

MIDDLE-CLASS MASCULINITY AND THE  
KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

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KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the late summer of 1897, a steamer docked in San Francisco bringing wonderful news of a large gold discovery in the Yukon Territory, far to the north. The news sparked the last great gold rush as thousands stampeded for the Klondike. In addition to its economic importance, the rush also raised questions about the meaning of masculinity for middle-class Americans during the late nineteenth century. One group supported an ideal that emphasized thrift, responsibility, civic virtue, and familial obligations. The other stressed a more aggressive ideal that praised competition, independence, and vigorous physical activity. These two ideas played themselves out on the trails and in the mining camps of the Klondike region. Proponents of the first ideal largely opposed the rush by citing the difficulties of the trail, and arguing that going north represented an abrogation of man's duty to his family. Supporters of the second ideal praised the gold rush as an opportunity for rugged individualists to test themselves against nature; they also reveled in the idea that at the end of the journey aggressive men would find gold beyond the dreams of avarice.

Although the literature on masculinity is growing, there is little material analyzing the connection between masculinity and western gold rushes.<sup>1</sup> This thesis moves towards

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<sup>1</sup> One of the best examples of current scholarship on this subject is Susan Lee Johnson, *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001).

rectifying this situation. It deals with middle-class perceptions of the Klondike and its relation to theories about masculinity. Some commentators based their opinions on published reports or eyewitness accounts while others simply speculated. Whether or not these opinions were factually accurate is not the concern of this paper; its more pressing concern is what people *thought* was true and how this information contributed to their commentary about the proper roles of middle-class men in society. An analysis of the Klondike gold rush through the lens of masculinity provides a good test case to see how the two opposing masculine ideals manifested themselves. The rush took place at a crucial time in American gender history, when the traditional idea of responsible manhood seemed to many observers under siege by a new and unnerving credo that seemed antithetical to many of the older values of civilized American society. Furthermore, the Klondike gold rush represented the last great American adventure before the Spanish-American War. The 1890 announcement that the frontier had officially closed dismayed many American men. Where could they prove themselves now? The gold rush appeared to many as a fresh opportunity to revive an atrophied pioneer spirit in American males.

Following a brief survey of the literature on masculinity and the gold rush, this introduction lays out the two differing ideas about the nature of true manhood. It also provides a short sketch of the history of the gold discovery, the routes to the gold fields, as well as the social life and structure of Dawson City, the main gold camp. The following examination is based upon an analysis of two types of primary material: popular magazines, most of which came from the East, and Klondike guidebooks. Guidebooks are an important source of promotional literature. They allow researchers to

see not only how writers promoted the Klondike, but also to extrapolate ideas about masculinity.

Anyone interested in late nineteenth century ideas about masculinity must start with the two standard works by E. Anthony Rotundo and Michael Kimmel.<sup>2</sup> These works, especially Rotundo's, offer the best introduction to the developments and changes in masculinity during the second half of the nineteenth century. A couple of works helped to shape the section on traditional virtuous masculinity. The first of these is *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, edited by Mark Carnes and Clyde Griffen.<sup>3</sup> Two articles from this work stand out. Margaret Marsh's work on masculine domesticity, one of the most important works on masculine identity, points out that a substantial portion of the male middle-class population took pride in their involvement in home life.<sup>4</sup> Clyde Griffen's article backs Marsh's assertion, and points out that critics who howled about a "crisis of masculinity" exaggerated the problem, and that lots of men led perfectly happy lives at home and in the office.<sup>5</sup> Anyone interested in the idea of fatherhood during this period also should refer to works by Robert Griswold and Stephen Frank. Griswold's book *Fatherhood in America* is the standard survey of the topic, although much of it focuses upon the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> More useful for an in-depth look at middle-class fatherhood in the late nineteenth century is Frank's *Life with Father*. Frank argues that fatherhood underwent a substantial change

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: The Free Press, 1996); E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Marsh, "Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity, 1870-1915," in Carnes and Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Masculinity*, 111-127.

<sup>5</sup> Clyde Griffen, "Reconstructing Masculinity from the Evangelical Revival to the Waning of Progressivism: A Speculative Synthesis," in Carnes and Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood*, 183-204.

