

# Listen to the Stories

*A history of the Kwanlin Dün People*

Kwanlin Dün First Nation

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*A History of the Kwanlin Dün: Our Land and People*



a Kwanlin Dün First Nation publication

2013

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ISBN 978-0-9880255-1-6

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Cover photo KDFN



Hazen Bailie.

## Preface

Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) is pleased to present this history of our vibrant community and illustrations of our accomplishments. Our First Nation has many stories about our ancestors and how they lived on the land. This book provides a small window into the many changes we have experienced.

Our location and history make us unique among the Yukon's First Nations. Our Traditional Territory was at the heart of historical trading networks and became a hub for transportation by land, water and air to the rest of the Yukon. KDFN and Ta'an Kwächän Council are Yukon's only urban First Nations and they share their Traditional Territories with almost 70 percent of Yukon's total population. Over the past century, we have experienced the impacts of three large scale developments: the Klondike gold rush of 1896-98, construction of the Alaska Highway in 1942-43 and construction of the hydroelectric dam at Whitehorse Rapids in 1956-58. These and other developments have eroded our land base and damaged or destroyed fish and wildlife habitats. Our lives were altered in many ways including loss of control of our lands, forced relocations, suppression and loss of our culture, and the marginalization of our people. We have travelled far to reverse these impacts and overcome many obstacles to regain control and our pride of place in our Traditional Territory.

This history was prepared to serve several purposes. Mainly it is for the Kwanlin Dün, to remind our people of the many challenges our ancestors have faced and to celebrate all that we have overcome. We also want to share this history outside our community. We can work together more fruitfully if there is a better understanding of our longstanding connection to the land and the many ways in which this relationship has been compromised and damaged in the past. Our land claim agreements, including the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement, Self-Government Agreement* and *Constitution*, provide the legal foundation and general means for KDFN to participate in and respond to all types of development and decisions – large and small. These agreements provide new approaches for managing developments and decisions affecting our people that, if effectively implemented, can avoid or lessen adverse effects on the land and our First Nation and secure benefits for all.

Today, we manage our own affairs and are restoring stewardship of the lands and resources within our traditional lands. Our Citizens work in government, health, education and culture, setting strong role models for the coming generation. We collaborate with other First Nations, territorial and federal governments. Many challenges remain, however we have the resources and the tools to persevere and succeed. We take pride in the strength and vision of our ancestors and leaders, and remember the many changes that have influenced our present-day lives as we create brighter futures for our children.

# Acknowledgments

This project was conceived by Tom Beaudoin, Director of the Department of Lands, Resources and Claims Implementation, and made possible with funding from Foothills Pipe Lines Ltd. Consultant Lindsay Staples played a key role in making this project possible. This book was researched, written and produced by Helene Dobrowsky and Rob Ingram of Midnight Arts.

The staff at the Department of Lands, Resources and Claims Implementation provided assistance with content, images, maps, identifications, edits and valuable suggestions. Others who have helped us out in various ways include Mike Smith, Rae Mombourquette, Heather and Andrew Finton, Jennifer Ellis and Lael Lund. Chapter 5 relies heavily on a report prepared by Sweeney Scurvey in 1997 entitled, “Whitehorse and Area: Chiefs and Leaders.” The 2003 KDFN publication *Back to the River* has been a valuable resource for many and we have reprised a number of quotations from interviews conducted for this project as well as some photos. In 1996, Kwanlin Dün First Nation undertook a project to document its archival resources. This resulted in a report entitled “Kwanlin Dün History Project: Bibliography and Notes.” This has undergone some updates while working on this project.

This project is indebted to all the people who have shared their stories through recorded interviews over several decades and the dedicated workers who have transcribed, translated and ensured this knowledge and wisdom is available for future generations. Participants in these projects include:

Billi Jo Alexis	May Hume	Louie Smith
Doris Bill	Lily Kane	Annie Smith
Ronald Bill	John Joe	Dianne Smith
Julie Cruikshank	Julia Joe	Johnny Smith
Barbara Fred	Pat Joe	Kitty Smith
Phil Gatensby	Rob McCandless	Violet Storer
Judy Gingell	Rae Mombourquette	Lucy Wren
Donna Holcomb	Emma Shorty	John Meikle

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# 1. Stones, Bones and Caribou Dung

Our people's stories go back to the beginning of time, back to the creation of the earth and all its creatures. Much of our history is tied to a place we call Kwanlin, meaning "where water runs through the canyon." So we will start this story with its creation.

During the last great Ice Age 110,000-10,000 years ago, the area we call Kwanlin was covered by a glacier more than a kilometre thick. *The May* (Grey Mountain) and *Sima* (Golden Horn Mountain) were both covered in ice.



"Raven created the world from pieces of bark."



Yukon Government photo

10,000 to 8,000 before present (BP)

## The First People

Some of the tools found around Fish Lake (Łu Zil Mūn) and Bonneville Lakes came from the time not long after the glaciers melted, when water levels in the lakes were higher. People then mostly hunted caribou and bison.

The oldest atlatl dart found in our territory dates from this time (c.9000 bp).

4,500 year old atlatl dart foreshaft.  
Yukon Government photo





Lake Laberge today.  
Doug Davidge photo

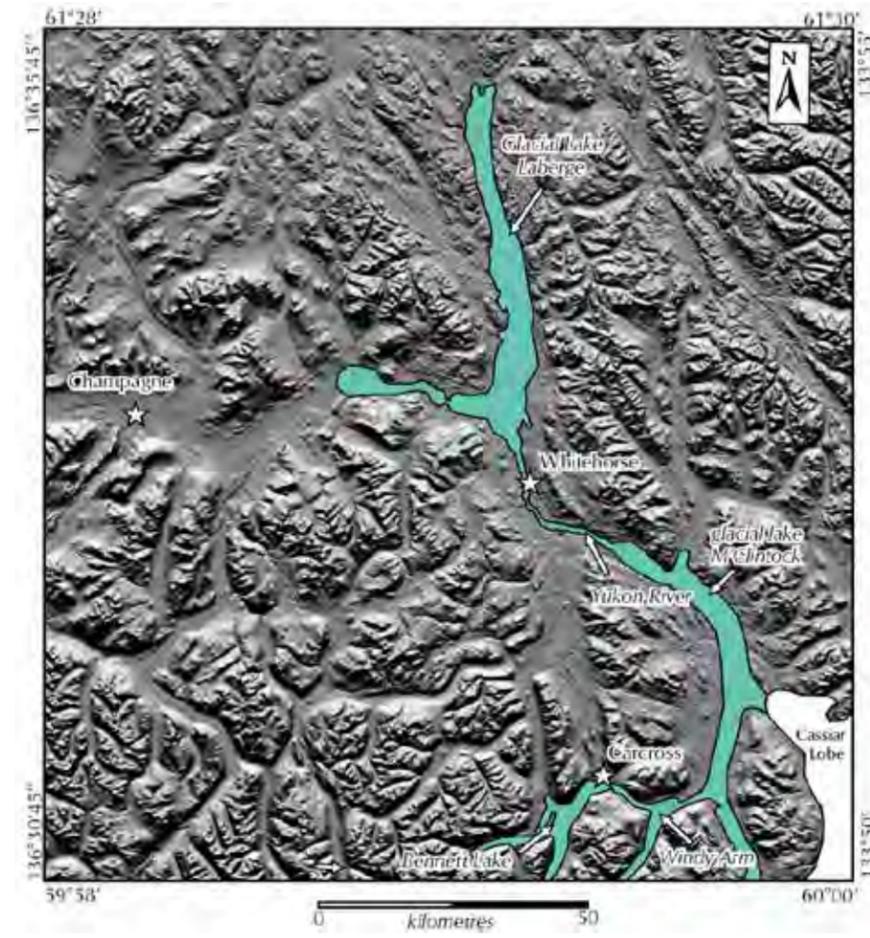
As the ice began to melt 10,000 to 14,000 years ago, huge lakes were formed. One of the earliest was post glacial Lake McIntyre. That deep lake filled the valley to a level 120 m higher than Fish Lake. (*Late Wisconsinan McConnell glaciation of the Whitehorse map area (105D), Yukon, Jeffrey D. Bond, Yukon Geological Survey*). Another great lake, post glacial Lake Laberge, began to form about the same time. As more ice melted, an immense body of water kept growing until it eventually extended north beyond present day Lake Laberge, west to Champagne and south to link up with post glacial Lake M'Clintock that covered present-day Marsh and Tagish lakes.



Fish Lake and Bonneville lakes. When the glaciers began to melt, this was one big lake called glacial lake McIntyre.  
Yukon Government photo



Quarry site above Fish Lake where stone tools were made. From here, hunters could have watched for bison and caribou while they worked on their tools.  
Yukon Government photo



This was post glacial Lake Laberge, (map courtesy Jeff Bond, Yukon Geological Survey)

Kwanlin was at the bottom of Lake Laberge until the moraine dam at the north end of the lake eroded and water levels dropped (Brideau). What had once been a lake over Kwanlin, became a river we call Chu Ninkwän that cut into the soft lake sediments and formed the Yukon River valley. The river also cut down through the basalts from the ancient lava flow from nearby Taa'an Män (Golden Horn Mountain) and formed a narrow canyon. Here the water ran swiftly and tumbled over the boulders left by the departing glacier. This was the beginning of Kwanlin.

*"People from Laberge, Tagish and Marsh Lake used to spear fish at Kwanlin Canyon (Miles Canyon). Kwanlin means water rushing through the rock."*

May Hume, recorded by Sweeney Scurvey, 1996

After the ice melted and the huge post glacial lakes drained away, the land around Kwanlin was dry and barren with few trees to break the wind. As the soil built up and the climate warmed, shrubby plants and grasses took root about 10,000 years ago, offering cover and food for animals (Bond). Trees also began to grow shortly afterward. Caribou and bison herds moved into the new grazing territory and people followed the herds from the ice-free lands to the north called Beringia.

These early hunters left behind some of their stone tools at Lu Zil Mün. The tool-makers were likely hunters of caribou and bison, using spears and atlatls (throwing boards and darts) to bring down the large game. While these hunters and gatherers camped near the lake, no relics have been found to tell us whether or not they used fish nets. It may be they fished, using other methods.

About 6,000 to 7,000 years ago, open grass and shrubs interspersed with groves of trees created a parkland where elk and bison thrived. People adapted to hunting game in this ever-changing landscape.

It took a long time for the cloudy sediments from the melting ice to settle out of the lakes and rivers. While fish probably returned to the rivers and lakes about 7,000 years ago, the first evidence of people using fish nets dates from 5,000 to 6,000 years ago. Fish may have been part of the people's diet before that, but they may not have been using nets with

## The Ice

Ice patches occur on the north sides of mountains between 1,550 and 2,100 metres above sea level. They are usually in bowls or cirques where snow accumulates and vary from a few metres to over a kilometre wide.

Caribou use ice patches in the summer as a refuge to cool down and escape biting insects. Early hunters knew this and travelled into the mountains to hunt the caribou on the ice patches.

When the ice patches began melting several years ago, thousand of years worth of caribou dung appeared as well as ancient artefacts.

While archaeologists usually find stone and sometimes bone and antler artefacts, it is very rare to find wood, feathers and sinew. The ice patches preserved these materials and gave us great insight into the material culture of the people here over the last several thousand years.



KDFN Elder examines some of the ice patch artefacts.

## 8,000 BP

### Ancient Disposable Razors

Beginning about 8,000 years ago, people used a type of tool called microblades. Similar to today's disposable razor, these small stone blades were used for a wide variety of purposes. They were often mounted on shafts to serve as knives, scrapers and even projectile points.

Microblades found at Lu Zil Mün.  
Yukon Government photo



## 7,000 BP

### Trees Grow in Kwanlin

Spruce trees grow creating a parkland environment where elk and bison flourish.

Sediments clear from lakes and rivers. Fish return.

Kwanlin probably looked much like this about 7,000 years ago.



## Caribou

At one time, the caribou were an essential part of our lives. Even back when ice covered this place, the caribou survived in the ice-free lands of Beringia to the north and people hunted them there. When the ice melted, the herds moved south into the new grazing lands and the people followed.

Our Elders still recall stories of when caribou darkened the hills of this area and great hunts were held, especially in the spring and fall.

The woodland caribou ranged through our land for most of the year. In the heat of summer, they moved into the high lands of the alpine where there was permanent snow and ice and fewer biting insects. Our people made camps nearby, often beside lakes, then hiked up to the ice patches and hunted caribou.



An ancient caribou hunting blind near the headwaters of the Wheaton River.  
Yukon Government photo

“My Grandma told me she shoot... so many caribou there [Fish Lake, Alligator Lake and Coal Lake].” Ronald Bill

sinkers. Fish traps and weirs were also used until historic times but, being made of wood, they did not survive.

About 4,000 - 5,000 years ago, the environment looked much as it does today with boreal forest made up of spruce, aspen and poplar. Moose populated the woods. Woodland caribou herds still roamed the hills in great numbers. The great runs of salmon were now firmly established in the rivers, and the lakes were populated with lake trout, white fish and other desirable food species. People settled into a pattern of living on the land that lasted up until 200 years ago.

During the winter, people broke into small groups of one or two families. They often stayed near lakes where they could fish through the ice and roamed the area hunting for moose and caribou. In the spring they moved to the mouths of creeks to catch grayling and collect fresh plants such as bear root. Once mountain passes were open, traders came from the coast and neighbouring people from all round came to visit. In late summer, the salmon harvest began. Large groups of people gathered at places like Kwanlin to catch and dry salmon for the long winter ahead. Fall was the time for moose and sheep hunting when, once again, people began to break off into smaller groups for the winter months. Hides were tanned, clothing sewn, and moose meat pounded with berries and fat to make food that would last through the winter, stored in animal stomachs and baskets in the cold ground.

The people of Kwanlin were part of an extensive trading network with neighbouring peoples. Native copper came to us from the White River and Burwash Uplands. Obsidian came from various sources including Mount Edziza near Telegraph Creek, Batza Tena in Alaska, Hoodoo Mountain and Wiki Peak in the St. Elias Range. Fish oil and decorative shells came to us from the Pacific coast. In return, we offered resources such as moose hides and furs. This network of trade extended far into what is now Alaska and south well down the coast of present day British

4,500 BP

### Net Gain

People started using nets for fishing.

People change from using microblades to larger points.

Climate turns colder and ice patches build up.

Living patterns established that extend to contact period.

A stone net sinker. This showed that people were using fishing nets.  
Yukon Government photo

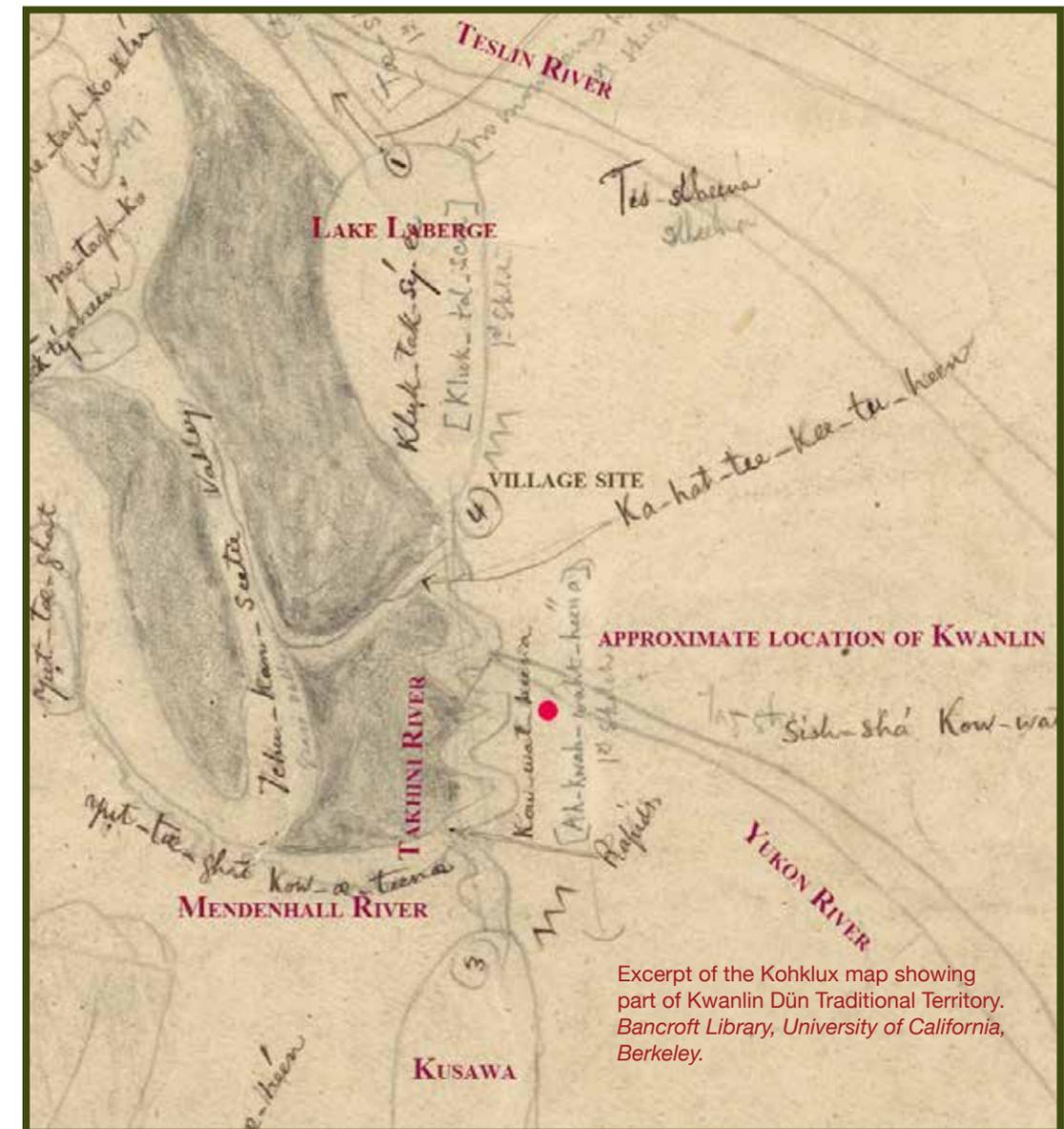


Columbia. Kwanlin was at the junction of several important trails. One of the most important was the route between Marsh Lake and Lake Laberge and the trade route used by the coastal Chilkats that ran along the Takhini River. Many people came here to trade. These longer trade pilgrimages were made as often as twice a year, at prearranged meeting places. This may well be how local technologies, such as methods of making tools, evolved. These gatherings were also social events at which we feasted, sang, danced and celebrated marriages between cultures. So it is that the people from this area intermingled with others, often from far away. Family relations spread far and wide.



The Kohlux map. This was drawn in 1869 by Chilkat Chief Kohlux and his two wives. It shows the trade route used by the Chilkats from Klukwan, Alaska to the Yukon interior as far north as Fort Selkirk.

The woman is identified as Mrs. Slim Jim holding Lily Kane who went to stay with relatives on the Coast for many years to learn their culture. YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen coll.) 2002/118 # 530



Excerpt of the Kohlux map showing part of Kwanlin Dün Traditional Territory. Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.



Glass beads became important trade items coming first from Russian traders and then the Hudson's Bay Co. via First Nations trading partners. Blue was an especially prized colour. Yukon Government photo

Through the extensive trade network, European goods began to show up in the Yukon fifty to one hundred years before white people ever saw this place. The availability of tools began to change the way people lived. Metal tools were much more durable than stone or antler and became desirable trade items. Other outside goods such as glass beads, woven fabric and foods like sugar, tea and tobacco also entered our lives changing our clothing, diet and the focus of trade. The Europeans wanted furs, so hunting and trapping became more important. Once firearms entered into the trade network, life changed enormously. These became, perhaps the most important items of trade. Many more animals could be harvested much more easily with a rifle. It changed how we hunted. Once large numbers of outsiders arrived with their technology and a different idea of economics, a 5,000-year-old way of life changed dramatically.



