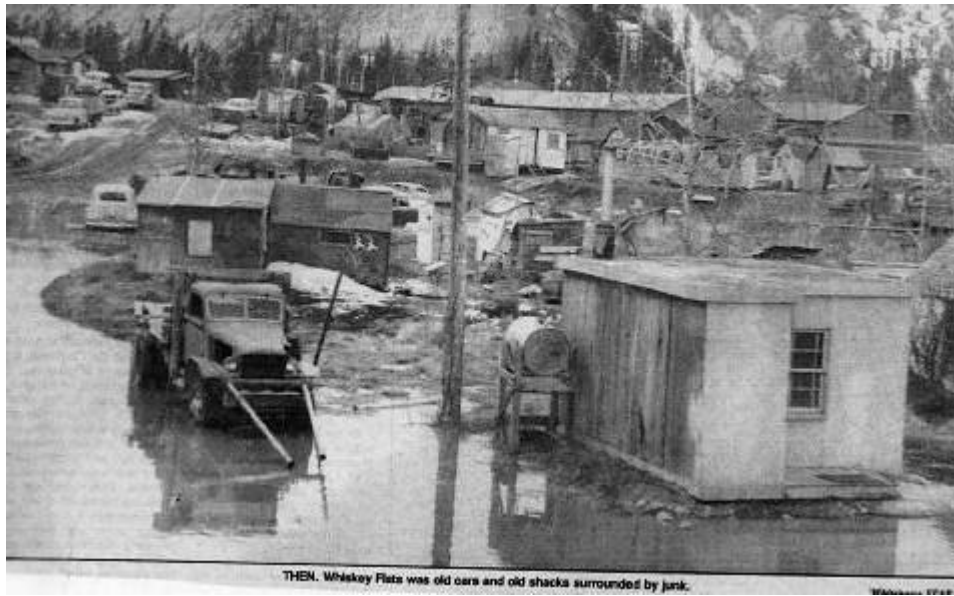


## **MOCCASIN TELEGRAPH – SPECIAL EDITION – SEPT 11, 2003**

### **WHISKEY FLATS**

*I held this story back from last weeks Moccasin Telegraph so I could get some further input. I was concerned that some of the facts were not accurate and felt an obligation to have history recorded accurately. I have concluded with the help of some input from the people you will hear from below, that a good part of our take on history is our perspective. I hope you enjoy the additional information brought in on this subject. Among others my concerns arose from such statements as; no taxes were paid. (I had worked on the other side of the desk in City Hall and collected them.)*

*My sincere apologies to Donna Clayson; who resigned as Story Editor on Sunday. I think my holding back this story and questioning its accuracy was upsetting to her. - Sherron Jones [sherronjones@shaw.ca](mailto:sherronjones@shaw.ca)*



Whitehorse Star Photo by Permission

### **WHISKEY FLATS**

By Donna Clayson  
[ytdogteam@telus.net](mailto:ytdogteam@telus.net)

In the southend of Whitehorse situated along the riverbank was an area known as Whiskey Flats. Whiskey Flats came into existence in 1942 because of the shortage of property in Whitehorse. This legacy of the wartime boom years was a conglomeration of bits and pieces of old American army log structures with oil drums and wrecked cars drawn around them like a wagon train waiting for raiders.

The American construction companies took whatever space which was available, and Moccasin Flats was nothing but a series of Army tents filled with supplies before there were any dwellings. No taxes were paid.

There was minor crime and the odd murder but on the whole Whiskey Flats, outside of boozing, was a fairly quiet place and it had a number of solid citizens who claimed they couldn't find anywhere else to live.

Whitehorse city fathers tried for years to coax the squatters to leave. They made deals with the territorial and federal governments for land on the outskirts of town for squatters to move onto, but no sooner would one squatter move out than another would move in. This process of moving squatters started the out of town developments of Porter Creek.

Then came the building of the first Robert Campbell Bridge and the opening of the subdivision of Riverdale. All those 9 to 5 commuters driving to and from downtown Whitehorse didn't like the view from the bridge so the pressure was on but it wasn't until 1964 that the big cleanup began. That year, the Chamber of Commerce, headed by businessman Erik Wieneke, along with companies and private citizens volunteered their labour and equipment and day after day hauled thousands of tons of junk and buildings away.

The way they did it was simple. After an extensive advertising campaign saying they would not force anyone out of a residence, the committee took printed signs saying the building was occupied and gave them to bona fide residents. After several weeks the shacks with no signs tacked on the outside were demolished or moved. Thus non-resident "owners" or drifters were out of luck. There were a few screams of rage but it worked. As the unowned shacks were disposed of, the real shack owners were encouraged to move. In the end it was attrition that ended Whiskey Flats.