<sup>6</sup> Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

during the second half of the century, moving away from an ideal of rigid discipline to a more companionable and nurturing role.<sup>7</sup>

There are a couple of very useful works on the changing ideal of masculinity in the late nineteenth century. One of these books is Howard Chudacoff's *The Age of the Bachelor*.<sup>8</sup> Chudacoff examines a group of men that, until his book, received short shrift from researchers. He argues that young men made a conscious choice to live the single lifestyle, and that most of these men were not social deviants. He analyzes their distinctive subculture, paying particular attention to predominantly male institutions such as boardinghouses and saloons. David Macleod's work on the YMCA and the Boy Scouts shows how middle-class men used these institutions, especially the Scouts, to infuse youngsters with martial virtues in order to keep them from becoming effeminate.<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey Hantover's article also deals with the Scout movement and the physical validation of masculinity.<sup>10</sup> John Kingsdale's article in the same work is one of the best places to start for scholars interested in the role that saloons played in masculine culture.<sup>11</sup> One of the most important works on masculinity is Gail Bederman's *Manliness and Civilization*,<sup>12</sup> which examines the connections between the ideas of race and civilization. She points out that middle- and upper-class white American men sought to find an ideal

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> David I. Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983).

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey P. Hantover, "The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity," in Elizabeth H. Pleck and Joseph H. Pleck, eds., *The American Man* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1980), 285-302.

<sup>11</sup> Jon M. Kingsdale, "The 'Poor Man's Club': Social Functions of the Urban Working-Class Saloon," in Pleck and Pleck., 255-284.

<sup>12</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

that would combine the cultural and social refinement of Anglo-Saxon “civilization” with the primitive strength and vitality of their evolutionary forebears.

The literature of the Klondike gold rush is extensive. However, it is a topic that has largely escaped serious scholarly attention from authors. Many of the standard works offer a basic survey, emphasizing adventure on the trails and the wild life of the mining camps themselves.<sup>13</sup> More useful scholarly surveys include works by Coates and Morrison, William Greever, and Melody Webb.<sup>14</sup> Many other works give a more in-depth analysis of various aspects of the gold rush.<sup>15</sup> In recent years, two scholarly monographs are important to a better understanding of this gold rush. Charlene Porsild’s work on the social history of Dawson City points out that, contrary to the popular stereotype, the

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<sup>13</sup> Pierre Berton, *The Klondike Fever: The Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982); William R. Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees: The Wild Days of the Alaska-Yukon Mining Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1974); David Wharton, *The Alaska Gold Rush* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1972).

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth S. Coates and William R. Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon* (Seattle: University of Seattle Press, 2005); William S. Greever, *The Bonanza West: The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963); Melody Webb, *The Last Frontier: A History of the Yukon Basin of Canada and Alaska* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> For more general surveys of mining history and pre-Klondike mining in the Canadian Northwest see the following: Douglas Fetherling, *The Gold Crusade: A Social History of Gold Rushes, 1849-1929* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1988); Michael Gates, *Gold at Fortymile Creek: Early Days in the Yukon* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1994); Paula Mitchell Marks, *Precious Dust: The American Gold Rush Era, 1848-1900* (New York: William Morrow, 1994); Allen A. Wright, *Prelude to Bonanza: The Discovery and Exploration of the Yukon* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray’s Publishing, Ltd., 1976); Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North, 1870-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971). For further information on Yukon transportation and the overland trails see Barry C. Anderson, *Lifeline to the Yukon: A History of Yukon River Navigation* (Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1983); Gordon Bennett, *Yukon Transportation: A History* (Canadian Historical Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History No. 19. Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1978); Stan Cohen, *Yukon River Steamboats: A Pictorial History* (Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Co., 1982); Richard J. Friesan, *The Chilkoot Pass and the Great Gold Rush of 1898* (Ottawa: National Parks and Sites Branch, 1981); J. G. MacGregor, *The Klondike Rush Through Edmonton, 1897-1898* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970); Roy Minter, *The White Pass: Gateway to the Klondike* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1987). Those interested in learning more about the business of mining and mining techniques should consult Duane Smith, *Mining America: The Industry and the Environment, 1800-1980* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1987); Clark C. Spence, *Mining Engineers and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); R. Stuart and J. Gould, *Permafrost Gold: A Treatise on Early Klondike Mining: History, Methods, and Technology*, microfiche (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1983); Ernest Wolff, *Handbook for the Alaska Prospector* (College, Alaska: University of Alaska Press, 1969); Otis E. Young, *Western Mining: An Informal Account of Precious Metals Prospecting, Placering, Lode Mining, and Milling on the American Frontier from Spanish Times to 1893* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1970).