Rose Lake

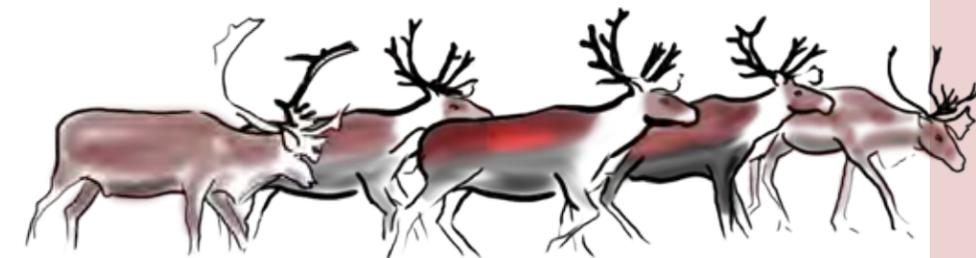
## An Ancient Connection

Shortly after the glaciers left, people came to this place we call Kwanlin. Since that time, countless generations of people have come and gone. Nomadic hunters chased bison, elk and caribou across the hills and plains. People were here to see the fish return to the rivers and lakes. They saw the trees cover the grasslands and volcanic ash choke the very air they breathed. Traders came from the coast then from distant continents to barter for the riches of our land. We met with them, talked, traded and even married. Lifestyles changed, even the land itself changed, but Kwanlin has always nurtured the people who lived here. At Kwanlin Dün we continue this tradition by welcoming First Nations people from many places into our membership.

## Long Time Places Fish Lake

Once the glaciers had melted, Fish and Bonneville Lakes became important hunting and fishing areas.

From the salmon camps below Miles Canyon ('Unilyin) and Whitehorse (K'wan'dlIn), many trails led to Fish Lake (Łu Zil Mūn). The lake was



Caribou have lived in the Yukon for over a million and a half years.

## Atlatl

One of the earliest weapons used by hunters was the atlatl or dart thrower. The discoveries in the ice patches prove that people used this weapon for at least 8,000 years in this part of the world.

The throwing board was a short stick that acted as an extension to the thrower's forearm. The stick had a spur at the end that fit into a corresponding hollow in the base of the dart. The thrower held the dart and board together in one hand. Throwing overhand, the dart was released when the arm was about overhead. The dart would flex, adding a spring action to the throw and hurling the dart forward with much more force than the human arm alone could manage. A good hunter could throw a dart as much as 100 metres, although they were generally only accurate to about 20 metres.



The Atlatl can throw a spear with ten times the force of the unaided human arm. Midnight Arts illustration

1,500 BP

### Copper

Copper tools and implements appear. Most are made from native copper near the White River area.

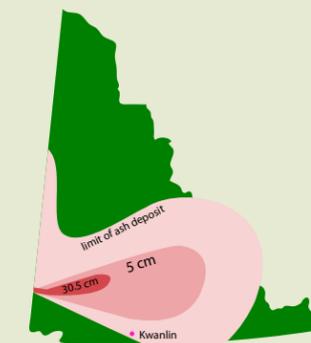


Copper Knife. ROM, D.A. Cameron Coll.

1,200 BP

### Ash and Exodus

The ash fall from White River makes Kwanlin unlivable. It is thought that people moved away, some as far as Nevada. When people return, they are using different tools. One of the main changes is the bow and arrow replaces the atlatl as weapon of choice.



Map showing the extent of the ash fall.



Jessie Scarff's family fished and hunted in the Łu Zil Mŭn area where many of our earliest camps were found. Yukon Government photo

named for its abundant whitefish (Łu Zil). The lake trout spawn in September and whitefish spawn in October and November. People travelled here in the fall to fish, ensuring they had enough to eat throughout the long winter. This was also good hunting territory and trails ran all around Fish Lake to Bonneville Lake, the Ibex Valley, Primrose and Rose lakes where people hunted moose, sheep and caribou. The north end of the lake was also a good place to hunt gophers and the high country offered marmot. Many people used to winter at Fish Lake and harvested fish through the ice. In the spring, this was good beaver and muskrat country and people used to trap them here, especially at the Bonneville Lakes where there was also good grayling fishing in the spring.

Kwanlin Dŭn Elders report that the main camps used by our people were at the north end of Fish Lake. This is where archaeological investigations began. Kwanlin Dŭn members worked alongside archaeologists on the excavations and offered advice especially with respect to location. It was a great opportunity to merge and use science and traditional knowledge together. It was also a great moment for our youth as they became involved in rediscovering their own heritage.

There were three large campsites studied at the north end of Fish Lake. We found evidence that people were hunting, fishing, working hides and making tools. A large number of stone flakes and tools were found at these sites, indicating they were important camps used over a period of at least 5,000 years. These people are thought to have been Athapaskan speakers and to have lived the seasonal round in a manner very similar to our immediate forebears. It is amazing to think that there have been people, similar to us, using this place for five millennia.

One large spear point was found buried very deeply, just above the gravels that formed the glacial lake floor). This indicates that people were using this site almost as soon as the glacial ice melted.



Projectile points of the Northern Archaic tradition from Łu Zil Mŭn. Yukon Government photo

One of the most remarkable sites on Fish Lake is the shale quarry. This was the source for most of the tools made in the area. There were many workshop sites located around the quarry where the remains of half-made tools were found. Tools this old are rarely found in the Southern Yukon. The quarry site gives us a clear insight into the tool-making process used by these ancient artisans. Located on a high promontory, quarry workers would have had a panoramic view so they could keep an eye out for the caribou and bison that roamed the area.

### Canyon City

The Canyon City site, above Miles Canyon and the White Horse Rapids, was named by newcomers during the Klondike gold rush. This was the head of the trail around the canyon. Our people had used this route, sometimes walking while they floated their belongings through the rapids on special rafts. During the gold rush, they helped stampeders pack their goods around the rapids. Canyon City was a regular stopover for travellers and, in 1897-98, it became the head of a tramway, following the

old trail and extending to the foot of the rapids. Horses hauled cartloads of freight along log tramlines to the original settlement of White Horse Landing. Long before that, however, it was a campsite for local Aboriginal Peoples. Kwanlin Dŭn and the Yukon Government investigated the site together in 1994. Kwanlin Dŭn researcher Donna Hagen recorded oral history interviews at that time. Elders were asked to share their memories and stories about the area. Mrs. Julia Joe, whose granddaughter worked on the dig, remembered buildings being on the site when she was a little girl. May Hume's father, Billy Smith, actually worked at Canyon City during the gold rush (*From Trail to Tramway: The Archaeology of Canyon City*, T.J. Hammer and Greg Hare, Government of Yukon).

The archaeologists found the remains of the gold rush buildings and they also found remains of ancient campsites and tools that prove people had been using this site for at least 2,500 years (Hammer and Hare).

There is a mystery associated with the finds at Canyon City: one of the stone points found on the site is of a design in use more than 7,000 years ago. However it was found near a hearth that was carbon dated at 2,600 years old.

It is likely the people who stayed here were fishing, as well as hunting moose in the nearby forest and sheep on Grey Mountain. Perhaps the most important thing about the site, however, is the ancient trail that runs through it connecting Marsh Lake to Lake Laberge. This was part of the seasonal route used by the people of Kwanlin but it was also part of the extensive trade network that brought people from the coast of Alaska and the interior of the Yukon. During the Klondike gold rush, stampeders built a tramline along the old trail to move people and goods around the dangerous rapids.

### Michie Creek and M'Clintock Area

Before the Marsh Lake dam was built, Michie Creek and M'Clintock Creek were very important salmon spawning areas. Our people used to fish here in the late summer and early fall, setting up camps to dry fish. In 2010 and 2011, Kwanlin Dŭn initiated an Archaeological Inventory of the area. We contracted Ty Heffner to lead the project with the assistance of Greg Hare from Yukon Government Heritage Resources. The first year, three Kwanlin Dŭn and two Ta'an Kwächän Council students assisted. The inventory identified more than 75 historic and archaeological sites in this part of our Traditional Territory. The oldest date back to several thousand years.

One interesting find from the 2011 field season was a Chinese coin near Michie Lake. This likely came from Tlingit traders from the coast. These coins were sometimes used as ornaments or possibly sewn onto clothing for armour. It was likely lost in the late 18th or early 19th century. This speaks to the extent of our historic trade network. The Coastal Tlingit bartered for furs, which they, in turn, traded to the Russians in the Gulf of Alaska. The Russians then sold the fur to Chinese merchants in



Miles Canyon in the early 20th century. YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection), 2002/118 #1107



Elk lived in the Yukon until about 1,500 years ago. They were reintroduced in 1951 in the Braeburn area. John Meikle, Yukon Government photo



Wood bison roamed the Yukon until a couple of hundred years ago. They were reintroduced in 1996.



Netting at M'Clintock

Canton. The Tlingit sometimes sewed the coins onto their clothing as adornment and the coin may have been lost when a trader visited this area at one time. (R. Gotthardt).

### McIntyre Creek

The route between the Yukon River and Fish Lake was well travelled. Early occupation and use of this ancient pathway was researched in 2009 by the Yukon Government. An inventory of heritage resources along McIntyre Creek revealed fourteen pre-contact heritage sites with stone artifacts. The archaeologists also discovered four places where people had stripped bark from pine trees to reach the cambium beneath for food. This was only done when food was very scarce and speaks to some hard times in the past.

In 2010, Yukon Government, Kwanlin Dün First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'an Council partnered in the excavation of four sites along McIntyre Creek. Three Kwanlin Dün and two Ta'an Kwäch'an youth participated in the digs. The sites had numerous stone artifacts. Radiocarbon dating and the presence of microblades date these sites at 5,000 to 7,000 years before present (Ruth Gotthardt, Yukon Archaeology). This travel corridor has been used for a long time indeed.

### Cooperation

Working with Yukon Archaeology, our Elders and youth are active participants in the rediscovery and recovery of our heritage. According to territorial legislation, all archaeological resources in the Yukon are the property of its people. Yukon Archaeology staff work closely with Kwanlin Dün in archaeological investigations in our Traditional Territory. Elders help identify old camps and trails using knowledge handed down for generations, and tell the old stories that bring the past to life. By having youth involved directly in the search for old habitation sites and in the excavation of sites, our young people are connected to their past and able to continue the legacy of knowledge and stories that tell us how to live on the land.



KD students working at the McIntyre dig. Yukon Government photo

## 2 Seasonal Round

Long before there were planes, helicopters, trucks and even roads, our ancestors lived and travelled throughout a vast area while making their living on the land. Today, the official Traditional Territory of the Kwanlin Dün encompasses a large region (17,025 sq. km) that extends beyond Braeburn and Hootalinqua in the north, to Robinson and Annie Lake in the south, west to the confluence of the Takhini and Mendenhall rivers, and east past much of the Teslin River. These boundaries are somewhat artificial, however, as our historical use of the land extends well beyond lines on a map. There are many overlaps with the areas used by other First Nations, and we have family ties that link us to places such as Tagish, Klukshu, Teslin, Atlin, Carmacks and southeast Alaska.



Peter Long photo

200 BP

### The International Market

Trade goods from Europe, Russia and even China begin to arrive in the Yukon through the trade network with the coastal First Nations.



Chinese coin found in the Michie Creek area. Yukon Government photo

1865

### Fever

Scarlet fever epidemic spreads from the coastal peoples to First Nations people of the Upper Yukon.

1869

### The First Map

Chilkat Chief Kohlux and his two wives drew a map of the routes into the Yukon interior for American scientist George Davidson. Explorers, traders and prospectors begin trickling into the upper Yukon.

“In the interior, the environment was not considered land to be exploited, but rather a community which inter-related people, animals, animate and inanimate objects mutually shared.”

Julie Cruikshank, 1974 (YA, *Through the Eyes of Strangers*).



Lucy Wren.  
Yukon Government photo

Our people tell many stories about the places that their families went to fish, hunt, trap and pick berries and medicinal plants. Over time, they adopted new methods of transport and new tools, but their relationship with the land and its resources remained constant. This chapter is about how people adapted their lives on the land during the many changes of the late 1800s and the twentieth century.

In a time when there were no roads or vehicles, Kwanlin people travelled mainly by foot, using snowshoes in winter. In summer, pack dogs helped to carry supplies and in winter, teams of dogs pulled sleds. People floated down rivers and crossed lakes using rafts or dugout canoes. Through all seasons, these hardy folk covered an amazing amount of territory.

What may seem like empty wilderness is our homeland. It is laced with an extensive network of established travel routes. Our Elders talk of following ancient trails to places such as M'Lintock Lake, Fish Lake, Braeburn Lake and Chadburn Lake, all good places to fish and hunt. In 1998, Mrs. Violet Storer prepared an inventory of First Nations landmarks along the Yukon River corridor in the City of Whitehorse. Rather than simply focussing on a strip of sites along the banks of the river, Mrs. Storer told of several trails leading away from the river to hunting and trapping areas, inland lakes and other parts of the country such as Champagne and Hutshi, or over Grey Mountain toward the Teslin River. While newcomers travelled on the Yukon River and its major tributaries, First Nations people set off from the rivers. They followed creek drainages, crossing mountain ranges to inland lakes and upland hunting and gathering areas. Kitty Smith told of how her family and others hunted in the high country:

*When I started to stay with my husband, Billy Smith, we stayed in Carcross and Robinson. Ddhäl Nàdhàda – Robinson Mountain – we hunted there. Used to be big meat hunts there. Lots of people—Slim Jim, Laberge Bill, John Joe – on top of that mountain. There's a pass at the head of Grey Mountain – they used to go there to hunt moose, to the other side of the mountain.*

Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived like a Story* (Univ. of Nebraska, 1990), p. 247

In spring, some families moved to sloughs along the Yukon River and near Marsh Lake where they trapped beaver, muskrat and ducks. In 1996, May Hume talked about the wetland area north of Marsh Lake:

*The Lewes River marsh belonged to Whitehorse Billy. People from Marsh Lake, Carcross used to dry fish there. The marsh land was called “tomba sho” which means “where the fish is big”.*

In late summer, people camped on the banks of the Yukon River during the annual salmon run. This was a time of plenty. Fish camps lined the river from the head of Miles Canyon to just below the rapids. One of our more important fish camps and gathering places was just above the canyon at a place that is now known as Canyon City. People caught and dried lots of fish to feed both themselves and their dogs during the forthcoming winter. First Nations people came from as far away as Aishihik to gaff the plentiful salmon and then dry them on racks over smoky fires, food for the long winter ahead.

Farther up the Yukon River was an important gathering place near the mouth of the M'Clintock River. People were attracted by the abundant salmon. Lucy Wren recalled that people from Tagish and Carcross boated to Marsh Lake then travelled far up M'Clintock River to set fish traps.

Other people have referred to this resource-rich area as being the “bread basket” of the region. Many of the people who lived in the extensive region between Marsh Lake and Tagish and their descendents refer to themselves as the Tagish Kwan.

*My parents told me a long time ago, in the gold rush days, you'd have to go a long way to hunt. They cleared all the game around towns and where the routes people took to Dawson. No way could you find your own meat. Wasn't canned goods in those days. Had to live off the land.*

Ronald Bill, quoted in *Back to the River*, 2003.



Ronald Bill.

“All along that area, right up along the (rapids) where the dam is now, the people used to gaff the salmon there. A lot of people came from Aishihik, from around Lake Laberge. They all went up there to dry fish. That's what Frankie Jim used to tell me about that area.”

Violet Storer, 1996

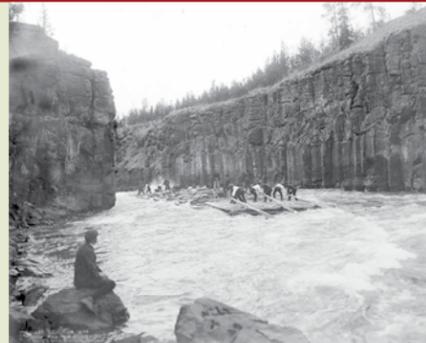


Violet Storer.

## 1870s-80s

### Portage

Early prospectors and other non-native visitors avoided the treacherous waters of Miles Canyon and Whitehorse Rapids by using the traditional First Nation portage trails. Some hired local men to help pack their goods.



Rafts running through Kwanlin.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #420

## 1883

### Schwatka

Lt. Frederick Schwatka led an expedition down the Yukon River on behalf of the U. S. government. Tagish guides led him on the early part of his journey. He renamed many features in Kwanlin Dün territory after various scientific and military people none of whom ever

travelled to the Yukon. Some names that are still used include Marsh Lake, M'Clintock River and Miles Canyon.

Portrait of Lt. Frederick Schwatka.  
From Frederick Schwatka, *A Summer in Alaska*. (St Louis, Missouri: J.W. Henry, 1894).



“One time at the head end of Fish Lake we were drying meat there. We hear a bang. Something is blown up, down there at Lewes Lake. They drain that lake so they can build the railway across it [White Pass and Yukon Railway, 1899]. Nobody had heard anything about it, they didn’t know if the railway was coming or not, but it had come that far.”

John Joe, quoted in Robert McCandless, *Yukon Wildlife: A Social History* (University of Alberta Press, 1985), p. 162.

## Klondike Gold Rush and Arrival of the Railway

*Days of 98? My mother, she said when she was 16-year-old, all she could pack was thirty pounds over Dyea Trail. She said when she pack it to this side she get paid thirty dollar . . . From Dyea to Lake Lindemann, Bennett. They say women and kids and all, they pack to make money; make lots of money if you pack stuff over for those white people.*

Lucy Wren, 1993

When the first prospectors and explorers began travelling through this area, First Nations people assisted them along their way, selling them fish and meat, and helping to portage their goods and vessels around Miles Canyon and the Whitehorse Rapids. Many had family members who worked as packers on the Chilkoot Trail, hauling supplies over the mountain pass.

On August 17, 1896, gold was discovered in the Klondike, a discovery that triggered the great gold rush of 1897-98. Tens of thousands of



Canyon City c. 1898.  
YA, Eric Hegg fonds #2696

fortune seekers from all over the world rushed north in search of riches. The most popular way was the “poor man’s route” over the Chilkoot Pass to the headwater lakes then down the Yukon River to Dawson. Suddenly our land was flooded with thousands of newcomers, most of whom had little skill with camping or boating. This spread-out, floating community of thousands of people had a huge impact on the land and its peoples. The stampede stripped the landscape of trees to build their crude boats and rafts, and to fuel their campfires. Carelessly tended fires caused many wildfires. Their casual hunting practices and noisy campsites drove the game far inland. These people also brought diseases causing sickness and many deaths among First Nations people they encountered.

As the only major navigational hazard on the Yukon River, the eight-kilometre stretch of water from the head of Miles Canyon to the foot of Whitehorse Rapids became a bottleneck on the route. Newcomers portaged their goods over our traditional trails or risked their goods, vessels and even lives running the rapids. The thousands of stampedees were accompanied by another flood of merchants, traders, tradesmen, police, surveyors and a variety of businesses ready to help transport the great mass of people and freight along their way. An aerial tramline was set up to haul goods up over the Chilkoot Pass. Sawmills on the headwater lake helped build the first steamships on the upper Yukon River using machinery hauled over the passes. In June 1898, Norman Macaulay completed a horse-drawn tramway on the eastern side of the river to transport freight and small vessels. Soon another tramline was built on the opposite bank. Most ambitiously, a group of businessmen financed the construction of a railway from Skagway into the Yukon interior.

Two communities sprung up at either end of Macaulay’s tramway: Canyon City at the upriver portion and White Horse Landing at the downriver end. This humble tent and log cabin community became the head of steam navigation on the Yukon River, leading to the decision to make it the end of the railway. Between 1899 and 1900, large crews of workers blasted through the White Pass and laid 110 miles of track from Skagway, through the Coastal Range along Lake Bennett and all the way to Whitehorse.

“At that time Indian people lived everywhere in the bush. They only went into Whitehorse at Christmas and after March 15 to bring in their furs and get supplies. Whitehorse was very small and no Indian people lived there year round.”

Louie Smith, *A Time of Change* (KDFN, 2000), p. 4.



Louie Smith.

1887

### George Mercer Dawson

Yukon Expedition, sponsored by the Canadian government and led by geologist George Dawson. Dawson described the territory and culture of the First Nations people he met en route including the Tlingit, Tagish and Southern Tutchone. He also

recorded many native place names and some Tagish vocabulary.

George M. Dawson, May 1885.  
*Library and Archives Canada, JW Topley Coll.*



1894

During a trip down the Yukon River, photographer Veazie Wilson described “the famous Tagish houses where councils of war and the yearly festivals are held. These buildings are the only permanent buildings seen in all the country above Pelly River.”