Then the sternwheeler Klondike was moved through the streets of Whitehorse to become a historic site in the former Flats area, and the Rotarians built a pristine and pretty area called Rotary Park.

Thus, a bit of Yukon history was carted away to the dump, to be replaced by better things. There are some that wonder whether the government will ever rebuild Whiskey Flats the way it was, as a historic site. It's not impossible and just think how great those names would look in the travel brochures: Sleepy Hollow; Moccasin Flats; Whiskey Flats.

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*The following messages are as a result of asking questions to clarify some differences in the perception of what Whiskey Flats had represented. – Sherron*

Sherron,

Just this minute had a phone call from Con Lattin. He says he was thinking about the taxes in Whiskey Flats. He knows there were no taxes paid up to 1954, however, he wasn't there after that so maybe taxes were paid from 1955 on.

Donna Clayson

Con indicated they paid the rent to White Pass. I was under the impression that it was because of Riverdale complaints that Whiskey Flats had to shut down but according to Con & Dorothy that was only a small part of the reason. The biggest part was that White Pass wanted them out. White Pass are the ones that set up lots in Porter Creek for the people to move to. I mentioned to Con that I couldn't believe that. I mean, Porter Creek is miles away from town and I can't imagine that most people living in the Flats having vehicles to be able to drive back and forth from Porter Creek. It seems to me that White Pass wanted to "get rid" of these people and moving them that far away is just unthinkable to me.

I went to school at F.H. Collins and worked at the Taku from 1965 to 1968 as a dishwasher. After school I would walk to the Taku, which meant crossing the bridge. I don't remember any buildings or anything in the Whiskey Flat area during that time. Only empty land. Once the sternwheeler was moved there at least I would enjoy my walk more as I could look at it on the way by.

Cheers

Donna Clayson [ytdogteam@telus.net](mailto:ytdogteam@telus.net)

Hi Sherron,

This is becoming complex but in the long run I think it will be productive. Let us go back to 1943 before any bridge; there was a road from Second Avenue that curved to the left and straight to the river. Wickstrom had a wood lot on the other side and had a barge cable ferry across the river to bring wood across using 3-ton trucks. His wood lot was before any new hospital or any building on the other side. The only building at that time was Langholtz who had a fox farm originally but not in use at that time across from the Regina Hotel. Langholtz worked in baggage in the White Pass Depot and used to row across the river each morning. The road went past his place and along that cut bank across from the shipyard and back in that next valley. Now to Whiskey Flats itself: Neil Keobke was with White Pass and rented a light green home from White Pass right next to the river on the left side of the road. There was another well built home just before Neil's, Ernie Theed. On the right hand side was Rose Kelly who had a white frame home trimmed with red and had five teenagers, one son and four daughters. Vivian, Eileen, Joyce and Gloria, and Ken, their son. Their father was Jerry Kelly, but they had split. Rose was one of the first to get property at "Kellyville" along the Alaska Highway before Porter Creek was even thought of. They tore down their building and rebuilt out the highway on the left side going out. Another was Ben Pringle who was next to the river and moved a building on the left side of the highway just past Porter Creek Canyon. At that time, just past the rock bluff in Porter Creek canyon the highway went to

the right and a sweeping left hand turn in the shape of a big "S", back to the right and again to the left where it came to a checkerboard. That was all straightened out a few years later. In the flats, White Pass interest would be where shacks were built on the railway right of way, so you had two factions: There was the 100 foot crown land 100 feet from high water in part of the flats and the railway right of way. Now I ask you," What was a White Pass building doing on crown land when they had a lot of their own?" The place was littered with shacks, but they all had to be insulated to survive the winters. At that time there was no way that you could find any property for sale in Whitehorse, as there was none. I personally was up that road and had to build on Moccasin Flats. There was always someone wanting to get rid of the squatters, and I was lucky enough to get a lot on Hoge where they made a mistake of trying to backfill a basement that was still green cement. They had caved in one wall, which I had to dig out and re-pour the concrete. But I can assure you that I paid taxes to the City of Whitehorse for my home when I was in Moccasin Flats, and can likely find it in an old ledger. When Riverdale was opened, they did not allow buildings to be moved in, so there was another crunch although there were some decent buildings in the flats. I think that to combat that, YTG got into opening Porter Creek where some of the buildings were moved. Another was army buildings that had been sold as residences and these had to have a place to go to open up property in lower Whitehorse. Another was Peter Berg who lived next to me in Moccasin. He had a good big house and was finally able to get a lot on Ogilvie St. So they were not all shacks, sure some were, but mostly people who needed a lot to put a home on.