largest gold camp in the territory was relatively tame. Dawson had a sizable number of women and children, and residents of the city moved quickly to replicate the social structure and institutions of towns far to the south and east, on both sides of the border.<sup>16</sup> Kathryn Morse's work *The Nature of Gold* is an environmental history of the rush that examines ideas about labor as well as the interaction between the stampeders and the natural world, both on the trail to the gold camps and in the mines themselves.<sup>17</sup>

The masculine ideal at the midpoint of the nineteenth century was the "self-made man." This paragon of manhood was a model of self-restraint, thrift, industry, and hard work. He was a reliable husband and father whose top priority was providing food, shelter, and clothing for his family. Marriage, a career, and a family represented the hallmarks of middle-class male identity. These responsibilities made it imperative that a man set aside youthful irresponsibility and focus instead upon the future.<sup>18</sup> In short, as Rotundo states, "Men were quiet and sober, for theirs was a life of serious business. They had families to support, reputations to earn, responsibilities to meet. Their world was based on work, not play, and their survival in it depended on patient planning, not spontaneous impulse."<sup>19</sup>

The traditional route to success and masculine identity was through work. Success in the marketplace was vital to a man's sense of fulfillment. Not only did work reflect his own commitment to success, it also determined the social position of his

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<sup>16</sup> Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 43, 59, 102; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 12; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 90.

<sup>19</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 55.

family. The financial success that came from hard work allowed both the man and his family to climb the social ladder and achieve a position of comfort and respectability. The main prerequisite for success was not talent, but persistence. The man who persevered and redoubled his efforts in the face of adversity was bound to succeed eventually.<sup>20</sup>

Changes in the scale, organization, and nature of work during the late nineteenth century posed a serious challenge to the idea of the self-made man. Throughout much of the century, men had little problem identifying themselves through work. However, industrialization during the 1880s and 1890s led to giant, centralized corporations, large-scale manufacturing, and expanding corporate bureaucracies.<sup>21</sup> One historian points out that these changes, “reduced the opportunities to own one’s own business, to take risks, exercise independence, [and] compete....The new expanded middle-class depended on others for time, place, and often pace of work.”<sup>22</sup> Under this new corporate system, the opportunity for self-mastery seemed almost completely blocked. The independent business owner or skilled artisan transformed into a corporate bureaucrat or employee.<sup>23</sup> By the late 1890s, it seemed clear that, “classic individualism had dwindled both in economic fact and social mythology.”<sup>24</sup>

Despite the fact that society was changing rapidly all around them, many men hoped to perpetuate the values of the Christian gentleman: continence, honesty, and a sense of duty to God, family, and community. Middle-class Americans lumped all of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 168-175.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Gabriel Filene, *Him/Her/Self: Sex Roles in Modern America* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974), 81; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 120.

<sup>22</sup> Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” 291.

<sup>23</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 83; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 249.

<sup>24</sup> Filene, *Him/Her/Self*, 84.

these virtues under the rubric of “character.” Character was exceptionally important if they hoped to maintain their hold upon their position in society.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the world seemed filled with possible threats to middle-class character. The urban poor, Catholics, immigrants, and labor insurgents all seemed likely to overturn the standing order in American society. Alcohol, sex, violent sports, and other cheap amusements also threatened middle-class young people, especially males.<sup>26</sup>

Religious institutions offered one solution to the growing threat to virtuous masculinity. Sunday schools, tract societies, and the Young Men’s Christian Association all attempted to inoculate young men against worldly vice. Reformers launched crusades against drinking, gambling, and prostitution. Instead, they offered sanitized entertainment and instruction.<sup>27</sup> The YMCA was the most famous example of the battle to save young men from degeneracy and debauchery. Imported from England in the 1850s, the YMCA offered a four-point plan that emphasized spiritual, mental, social, and physical development. Described by author David Macleod as the “light-armed cavalry of the Lord,” the YMCA offered youth an alternative to worldly influences. To this end, supporters erected large buildings that contained meeting halls, libraries, classrooms, and gymnasiums. Thus, the YMCA sought to minister to both the body and the spirit. Bible studies, prayer groups, and street ministries promoted spiritual development. The gymnasium offered young men a chance to work off any excessive energy they might otherwise channel into vice. By bringing young, middle-class men into a safe

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<sup>25</sup> Charles E. Rosenberg, “Sexuality, Class, and Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” in Pleck and Pleck, eds., *The American Man*, 226, 229, 235; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, xvi.