Southern Tutchone people of the Lake Laberge area trading with newcomers in 1894.  
From: Veazie Wilson, *Glimpses of Alaska, Klondike and Goldfields* (The Calvert Co., 1895), p. 24. YA Pam 1895-3

“[There] used to be Taylor & Drury store there and Puckett [hardware store] and T.C. Richards used to be a butcher there.”

Lily Kane, 1993



Lily Kane.

At the planned terminus, the railway owners surveyed a new townsite on the west bank of the Yukon, across the river from White Horse landing. From this point on, many of the newcomers settled permanently within our area. They introduced a different economy and a different culture, bringing many changes to our lives and our land.

## Whitehorse

*Dogteam even come from Little Atlin, from Tagish, all the way to Whitehorse with dogteam ... like my Uncle Sam Smith and Tagish Jim. And who else now? Billy Smith. They live around Marsh Lake, around Tagish in the summertime. But in the wintertime they go to where they trap.*

Lucy Wren, 1993

Between the 1910s and the 1930s, Whitehorse was a small town of only a few hundred people, and yet it occupied a key place in the Yukon economy. As the end of the rail line and head of Yukon River navigation, this was the main travel route. From here, freight from “Outside” was shipped all over the territory. Goods were transported downriver by sternwheeler, overland to Kluane country by horse-drawn wagons and along a winter road to Dawson by horses and sleds.

For us, Whitehorse became another stop on our seasonal round: a place to trade, find seasonal work and purchase supplies. First Nations people camped and built small dwellings around town, moving farther to the fringes as our traditional campsites were gradually taken over by the railway, shipyards, businesses and houses of the newcomers.

The Anglicans built a small log church in 1900. Many of the church workers held services with First Nations people and set up a day school for native children. Beginning in 1911, our people were encouraged to send their children to Choutla Residential School in Carcross. While Whitehorse had at least one doctor, non-native residents objected to sharing a hospital with First Nations people. For several years, the old log telegraph office across the river was used as a hospital or quarantine facility. Until Yukon’s first Indian Agent was appointed in 1914, the Mounted Police were in charge of doling out relief when needed.

The year 1911 was a particularly harsh one for First Nations people in the Whitehorse area. The Pueblo copper mine shut down, less freight was being shipped and White Pass & Yukon Route laid off half their River Division staff and 20% of the railway crew. When jobs were scarce, it seemed that First Nations people were the last to be hired. All this and a poor fur catch made life very difficult for First Nations people. Inspector J.A. MacDonald wrote about this in his annual report.

*The Indians were in poorer circumstances, probably, this year than they ever have been since the advent of the white men, in any numbers, in the country. The fur catch in the southern Yukon last year was very small together with their inability to obtain the employment they got in other years rendered their lot a hard one. Until the salmon run commenced this summer we had to issue more or less relief each week. We had to look after completely, a number of cases requiring medical treatment until they were in a fit condition to hunt and fish.*

– 1911 RNWMP Annual Report, Report of Insp. J. A. MacDonald, Whitehorse

“The trip by dog team from Lake Laberge to Whitehorse and back took three to four days. I remember coming into town with my father and brothers in the spring. He would bring in the lynx, fox, beaver and martin furs he had trapped over the winter. Back then we could easily pay off our bill at T&D and have money left over.”

Louie Smith, 2000



Taylor & Drury Store in the early 1920s.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #289



Illustration from *A Time of Change*.  
by Louie Smith, artwork by Eddy Shorty.  
KDFN, 2000.

1896

### Rabbit Creek Find

16th August, Skookum Jim, Tagish Charley, George Carmack and Kate Carmack discovered gold on Rabbit Creek (soon renamed Bonanza Creek) draining into the Klondike River. The subsequent gold rush was to bring tremendous changes to the lives of the Yukon’s native people.

Many people in Kwanlin Dün are descended from these famous gold discoverers.

L-R: George Mackenzie, Jim Boss, Skookum Jim, Rev. D.G. Blackwell.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #174



1897-98

### Impact of the Gold Rush

The height of the Klondike gold rush and thousands of stampedeers moved through Kwanlin Dün Traditional Territory. Some effects on First Nations people: game driven far from the river corridor, fires started by careless campers and disease.

YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #142





Jack Sewell's house in the Shipyards, 1997.  
Yukon Government photo

## Trading and Market Hunting

In Whitehorse, we were now trading directly with non-native traders as opposed to dealing with go-betweens from the Alaskan coast who brought us European goods. Many people talk about shopping at the Taylor & Drury store. This partnership of Isaac Taylor and William Drury began during the gold rush, when the two men began buying the outfits of homeward-bound stampeders, unable to face the hardships of the long trip to Dawson City. After a time in Atlin, the pair made Whitehorse their base in 1900 and eventually set up trading posts all around the territory. They supplied the posts with a series of small steamboats: the *Thistle*, the *Kluane* and the *Yukon Rose*. In 2000, Louie Smith spoke about his family's relationship with the traders. His story was later made into a children's book, entitled *A Time of Change*, illustrated by Eddy Shorty.

In those days Indian people did not have money, but furs were worth a lot. Taylor & Drury were the first to set up a credit system. People could get all the supplies they needed like traps, snares, shells and even rifles. They could also get food staples like flour, sugar, tea, coffee and dried vegetables. Each person's name and the total of what they owed was

written down. This amount would be paid off at the end of trapping season.

The local butchers, Burns and Company, leased a stockyard and slaughtering shack north of town on the waterfront near Kishwot Island. Live cattle and hogs were shipped north on the railway and then butchered before being sold in the store on Main Street and elsewhere in the territory. The butcher shop also sold wild meat, fish and waterfowl, which they purchased from local hunters. There are also stories of people drying whitefish from Fish Lake and selling them to Taylor & Drury.

John "Jack" Sewell moved to Whitehorse in 1904 and lived in a small house in the shipyards. He eventually bought a store on Front Street near the Regina Hotel and lived in an apartment upstairs. Many First Nations people came to his store to trade and remember Mr. Sewell's generosity in extending credit to needy people and his kindness to First Nations people.

Other stores used by our people included the Arctic Trading Company operated by Captain Paddy Martin and William Puckett's Hardware store.



Sternwheeler *Eldorado* at Whitehorse. YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #16



Captain Martin's Store on Front Street, 1934.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #389.



Back row, left to right: Pelly Jim, George Dawson, Frank Dawson, Jackie MacIntosh, Big Salmon Henry, David Jackson.  
Front row, left to right: Charlie Johnson, Joe Jackie, Frankie Jim, Charlie Dall. ca. 1920.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #226

1900

### Founding of Whitehorse

Completion of the White Pass and Yukon Railway from Skagway. Founding of the settlement of Whitehorse: the end of steel for the White Pass and Yukon Railway and head of sternwheeler navigation on the Yukon River.



Whitehorse in 1900.  
YA, #1334, University of Washington coll. Goetzman photographer

### A Place for Us

April 1900, Chief Jim Boss (Kishxóot) travelled to Tagish to request that a reserve be placed around his traditional lands at Lake Laberge.



July 13, an Order-in-Council set aside 320 acres at the upper end of Laberge "for the use of Indians in that vicinity."

Chief Jim Boss.  
YA, E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #210



Nelly Johnny with her great grandson Joe Smith after a shopping trip to Taylor & Drury's store in Whitehorse, 1950. YA, Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 2009/81 #327

So a new way of living came to be. We used to make our living entirely from the land; now we were more a part of the wage economy. Harvesting wild meat, fish and plants was still an important part of our lives but we had become accustomed to store bought goods. The town became part of our lives and we spent more time here. Living entirely off the land became more difficult and, it was sometimes hard for First Nations people to get jobs. Still, our skills in trapping, wood cutting, crafts and our knowledge of the land were all marketable.



Burns stockyard near Kishwoot Island. YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #146.



John Sewell's Store on First Avenue, 1963. YA, James Quong fonds, #1-11-409

## Life on the River

The Yukon River and its side streams were the summer highways to Dawson, Mayo, Teslin and several small settlements in-between. During the short navigation season, the crews of the sternwheelers worked hard to deliver a year's worth of supplies. For many families, working to service the steamboat industry became part of their annual round. Men took jobs as deckhands on the boats and longshoremen on the docks. The sternwheeler boilers had an insatiable appetite for cordwood and all along the river were scores of wood camps where the boats stopped to refuel. Many families worked in the wood camps. In the early days, this was all manual labour using crosscut saws to cut the trees into four-foot lengths and horses to haul the wood to riverbanks.

Some of the woodcutters in the Whitehorse area included the Ryder and Cyr families. The Ryder family operated wood camps in eight major locations. In a 1987 essay about the Ryder wood camps, Marny Ryder talked about the interdependence between the Ryders and local First Nations people:

*Just as the different generations of the Ryder family assumed responsibility for the wood camp operation, different generations of the local native people worked as wood-cutters. During the summer months entire families would move out to the wood lots as early as April – green tree cutting had to be completed by September in order for the wood to dry for winter use. During the peak season, 25 to 30 men could be employed at any one camp. This number would vary as the Indian families moved in and out of camp pursuing their own life style. The fishing in the area of the camps was not usually good so a family would disappear from the camp site for several days and then quietly reappear whenever the fishing trip was finished.*

The woodcutters were among the few townspeople who owned trucks. Violet Storer spoke of how they assisted First Nations travelling upriver after a successful hunting or fishing trip.

*It was the fall time and ... it was the last chance to get fish at Marsh Lake. We visited old Whitehorse Billy at the dam. He helped us float our boat through the lock; then go down to Wigan (former railway construction camp above McCrae), and dad walked to Whitehorse and got George Ryder to come and get us ... When we got back to Whitehorse in the fall, everybody went to Fish Lake and got a bunch of fish for winter.*



Captain Frank Slim at the wheel of the S.S. Keno. YA, John Scott fonds, 89/41 #23



Frank Slim aboard the M.V. Schwatka. YA, Frank Slim fonds, 2003/121 #100

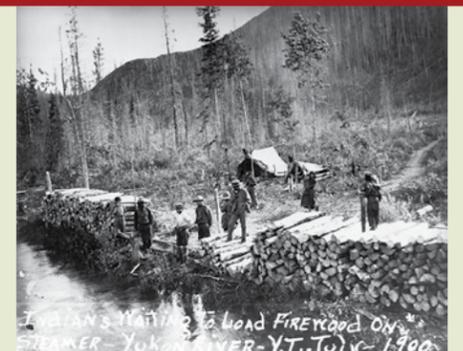
### 1902

Jim Boss wrote to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs requesting compensation for his people's loss of lands and hunting grounds. This is now recognized as the first attempt to secure a land claim for Yukon First Nations people.

### 1910s

New economic opportunities for First Nations people in wood camps, as dock workers and deckhands on riverboats.

MacBride Museum of Yukon History # 4135



Everything was nice, before the highway. When the highway moved in, everybody got sick. Water got sick and everything was polluted... Our lives started to change.

Leonard Gordon Sr., 1996



Leonard Gordon, Sr.

Many Elders recall that when they travelled downriver to Whitehorse, they often stopped at Wigan, an old railway camp site near McCrae and just before the rough water of Miles Canyon. They waited here, while someone walked into town to find a man with a truck. Different people tell of how William Puckett, George Ryder or Tony Cyr drove to the camp above the canyon to transport First Nations people and their fish and game to Whitehorse by road. According to Violet Storer, the payment was usually a quarter of moose.

Frank Slim, originally from Marsh Lake area, became the first and only Yukon First Nation man to earn his river pilot's license. He captained the trading vessels of Taylor & Drury as well as some of the larger White Pass sternwheelers. He worked on steamboats in Alaska, Northern British Columbia and the Yukon. When the sternwheeler era ended, he worked on the ferries at the river crossings on the road until bridges were built at Carmacks, Pelly Crossing and Stewart Crossing. In 1964, he piloted the *Keno* on its last voyage from Whitehorse to Dawson City (where it has since become a National Historic Site). In the 1960s, he was piloting the tour vessel *M.V. Schmatka* up Miles Canyon and entertaining tourists with his stories of the riverboat days. Now his grandchildren run a canoe rental business, maintaining the family connection to the river.

The river that had always been so important in giving us food and transportation, was providing us with new ways to make a living.

## Fox Farming

When fur prices rose in the 1910s and 1920s, many Yukoners took up fox farming. Most fur farms started up using live-trapped animals. They raised the animals for fur as well as for breeding stock that could be sold to other fur farmers outside the territory. There were several years when First Nations people earned premium prices for fox pelts and even more for the foxes that they live-trapped. In the 1920s, a high quality silver fox pelt sold for as much as \$100. According to a 1914 publication, a pair of silver foxes that "bred true" was worth as much as \$25,000. In 1914, the Royal North-West Mounted Police Annual Report found it noteworthy that Tagish Jim had earned \$1,000 for his foxes and then bought a gasoline launch.

Key to the success of these ventures was a plentiful supply of food. Although some farmers used game meat, most of these farms were set up along the Yukon River or near lakes with an abundant fish stock. There were several fox farms along the river in the greater Whitehorse area and a farm on Fox Point on Fish Lake. Remains of animal pens suggest that there may have once been a fur farm at the Canyon City site but this has not been confirmed. Downriver at Lake Laberge, Chief Jim Boss (Kashxóot) – always quick to pick up on an entrepreneurial opportunity – set up his own operation.

According to Elders, the fox farm at Fish Lake was responsible for a drop in fish stocks. It is presumed that the high elevation of the lake and the very cold temperature of its water slowed the recovery from overfishing.

Inevitably, fur prices dropped and the fox farming era ended. Still, many families continued to earn part of their living from the trapline.

## Alaska Highway

*I was in Carcross when the Alaska Highway building through. And those soldiers and things, lots of people come in from outside. And that's when all the people die off. They got that stomach flu and measles and I don't know what all. Lots of kids die off then too.*

Lucy Wren, 1993

For over forty years, Whitehorse was a quiet community with a year-round population of about 350 people. This doubled in summer during the navigation season when hundreds of workers travelled north to work in the shipyards and crew the boats. The town itself occupied a fairly small area centred on Main Street and the shipyards. The most important and exciting spot in town was the train depot and docks where people regularly gathered to meet trains and steamboats to see who was arriving in town.

When war was declared in 1939, several local people enlisted, including a number of First Nations men. Nonetheless it seemed that the battlefields of Europe were far away and that the war would make little difference in the day-to-day lives of northerners. The bombing of Pearl Harbour in



Working on the Alaska Highway near Kluane Lake, 1942. YA, Willis Grafe fonds, 83/87 #7



Members of the U.S. Army 302nd Engineers with a dead moose near Teslin, 1942. The soldiers were later fined \$200 for illegal hunting. Glenbow Archives, NA-3622-43

### 1910s

Good prices for fur. First Nations people earn good income trapping live foxes for fur farms. Jim Boss sets up his own fox farm.



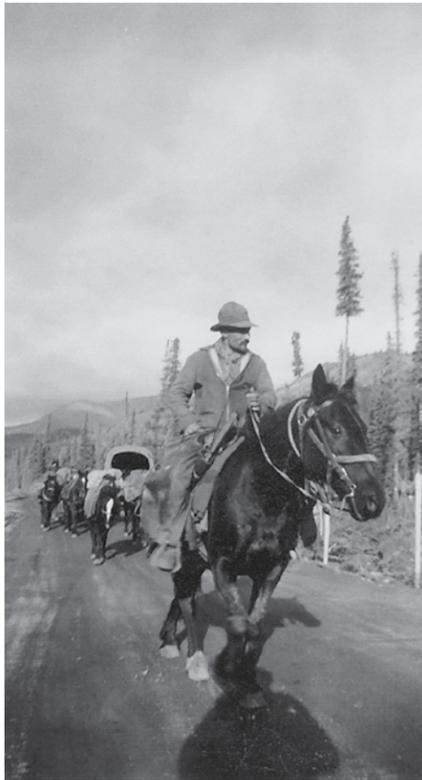
A Yukon fox farm. YA, Christopher Everest Webb fonds, 80/87 #40

### 1911

Opening of Choutla residential school in Carcross by the Anglican Church with assistance from federal government.



Choutla School. YA #398, National Archives of Canada coll.



Buck Dickson leads a group travelling along the Alaska Highway, summer 1942. YA, Bob Ormbrek fonds, 90/52 #73.

December 1941 followed by a Japanese invasion of the Aleutian Islands changed all that. Suddenly the northwest corner of the continent seemed very vulnerable and was getting a lot of attention.

The Americans, supported by the Canadian government, were quick to respond. It was determined that the best way to move forces and supplies to Alaska was to build a highway through the Canadian interior far from the coastal threats. This meant surveying and constructing a road through hundreds of miles of unmapped wilderness far from supply centres. Speed was critical and there was no skimping on resources for the project – be it manpower, equipment or money.

All negotiations were conducted in secret. In April 1942, local residents were startled by the arrival of the first wave of U.S. Army soldiers and the news that Whitehorse was going to be headquarters for the building of a new highway to Alaska. With its airport, railway and water connections, Whitehorse was ideally placed to become the administrative and distribution centre for this immense construction project. The soldiers dismounted from the train then marched straight up the bluff to the airport and set up a tent camp. They were soon followed by many thousands of American soldiers and civilian workers. They streamed into the town via the railway, which had been taken over by the army, and was now operating 24 hours a day. The camp near the airport became a large tent city while all around the edges of town, the newcomers set up large camps, workshops and equipment dumps.

Within a year, the construction boom increased even more with another wartime mega-project. To meet the demand for fuel created by the new Alaska Highway and especially for the airports of the Northwest Staging Route, petroleum was to be piped from the oilfields of Norman Wells in the Northwest Territories over the Mackenzie Mountains 960 km to a new refinery in Whitehorse.

During this “Friendly Invasion,” we experienced yet another great influx of strangers, many of whom were unaware that they were in another country, not to mention living and working within the traditional lands of several Yukon First Nations.

The land suffered due to careless construction practices. The mission of the soldiers was to carve a “tote road” through the wilderness. They, in turn, were followed by an army of civilian contractors who often had to

reroute and rebuild the crude trail. Equipment operators and engineers stripped the forest and land cover exposing the permafrost beneath. Once the frost layer lost its insulation, it began melting creating boggy, muddy areas that swallowed trucks and equipment. Many construction photos show workers attempting to free tractors and other vehicles that were deeply embedded in muck. Despite filling the boggy areas with logs or “corduroy” and rock, many of these compromised areas continued to plague travellers and road-builders for decades after.

People with no experience living and camping in the bush were now trying to cope with clouds of mosquitos and blackflies in summer and huddling in tents during the severe cold of Yukon winters. In their free time, the soldiers went hunting for fresh meat and entertainment. The behaviour of these newcomers was often careless and disrespectful and there were no authorities to monitor or regulate their activities. Overzealous hunters drove game far from the highway corridor, wasted meat and shot animals simply for sport. There were many forest fires due to untended campfires. The highway workers carelessly dumped their machinery and DDT canisters.

The Canol Refinery in, what is today, the Marwell industrial area. Rolf Hougen coll.



## 1912

First Nations people set up a camp just south of town, near what is now Rotary Peace Park. Many townspeople object to their presence.

## 1914

Appointment of the Yukon's first Indian Agent, Rev. John Hawksley.

All along the highway route, isolated communities experienced negative impacts from the arrival of the outsiders. There were problems with alcohol, disease and other social ills. When the soldiers broke Canadian laws, they came under the jurisdiction of military police and courts. Often, these authorities simply relocated the offenders, far from the consequences of their actions. The Americans took charge of “security” along the highway, limiting or forbidding access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds. Lucy Wren described one such encounter:

*My mom had a fight with one soldier up the hill. She wanted to go grouse hunting up there where Air Force camp [Hillcrest]. She said, “That’s my hunting ground.*

*He said, “Out of here!”*

*She couldn’t understand why. She said, “I’ve lived here many years. You just came here. Go home!” ... He pushed her away with the rifle. Them days you can’t say anything, you just have to go, get out.*

The highway and pipeline workers relied on our knowledge of the country. Many of our people acted as guides leading the surveyors. The construction was so hurried that often the surveyors scrambled to mark the route immediately ahead of the heavy machinery mowing down trees right behind them. Our men took labouring jobs and cut wood. Woodcutters were in high demand, now supplying the stoves of the newcomers as well as the riverboats. In Whitehorse, many of our women took jobs housekeeping and doing laundry. Many earned good money making and selling hide and fur mitts, hats and parkas to the soldiers. Lily Kane remembers selling moosehide clothing to the soldiers. Kitty Smith told Julie Cruikshank that her family’s sewing earned enough to buy the family a truck:

*You know how we bought that truck? Sewing! One pair of moccasins is worth twenty-five dollars. I got hundred muskrat skins. I wanted to make blanket for myself, but I made mitts. Fur mitts? Soldiers buy them for twenty-five dollars. Muklukes sometime fifty dollars.*

*Life Lived Like a Story*, p. 250.