Cheers, Henry Breaden [breaden@shaw.ca](mailto:breaden@shaw.ca)

Sherron,

When there are 4 or 5 outstanding messages all dealing with the same subject - but not all from the same person - it's really hard to know where to start answering the questions that they pose! No intended prose, but here goes.

First of all, you must consider that while the White Pass owned almost all of the land adjacent to the river in downtown Whitehorse, in some cases there may have been a Crown "waterfront reserve" of 100' from the "ordinary high water mark" of the river. This may or may not have applied to some of the "deeper" parcels of White Pass land - such as the Whiskey Flats area. This would have been a logical reason for both the White Pass and Federal government being involved in the removal of squatters. Some time after 1990 (when I worked on the project with another Yukon consultant), all vacant "Crown" land in Whitehorse (e.g. the "tot lots" in Riverdale), was transferred from the Yukon Government to the City, but I don't think that is relevant to the Whiskey Flats situation, since it had already been dealt with.

There was also a good deal of confusion with respect to some of White Pass' waterfront property. You may recall that, when Tim Koepke CLS was surveying the new Territorial Building site he discovered a long narrow parcel of waterfront (including a narrow strip of 1st Avenue) lying between Rotary Park and either the White Pass station or the

adjacent Yukon Electrical warehouse. That parcel was still held in the name of Samuel H. Graves (one of the principles in British Yukon Navigation). It had NEVER been on the City's tax roll, and I made every effort to have it granted to the City on the basis of a portion of the land including a strip along the east side of the surveyed First Avenue right-of-way. While I lost the main battle to Athol Retallack (who was working for WP in some capacity at the time), I think I did manage to at least get the balance of the First Avenue right-of-way transferred to the City. Hopefully the City has at least been collecting taxes on the rest of the strip ever since!

When we moved to Dawson City in 1965 (and then on to Yellowknife before returning to work for the City in February of 1971), I'm fairly sure that most, if not all, of the squatters were still peacefully living in Whiskey Flats. Every morning as I drove to work I clearly recall one of the residents who lived in a little shack near the bridge, as he came out of his shack with a bathrobe on over swim trunks, and with an axe in hand. He would re-open his hole in the ice, stick the axe in the snow, hang his bathrobe over the axe handle...and then take a couple of dips in the freezing river before climbing out again, putting his bathrobe on, picking up the axe, and heading back to his warm shack.

The relocation of the squatters must have taken place between 1965 and 1971, and I'm sure the City wasn't involved in it at all when I started with them. My best guess concerning the "taxes" vs "rent" issue is that those squatters that Sherron remembers paying minimum taxes to the City were ones that were occupying Crown land, while those that paid "rent" to White Pass were making a contribution towards the property taxes that WP were paying for the land they were occupying. With the exception of persons occupying Crown land, buildings (technically "improvements") are assessed in the name of, and taxed in the name of the registered owner of the land they occupy.

I hadn't heard of White Pass or anyone else taking steps to "provide" land in Porter Creek to accommodate squatters removed from either White Pass or Crown land! What may have happened is White Pass putting some pressure on the Yukon Government to develop additional lots in Porter Creek at the time to overcome the squatters complaint that "there is no land available for me to move my building onto, or on which to build a new home" - and there were certainly times when this situation did exist. For White Pass to have done anything more than that seems unlikely - as well as inappropriate.

Sherron questions the logic of "three levels of government getting involved in a program to remove buildings on White Pass land". I suspect that both White Pass and the Federal government were both involved, as there were almost certainly riverfront squatters on land owned by both parties. I can't think of any reason that the City would become financially involved - nor have I ever heard that they were. I also can't think of any logical reason why, or how, they would have been financially involved - although from a planning perspective the removal of the squatters would certainly have appeared to be in the long-term interests of the city.

There may be more relevant data on my personal "hard drive", but that's all my RAM is able to access at this point.

All the best to you all!

Dave Gairns

Sherron,

I agree with your concern over getting the facts as correct as possible in the Whiskey Flats story. My further comments are:

1. I'm sure that taxes were paid directly to the City by some squatters. If those squatters were in Whiskey Flats they MAY have been ones that were occupying Crown land rather than land owned by White Pass. In the latter case the occupants MAY have paid the \$25 "rent" to White Pass (and the company may or may not have been assessed and taxed on the squatter buildings).