<sup>26</sup> Mark E. Kann, *On the Man Question: Gender and Civic Virtue in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 200; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 33, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 10; Susan Curtis, “The Son of Man and God the Father: The Social Gospel and Victorian Masculinity,” in Carnes and Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Masculinity*, 71-72.

environment, the YMCA played an important role in fostering and supporting civic virtue and Christian values.<sup>28</sup>

It appears clear that a substantial segment of the male middle-class took great satisfaction in engaging in what Margaret Marsh calls “masculine domesticity.” These men enjoyed stable employment and familial interaction. Masculine domesticity had three prerequisites: first, a companionable marriage with less emphasis upon domineering patriarchal authority; second, steady work and job security; finally, a spatial component that allowed men to separate themselves from the hectic pace and temptations of urban life. By the late 1800s, a number of male-advice givers began to endorse this ideology. Although this ideal led to greater male domestic involvement, it did not equate to feminism or an equal sharing of household tasks and responsibilities. These writers did not suggest that men abandon their roles as breadwinners in order to be home to make the bed and wash the dishes. However, they did encourage men to become a more visible and active member of their household.<sup>29</sup>

Marriage was an important step in the life of the aspiring middle-class male. Marriage required a sober and steady commitment. However, before meeting his beloved at the altar, the young man had to make sure he could support not only his wife, but also his expected family. The ability to become a reliable breadwinner conditioned men’s preparedness for marriage. Men also assumed the responsibility for procuring a home. For these reasons, engagements often lasted as long as a couple of years, until the young man was absolutely certain he could support a wife and family.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 73-82.

<sup>29</sup> Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” 112-117.

<sup>30</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 114, 117-118.

Perceptions of marriage evolved over the course of the nineteenth century from an almost contractual, business-like merger dominated by the husband, to a union between two compatible people who placed a high premium upon intimacy. Mutual love became a top priority for marriage. Even though men might still commute to their job and work long hours, many now relished the opportunity to return at night to a loving companion.<sup>31</sup>

The next important step in masculine fulfillment was fatherhood. Both social commentators and medical advisors equated fatherhood with natural male fulfillment and identity. These theorists argued that fatherhood was man's highest calling and noblest responsibility. Historian Stephen Frank writes that "fatherhood was the crowning reward for the self-restraint, self-culture, and self-mastery central to Victorian concepts of masculinity."<sup>32</sup>

Fathers had to work in order to support their families. However, for many middle-class men, work meant commuting and long hours at the office. This situation often led to increasing separation of men from their families, a situation men genuinely regretted and sought to rectify, with varying degrees of success. Society expected working men to provide a certain level of financial ease for their families. Money was necessary to purchase the consumer goods and luxury items commensurate with the evolving hallmark of middle-class consumption. The situation was sometimes paradoxical: "What men gained in the world of [financial] power they may have lost in the world of sentiment. Such was the trade-off at the heart of male breadwinning."<sup>33</sup> It might seem odd that despite the bureaucratization that came with industrialization domesticated men could still identify themselves by the work they did. However,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 110-111, 115, 146, 149, 156.