Many First Nations people talk about the Alaska Highway construction as marking the beginning of a time of many profound changes. Previously remote trading posts and settlements were now linked by new roads, both the Alaska Highway and other year-round roads built after the war. People moved closer to the highway communities for jobs and to be nearer to children attending school. In 1951, approximately 2,600 people were living in Whitehorse and the town had spread in size with the new army and air force communities above the escarpment and, after 1956, the new subdivision of Riverdale across the river. The Yukon’s economic and political focus had moved south in 1953, the territorial capital was moved from Dawson City to Whitehorse.

In the early 1950s, the riverboats shut down. This meant the end of another era for us, as our people lost jobs on the boats and in many of the wood camps. River communities lost their main supply line and settlements such as Upper Laberge, Lower Laberge, Little Salmon and Big Salmon were abandoned, as residents moved closer to the new roads. Other new communities such as Swift River, Brook’s Brook and Haines Junction sprang up near the highway camps.

Lower fur prices, new government regulations regarding fishing and hunting, and a new government system of registering traplines made it more difficult to follow traditional trapping practices. Our access to the land was limited over the next few decades, as it became more difficult to live in Whitehorse. The very nature of the land had changed. More people from the outside had arrived and, with them, more technology. The highway made it easier for people, equipment and different ideas to come into our land. Whitehorse went from a village where everyone used an outhouse, to a large town with sewer, water and electricity. We had found a place in the sternwheeler era, but that was now over. We had yet to find a niche in a landscape and community dominated by this new road and all that came with it.

## 1916

Hawksley together with White Pass and RNWMP Supt. Bell arranged to move a First Nations community from downtown Whitehorse to a site a mile downstream.

Site found to be on White Pass lands and people were moved even farther downriver.

## 1921

Survey of Lot 226, by Order-in-Council this land was set aside as a First Nation reserve.

The Shipyards area where many Kwanlin Dün members lived.



## Damming the River and the Fish

*I used to get 300 rats sometimes along the river here [between M'Lintock Bay and the Yukon River Bridge]. In summer when the water is low, the muskrat are digging tunnels for winter. From there they can feed along the river bottom in wintertime. Now they build a dam and keep the water high, clean out a bunch of willow along the bank and the muskrat are all gone... At the same time, they build a bigger dam at Whitehorse. There used to be big king salmon come up through here. Used to be a salmon camp near here and all the Indians used to come there to dry salmon for winter. We had two big long traps. One time we got fifty salmon in one night. It was like Klukshu.*

John Joe, quoted in McCandless, *Yukon Wildlife: A Social History*, p. 163.

The construction of three dams within Kwanlin Dün territory affected the First Nations fishery. In 1925, the White Pass & Yukon Route completed a dam across the Yukon River just below Marsh Lake. Its purpose was to advance the navigation season in spring by holding back water then suddenly releasing it in May. This helped flush out the ice in Lake Laberge which remained for some weeks after the river opened above and below the lake. For much of the year, this flooded the area above the dam and – depending on when the gates were lowered – blocked spawning salmon as well as the passage of other fish.

As part of the McIntyre Creek hydro project, a dam was built at Fish Lake in 1949, raising the water level and changing the drainage. Formerly the lake outlet ran through Jackson Creek and the Ibex River to the Takhini River. This was now rerouted through Franklin and Louise lakes down McIntyre Creek to the Yukon River. Water levels in the lake rose about a metre and many traditional camps were flooded.



Marsh Lake Dam.  
YA, James Quong fonds, 5-1-81

The largest project of all was the construction of the hydro dam just below Whitehorse Rapids. This project flooded the rapids, created Schwatka Lake and raised the water levels in Miles Canyon by as much as four metres. During the three years of construction, from 1956 to 1958, the salmon were blocked in their upriver migration by the new barrier across the river. There are stories of fish scooped up in buckets then trucked above the construction area, but such measures could only handle a fraction of the run. By the time the fish ladder was constructed, the annual number of spawning salmon had greatly dropped. The construction of a wooden fish ladder on the east side of the river helped move the fish upriver, but much of the damage was already done.

This particularly affected the fishery upriver at the mouth of the M'Clintock River. The creation of Schwatka Lake had other impacts. The rising waters flooded a large area that once contained several fish camp sites, a rich berry-picking area and habitat for plentiful small game such as grouse and gophers. Leonard Gordon Senior pointed out that the drowning of small ponds and wetlands along the river banks also affected beaver and muskrat populations.

While the town of Whitehorse gained a reliable supply of hydroelectric power, we lost one of our most important food sources, the salmon. Life was changed again and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find alternative places to hunt, fish and trap. Also, with the dam came the bridge across the Yukon River to Riverdale in 1956. This new subdivision meant that houses were built on an area where we had traditionally camped. The bridge ran through the community of Whiskey Flats where many of our people lived. Soon, these two areas where we lived would be cleared and we would have to move even further away from the centre of town.



New bridge to Riverdale, c. 1958.  
Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 2009/81 #771.



Whitehorse Dam, c. 1959.  
YA, James Quong fonds, 1-11-333

# 3. Reclaiming Our Land

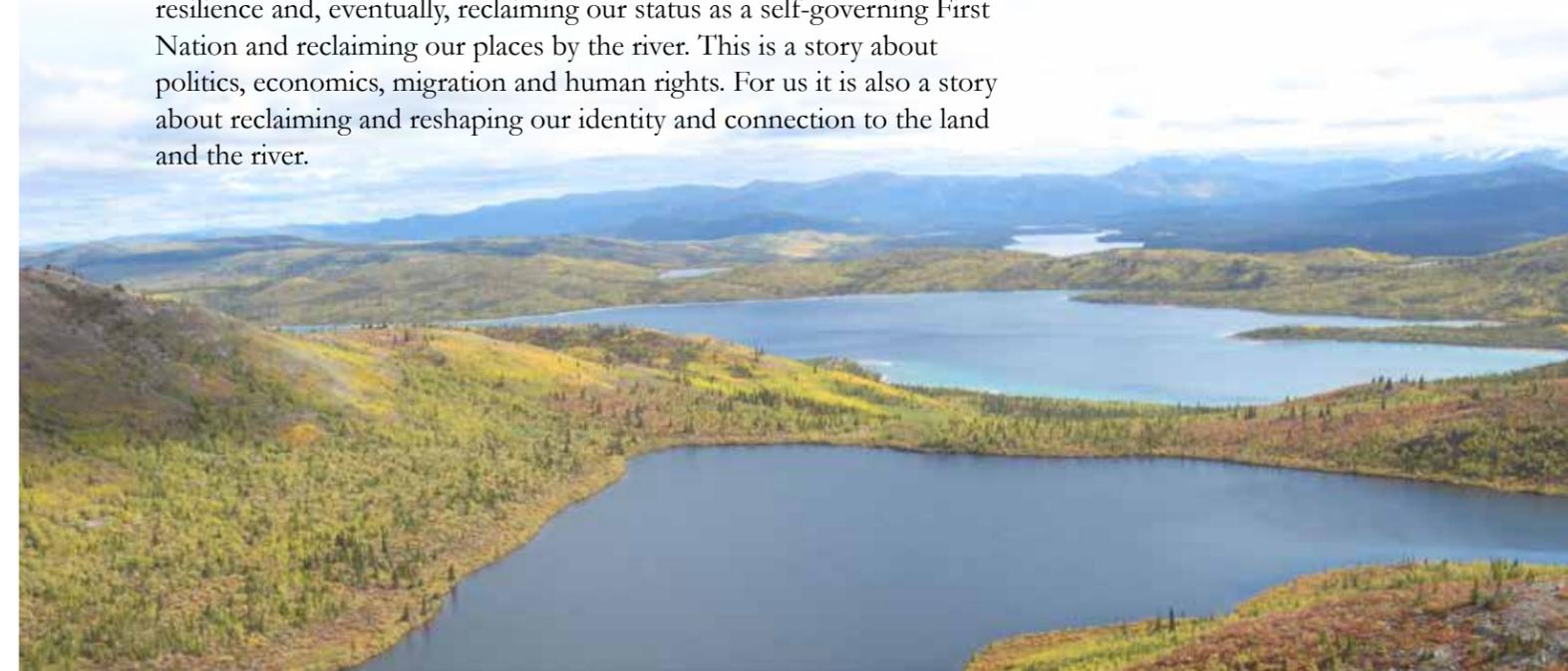
*Listen to the stories. It's good to listen, kids. It's like what is being said about the waterfront and right here in Whitehorse, in 20 or 30 years from now, you people will be around. That's why you gotta listen to the stories. And that school is good too. Don't forget you gotta finish it.*

Louis Smith, 2003

When they built the town of Whitehorse, the newcomers may have seen empty land. But for us, and for our ancestors, the banks of the Yukon River were our home. We had fished and camped here. We buried our dead here. We had names for these sites. We belonged here. Many of our places became part of the new town and over the years, the landscape itself changed as wetlands were filled, new roads overlaid ancient trails, and our campsites were taken over by buildings, train tracks, and garbage dumps. Even as we settled on the edges of the community, we were often moved even further – sometimes forcibly – as other uses were found for our land. This is a story of displacement, adaptation, resilience and, eventually, reclaiming our status as a self-governing First Nation and reclaiming our places by the river. This is a story about politics, economics, migration and human rights. For us it is also a story about reclaiming and reshaping our identity and connection to the land and the river.



Kwanlin Dün Traditional Territory.  
Kwanlin Dün map



1924

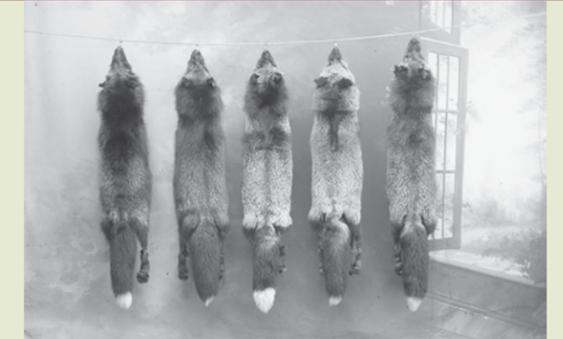
Construction of Marsh Lake dam — built to hold enough water to flush out Lake Laberge ice in spring — blocks salmon fishery at M'Clintock River.



E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #857

1920s–30s

Fur prices were high, good years for trappers.



Fox pelts.  
YA, E.J. Hamacher fonds  
(Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #649



Early survey plan of Whitehorse. YA, GOV 1623, f. 2788

## Uneasy Neighbours

The White Pass and Yukon Railway reached the Yukon River at Whitehorse in 1900. The year before, the railway owners surveyed and eventually purchased all the land on the west bank below the escarpment including the new townsite at the railway terminus, a total of nearly 800 acres. The downtown area was limited to an area of about 40 city blocks between Strickland and Hawkins Street from north to south and, from west to east, from Front Street (later renamed First Avenue) by the river up to Seventh Avenue. Although some land was set aside for government use and many lots were sold to the businesses and residents of the new community, the company became the town's main landholder.

By 1901, the umbrella company – the White Pass & Yukon Route (WP&YR or simply White Pass) – had created its River Division, set up a large shipyard downstream of the railway station and started building sternwheelers. The new town quickly filled up with everything from a host of tents to rather grand public and commercial buildings.

For nearly 50 years, Whitehorse was primarily a company town with White Pass as the main employer. WP&YR had many interests including a land office, the mail contract on the winter road that the company built and maintained between Whitehorse and Dawson, its sternwheeler fleet and shipyards, and eventually its own airline.



Whitehorse in 1904. YA, E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/262 #857

Over the years, White Pass and its various business interests, the police, the churches and federal government officials all made decisions which affected our lives. We were told that our traditional camps were now encroaching on the railway right of way, within the shipyards area and downtown.

We belonged to the land as much as it belonged to us, our ancestors and our descendants. For the outsiders, the land was a commodity to be divided, used and, most of all, owned and barricaded. These very different relationships to the land would lead to frequent clashes in the years to come.

## The letter from Chief Jim Boss

One of our leaders was troubled by the increased occupation of our land and decided to do something about this situation. The hereditary chief of the people at Lake Laberge, Kishxóot (better known as Chief Jim Boss), approached federal government officials as early as 1900 requesting protection of a portion of his people's traditional lands. The Crown Timber and Land Agent based at Tagish, R. Miller, sent a report to Commissioner William Ogilvie in April 1900. It stated:

An Indian named Jim Boss from Lake LeBarge has made an application to me for a tract of land for a reserve at the home of his people. The land he would like to secure is situated near the head of Lake LeBarge on Western shore. There are some houses in which his people live at the point applied for, and he will be perfectly satisfied with a tract extending from a point one mile above to another one and one-half miles below these houses, and running, say one mile back from the Lake.

He claims to have a line cut out through the bush some distance back from the Lake shore, and which will enclose most of the land he wants.

It appears that some squatters have recently started a stopping place or places near his home, and he strongly objects to this. The land, he says, has been occupied by his people from time immemorial.

“Jim Boss, I may state is a very intelligent man and is fairly well off and I am told very liberal with his own means in supporting his own Indians.”

T. W. Jackson, 13 January 1902

1939

Outbreak of World War II. A number of First Nations men enlisted including Elijah Smith (KDFN chief ca. 1967-1968).

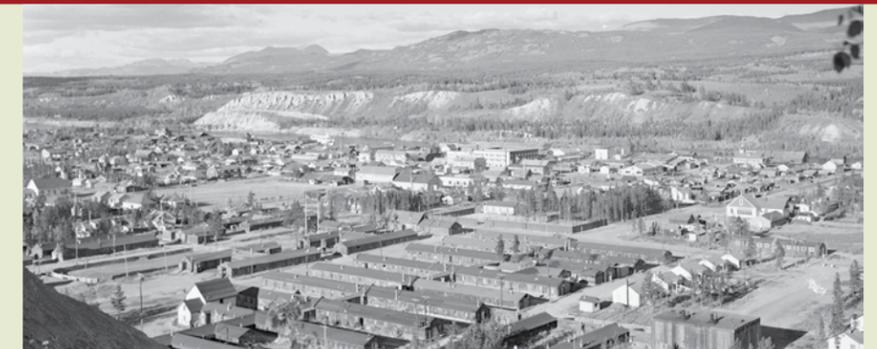
Elijah Smith

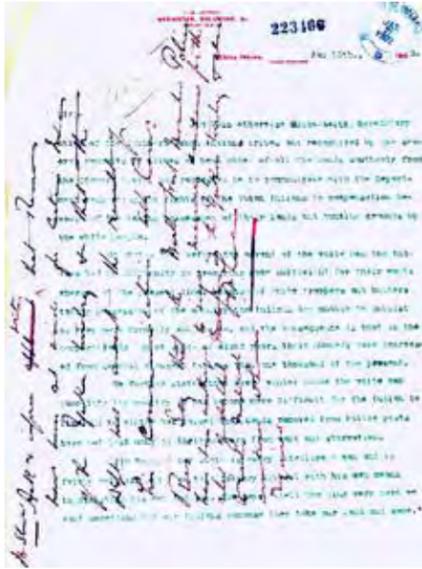


1942

US Army troops move north to construct the Alaska Highway, soon followed by thousands of civilian road workers.

Army barracks in Whitehorse, 1945. YA, Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2009/81 #760





Letter written by lawyer Jackson on behalf of Jim Boss.  
LAC, RG 10, DIA, Jackson to Supt. General of Indian Affairs, 30 June 1902



Chief Jim Boss.  
Detail from E. J. Hamacher fonds  
(Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection)  
2002/118 #731. Retouched by Midnight Arts.

William Ogilvie was personally familiar with the site and recalled that, when he first visited the area in 1887, it “bore every mark of having been occupied for a long time previously.” He recommended to the Deputy Minister of the Interior that a tract of land not less than 320 acres be set aside for use of the people at Laberge, substantially less than the 1,600-acre reserve originally requested.

Two years later, Chief Jim Boss took stronger measures. In 1902, he hired a local lawyer, T. W. Jackson, to help him draft a letter to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs. In this document, Kishxóot acted as spokesman for the Southern Yukon native people. Chief Boss requested compensation from Canada because of the Indians’ loss of land and hunting grounds to the white people, stating that the numbers of First Nations people were dwindling because they were unable to subsist as they once could. He went on to estimate the numbers of people at different communities around the Yukon, his point being to show how their populations had diminished since the coming of white people. One famous quotation from this letter is: “Tell the King very hard we want something for our Indians because they take our land and game.”

There was scant response at the time. Notes made on a copy of the letter directed federal official Mr. Stewart (the Crown Timber and Land Agent) to state that small reserves had been already been set aside for various Yukon First Nations. As well, “the North-West Mounted Police have been authorized to issue necessary assistance” for the relief of the needy as well as medical treatment when required.

After sitting for over 60 years in government files and archives, this document became the foundation of the Yukon Land Claim movement and Chief Jim Boss was hailed as a visionary leader by all Yukon First Nations. He predicted the increasing loss of both land and independence of his people, and recognized the need to use the tools of the white people to regain them.

## Lot 226

In the early 1900s, we continued to use the area around Whitehorse to fish, hunt and forage. At that time, the *Whitehorse Star* published accounts of successful hunting and trapping seasons, record sales for furs and live-trapped foxes, and visits from other First Nations. Sadly there were also many deaths due to diseases like tuberculosis and pneumonia.

Although we had always met with other First Nations below the rapids, our allies and kinfolk were now also coming here to visit the Whitehorse stores. One gathering took place in October 1905, across the river near the present hospital site and, according to the *Whitehorse Star*, lasted several days and nights.

The North-West Mounted Police reported on First Nations activities in the Whitehorse area in 1905 with their own interpretation of events.

The Indians throughout the district were self-supporting during the year, the majority of them fairly prosperous, the few instances in which relief was being given being extreme cases in which they were unable to work through sickness or old age. Sickness, however, seems to be, if anything, on the increase, hardly a day passing that a number of them do not visit the hospital for medical treatment, principally old men, women and children suffering from rheumatic and scrofulous complaints. . . .

All the Indians in the district, together with those at Atlin, gathered at White Horse this fall, where the festivities peculiar to these tribes were indulged in. Representatives from the Indians at Dalton House, Little Salmon, Tagish and Atlin afterwards assembled at Little River, where a potlatch was held . . .

As well as the settlement across the river, *Whitehorse Star* stories began referring to First Nations encampments north of town. In 1912, the editor of the newspaper drew attention to a “new” community of First Nations people upriver from town and called for the relocation of First Nations people farther from town.



Excerpt from 1900 survey plan of Whitehorse, showing northern extent of White Pass lots. CLSR Plan 8406

## 1940s

War work offered new economic opportunities to First Nations people: guiding survey crews, slashing and construction work. Women took in laundry, cleaned in camps, hotels and restaurants; and made mitts, jackets and boots to sell to soldiers. Kitty Smith was able to buy her

family a truck with the money she made selling mukluks and mitts. Another woman in Whitehorse made \$3,500 taking in soldiers’ laundry between April and November 1942.

## 1940s

Less positive changes: alcohol, disease, loss of game and fish stocks due to recreational - and wasteful - hunting by soldiers, forest fires due to neglected campfires.

Following is part of an editorial written at the time:

### Menace to Health

Within the last two weeks no less than four houses, making eight in all, have been constructed by Indians in the flat, pestilential and mosquito-breeding swamp, just south of town between the railroad section house and the river—and nearly all the Indians who formerly lived across the river and in the woods north of town now make the new town their home...

As the land on which the Indians have constructed their houses is owned by the railroad company, it is the duty of that company to treat them as trespassers and summarily remove them. By permitting them to remain unmolested, the railroad is liable to prosecution for maintaining a nuisance. In the meantime it is the duty of the authorities, primarily of the police, to see that the railroad company ousts the Indians from their present location ...