2. While I'm sure there were a few "log" structures in Whiskey Flats, I agree that they would NOT have been "old American log structures", as I can't recall any of the US or Canadian army buildings being build with logs. In Whiskey flats any log structures were likely additions to Army buildings added by the occupants.

3. I was the senior clerk in the Federal lands office until April of 1965, and can assure you that there were a number of legal private properties in Porter Creek long before the squatter removal program which took place shortly after that. I would be very surprised if the original Porter Creek subdivision was not surveyed before 1965. One might well find that the original Porter Creek subdivision was surveyed some years earlier at the same time as the Canyon Crescent subdivision (across the highway from the Miles Canyon Road - and in which only one lot was sold!), and the Forest View subdivision at the "Mayo Road" junction (which I'll bet almost nobody has ever heard of!).

4. I would be very reluctant to read that "Whitehorse city fathers...made deals with the territorial and federal governments for land on the outskirts of town for squatters to move onto" - other than in the context of pressing for more lots to be developed (probably in Porter Creek) for the squatters to purchase and move to, as I'm sure there was a real shortage of developed residential lots at the time - both serviced and unserved. I'm sure the surveyed lots at Canyon Crescent and Forest View were sitting there in the woods at the time - but nobody seemed interested in them. The word "deals" could be interpreted to mean just about anything, and I think it should be avoided for that reason alone.

There's a real story in Whiskey Flats (ask Con Lattin about the more "exclusive" area of Whiskey Flats known as "Blueberry Hill"!), but when one is trying to report facts, it's important that they be at least reasonably correct - and that's not always easy to accomplish.

By the way, as a resident of Riverdale from 1958 to 1965, I don't remember any concern or pressure from Riverdale residents to remove the Whiskey Flats squatters - but maybe that's just because I considered them a part of Whitehorse history!

Dave Gairns [dgairns@telus.net](mailto:dgairns@telus.net)

Hi Sherron

When Donna mentioned taxes in her article it was ambiguous and to me referred to the army tents on Moccasin flats.

I do not remember every paying taxes when I lived down there. Indeed why would they tax the homeowners when White Pass owned the land.

I vaguely remember White Pass trying to collect \$100 off of us. They if I remember right they tried to have us removed off the flats. When they did this we hired a new lawyer in town by the name of King to represent us, to find out if Whitepass owned the land. King charged a \$1500 retaining fee that we had to raise and I think we each put in \$100. His opinion was that Whitepass was given the land on the stipulation that it would be used for railway purpose only and as the flats were being used for other purposes we should stake and try and claim our property. I know we staked property and I must have moved after that cause I cannot remember what follow up we did.

People refer to Moccasin Flats as if it is where Whiskey Flats is. We referred to Moccasin flats as the area on the north side of town pass the shipyards.

Also there were log cabins down on the flats, although most of the houses were in the shack category. Paul Lemieux (he worked for T&D.) lived in a log house on the Flats. (He was our neighbour.) There were also some nice houses the house across from us was a bungalow of about I would guess 800 to 1000 sq. feet. It was I believe owned by Wise insurance and was rented to Mr. Tingle who at that time was manager of the Unemployment insurance in Whitehorse. It was as nice or nicer than most of the houses in downtown Whitehorse.

Sherron on all the stories you are going to receive they are the writers memories (no two people are going to remember the event the same way-even my wife has a different opinion so why not put a disclaimer on the article that it is the author's recollection and ask if anyone remembers it differently to write you, might get some interesting letters.

All for now

Con Lattin [clattin@klondiker.com](mailto:clattin@klondiker.com)

Sherron, we were away for a few days and just read the mail tonight. Anyway - Bucks wrote the following:

Shirley showed me the emails from Donna and Dave. I can't argue with anything they've presented. The one exception: I don't remember any murder, only an attempted murder - a shot was fired through a door into the house and shattered this fellow's jaw. He recovered and I remember his great sense of humor!

As for the flats (we never called it Whiskey or Moccasin Flats, just "the Flats". Our involvement started in 1943 when we moved from Mayo. My Dad had moved to Whitehorse the year before. He got a job as assistant Superintendent of BYN Construction & Highway Division (of White Pass). When the Superintendent quit, Dad became Superintendent. Housing was in short supply because of the Alaska Highway construction, so BYN built a 3 bedroom apartment in one end of a bunkhouse on the Flats, just downstream of where the bridge to Riverdale is now, right on the riverbank. The other end was converted into a carpenter shop. BYN used a couple of buildings in the White Pass shipyards and also had buildings up on the west side of the airport. Later, Dad bought the whole building, put an apartment in the other end and rented it out. BYN built 2 more houses on the flats for employees, close to ours. No indoor plumbing at first, got water from the river or from the US Army pump house just upstream 100 yards. Of course, an outdoor biffy, BUT a 4 holer (for the original bunkhouse). Dad later sluiced out a basement & installed plumbing. It was great not to have to pack any more water! The one drawback was that the water line out to the river froze up repeatedly in the winter. We thawed it out the way the Highway Department thaw frozen culverts now: pushing a water hose into the pipe, melting the ice. In 1951, Dad cut the building in half, sold the apartment and moved our house up to the corner of 3rd & Hoge, where it remains today, enlarged and on a basement. I believe one of the Tour bus companies own it now.