<sup>32</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 88-89; Frank, *Life with Father*, 2, 48, 50-51, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 13-14, 33.

bureaucrats and office workers settled into a steady, if somewhat dull, routine of secure, salaried jobs, regular hours, and occasional promotion. This economic stability allowed many men to find more quality time to spend with their families.<sup>34</sup>

Middle-class men contrasted the rigorous pace of the workplace with the peace and comforts of home life. By engaging in meaningful interactions with wives and children, men sought to soothe and revive spirits buffeted and bruised by their jobs. Home became the ideal refuge from the world. Frank notes, “Fathers...were encouraged to view home as a ‘utopian retreat,’ a source of spiritual refreshment and after-hours escape from the daily rigors of breadwinning.”<sup>35</sup> The physical location of the home played an important role in masculine domesticity. The new suburbs provided the best environment in which to raise a middle-class family. Men bought modest homes far from the dirt, noise, and moral corruption they equated with city living. The suburbs offered a quiet enclave in which middle-class men could love their wives and raise their children in peace.<sup>36</sup>

Spousal compatibility and an appreciation of their children did not preclude men from engaging in more traditional fatherly practices such as moral instruction and advice giving. Fathers used family gatherings such as meals and evening fireside activities to advise, instruct, and discipline their children. Fathers were expected to act as moral role models for their children to emulate. Parents yearned for their children to grow into responsible adulthood and take their place in middle-class society. In order to facilitate this transformative process, fathers bombarded their children, especially their sons, with a barrage of advice on all manner of issues from love to work to school. Fathers did not

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<sup>34</sup> Frank, *Life with Father*, 53, 60; Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” 120.

<sup>35</sup> Frank, *Life with Father*, 80-81, 120.

<sup>36</sup> Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” 123.

neglect their daughters, though. Men counseled daughters on potential suitors as well as pregnancy and interior decoration.<sup>37</sup>

However, late-nineteenth century fathers also attempted to play the role of nurturer to their children as well. Again, the middle-class led the way in the development of family cohesion and the ideal of the “family man.” In part, this desire to play a more active role in child raising stemmed from an attempt to balance, though not overshadow, the female influence on children. The “family man” spent time with his children, and enjoyed it. The ideal father took his son camping or played baseball with him. Fathers now aspired to friendship with their children.<sup>38</sup> Stephen Frank observes, “In significant ways, the nineteenth century was less the age of the mother than it was an era of the parent. For as surely as nineteenth century Americans believed in the power of a ‘mother’s love,’ they believed in the need for a ‘father’s care.’”<sup>39</sup>

In summary, as middle-class males advanced from adolescence to adulthood, they expected to take on the twin role of virtuous father and husband. Men took these responsibilities very seriously. The ideal man provided not only sustenance and financial support, but love and tenderness as well. At times, these obligations conflicted with one another as men sought to balance the tasks of the workplace with those of the home. Virtuous men loved both their wives and their children, and sought to spend as much time as possible with them. This combined model of breadwinner, loving husband, and nurturing father formed the ideal basis for male middle-class domestic life.

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<sup>37</sup> Frank, *Life with Father*, 35, 140-165, 176.

<sup>38</sup> Frank, *Life with Father*, 126, 130; Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” 122.

<sup>39</sup> Frank, *Life with Father*, 174.

Not everyone was thrilled about the prospect of a desk job, interior decoration, and the trappings of suburban domesticity. Other middle-class men believed that insidious, powerful forces conspired to erode their masculinity. In a world rapidly succumbing to the time clock, and what they saw as an encroaching flock of clucking women, men began to fear that they might become weak, helpless, and overcivilized. This viewpoint led many men sought to bolster their flagging machismo through competition, physical aggression, returning to and testing themselves against nature, and constructing their own spaces in which they could once again truly be men.<sup>40</sup>

Many men felt that industrialization robbed them of their traditional path to self-identity: work. Whereas adherents of the idea of masculine domesticity did not mind commuting and paper pushing, its critics felt weakened by changes in the workplace. No longer could the true man be self-reliant, his own boss. As factories, mechanization, and unskilled menial laborers came to dominate the American industrial machine, many men became frustrated with traditional ideas about the nature of true masculinity. Peter Filene summarizes the situation this way: “More and more of them [men] found that the economic heights were already occupied, that the approach routes were barricaded by monopolies, that detours led only into bureaucratic swamps. Individual opportunity for the man on the make seemed to be a myth- not simply a belief charged with social meaning, but a falsehood.”<sup>41</sup>

Everywhere these men looked they saw women whom they perceived as an army of pious, overbearing, feminine kill-joys intent on turning boys into delicate sissies, and

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<sup>40</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 15; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 157; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 238, 253.