It is hoped the railroad company will lose no time in removing these trespassers, otherwise, it is hoped the authorities will lose no time in doing their duty. The public health is at stake...

*Whitehorse Star, 11 October 1912*

People who had only been in our country for a few years, were calling us trespassers. In 1914, the Yukon's first Indian Agent was appointed, Reverend John Hawksley, an Anglican priest from the Dawson City area. The following year, Hawksley travelled to Whitehorse and consulted with White Pass officials and the police about relocating the First Nations people. No one consulted with us. In his 1915 report, Inspector Bell described what happened next:

The Whitehorse Indians have been living for some years on land owned by the White Pass Company. Abortive attempts have been made to get these Indians off the townsite. This month, however, each Indian has been served with a notice in writing to vacate, and it is the intention of the company to compel them to move as they require the land for their own purposes.



Rev. John Hawksley.  
E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #211

The move happened in the fall of 1915. A site was selected about two miles downriver. White Pass provided barges to move the people and their belongings. The *Star* welcomed this turn of events:

The *Star* congratulates Indian Superintendent Hawksley on his wisdom in moving the Indians, houses, tents, bags and baggage from the swamp above town to a point a mile below town on the left limit of the river... Now that the Indians are gone it is hoped that any future move to establish a village so near town will be promptly nipped in the bud. It is better for the Indians that they should be away by themselves and it is certainly better for the town that they not be camped so close to the source of public water supply.

*Whitehorse Star, 22 October 1915*

The move was not straightforward, however. When John Hawksley attempted to have the land surveyed as a reserve, he learned that the First Nations people were still occupying one of the large blocks of land owned by White Pass. Again First Nations people were evicted and moved farther downriver. One reason given for selecting this land was that it was "of little prospective value for any other purpose." The land that was eventually surveyed as a reserve for our people became known as Lot 226. In 1921, this property was officially set aside for the use of the Whitehorse area Indian people.

The area downstream of the shipyards where First Nations people were eventually settled.  
Detail from YA, E. J. Hamacher fonds (Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection) 2002/118 #22



### 1949

Fish Lake hydro project. Construction of dam at foot of Fish Lake floods camping spots along lake and redirects lake outlet, affecting fish population.

### 1950

The Yukon government began registering traplines. This conflicted with traditional trapping practices and areas.

While our people spent some time here when they came to town, it was inconvenient and eventually most moved to various places on the outskirts of town. Unfortunately, the move to Lot 226 was only the first of several forced evictions and relocations that would take place over the next 60 years.

## “Pushed here and pushed there” — the squatter communities

*... there were people from Teslin and Carmacks, all where the Rotary Park is now. They camped all the way through there, way before Whiskey Flats. People started coming in from outside, building all kinds of little houses. So the Indians always fade away, they go somewhere else. So that's what happened, they were pushed here and pushed there all the time. They can never stay one place permanently, even though they built house and all that. They knocked them down. They did that to my sister right by Jamieson's. And my mother's house too, without her permission.*

Violet Storer, 1996



Pat Joe.  
Peter Long photo

*I believe things started to change and we started to lose that close connection when the White Pass removed us from the waterfront. We were all asked to move. I just remember some of my friends moving to the end of Black Street, some moved to Porter Creek and some went back to their Traditional Territories. We lost our home, we lost our friends, we lost our safe haven.*

Pat Joe, 2003

When the population of Whitehorse boomed during the war years in the 1940s, everyone, including First Nations people, struggled to find housing. As well as the thousands of outsiders building the Alaska Highway and Canol Project, many Yukoners from outlying settlements poured into Whitehorse, where all the jobs were. The small squatter communities to the north and south of town kept spreading as hundreds of people settled along the waterfront. The area now occupied by Rotary Peace Park and the S.S. Klondike was called Whiskey Flats. The settled areas to the north were referred to by various names including Shipyards,

Moccasin Flats and Sleepy Hollow. Squatting was seen as a valid way to get by on a low income or to get ahead by avoiding high housing costs.

These places became home. Residents worked hard to raise their children, rambled into the wilder areas nearby to pick berries and hunt small game, and enjoyed a strong sense of community.

In 2003, Kwanlin Dün First Nation published *Back to the River*, a booklet that celebrates our continuing connection to the river. It contains many fond memories from the former residents of the riverfront communities, including the children who grew up there:

*Me and my late husband, Norman Shorty, lived with our in-laws. My mother-in-law, Jessie Shorty, bought a tiny little shack which must have been a storage shed owned by the army. My husband and I worked hard rebuilding it into a cozy little two-room shack. The house was located right where the S.S. Klondike sternwheeler sits today. It was good living there, I enjoyed it, we had a good neighbourhood. There was mostly First Nations people from different parts of the Yukon. There was quite a few. Everybody was friendly. Everybody shared. Everybody knew each other.*

Emma Shorty, 2003

*We used to be able to just pick up, or Dad would anyways pick up his gun, and go for a walk down the tracks, towards Sleepy Hollow, around the pond where Wal-Mart is now. He would hunt beaver, ducks, and if we saw gopher we would get them too. And Mom would come with us and she would be picking mushrooms as we walked. It was just out your back door really. We kids had fun skipping along the tracks. We'd make the scoop, go around and walk back and have our dinner.*

Barbara Fred, 2003

At the outset of the squatter eviction movement in the late 1950s, over 1000 people lived along the waterfront, many of whom were Kwanlin Dün. This amounted to a third of the population in the lower Whitehorse area. Nearly 70% of them owned their own homes. Many well-known Yukon and Whitehorse residents lived in one of these communities at one time. These people made important contributions to the local economy.



Emma Shorty.



Barbara Fred.

### early 1950s

Indian Affairs funds some housing and a well in what is now the Marwell industrial area.



Michelle Dawson in the Old Village, Marwell.  
Shirley Dawson photo

### 1953

Capital of the Yukon is transferred from Dawson City to Whitehorse.

The Old Territorial Administration Building in Dawson City, 1907.  
Public Archives of Canada, 46695



Over the next 60 years, the squatter areas were gradually cleared away. The pattern was much the same in almost every case. Various levels of government and the WP&YR decided that the land was needed for another purpose. Then they used various means to try to move people from their homes: serving eviction notices, sometimes promises of assistance to relocate elsewhere, and most drastically, levelling buildings with bulldozers. The squatters organized to protest the removals and negotiate with authorities, sometimes they were able to ensure that the evictees received a fair deal; other times their protests were ignored.

This removal began in the early 1960s to the south of town in Whiskey Flats (which had grown large enough to be referred to as Whiskey Flats North and Whiskey Flats South). The area was cleared to make way for Rotary Park and a new resting place for the *S.S. Klondike* which was to become a Parks Canada National Historic Site. A “Transient Area” was set up north of town in part of what is now the Marwell industrial area. Buildings that were considered substandard for the new subdivisions above the escarpment were moved here.

Kitty Smith described her family’s eviction from Whiskey Flats, the first of a few moves:

Portion of Whiskey Flats.  
YA, Dorreene Wahl collection, 83/98 #8.



### 1956-57

Indian Affairs decides to amalgamate the First Nations from the Lake Laberge and Whitehorse areas.

First election of the Whitehorse Indian Band chief and council. Billy Smith appointed as chief.

*We got kicked out all at once, but they buy those house off us. Then they tell us to move out. Some people they move their house.*

*When we moved from Whiskey Flats we had no place to go. We moved to across where Beaver Lumber (Home Hardware) area is. Used to be village area. Build a log cabin, we sold that one. From there we move to the village in the Marwell area.*

*Back to the River, 2003*

White Pass dealt with the squatters directly when Second Avenue was extended to the north and again when the company built a new freight shed and ore transfer station (later taken over by Motorways). Phil Gatensby spoke of his family’s experience:

*White Pass bulldozed my mom’s house down. My mom bought this house. She worked doing different jobs like cooking and stuff like that. So it was really difficult for her. I remember knowing that she finally finished paying for her house and it was her house and she owned it. It was really a sense of accomplishment for her. At the same time White Pass came and said you can’t be here, this is our land. And they gave her a certain amount of time to move out. And we didn’t actually even move out. We got some things out and they came with a front end loader and they crushed the house, but they crushed it just so it was unlivable.*

The people to the north were overlooked for several decades until, again, the land became desirable for other purposes. In 2004, the last of the riverfront squatters were bought out and moved from the area that is now Shipyards Park. During these many moves, Lot 226 again became important as an alternative living area for our people.

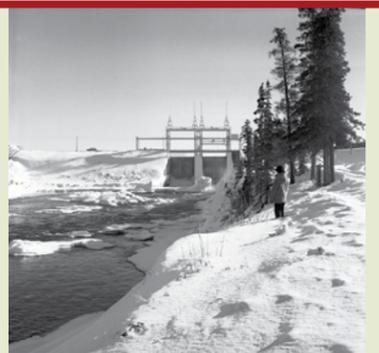


Susie Fred, Lily Kane, Ralph Lavallee, Annie Smith, Pardon Kane and Johnnie Smith in the Shipyards.  
Barbara Fred photo

### 1956 – 58

Construction of hydro dam just above Whitehorse blocked salmon traveling to their traditional spawning grounds. Some Elders state that this killed off the chum salmon population. Traditional berry gathering area flooded.

Whitehorse Dam 1962  
YA, James Quong fonds. 1-11-388



## Whitehorse Indian Band

During World War II, Lot 226 had been part of the large area occupied by the new Canol refinery, a restricted site closed off to all local people. When the soldiers moved on and the refinery was dismantled, construction businesses and other industries moved into this area. In the 1950s, Lot 226 was reactivated as a reserve. Ronald Bill spoke of this in 1996:

*... the army put the gravel all over the place there. They build a house. After the army pull out, they put the Indians in there. There use to be oil refinery down there... I guess they tore it down and put the Indians in there.*

In the 1950s, Indian Affairs decided to “amalgamate” or combine several small First Nation bands. The purpose seemed to be for administrative convenience. By combining smaller groups, services could be delivered in one place, in this case the reservation at Lot 226. In a 1954 letter, Indian agent R.J. “Jack” Meeks recommended combining the Tagish Kwan of the Marsh Lake area with the Ta’an Kwäch’än of Lake Laberge. Two years later, this was approved by the federal department of Indian Affairs.



Scurvey Shorty.

Old village site in Marwell.  
Peter Long photo



The first appointment of a council for the new Whitehorse Indian Band was held at the local Mission School in 1957. The first chief was Billy Smith and his councillors were Scurvey Shorty and John McGundy.

According to the *Whitehorse Star* of September 26, 1957:

*Their duties are to act as an advisory group, working toward better conditions for the band for the Indian reservation in conjunction with the Department of Indian Affairs here. Officials at Indian Affairs hope this new arrangement will lead toward more responsibility in their own affairs.*

Many Kwanlin Dün families moved to this area as well as First Nations families from outside of Whitehorse area. In 1971, about 300 people lived there, about half the total members of the Whitehorse Indian Band. The site had many problems. Residents had to cope with raw sewage being discharged over the escarpment from Camp Takhini and Takhini Trailer Court to the west. From the Industrial area to the south came noise, dust and chemical odours carried by the prevailing winds. The water table is high in this low-lying area which made it difficult to install municipal services. Cabins were crowded together so there was little privacy and not much land was left for expansion. There was nothing in the way of facilities and it was a long hike to stores, schools and other services (EPEC Consulting, 1972).

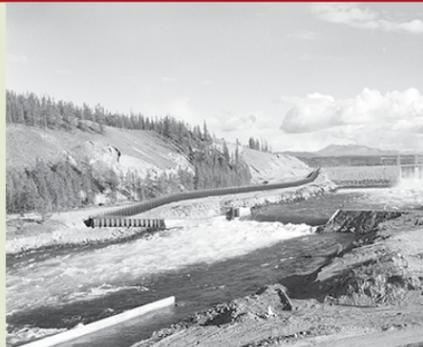
In 1969, the Whitehorse Indian Band Council passed a resolution recommending the relocation of the Whitehorse Indian Village and the creation of a relocation committee. Many years of negotiations ensued. In 1985, the people of Marwell village finally began moving to the new subdivision of McIntyre west of the Alaska Highway, far from our original river home. This land had been originally developed in the late 1970s, in anticipation of the imminent construction of an Alaska Highway gas pipeline.



Street scene in McIntyre Village.

1959

Opening of wooden fish ladder, described as longest wooden fish ladder in the world.



Whitehorse Fish Ladder 1959.  
YA, James Quong fonds. 1-11-329

1960

First Nations people are given the right to vote in federal and territorial elections without having to surrender Indian status.

## Land Claims

Over the second half of the 20th century, our people gradually regained many of their human rights. Schools were integrated and we no longer had to attend separate residential schools. In 1960, First Nations people were finally able to vote in federal and, soon after, territorial elections without surrendering our Indian status. In February 1973, a delegation of Yukon chiefs and leaders travelled to Ottawa to deliver an important document to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau: *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow: A Statement of Grievances and an Approach to Settlement by the Yukon Indian People*. This was a historic moment: the first time any First Nations group submitted a comprehensive land claim to the Canadian government. Prime Minister Trudeau agreed to accept this report as a basis for negotiations.

After this promising start, it took more than twenty years of land claims negotiations before the first significant agreement was signed. In the meantime, there were many changes of federal, territorial and First Nations governments, and consequent changes in policy. During the many years of land claim negotiations, we learned the skills we needed to deal with governments. Significantly, the process also helped revitalize our culture as we compiled knowledge that had been lost during the residential school years. We worked with our Elders to record and document traditional sites and land use. In the 1970s, linguists worked with Elders to put many of our languages into written form. Archaeologists worked with our people to help identify sites that had been used for thousands of years and reconstruct the activities of our ancestors.

We were also negotiating a more immediate issue in the Whitehorse area. In 1987, the people from the Lake Laberge area submitted a resolution to the Council for Yukon Indians, requesting status as a separate band, the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Like any separation, this was sometimes painful and much had to be resolved including the division of lands, funds and administration of lands. In 1997, Chief Glenn Grady of the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council and Chief Joe Jack of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation announced an accord regarding the division of assets and the creation of a joint renewable resources council once land claims were completed. According to both chiefs, the negotiations had gone well. According to Chief Grady, "The most complicated thing was trying to get to know



Chief Mike Smith with Premier Dennis Fentie and federal Minister Andy Scott at the signing of the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement*.  
Yukon Government photo

1973

*Together Today for our Children Tomorrow*. This report, presented to Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau by Yukon chiefs, marked the beginning of the modern land claim movement.



Delegates on the steps of Parliament in Ottawa, 1973.  
DIAND photo

each other again. It was a chance to renew old friendships." Within a few years, both First Nations also agreed on Settlement Land selections from within their Traditional Territory.

In 2004, thirty years after that 1973 trip to Ottawa, representatives of Kwanlin Dün, Canada and Yukon initialled a complete package of agreements, including the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement*, *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Self-Government Agreement*, implementation plans and other relevant agreements. A year later, the Citizens of Kwanlin Dün voted to ratify the agreements.

## Back to the River

*I know the stories about the way we used to live along the Yukon River. Right from the top of the mountain where the water comes down, right to the ocean. Indians got rights to the river to fish. It is where we catch our salmon. That's why waterfront is real important to us. To our people, our history, grandma, grandpa. We're part of the river.*

Johnny Smith, 2003

As part of the land claim process, we affirmed our connection to the Whitehorse waterfront and Lot 226 where so many of our people lived for so many years. As well as legally gaining title to Lot 226 and various other properties in Whitehorse, we obtained a large piece of land at the Motorways site, a place where many of our families had been evicted. Our people agreed that this should house a gathering place, where we could share our history and culture with all. This vision became reality and in 2012, Kwanlin Dün First Nation officially opened the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre on the downtown Whitehorse riverfront.



Construction begins on the new Cultural Centre, July 2010.



Gary Bailie, Chief Rick O'Brien, Councillor Ron MacIntosh, Councillor Ray Sydney and Jason Shorty in front of carving by Justin Smith.

1987

Ta'an Kwäch'än Council made a presentation to the Council for Yukon Indians general assembly requesting recognition as a separate First Nation.

# 4. Our Community



Barbara and Violet Fred.  
Barbara Fred photo



Annie Smith.



Ann Smith.



Baptist Indian Mission School.



Dianne Smith, Emma Shorty, Ann Ranigler, Kathleen Bakonyi.



Les Wilson.

1988

Kwanlin Dün people move from village site in Marwell area to new subdivision of McIntyre.



All Yukon First Nations share certain values: a deep connection to ancestral homelands, respect for the wisdom and teachings of our Elders, and a desire to ensure that our children – the leaders of tomorrow – have continuing links to our languages and traditions. Most First Nations have completed a long journey to protect their lands and culture and obtain the recognition and resources to be self-governing First Nations.

Lacey Scarff of the group Rising Sun singing at the Whitehorse 2012 Arctic Winter Games Kwanlin Dün Cultural Showcase event, 7 March 2012.





Eva Sam.



Whitehorse Baptist Indian Mission School, ca. 1950. YA, Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 2009/81 #287



Bill Laberge on railway near his cabin at the south end of town. YA, Evelyn Brunlees fonds, 2001/139 #14



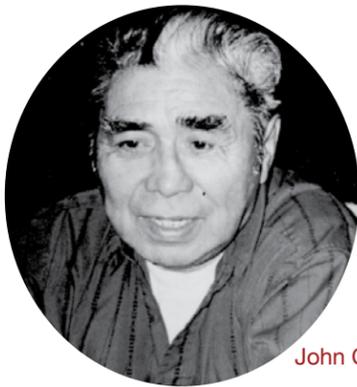
Marsh Lake Cemetery Yukon Government photo



Archaeology crew at McIntyre Creek dig. Yukon Government photo



Emma Burns.



John Charles Smith.

All of these statements certainly apply to the Kwanlin Dün. The Kwanlin Dün First Nation is also unique in many ways. With a membership of just under 1,000 Citizens, Kwanlin Dün is one of the largest First Nations in the Yukon. In addition to the people of Tagish Kwan ancestry, many of our Citizens have links to First Nations all around the territory either



Group at 30 Mile about 1940. L-R, back: Gertie (Shorty) Tom, Ida (Shorty) Carlson, Mary Shorty, Jessie Shorty, Jim Shorty; front: Elizabeth (Shorty) Wilson, Billy Shorty, Mabel Shorty, Joe Shorty.



Victoria Fred. Fritz Mueller Photography



Boys Hockey Team. Top: Alfred Charlie, Smitty MacIntosh. Tim Dick, Kenneth Kane, Charlie Joe, Jerry Roberts, Sweeney Scurvey, McLeary Acklack, Harry Allen, Belfry Adzit. Bottom: Harold Harry, Mundy Joe, William Silverfox.



Tanning a hide. Annie Smith, Irene Smith, Dianne Smith, Sally Lutchman, Andrameda Hunter.



Dwayne Charlie.

through family relationships or people who became members after moving to Whitehorse. As a result, our Citizens represent most of the Yukon's Aboriginal languages and First Nations, making us a truly multi-cultural society.

1993

Yukon Land Claim Agreement-in-Principle: signed by representatives of Canada, Yukon and Council for Yukon Indians.

1997

First ice patch find in mountains west of Kusawa Lake. Subsequent partnerships among First Nations and other governments, scientists, etc. to document and study these valuable resources.





Kitty Smith.



Fred Smith.



George Dawson.



Edith Ladue and Mary Etzel.



Lawrence Bill.

Kathleen Bakonyi and Emma Shorty.



Annie Smith and Judy Gingell.  
*Yukon Government photo*

Shirley Dawson and unidentified girls.



Eileen's sister, Eileen Fields and unidentified Elders.



Doronn Fox and Mary Allison.

Sharing much of our Traditional Territory with Ta'an Kwäch'an Council, we are also one of the territory's two urban-based First Nations. We are dealing with many urban issues. Approximately half of our members live in and around the City of Whitehorse. The Yukon's capital city occupies the heart of our Traditional Territory. For a time the Whitehorse was the largest city in Canada in terms

of the area encompassed by municipal boundaries. Even as our leaders were negotiating for lands within the City of Whitehorse, new subdivisions were being developed with little or no consultation from us. Like many other Whitehorse residents, we face several urban challenges such as lack of affordable housing and various social problems including substance abuse and homelessness.