There were colorful characters living on the Flats. A mechanic with a yard full of old vehicles; Andy Hooper, before he got into the house moving business. A Belgian couple who made home brew and wine and of course sold it. The Police would raid the place; pour the brew out the backdoor (we could smell the "delicate" bouquet when the wind was blowing from the north!). He would go to jail and she would start another batch of brew!!!

Dad had tried to buy the property on the Flats, but Bill Emerey, the Government Agent, said we were on crown property on a navigable waterway, not for sale. I understand White Pass owned the rest, from Crown land to the railway tracks. I don't know exactly when everyone was finally moved, but Gordon Cameron was Commissioner, sometime after 1956.

As for Porter Creek, people were "squatting" out there long before then. The Flats at the north end of town was not cleaned up until many years later.

I think you should print both Dave's and Donna's account of the Flats, the "facts" are no different than other stories on the Moccasin Telegraph. You have my permission to print this if you want.

Keep up the good work Sherron.

Regards, Bucky Keobke [keobkens@marshlake.polarcom.com](mailto:keobkens@marshlake.polarcom.com)

*So you see it is a matter of perspective. What some of us deemed to be squatters of a different sort were actually people in Employee Housing.*

*I personally had no knowledge that land was not available to some people due to the influx of so many people during the highway construction.*

*In the early years there may very well have been people who did not pay taxes for various reasons. Whether it have been because they were only renting, because the tax assessor never found out who was living in the dwelling etc. I just wish to say it was the intent of the City that all residents of Whitehorse pay taxes and share in the cost of providing the services such as fire protection. White Pass paid the taxes on the land they owned and the owners of the dwellings squatting on their land were expected to pay their own.*

*In the early days the Tax Assessors including Al Williams were contracted from Alberta and brought in to do the tax assessment. It may have even been every second year that they were brought in, which again would account for some of the taxes missed. Later the Yukon Government opened its own Assessment department and Al Williams, John Hutsul and Jim Yamada were all early employees of that department.*

*There has been an excellent book written by the Yukon Historical & Museum Association titled "The River The City". It outlines the evolution of the waterfront in Whitehorse. It indicates that "South Whiskey flats" became the site for the "Klondike" in 1966 and "a couple of years later" the remaining buildings were removed from "North Whiskey flats" to make way for "Rotary Park".*

*In still another section of the book, page 60, when referring to the Rotary Peace Park, this portion of the former Whiskey Flats it states was donated by White Pass to the Rotary Club in 1960 on the condition that it would be used for a park. It goes on to say that "by the fall of 1969, North Whiskey Flats had been cleared of its squatter population and the Rotarians began developing the site." It goes on to say that in 1974 the project was completed and in 1993 was renamed Rotary Peace Park.*

*I was happy to see this fact written since I had a visual image in my mind of some residual buildings on the site after I moved to Whitehorse in the fall of 1968.*

*I do hope that between us we have given you some insight that you would not otherwise have had. – Sherron Jones [sherronjones@shaw.ca](mailto:sherronjones@shaw.ca)*

### **REPLIES TO A DRAFT OF THIS SUBJECT WHICH WAS SENT TO THOSE WHO CONTRIBUTED**

Despite a few possible inaccuracies, I don't have a real problem with Donna's story as originally written. I would prefer to see the word "log" deleted in the reference to "...old American Army log structures...", as the majority of Army buildings (or parts) moved there were of frame construction rather than log - but that's also a fairly minor point.

Dave Gairns

Hello Sherron,

I think you have done justice to the article on Whiskey Flats. And again I think it all depended from what angle that you were looking at it. When we built on Hoge Street, we could look across to the flats and there was no huge push but it was cleared as property was made available for people in Porter Creek and Crestview. South of the bridge was finally cleared about the time the Klondike was moved, and what later became Rotary Park was cleared soon after. I think it is well covered. Cheers,

Henry Breaden

**LAST WORD**

We would be happy to hear from anyone who has more knowledge about Whiskey Flats that they would care to share.