<sup>41</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 13; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 86; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 249-250; Filene, *Him/Her/Self*, 81.



dedicating any spare time to making sure men did not have any fun. The tentacles of feminization reached into traditional male strongholds such as the office and institutes of higher education. Women, it appeared, already dominated the home and the church. Feminine influence threatened to drain males of any vigor and turn them into weak and dependent shells of their former selves.<sup>42</sup>

In order to combat the “feminine menace,” men sought to create their own institutions and spaces where they could enjoy themselves apart from women. The late nineteenth century saw an unprecedented rise in the number of fraternal organizations. Men trapped in the dull routine of work and family became Masons and Odd Fellows. Younger college students joined fraternities to interact with fellows their same age. Bachelors substituted their lodge crowd for familial connections. Lodges and fraternal orders provided “a place where men might experience fellowship and intimacy without the feminizing influence of women.”<sup>43</sup>

Another option for men was to make religion more masculine. Many men resented what they perceived as female dominance in the religious sphere; they worried that “ministers and their female parishioners articulated a culture based on nurture, sentiment, and indulgence.”<sup>44</sup> Men sought to counteract these feminizing influences with a more manly religion. They formed athletic leagues, church clubs, and sang martial hymns like “Onward, Christian Soldiers.” The impetus for this masculine Christianity came from England in the form of religious novels by authors like Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes. Novels, instructional literature, and even art reshaped the image of

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<sup>42</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 122; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 47; Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” 289-290.

<sup>43</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 153; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 172.

<sup>44</sup> Curtis, “The Son of Man and God the Father,” 67.

Jesus. He now appeared as a muscular laborer with his sleeves rolled up, rather than the longhaired, sad-faced Savior of feminine and sentimental imagery. Men reveled in the idea of Jesus the masculine activist, driving the moneychangers from the temple courtyard, rather than the “soft-spoken author of the Beatitudes.”<sup>45</sup>

Men uninterested in church could always go to the saloon. Social drinking was one of the major activities of male recreational culture. Upright citizens blamed drinking and saloons for all manner of debauchery and dissipation. They blamed alcohol consumption for turning men into lazy louts who loafed about the saloon wasting time and money instead of returning home to support their families.<sup>46</sup> In reality, saloons played a number of important functions for men and the community. Saloons were meeting places. Businessmen might meet to close a deal over a beer, while the proprietor often rented out spare rooms to social and political organizations. Local watering holes often had the only public toilets in the city; they also had outdoor troughs where teamsters could refresh their animals. In addition, saloons sometimes acted as a sort of bank: cashing checks and lending money. They also provided food in the form of free lunches or the cheap “businessman’s lunch.” Most importantly, the saloon acted like the fraternal lodge, giving men a relaxing atmosphere in which they could reinforce their masculinity. Saloons served as a second home for many bachelors and restless middle-class men. In this all-male atmosphere, surrounded by photographs of famous athletes, and images of nude or seminude women, men felt free to drink, swear, tell bawdy jokes,

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<sup>45</sup> Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 48-49; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 177; Curtis, “The Son of Man and God the Father,” 73-74.

<sup>46</sup> Kingsdale, “The ‘Poor Man’s Club,’” 274-275.

sing, and discuss sports or politics. In this environment, men could, at least for a couple of hours, feel like they were once again real men.<sup>47</sup>

Sex also offered men a chance to reaffirm their masculinity. Men had to deal with two opposing ideals about sex. On the one hand, sex was a completely natural expression of male aggressiveness. On the other hand, propriety demanded a strict ideal of self-control. The urban landscape provided many opportunities for sexual exploration and experimentation. Indeed, at times it seemed that sexuality was everywhere: it appeared in the form of erotic literature, pictures, dance halls, and brothels. Cheaper theaters and dance halls presented young men with a perfect opportunity to find a willing sexual partner for a few moments, or for the entire evening. Men might easily establish casual sexual liaisons with so-called “charity girls, young women who might exchange sexual favors in return for the dance halls’ cover charge and a couple of drinks.”<sup>48</sup>

Patronizing prostitutes was another option. Although it is difficult to chart the extent of prostitution in the late nineteenth century, it is not unreasonable to conclude that libidinous males had ample opportunity to visit the practitioners of the world’s oldest profession. Sex with a prostitute allowed men to discharge their pent-up sexual energy in a private and anonymous environment far away from the prying eyes of middle-class society.<sup>49</sup>

Another way to deal with feminization and the problem of overcivilization was to view it as an actual physical illness. Physicians called the problem neurasthenia. They based this idea upon the theory that the male body contained a finite amount of energy, called “nerve force.” Overcivilization, not sexual excess, depleted nerve force. The

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 261-262, 267-277.