2003

Discovery of 1400-year-old moccasin near Kluane Lake - the oldest known moccasin in Canada. Six First Nations of the Southern Yukon have been collaborating to study the ice patches.



*Yukon Government photo*

2005

Kwanlin Dün and the Government of Canada sign Kwanlin Dün First Nation *Final Agreement*.

2012

21 June 2012, grand opening of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.

Celebrating the grand opening of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. *Fritz Mueller Photography*





Students visit the Fish Ladder.



Annie Smith.



Children watching the new television presented to Kishwoot Hall by Hougen's Department Store, ca.1968. YA/Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 2009/81 #322



Mary Battaja.



Edith Baker.



Emma Lee Burns.



Harold Dawson.



Louie Carlick.



Bill Scurvey.



Jessie Dawson.



Charmaine Hall.



Cathy Empey.



Lesley Smith.



Cheyenne Bradley.



Priscilla Dawson.



Dennis Jackson.



Larry Smarch.



Darwin O'Brien.

Our location and situation have also given us opportunities. As one of the largest landowners in Whitehorse, we can contribute to new housing and economic developments. Our agreements allow for new business opportunities and training for our Citizens. To learn about some of these positive developments, see the next chapter. We are now focussing on “building capacity”, training our Citizens and future leaders to learn the skills for different jobs and new responsibilities.

Like all Yukoners and Canadians, indeed people everywhere, we share universal goals: good education for our children, meaningful work, an improved quality of life, health and healing for those in need, and contributing to make our community a better place.

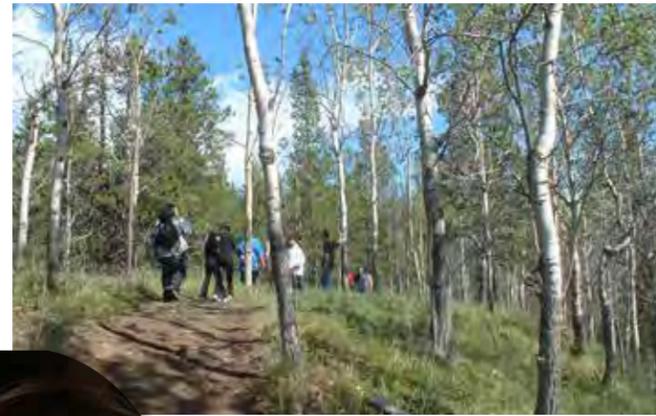
Here we honour and celebrate the diversity of our Citizens and how we come together as a community.



Elders 1997.



Effie Bill with Annie Smith on right.



Malcolm Dawson.



Katelyn Dawson.



Doris Bill.



Tyler O'Brien.



Katelyn Johns.



Harry Silverfox, Jim Shorty, unknown.



Dorothy Charlie, Donna Holcomb, Shawna Shorty.



Mark Rudyck.

Tessa O'Brien.



Helen Holway.



Judy Tyerman.



Jackson Lake.



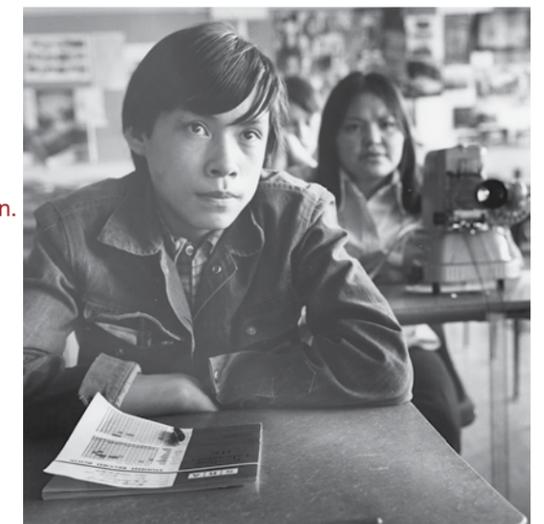
Phil Gatensby.



Jessica Marie Nukon.



Chanel Brackenbury, Natalie Thompson.



YA, Rolf and Margaret Hougen fonds, 85/25 #490



Winston Smarch serving at a community celebration marking the inauguration of the new Chief and Council, April 17, 2011.



Brenda Sam, Jessie Dawson, Hazel Bunbury.



Annie Smith with daughter Dianne Smith.



2010 Judicial Council: Judy Gingell, Doris Bill, Barbara Fred, Sean Smith.

John Smarch.



Anne-Marie Miller.



CHOICES Youth Sexual Health Conference.



Donna Holcomb.



Billie Jo Alexis.



Cathy Borsa and Rachel MacLeod



Duran Henry poses with dugout canoe. Fritz Mueller Photography



Dianne Smith & granddaughter Kalea.



Garrett Cletheroe.



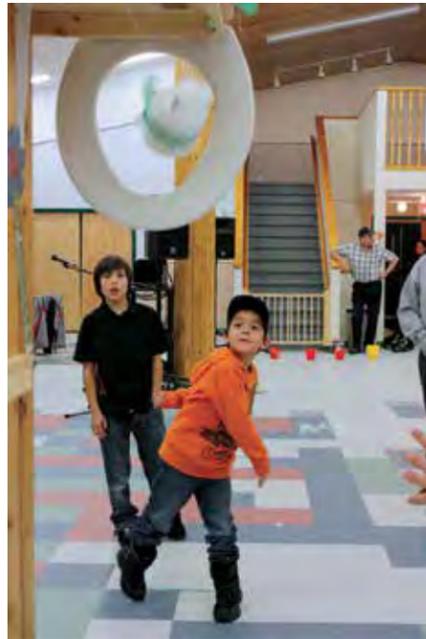
**Kwanlin Dün Elder Judy Gingell Invested into the Order of Canada**

On May 3, 2013, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, presided over an Order of Canada investiture ceremony at Rideau Hall. Kwanlin Dün Elder Judy Gingell was among the 44 recipients being honoured that day. She was invested as Member of the Order of Canada.

For more than 40 years, Judy Gingell has promoted and advanced Aboriginal rights and governance in Yukon. As chair of the Council of Yukon First Nations, she was instrumental in self-governance and land claims negotiations with the Government of Canada. She served as Yukon's first Aboriginal commissioner and was renowned for her ability to build bridges between peoples, notably by raising awareness of First Nations culture through the annual Commissioner's Potlatch. As a leader and Elder of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, she has ensured that First Nations communities are key players in the territorial economy.

Photo credit: Sgt Ronald Duchesne, Rideau Hall ©Her Majesty The Queen in Right of Canada represented by the Office of the Secretary to the Governor General (2013).

The Order of Canada was created in 1967, during Canada's centennial year, to recognize a lifetime of outstanding achievement, dedication to the community and service to the nation. Since its creation, more than 6 000 people from all sectors of society have been invested into the Order.



Kaydn Davies and Dennis Smarch



Judy Gingell, Lena White, Annie Smith at opening of Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, June 21, 2012.



Shirley Dawson.



Jacquie Shorty.



Kwanlin Dün dance group.



Doris Bill and Councillor Ron MacIntosh at 2011 swearing in ceremony.



Jason Shorty.



Ava Vance. Fritz Mueller Photography



Charlene Charlie. Rae Mombourquette photo



Charlene Burns.



Honey-Starr Sydney.



Kristine Smarch, Millie Gage, Rachel McLeod, Dawn Calvert and Stephanie Stewart.



Rae Mombourquette and her mother Norma Shorty.



Barb Joe.



Sarina Sydney, 2011 spokesperson for the Youth Council



Takaska Calbury.



Wynter Grant picking balsam buds.



Youth group at Mount Lorne Community Centre.



Mya Wilson.



Jackson Lake Healing Camp, men's group.



Chief and Council, L-R (FRONT) Jessie Dawson, Jennifer Edzerza, Charlene Charlie, Alicia Vance (BACK) Ray Sydney, Rick O'Brien, Ron MacIntosh.



Jennifer Edzerza and Carmen Gibbons.



Kylee Taylor and Tamika Charlie.



Grouse dancer.



Sarina Sydney on survey of Traditional Territory.



Annie Smith and daughters and other relatives (June 2012)



David Taylor, Steve Kocsis, Darrell Charlie, Brian MacIntosh, Brad Bill, Brian Smith.



Nora McIntosh.



Alicia Vance (Councillor).



Howard MacIntosh and daughter Katelyn Dawson.



Council inauguration community celebration April 17, 2011.



Elders.



Big Salmon Harry & Eileen Johnnie.



Norman Shorty at CBC.



Doronn Fox and unidentified girl.



From left: Edwin Scurvey, Leonard Gordon, Bill Webber, Louie Carlick.



Stick gambling.



Martha Vanheel.



Chief Johnny Smith.



Mary Scurvey.

# 5. Chiefs

Traditionally, there were several kinds of leaders in Yukon's First Nations. Headmen were usually leaders of small groups of people, not entire bands or tribes. The headman of the group was usually a good hunter, a forceful speaker and a sharp negotiator. He had to be a leader with proven skills, so he was rarely a young man. He was expected to set an example for his people. He looked after their welfare, ensured they had enough to eat, and was responsible for the orphans and widows in his group.

While the headman made the important decisions, he depended on his people for advice and support. He regularly consulted Elders and held councils where anyone was welcome to speak.

Today chiefs are elected. They are respected community members with many of the same responsibilities as the traditional headman or chief. Within Kwanlin Dün, men and women alike may run for chief. We also have many other leaders who, like the chiefs, are valued members of the community and who might take the lead for specific purposes or projects.

As discussed in Chapter 2, people used to move about the land in small groups of one or two families. At certain times of year, these groups would come together to trade, hunt or join in celebrations. The territories of these groups overlapped so it is not surprising that, while boundaries on the landscape became more defined, individual and family heritage remained difficult to categorize. The people who are now Kwanlin Dün share many ancestors and territory with the Ta'an Kwäch'an of the Lake Laberge area. The two groups likely shared many leaders in common, although their names have been lost to time.



Chief Jim Boss.  
Detail from E. J. Hamacher fonds  
(Margaret and Rolf Hougen collection)  
2009/89 #17

## Powers and Responsibilities of the Chief

1. The Chief of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation:
  - a. is the leader of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation; and
  - b. is the leader of any delegation representing the Kwanlin Dün First Nation in any intergovernmental relationship.
2. The Chief is accountable to Citizens in accordance with this Constitution.
3. The Chief is responsible to:
  - a. preside at meetings of the General Assembly, the Council, and other bodies of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation as required by this Constitution or Kwanlin Dün First Nation law;
  - b. report to the General Assembly on the state of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation; and
  - c. carry out any other power or perform any function required by this Constitution or Kwanlin Dün First Nation law.

*Kwanlin Dün First Nation Constitution*

## Mundessa

(c. 1830-1925)  
chief in late 1800s

Mundessa, also known as Mandassa, was the hereditary chief of the Lake Laberge area. He was related to Hutchi Chief, from the Champagne area, and Copper Chief, from White River country. Like other First Nations people, Mundessa is reputed to have travelled widely with his group. They hunted and fished the lands near Lake Laberge, Big Salmon, Grey Mountain, the McClinton Valley and Kusawa Lake. One of his descendants (Violet Storer) related that Mundessa once travelled in winter from Lake Laberge to Klukwan on the Alaska Coast near modern day Haines. He was on a mission to trade furs and moose skins for eulachon oil, shells and European goods.

By the time the Klondike gold rush began, Mundessa was already in his seventies and his son, Kishxóot (Kishwoot) had assumed leadership. He lived with his son in the roadhouse Kishxóot had built at Lake Laberge. He died at the age of 95 in the traditional fish camp of Kwanlin (now occupied by Robert Service campground).

## Gunaatak'

(Marsh Lake Jackie)  
chief in late 1800s

Gunaatak' was chief of the Marsh Lake people at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He was also known as Marsh Lake Jackie. He and his wife had nine children who are the ancestors of many Kwanlin Dün. Their names were: Jenny Erikson, Bessie Burns, Sadie Baker, Mary Billy, Susie (Saih kie), Slim Jim, Joe Jackie, Jackie MacIntosh and Tagish Jim. Three of their grandchildren are Julia Joe, Lily Kane and Elsie Suits.

## Jim Boss

(c. 1871-1950)  
chief: c.1890s to 1950

Jim Boss, Kashxóot or Kishwoot was the son of Chief Mundessa and assumed chieftainship as his father became quite elderly, around the time of the Klondike gold rush. His mother, Lande, was from the Tagish people. Kashxóot was born at Lake Laberge, though the precise location is not known.

To understand the importance of Jim Boss, one has to understand the era into which he was born. Until his father's time, the Yukon was virtually unknown to non-native people. The easiest route to the Yukon interior was through the coastal passes of the Alaska Panhandle. These were

closely guarded by the coastal Tlingit and very few outsiders were allowed through. But the trickle of traders, trappers and prospectors began to enter the Yukon and, by the 1870s when the United States assumed control of Alaska, the pressure to open the passes was irresistible. Through the 1880s and early 1890s, trading posts were set up and First Nations people made them part of their seasonal round. The availability of guns and modern traps made life on the land easier. Dried food made fishing and hunting less critical for survival.

With the discovery of gold in the Klondike in 1897, thousands of people poured into the Yukon. They brought with them southern customs and imposed their foreign laws on First Nations people. The newcomers, for the most part, regarded the land as unoccupied because they saw relatively few people and almost no permanent settlements. They felt, therefore, they could use whatever land they wanted as long as it was done in accordance with Canadian government laws. The newcomers assumed the right to take and use timber and game resources, especially near the major rivers. They also brought diseases which decimated the First Nation populations near the towns and rivers. The First Nation populations in the southern Yukon fell from several thousand to several hundred in just two decades.

Kishxóot recognized the danger to Yukon First Nations people. He had a following that began with the people of Lake Laberge and grew to include most of the indigenous Yukon people south of the Stewart River. On their behalf, he petitioned the government for land, beginning with a plot on Lake Laberge. In 1902, he followed this up with a letter "to the King" on behalf of all Yukon First Nations people. Today this is recognized as the Yukon's first land claim and Chief Jim Boss is honoured as the "Father of Yukon Land Claims."

Despite the upset caused by the newcomers, Chief Jim Boss adapted to the new reality and prospered. He was an excellent hunter and provided game meat for the Burns Company in Whitehorse. He also sold lake trout and white fish to the sternwheelers and miners all along the Yukon River. He owned several houses, including the roadhouse at Lake Laberge near Deep Creek which he kept with his three wives. He was known as a very tidy and orderly man and this brought him a great deal of admiration.

While fighting for the rights of his people in a changing world, Kishxóot studied the new systems of laws and economics. He was a good businessman and able to argue points of law effectively with government officials. In this, he showed the way for his people and set a strong example for other Yukon First Nation leaders.



Chief Jim Boss.  
YA, James Y. C. Quong fonds, 2006/140,  
1-5-579



Billy and Kitty Smith

## Billy Smith

(1886-1968)  
chief: 1957-1965

Billy Smith was born in Dyea, Alaska. His Tlingit name was Kanel. He was the nephew of Skookum Jim and brother of Dawson Charlie, the discoverers of Klondike gold. He was also the brother to Patsy Henderson, a well-known leader in Carcross.

After considerable negotiation, which included building and furnishing a house at Robinson, Billy married Kitty, a high ranking Tlingit woman. She brought her mother, a Marsh Lake woman, to live with them. The two had a strong partnership, Kitty Smith being recognized as an accomplished trapper and provider in her own right. Billy and Kitty had six children: Ida, Sam, Willie, Johnny, Grace and May. In later years, Johnny also became a Kwanlin Dün chief.

Over the years, the family lived in many places including Marsh Lake, Robinson, Teslin, Little Atlin and the Wheaton River area. Billy worked as a guide for the U.S. Army during the construction of the Highway, while the rest of the family earned a good income sewing and selling hide and fur clothing to the soldiers. They moved to Whitehorse sometime after the Alaska Highway was built.

In the 1950s, the federal Department of Indian Affairs decided to combine two small First Nations into one band in Whitehorse. This was done, apparently, to make it easier for the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) to provide services for the people in Whitehorse (see Chapter 3). In 1957, the people of the newly formed Whitehorse Indian Band selected Billy as their first chief along with councillors Scurvey Shorty and John McGundy. These were unpaid volunteer positions. Billy served until 1965 when the first formal election was held. According to the *Whitehorse Star*:

*Their duties are to act as an advisory group, working toward better conditions for the band for the Indian reservation in conjunction with the Department of Indian Affairs here. Officials at Indian Affairs hope this new arrangement will lead toward more responsibility in their own affairs.*

At the beginning of Billy's tenure, First Nations were unable to vote in federal or territorial elections. Not only was he concerned about this disenfranchisement, but his people were often refused services in local restaurants and businesses. Although some human rights groups recognized this inequity, little was being done to change it. Billy Smith was one of those who worked to win the right for Yukon First Nations people to vote and, in 1960, the federal government recognized that right. The territorial government followed suit in 1961.

Not only was Billy a well-respected leader, he was also a skilled Indian doctor and knew the healing powers of various herbs and plants. He was also a drummer and dancer who composed songs for the drum. These often came to him, he said, while sitting quietly under a large tree.

Billy passed away in 1968 and is buried at the Carcross Indian Cemetery near the graves of his relatives, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie.

## Scurvey Shorty

(Northern Tutchone name: Ketsotthe, Tlingit name: Kajani)  
(1928 - 2004)  
chief: 1965-1967

Scurvey Shorty was born in 1928 at Big Salmon to Lena George and Little Shorty. From his parents, he learned to hunt, fish and trap. He also became a skilled artisan, learning how to make snowshoes, toboggans, tools and build cabins. He was well qualified for a life spent mostly on the land, travelling from camp to camp, cutting wood and running a trapline.

Scurvey met his wife Violet in the late 1940s. Together, they had eight children; Roy, Watson, Harold, Dennis, Lawrence, Terry, Sadie and Linda Ann. They moved to Whiskey Flats around 1949. Around the time of one of the many squatter removals, he built his first house in the Shipyards. He and his family were amongst the many forced from their homes. In 1954, the family moved into the Old Village in the Marwell area. Scurvey built a cabin and continued trapping in the area across the river from the present day Mountain View Golf Course.

Scurvey helped many people build homes. He also helped restore the cemeteries and assisted in village gatherings. His home was often the site for meetings, potlatches and dances.

When the Whitehorse Indian Band was formed in 1957, Scurvey was selected as a councillor along with Johnny McGundy. In 1965, in the first formal election, Scurvey Shorty became the first elected chief.

During his tenure, relations between the Whitehorse Indian Band and Indian Affairs were not cordial. Scurvey spoke out strongly against the department's unwillingness to discuss pressing matters, going so far as to poll several villages and collectively call for the resignation of the Superintendent (Coates 1991).

Scurvey continued to work for the community even after his tenure as chief, renovating the former Elder's Complex in the new village, and working as the foreman and elder advisor to the renovation crew.



Scurvey Shorty, 2001



Elijah Smith

## Elijah Smith

(Tambey)  
(1912-1991)  
chief: 1967-1968

*We, the Indians of the Yukon, object to ... being treated like squatters in our own country. We accepted the white man in this country, fed him, looked after him when he was sick, showed him the way of the North, helped him to find the gold, helped him build, and respected him in his own rights. For this we have received little in return. We feel the people of the North owe us a great deal and would like to see that we get a fair settlement for the use of the land.*

Elijah Smith, speaking at an *Indian Act* consultation meeting, 1968

Elijah Smith was born in 1912 to Paddy Smith and Annie Ned in the village of Champagne. He had a traditional upbringing, participating in potlatches, puberty ceremonies, and traditional singing and dancing. He also enjoyed games and sports, such as hockey, outside the First Nations community. He spent much of his time in the wilderness, hunting and trapping, and was an excellent horseman. At various times, he made a living as a prospector, a truck driver and a heavy equipment operator.

Elijah's real name was Ed Smith but, when he joined the Canadian Army, he was asked to change his name to Elijah as there were too many Ed Smiths in the military. During World War II, he was stationed in Normandy, Dieppe and other battle sites in Europe. One of his main assignments was to bulldoze roads into new areas. While pushing a road through in France, his machine hit a mine. Elijah was seriously injured in the resulting blast, suffering facial burns and shrapnel wounds. He was in a coma for a month and remained in hospital for four months. He received a medal for gallantry.

When he returned home from the war, Elijah Smith found his people in an impoverished situation and felt the need to make changes. In 1966, he was one of the delegates to a conference addressing problems faced by Indian people. Six months later, the Yukon Indian Advancement Association was formed. This group was comprised of First Nations leaders, leaders of Yukon religious organizations and public health officials. The group did not last long but one of their important accomplishments was the building of the Skookum Jim Memorial Hall in Whitehorse, a place that had welcomed and supported First Nations people from all over for nearly 50 years.

In 1967, the size of the Whitehorse Indian Band was increasing rapidly as more and more First Nations people moved to town from outlying camps and settlements. That year, Elijah Smith was elected chief. Many friends and relatives believed that Elijah's decision to become involved in politics was the turning point for the future of Yukon's First Nations.

In 1968, Elijah Smith stepped down as chief and formed the Yukon Native Brotherhood (YNB). Later, he was instrumental in forming the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians (YANSI) and the Council for Yukon Indians (CYI). He became the first chairman of both the CYI and YNB. He was instrumental in developing the paper *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* which he took to Ottawa and presented to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau in 1973. This is considered to be the document that launched the land claims process.

He inspired subsequent generations of Yukon First Nations people to work for social justice.

*Elijah (Smith) told Mike Smith and Dave Joe that they had to go to university and become lawyers because we needed them to help with the land claims, so they did.*

Edi Bohmer (*Our Story*, Marilyn Jensen)

Elijah died tragically in a car accident in 1991 at the age of 79. He left behind four children: Jacqueline, Gillian, Phyllis and Steve. The federal building in downtown Whitehorse and an elementary school in the Granger subdivision are named in honour of this dedicated leader.

## Andrew Clifford McLeod

(ca. 1928-1990)  
chief: 1968-1969

Clifford was born in Dawson City to Lily de Bastien, a single mother without the means to care for her child. In accordance with native tradition, Clifford was adopted by Mary and Simon McLeod to be raised with their own children. Mary McLeod is remembered as a respected Elder of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, a teacher and storyteller who shared her bush skills with the children of Moosehide.

A hard-working man, Clifford took his first job at age 13, hauling water in Dawson City. A few years later, he found work as a deckhand on the sternwheelers. While working on the sternwheelers, Clifford met Mary Jackson (Koluki'uk) who would become his wife. Mary was from Klukshu though her father was from Hutshi and her mother from Juneau. Clifford and Mary wed in Dawson and, soon after, moved to Whitehorse. Clifford and Mary raised seven children: Gerald, Mazie, Karen, Mary Ann, Joan, Joyce, Clifford Jr. and Cecil, Mary's son from a previous marriage.

During World War II, Clifford worked for the U.S. Army during Alaska Highway construction. He helped build the Whitehorse dam in the mid-1950s, and spent 22 years working for Whitehorse Copper.

After Elijah Smith resigned, Clifford became acting chief. While his term was brief, he did significant work on cleaning up the village's



Clifford McLeod



Johnny Smith

water pollution. When wells were found to be contaminated, they were shut down and the city delivered water to a central distribution tank. Another significant contribution he made as chief, was to lobby the federal government to pay chiefs a salary. He argued that the hours and responsibilities of the position were onerous considering it was unpaid. A few years later, salaries were initiated for Yukon chiefs.

Out of the conviction that religion and politics did not mix, Clifford did not seek office in 1969. Instead, he supported several of the young people running for the chief and councillor positions. He believed that young people with a good education would better serve the community.

Clifford lived in the Old Village until his death on October 26, 1990 at the age of 62.

## Johnny E. Smith

(K'ask'ik)

(1922-2010)

chief: 1969-1973, 1981-1985, 1985-1988

Regarding development in the Wheaton River Valley:

The development there is driving out the wildlife and making it more and more difficult to trap. There are restrictions on how close you can operate a trapline to a house, and as more and more houses are built in this area, there will be less and less opportunity for trapping. Last time I went trapping for marten, I caught a dog instead.

*They have to listen to us about our land and our water. Another 50 years from now, maybe this water won't be any good if we don't say something.*

- Johnny Smith, 2002 addressing Yukon River Intertribal Watershed Council

The son of Kitty and Chief Billy Smith, Johnny was born near the Marsh Lake Dam. He was related to Tagish Charlie and Skookum Jim. His father's country was around the Wheaton River and his family worked a trapline there until the early 1990s. The family still hunts in the area.

As a child, Johnny lived in a number of places including Liard, Teslin, Marsh Lake, Robinson and Whitehorse. Although he never attended school, he was respected for his understanding of the land and knowledge of traditional stories.

Johnny met his wife Annie Fred in the 1940s. Their children are Alice Bien (Edwards), Shirley, Lesley, Dianne, Rosemarie, John Jr., Kathy, Edith, Betsy and Judy (Gingell).

The couple spent most of their time in the Robinson area, only moving into Whitehorse temporarily while their children were at school. In town, they had a tent frame on Black Street that was moved to the Old Village in 1950. They moved into housing in the Old Village in 1956 and eventually to the New Village in McIntyre. Between 1969 and 1988, Johnny was elected for three terms as Chief of the Kwanlin Dün.

Johnny was part of the leadership working with Elijah Smith on *Together Today for Our Children Tomorrow* and was part of the delegation to Ottawa to present the petition in 1973. Following the meetings with the Prime Minister and his staff, he sat on the team of chiefs and strategists that worked with the Council of Yukon Indians who met with representatives of the Minister of Indian Affairs.

In 1969, Johnny was a member of a committee formed to look at creating a new village. The Old Village was plagued with poor water and in the path of the sewage outfall from the Takhini subdivision above it on the bluffs. He and his wife Annie were dedicated to passing on First Nations traditions and culture. They participated in Whitehorse schools by teaching traditional knowledge. Johnny was also a well-known linguist, singer and storyteller. He and his wife participated in cultural camps and even set up a camp behind the administration building in the McIntyre Village so that Elders could share stories, crafts and skills with community members, particularly young people.

Johnny Smith September 2010, at the age of 88. At a moving ceremony in the new Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre on March 7, 2012; a recording was played of Johnny Smith singing a song he had written to celebrate his people's return to the Yukon River.

## Roy H. Sam

(Kennli Ata)

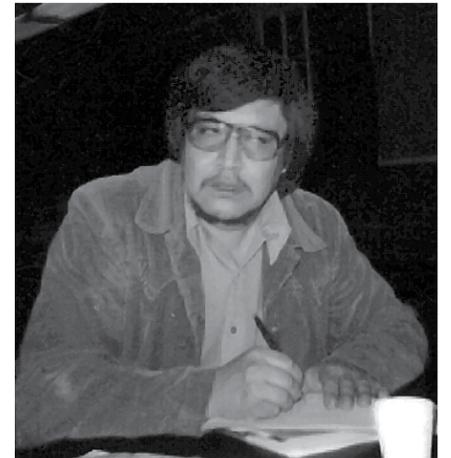
(1938-1997)

chief: 1973 to 1981

Roy H. Sam was born at Lower Laberge in 1938 to Alice (Broeren) and Jim Sam. He attended the Whitehorse Indian Baptist Mission School in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While in school, he attended air cadets and decided to enlist in the Canadian Army. At 17, he joined the army with his friend Ronald Bill. He was first stationed in Edmonton with the Canadian Airborne Regiment and then moved to the Second Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry in Winnipeg. Roy left the army in 1959.

Roy married Florence (Morberg) MacIntosh whom he knew from his school days. They had seven children; Howard, Debra, Ronnie, Brian, Walter, Michael and Richard.

He began his political career in the 1960s. He became Deputy Chief of the Yukon Native Brotherhood serving alongside Harry Allen, Elijah Smith, Judy Gingell, Willie Joe and Ray Jackson. He first served as a band councillor under Chief Scurvey Shorty then Elijah Smith, Clifford McLeod and Johnny E. Smith. In 1973 he was elected chief and won a second term in 1977.



Roy Sam

Roy was instrumental in the creation of the first band police force. He personally met with then Indian Affairs Minister Jean Chrétien to persuade him that chief should be a paid position. His administration was responsible for having the village buildings brought up to Canadian standard building code and for construction of the first official band office.

A forward thinker, Roy tried to establish a land claims negotiating process that did not involve borrowing money from the federal government after an Alaskan model he had studied. Although his idea was not adopted, it was an example of his progressive ideas.

He passed away in 1997 at the age of 58.



Anne Smith.  
Yukon Government photo

## Ann Smith

(Ashá)  
chief: 1988-1990

Ann is the daughter of Fred and Kitty Smith. She spent the first six years of her life in the bush with parents and grandparents who taught her much about First Nations tradition. She attended the Whitehorse Indian Baptist School and the Choutla Residential School in Carcross. She also attended F. H. Collins High School until she was 16 when she decided to go to work. Ann later completed her formal education through upgrading courses and trained as a clerk-typist at the Whitehorse Vocational School. She worked with the Yukon Native Brotherhood and the Yukon Association of Non-Status Indians.

In 1977, Ann became a Whitehorse Indian Band Councillor under Roy H. Sam. She chaired the relocation committee, was a land claims delegate and board member of the Council for Yukon Indians. She also had a wealth of experience in other areas, having worked as a manager in the National Native Alcohol and Drug Awareness Program, training as a broadcaster and accountant. She put this experience to use in the 1988 election when she was elected chief. Later, she served for a year as a councillor in the Joe Jack administration, but resigned to devote herself to her art.

After her time as chief, Ann became well-known as an artist, curator and teacher of the ancient Ravenstail and Chilkat weaving techniques. She has become nationally and internationally recognized for her efforts to revive traditional weaving. Her work is in the Yukon Permanent Art Collection and in the Indian Art Centre in Ottawa. Despite her success as an artist, Mrs. Smith continued her commitment to public service and was elected to serve a term as a band councillor in November 2006.

## Lena Johns

(1934-2000)  
chief: 1990-1993, 1993-1996

Lena Rose Johns was born at Lower Laberge on January 15, 1934 to Alice and Jim Sam. Her father came from the Hootalinqua area. Her mother was Alice Broeren, niece of Chief Jim Boss. Lena's siblings are Irene (Smith), Lawrence, Donnie and the late Roy Sam.

Lena attended the Chootla Residential School in Carcross and later the Whitehorse Mission School, but grew up in a traditional environment and spoke Southern Tutchone.

In the early 1950s, she married Art Johns, son of well-known Carcross-Tagish guide and Elder Johnny Johns. They had seven children; Lydia, John, Darlene, Charles, Art Jr., Daphne, and Dino and stepson Conrad.

In the late 1960s, Lena married again to Pete Borotsik. They had two children, Alan and Peter Jr.

Lena gained a breadth of experience from a variety of jobs. She worked for the Yukon Parka Factory, was manager for the Yukon Trappers Association and was a NNADAP (National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program) worker for Kwanlin Dün First Nation. She served Kwanlin Dün First Nation as councillor from 1988 to 1989. In 1990, she was elected chief, a post she held for seven years.

One of her great concerns was child welfare, particularly children taken from their families and placed in foster care or adopted out. Many of these First Nations people end up in treatment centres because of traumas associated with these situations. She worked diligently to make policy changes to help children remain with their families and also reunited children with their families.

During her administration, the first safe house for adults with addictions was constructed. She continued to work against the government placing Kwanlin Dün children in non-native homes. She was instrumental in building of Nàkwät'á Kù Potlatch House at the McIntyre Village and the Ashea Daycare.

Circle sentencing, a practice that has become widely used as an alternate method of trying and sentencing First Nations offenders, was developed under Lena's administration. It served as the model for many jurisdictions. Her administration was also instrumental in developing a Kwanlin Dün police force through negotiations with the territorial and federal governments.

Very concerned about the impact of alcohol on the community, Lena and her councillors, along with Kwanlin Dün staff, organised community



Lena Johns.  
YA, Kwanlin Dün First Nation fonds,  
94/99 #4

walks in a campaign against bootleggers, alcohol abuse and drug dealers (*Whitehorse Star*, 30 Aug. 1993).

Lena retained her ties to the land and enjoyed fishing, berry picking, hunting and camping and shared these activities with children.

In 1993, her administration cooperated with the Government of Yukon in an archaeological dig at Fish Lake (Łu Zil Man). She spoke about the importance of this partnership between scientists and her people:

*So much of our history has long been ignored. Now, here is a chance to explore an area that was so vital to us, vital as a source of hunting and fishing for the Kwanlin Dün people.*

Lena Johns passed away in 2000.



Joe Jack.

## Joe Jack

(Gogon)  
chief: 1996-1999

*Use power to achieve your goals. A lot of leaders do not want to let go of power as it represents prestige. People should think about power in terms of what it can accomplish for the betterment of people.*

Joe Jack was born in Whitehorse to Agnes (Broeren) Boss and Billy Jack. His father is the grandson of the Copper Chief from the White River area and his mother is the daughter of Chief Jim Boss. Joe has one brother, Stanley, and two sisters, Edith and Shirley. He also has four half-brothers and four half-sisters.

In his youth, Joe spent a great deal of time with his grandmother, Susie Jim, a well-known medicine woman from the Hutshi area. Part of the time he spent with his grandmother was at Takhini Crossing. In the 1960s, his family lived in Sleepy Hollow, the former community north of Kishwoot Island on the Yukon River. Their home was an abandoned log structure from a copper mine west of Whitehorse that his father had moved to the site and rebuilt. When the family was moved off that land during one of the squatter clearances, he stayed with his half-sister Minnie Smith in order to finish high school.

Joe attended Christ the King Elementary School and completed grade 12 at F. H. Collins High School in 1969. Following that, he completed a two year program in renewable resource technology at Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. His training got him a position with Renewable Resources in the Government of Yukon.

Joe also worked for the Council for Yukon Indians with Harry Allen to bring the various Yukon First Nations groups together. He was elected Vice-Chairman of CYI, a position he held for six years. Branching out into national politics, he ran as the NDP candidate in the federal election of 1979 and for the Liberal party in the 1988 election.

As his family has roots in the White River country, Joe became involved in the formation of the White River First Nation in the late 1980s. In 1991, he was elected chief of the newly-formed nation.

After working in the tourism industry, and becoming a founding member of the National Aboriginal Tourism Association, Joe successfully ran for chief of Kwanlin Dün in 1996. His focus was preparing Kwanlin Dün for self-government and speeding up the land claims process. His administration also saw construction begin on a new health centre, the A Shaw Ku recreation centre, and the clean-up and restoration of five Whitehorse area cemeteries.

## Rick O'Brien

chief: 1999-2002, 2011-

*In the past, Kwanlin Dün has been left out of major developments that took place on our traditional lands, but we are determined not to let history repeat itself. We, as leaders, are going to ensure that our people benefit from any future development, such as an Alaska Highway pipeline project.*

Rick O'Brien was first elected Chief of Kwanlin Dün First Nation on March 22, 1999.

Previously, Rick worked in construction, and eventually earned a journeyman carpenter certificate. He established his own successful business in commercial and residential construction and maintenance. When elected, he stated that he had many priorities but at the top of the list was settlement of the Kwanlin Dün land claim.

Before completing his second term as Chief, Rick moved on to another opportunity. He was elected as Yukon Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations in 2003.

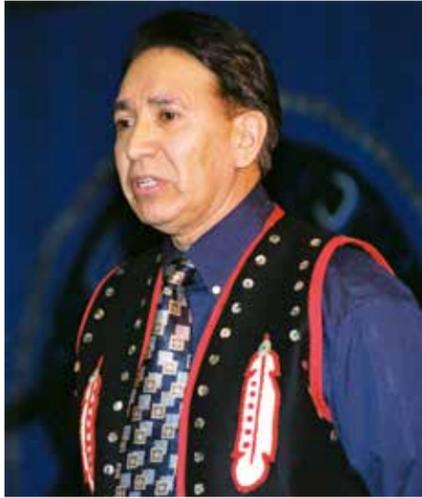
Following Mike Smith's retirement after serving three terms as Chief, Rick O'Brien once again put his name forward for the top post in his First Nation, bringing his national experience and renewed dedication back to Kwanlin Dün. On election night, March 16, 2011, Rick stated that his focus will be on economic development and job creation, and ensuring that the First Nation gets involved in development within its Traditional Territory.

“It takes courage, effort and a passion for people to serve as elected members, and you will always be respected for your efforts.”

*Kwanlin Dün Ch'a*, December 2006



Rick O'Brien.  
Fritz Mueller Photography



Mike Smith.  
Yukon Government photo

## Mike Smith

(Shawkuni)  
chief: 2002-2011

Although Mike Smith is one of the modern chiefs, he comes from a traditional background. For the first eight years of his life, he spent much time with his grandparents in the Lake Laberge area learning about his culture. His family eventually moved to the Old Village in Whitehorse.

After graduating from high school in Whitehorse, he attended universities in British Columbia and New Mexico where he studied general arts and science and law. As with many First Nations people of his generation, the longstanding land claim negotiations played an important part in Mike's career. He practiced law for a time before becoming a land claim negotiator with the Council for Yukon Indians (now the Council for Yukon First Nations). He also served a term as the chair for the Council. Mike was also a negotiator on the KDFN land claim negotiating team.

In 2004, Mike told the Youth of Today Society that he had been inspired to run for chief for a number of reasons. He felt that Kwanlin Dün needed to really understand the land claims settlement offer before making a decision on whether to accept the agreement or to vote against it. He also felt that Kwanlin Dün had some very big issues to deal with, the proposed gas pipeline, the need to keep the people unified, and especially to provide a better future.

When Chief Rick O'Brien resigned in 2003, Mike Smith won a by-election and was sworn into office on October 10, 2003. He served three consecutive terms before retiring in 2011. Undoubtedly his greatest accomplishment during his time in office, was building on the work of his predecessors to complete the Kwanlin Dün land claim treaties and ratification vote. Although he did not run again for KDFN chief, Mike was not done with public service. In June 2012, he was elected Yukon Regional Chief for the Assembly of First Nations, the national organization representing First Nation Citizens in Canada.

“My vision for Kwanlin Dün continues to be focused on re-establishing our traditional governance: protecting the land and developing programs, and encouraging the mentorship of our leaders with youth in both traditional government and traditional land use.”

“As we continue to work towards this vision, I believe that we will strengthen our identity through our relationship with the land, the culture and the language of the KDFN people. This will, in turn, make life better for us and our children.”

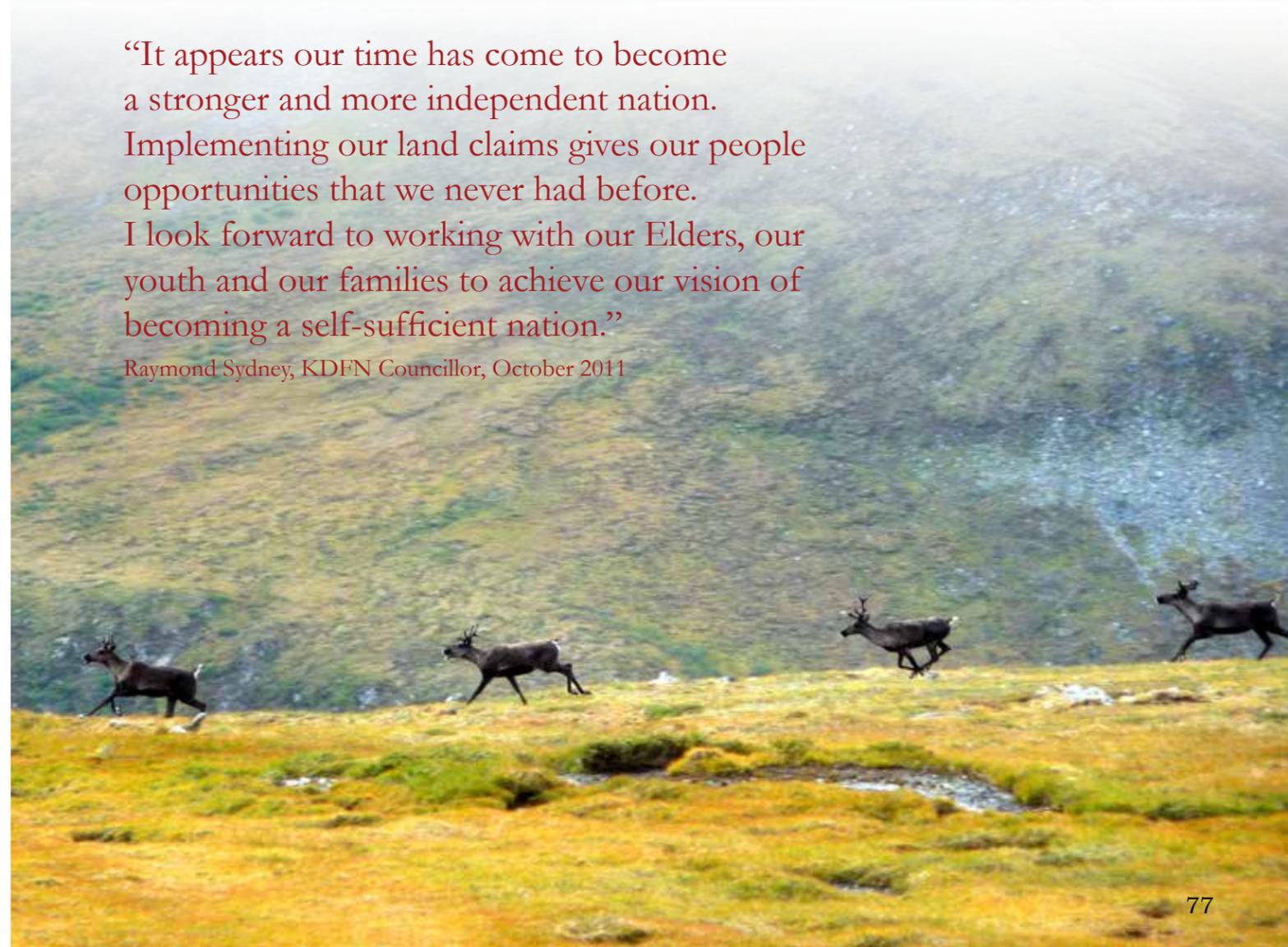
quoted in *Kwanlin Dün Ch'a*, July 2007.