<sup>48</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 122; Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 135, 169-170.

<sup>49</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 169-170; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 126.

increased pace of the workplace often caused middle-class men to experience headaches, dizziness, and nervous breakdowns. From this perspective, civilization and self-control literally weakened these men.<sup>50</sup>

Although neurasthenia was considered a disease of men, concerned physicians and specialists believed that they needed to immunize boys lest the disease lay them low when they reached adulthood. Psychologist and educator G. Stanley Hall believed he could save American boys from this fate. Hall based his solution upon the evolutionary theory that mankind progressed from barbarism and savagery to civilization. Hall applied this principle to child development, and called it Recapitulation Theory. Hall claimed that children physically progressed through the evolutionary stages of their ancestors. For example, a very young boy might possess the intelligence and social characteristics of a Neanderthal. As the boy grew older, he progressed up the evolutionary ladder, reenacting the physical and mental development of all his ancestors until he reached the pinnacle: Anglo-Saxon manhood. The key, as Hall saw it, was to let young boys give full expression to the primitive strength and vitality of their ancestors. Once boys reached adolescence, they could absorb more civilized values, and combine these with the primitive virtues of his earlier development.<sup>51</sup>

Grown men also sought to rediscover their primitive roots. While theorists considered passions like rage, greed, lust, and physical aggression essentially male characteristics, throughout most of the nineteenth century these characteristics were something that men feared and sought to control. This idea began to change in the last third of the century. Confronted with the specter of effeminacy, men began to revel in

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<sup>50</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 86-87.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-106.

the characteristics of their evolutionary forebears. Men now dreamed of “going primitive.” The animal impulse that lurked just beneath a man’s skin needed exercise and expression from time to time. Historian E. Anthony Rotundo writes, “Talk of man’s ‘bestiality’ was largely a figurative language to discuss the passions that were ascribed to him. If men were showing a newfound pride in the animal within them, it was really a way to express positive feelings about male impulse.”<sup>52</sup>

The glorification of the male animal was part of a larger theme of masculine display through competition and vigorous physical activity, especially sports. In the late nineteenth century, many men felt it necessary to prove their masculinity lest others label them effete or feminine. While earlier generations praised inner strength and character, these new men placed a premium on physical displays of their manhood.<sup>53</sup> One of the best ways to display masculinity was in the gymnasium and on the athletic field. Men flocked to football fields and baseball diamonds; they lifted weights and did hundreds of calisthenics in order to stave off feminization and overcivilization. Furthermore, proponents argued that sports and competition taught valuable life lessons and encouraged marital virtues like courage and nerve. In short, sports prevented men from going soft.<sup>54</sup>

Some men sought to escape the stultifying atmosphere of domestic life by fleeing to the frontier. On the frontier, men could recreate themselves and take on a more masculine identity. The gold camps and cattle trails allowed men to enter a world of unsupervised gambling, drinking, swearing, and sex. The frontier offered men a chance

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<sup>52</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 227, 229, 231.

<sup>53</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 100, 120.

<sup>54</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 126; Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” 287; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 241-242.

to recuperate not only psychologically, but physically as well. A number of prominent eastern weaklings such as Theodore Roosevelt and Owen Wister exemplified the physically regenerative powers of the American West.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, for late nineteenth-century men, escape to the frontier became increasingly difficult as it steadily receded before the advance of civilization. In 1890, the announcement that the frontier had closed sent a wave of consternation washing over men who dreamed of escape. Many disappointed men sought solace in books. Adventure stories and western novels like Owen Wister's *The Virginian* and Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* allowed men to live the frontier experience vicariously through fiction.<sup>56</sup>

If men could no longer live the frontier experience, they might still live what Theodore Roosevelt called the "Strenuous Life." The outdoors in general served as a substitute for the frontier. Men could still leave the feminizing effects of the city behind them for a time to hunt, fish, camp, and hike in forests and hills much closer than California or Montana.<sup>57</sup> Theodore Roosevelt was the greatest champion of masculine reconstruction and identity through competitive and vigorous activity. Roosevelt himself whipped childhood weakness and asthma through a rigorous regimen of physical exertion and exercise.<sup>58</sup> Howard Chudacoff concludes that, "Roosevelt symbolized the panacea for emasculated manhood that was presumed to be characterizing the modern American male population."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 59-62, 88, 135.