# 6. Our Future is Now

“Here in the Yukon we are seeing the potential for First Nations to become leaders in the region once again. Kwanlin Dün First Nation is the largest landowner in Whitehorse, and land has become scarce. Impressively, many of our government programs like health have evolved to a state where we can now get involved with helping others. As such, Kwanlin Dün First Nation is in a position to make our entire community in Whitehorse stronger.”

“It appears our time has come to become a stronger and more independent nation. Implementing our land claims gives our people opportunities that we never had before. I look forward to working with our Elders, our youth and our families to achieve our vision of becoming a self-sufficient nation.”

Raymond Sydney, KDFN Councillor, October 2011





Over the last few decades, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation has made great strides in renewing ourselves and our culture as we meet the challenges of health and healing, early childhood care, economic development, and the management of our lands and resources. Since 2005, we have also taken on the responsibilities and challenges of self-government.

While there is still much work to be done, the people of Kwanlin Dün have a great deal to celebrate. We have a renewed enthusiasm for our culture, for our role as stewards of the land, and for celebrating our traditions. Below are just a few of the many programs and initiatives being undertaken by our people, as well as some highlights of our land claim package and *Self-Government Agreement*.

## KDFN Land Claim Package

Kwanlin Dün has a diverse population and is located in the most populated area of the Yukon. The *Final* and *Self-Government Agreements* KDFN has negotiated with the Government of Canada and the Government of Yukon contain many provisions that reflect the First Nation's unique circumstances.

Our Settlement Lands total 1,042.79 square kilometres (402.65 square miles). This is made up of many parcels including 47 parcels of Rural Settlement Lands outside the City of Whitehorse boundaries and 121 smaller parcels of Site Specific Lands, distributed throughout the Traditional Territory. Our negotiation of 34.85 square kilometres of Community Lands within and near the boundaries of the City of Whitehorse makes us the largest land owner in Whitehorse.

Kwanlin Dün's land claim ensures our key heritage sites are protected. The *Final Agreement* also provides funding for Kwanlin Dün to share our history and cultural heritage with the community and visitors from around the world.

KDFN's agreements have a number of distinctive aspects. One reason for this is the fact that KDFN's Traditional Territory encompasses Yukon's capital and economic heartland, the City of Whitehorse. About 75 percent of Yukon's population lives within KDFN's Traditional Territory. Also, special arrangements had to be made as KDFN has a long history and strong association with the Yukon River and Whitehorse waterfront.



Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement signing event.  
Yukon Government photo



## Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre

An important part of Kwanlin Dün's land claim included gaining legal title to 2.63 ha of riverfront land in downtown Whitehorse. This parcel is part of Kwanlin Dün's Traditional Territory and symbolizes the Kwanlin Dün peoples' connection to the river and the central role that Kwanlin Dün people have played in shaping the history and culture of both Whitehorse and the Yukon Territory.

After extensive consultation with its Citizens, Kwanlin Dün First Nation determined that this land would be used as a gathering place where all are welcomed to gather and learn about Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Provisions in Kwanlin Dün's land claim agreement allowed for the development and construction of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre.

The main purpose of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre is to promote an understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a member of Kwanlin Dün and to share this knowledge with other First Nations, visitors and members of the public.

Through the richness of Kwanlin Dün culture and the teachings of our Elders, the Centre is supporting and working with Kwanlin Dün people to preserve a traditional way of life and move forward together as a progressive self-governing First Nation.

The Centre represents Kwanlin Dün peoples' return to their traditional home along the Yukon River, and opened officially to the public on National Aboriginal Day on Thursday, June 21, 2012.

The Grand Opening celebration of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre hosted approximately 2,500 guests in total. The celebration began with the launch of a special dugout canoe into the Yukon River and a drumming procession of hundreds of people along the riverfront from Rotary Park to the river-side entrance to the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre. The beautiful day was full of song and dance, storytelling, food and fun. It was a wonderful community-wide celebration of KDFN's return to its cultural home by the river.

The opening of the Cultural Centre is a major milestone in Kwanlin Dün's work to implement our land claims agreement. This day also marks a deeply meaningful event for our people, as we celebrate the reclamation of our ancestral home along the riverbank.

Rick O'Brien, Chief of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Grand Opening of the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre, June 21, 2012.



Visitors help celebrate the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre Grand Opening.



Carvers with the 'Spirit of Awakening' Dugout Canoe that was gifted to the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre by the Northern Cultural Expressions Society.



Chief Mike Smith and Premier Dennis Fentie at the Cultural Centre groundbreaking ceremony.



KDFN's Traditional Territory includes the area that Kwanlin Dün people traditionally used and occupied. Chapter 10 of the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement* aims to maintain and protect important areas in the Yukon by establishing Special Management Areas (SMAs). Under Chapter 10, two SMAs have been created: Kusawa Park and Lewes Marsh Habitat Protection Area.

## Special Management Areas

Kwanlin Dün and other First Nations are working with federal and territorial governments to preserve and manage important areas in need of protection such as parks, special habitats and wildlife sanctuaries. These are to be managed in ways that will protect the rights of Kwanlin Dün Citizens.

KDFN's agreement allows for the creation of two new Special Management Areas (SMAs). For both of these areas, our people are able to continue harvesting fish and wildlife. We will also benefit from economic opportunities relating to the operation and maintenance of the areas, such as the construction of facilities. First Nation partners have representatives on the steering committees which are responsible for SMA management plans.

## Lewes Marsh Habitat Protection Area

The Lewes Marsh is located at the north end of Marsh Lake. It extends from M'Clintock River downstream to the Yukon River bridge, an area of about 20 square kilometres. It is important migratory bird habitat and includes Swan Haven. This important fishing and hunting area is located within the Traditional Territories of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council.



Yukon River near Marwell Industrial Area, Whitehorse.



Lewes Marsh

## Kusawa Park

The creation of Kusawa Park will protect an area of 3,078 square kilometres extending from the north end of Kusawa Lake south to the Yukon-British Columbia border. This area lies within the Traditional Territories of KDFN, Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

Chapter 16 of the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement* aims to ensure conservation in the management of all fish and wildlife resources and habitats, and to preserve and enhance the renewable resources economy in a way that ensures equal participation on part of Citizens and the public. It also guarantees the rights of Yukon's First Nation people and respective First Nations to manage renewable resources on Settlement Land. Specific provisions in Chapter 16 called for the establishment of a Committee in respect to management of wildlife populations in the Southern Lakes area and for the redevelopment of the Whitehorse fishway and hatchery.

## Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee

The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee (SLWCC) is unique in the Yukon because it is a government-to-government body set up to coordinate wildlife and habitat management in the Southern Lakes area.

The mandate for this important committee was negotiated in the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement*, Chapter 16, Schedule B and established on April 1, 2008. Its three-year mandate was extended by a year to March 31, 2012. This group has members from six different First Nations with interests in the area, as well representatives from the governments of Yukon, British Columbia and Canada. The committee draws on a wealth of expertise, using the knowledge and experience of the First Nations, as well as data collected by scientists.

“For First Nations people, living by the water is very spiritual because it gives us a lot. If I'm feeling down I go to the water and I sit for a while and collect all my thoughts. I pray near the water. This is what really draws us to the water. We are a part of the water. We get our food from the water. We quench our thirst from the water. We are born into the world from water. We receive our life by water.”

Emma Shorty, 2002



Kusawa Lake



Nine committee members represent government parties that have authority and responsibilities for land and wildlife management. These governments include Kwanlin Dün First Nation, Carcross/Tagish First Nations, Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, Teslin Tlingit Council, Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, Taku River Tlingit, Canada, Yukon and British Columbia.

The Southern Lakes Wildlife Coordinating Committee was set up to coordinate the management of caribou, moose, sheep, and other wildlife populations and their habitats in the Southern Lakes area by providing advice and recommendations to its member governments. As part of this work, the Committee is also promoting the recovery and conservation of these populations.

Today, about 80% of the Yukon's population calls this area home, along with at least 50 of the known 60 mammal species that occur in the Yukon. A variety of land uses and needs makes wildlife management planning in this area particularly complex and challenging. All affected parties need to show good will and work together to successfully carry out the plan.

Committee members drew on the expertise of these various parties to prepare a detailed document outlining the history and issues of wildlife management in the Southern Lakes region. The committee has recently completed recommendations to guide future wildlife management in the area.

## Whitehorse Fishway Redevelopment Project

The creation of the Whitehorse dam and years of overfishing have seriously damaged the fish stocks in the Yukon drainage in our Traditional Territory. This project is funding Kwanlin Dün participation in joint planning and redevelopment of the Whitehorse Fishway and hatchery, as well as KDFN participation in fish stock rehabilitation. The government of Canada is contributing over \$100,000 to fund this work.



Student group at the Whitehorse Fishway.

## Overlapping Traditional Territories

One of our ongoing challenges is to continue to work with other First Nations on issues arising from overlaps of our Traditional Territories. To some extent, all First Nation Traditional Territories in Yukon overlap with neighboring First Nations. In the Southern Lakes area this overlap is extensive. Many government and Renewable Resource Council powers and responsibilities are affected by these overlapping areas, thereby limiting the parties' abilities to manage hunters, wildlife harvesting, and trapping the this area.

First Nations have been working on resolving their overlapping claims, according to Schedule B, Chapter 2 of their Final Agreements. On February 12, 2013, chiefs for the Carcross/Tagish First Nation (CTFN), Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN), Ta'an Kwäch'än Council (TKC), and Champagne and Aishihik First Nations (CAFN) signed an agreement to resolve some of the Final Agreement provisions that have been suspended in Traditional Territory overlap areas. The Interim Administrative Agreement for Overlapping Traditional Territories and associated maps provides area boundaries for forest management planning, regional land use planning and a fresh water fish assessment and management plan. The agreement also allocates traplines between First Nations in the overlap area. It identifies common sense boundaries that are easy to locate on the ground and on a map. The four governments had been working together toward an overlap agreement since 2007.

## Local Area Planning

Section 20 of the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation Final Agreement* outlines the process for KDFN and Yukon Government to engage in local area planning. The Marsh Lake Local Area Plan was the first to be initiated under this process. The planning area is an extensive tract running along the east side of Marsh Lake from the Yukon River in the north to just south of Judas Creek. It includes both Commissioner's and Settlement Lands.

The Plan area includes 10 KDFN R Blocks and numerous Site-Specific lots. Lands were selected for ongoing use, cultural significance and development potential. KDFN interest in the area include: existing residences; cemetery; cultural sites' development potential, primarily along the Alaska Highway; habitat concerns, particularly for the Carcross Caribou Herd, M'Clintock/Michie salmon population, wetlands and moose. KDFN consulted with its own members who live in the Marsh Lake area, or who have an interest in the area and the Plan.



Leaders sign the *Interim Agreement for Overlapping Traditional Territories*. L-R: CTFN Chief Dan Cresswell, CAFN Chief James Allen, TKC Chief Christina Kane, KDFN Elder Councillor Judy Gingell, KDFN Chief Rick O'Brien.





Nàkwät'àKù Potlatch House.

## Final Agreement and Self-Government Agreement

After many decades of negotiating, Kwanlin Dün First Nation signed its *Final Agreement* and *Self-Government Agreement*, which became part of Canada's Constitution, and came into effect on April 1, 2005. On this day, Kwanlin Dün officially became the tenth self-governing Yukon First Nation.

Since settling its *Self-Government Agreement*, Kwanlin Dün have operated and negotiated with the federal, territorial and all other governments as a self-governing First Nation government.

Kwanlin Dün First Nation, the largest Yukon First Nation, is now putting in a system of governance that reflects this new environment of self-determination and moves Kwanlin Dün into the responsibilities of self-government. The transition from an *Indian Act* government to a self-governing First Nation has brought many changes to ensure that Kwanlin Dün First Nation is a government that respects First Nation culture, delivers appropriate programs and services that promote health, wellness and prosperity, provide land stewardship and empowers Citizens to participate in the self-government process.

As a self-governing First Nation, KDFN has regained jurisdiction over its internal affairs, its Citizens and activities on Settlement Land.

For example, under its agreements, Kwanlin Dün First Nation is able to make laws in various areas including, and not limited to: health care, aboriginal languages, training programs, social welfare, education and cultural beliefs and practices.

KDFN can pass laws related to the adoption of children, marriage, inheritance issues and dispute resolution outside of the court system. Kwanlin Dün can make laws related to hunting, trapping, fishing, timber harvest and other uses of its lands.

Kwanlin Dün also provides programs and services to Citizens such as health, education services, municipal services and housing.

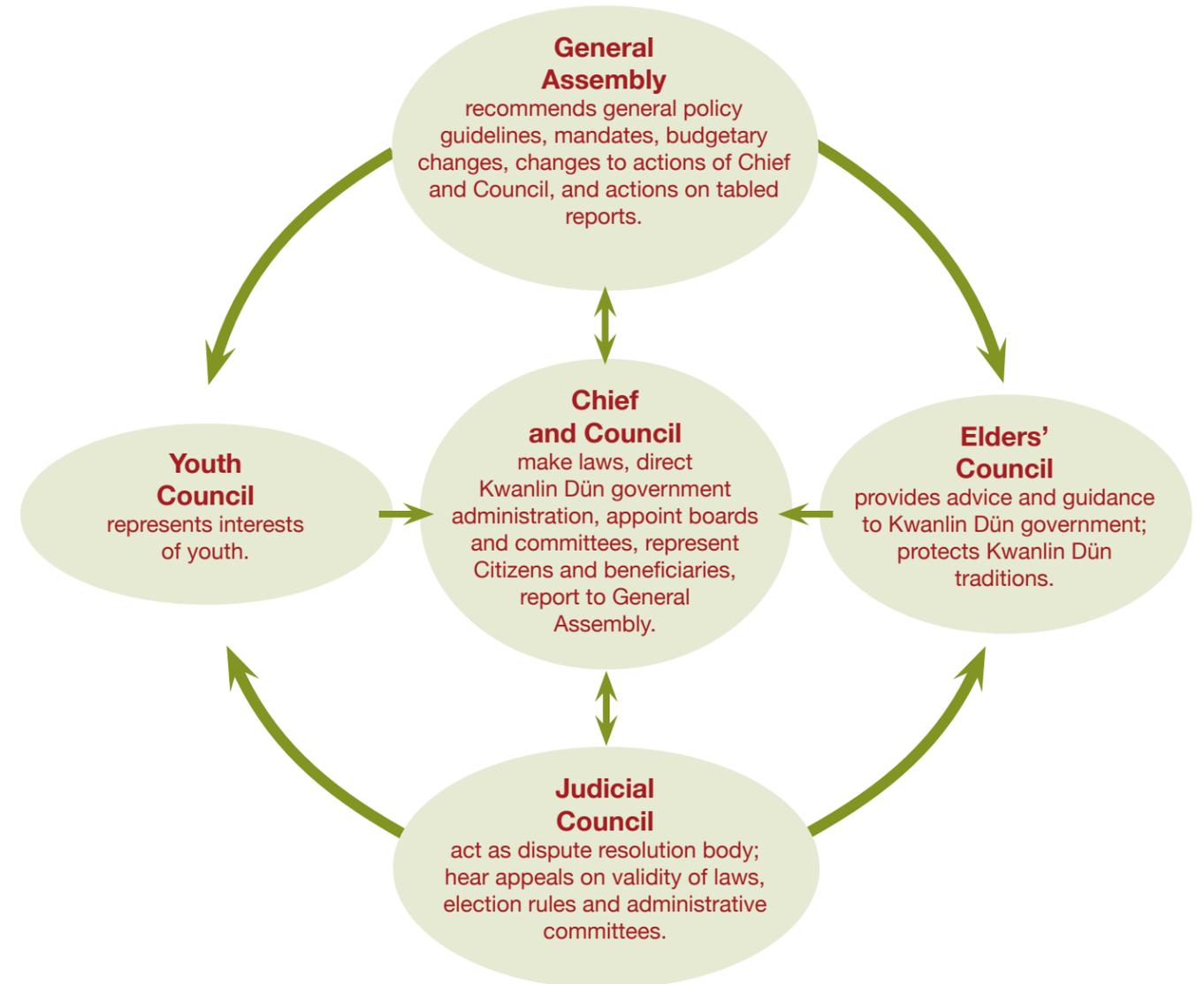


Health Centre.

## Kwanlin Dün First Nation Governing Bodies

In accordance with its Constitution, the Kwanlin Dün First Nation government is comprised of the General Assembly, the Chief and Council, the Elders Council, the Youth Council and the Judicial Council. Kwanlin Dün First Nation Citizens elect a Chief and 7 councillors every three years. The headquarters of the Kwanlin Dün First Nation are located at 35 McIntyre Drive in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

Chief and Council are the elected leaders of Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Chief and Council draw support from the Elders Council, Youth Council and Judicial Council. Public services such as Health, Housing, and Heritage, Lands and Resources are provided to Citizens by the Kwanlin Dün First Nation. Support services for self-government are provided through the departments of Finance, Administration and the Executive Council Office.



KDFN Government Bodies and Responsibilities

## Our Future is Now

Kwanlin Dün First Nation has been focused on building internal capacity to manage the challenges and opportunities created through the *Final and Self-Government Agreements*. Along with the same rights and responsibilities as other Yukon First Nations, Kwanlin Dün First Nation secured special provisions such as major land holdings within the City of Whitehorse and support for completing the Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre located on the Whitehorse waterfront.

Over the last few decades, Kwanlin Dün First Nation has made great strides in renewing its culture and reclaiming its space as we meet the challenges of health and healing, early childhood care, economic development, and the management of our lands and resources. Since 2005, we have also taken on the responsibilities and challenges of self-government. Implementing these agreements is for the good of all Citizens and has created a new beginning for Kwanlin Dün First Nation.

While there is still much work to be done, the people of Kwanlin Dün have a great deal to celebrate. We have a renewed enthusiasm for our culture, for our role as stewards of the land, and for celebrating our traditions.



Kyla Taylor, Nicky Charlie, Temika Charlie and Kitana Sterriah lead the procession along the Whitehorse waterfront at the Cultural Centre Grand Opening.  
*Fritz Mueller Photography*



Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre Grand Opening, June 21, 2012. *Fritz Mueller Photography*

“Kwanlin Dün First Nation people have made the choice to take responsibility for our future. We look forward at this time to pass on our legacy to future generations. We are marking a new beginning for our people in economic prosperity, cultural strength and our rights under the law, which will be accepted and respected by other governments.”

Chief Mike Smith at the signing ceremony on February 19, 2005