<sup>56</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 87-89; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 45-46; Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 228.

<sup>57</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 121, 136, 150.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 181-187.

<sup>59</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 240.

In conclusion, it seems clear that men living at the end of the nineteenth century had different ideas about the nature of true masculinity. The ideal of physical, aggressive, primitive man gained a large following as the century drew to a close. Critics and proponents of the new ideal gave it wide publicity at the expense of the more staid idea of the responsible domestic man. However, the attention generated by the physical ideal did not completely overshadow the opposing model. According to some historians, those who lamented a “crisis of masculinity” exaggerated. Clyde Griffen writes that “generalizations of a new middle-class masculinity in the [late nineteenth and early] twentieth century necessarily oversimplifies.”<sup>60</sup> Griffen goes on to point out that a large segment of the male middle-class population held on to the more traditional ideal of masculinity. Many men sought to balance the male world of the marketplace with increased time with their families.<sup>61</sup> However, Margaret Marsh reminds readers that the increase in masculine domesticity did not necessarily mean equality between the sexes. She admits that the presence of more domesticated men does not mean that many men did not exalt the cult of the new masculinity. However, both views need consideration.<sup>62</sup> Griffen concludes that,

There was indeed anxiety over what seemed to be happening to gender norms and gender relations. But calling it a “crisis,” seems misleading, given the evidence we now have that a new class of experts of both sexes tended to redefine both the sexual division of labor and family relationships in ways that did not end male dominance and that in important respects perpetuated deference to male desires.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Griffen, “Reconstructing Masculinity,” 203.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 199-203.

<sup>62</sup> Marsh, “Suburban Men and Masculine Domesticity,” 125-126.

<sup>63</sup> Griffen, “Reconstructing Masculinity,” 200.

## CHAPTER II

### KLONDIKE GOLD

If Robert Henderson had been polite he might have become a very rich man. In the summer of 1896 Henderson, a Canadian prospector, struck gold on a small branch of the Klondike River, a tributary of the Yukon River, in northwestern Canada. In July, Henderson shared the news with a fellow prospector, George Washington Carmack. Carmack, who was married to a native wife, asked Henderson if there was room to stake a claim. Henderson replied that Carmack was welcome, but his wife and in-laws, whom Henderson reportedly referred to as “damned Siwashes,” were not. The Carmack party opted to go their own way. On August 31, 1896, the group struck a rich deposit of placer gold on Rabbit Creek, another branch of the Klondike. Carmack found enough nuggets and gold dust to fill an empty shotgun shell. He carried his precious cargo to the nearest town, Forty Mile. Miners in Forty Mile were skeptical of Carmack’s story until the man emptied his shotgun shell on a barroom table. The sight of the gold started a stampede to the Klondike.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 80-83; Stephen Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 201; Robert Wallace, *The Miners* (Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1976), 201-202.



One miner was conspicuously absent: Robert Henderson. Although prospecting only ten miles away, Henderson was oblivious to the activity on Rabbit Creek. Carmack later claimed that he had invited Henderson to join the excitement, but Henderson made it clear he had no desire to associate with Carmack's native relatives. In later years, Henderson denied Carmack's story. Henderson continued to prospect throughout northwestern Canada, but never struck it rich. Eventually, the Canadian government awarded him a lifetime pension of \$200 a month for his role in pointing the way to the gold fields even though he had not made the great discovery. By fall 1896, the Klondike country swarmed with prospectors who staked out most of the creeks in the area.<sup>65</sup>

The Klondike discovery did not occur in a vacuum. Stories about gold on the tributaries of the Yukon circulated in the far north as early as the 1850s. By the late 1880s, nearly twenty-five hundred prospectors tramped through the country digging and panning. The first great break came in 1885, when prospectors found gold on the Stewart River in the upper Yukon watershed. The number of prospectors on the Stewart grew from two hundred in 1887 to about one thousand by 1894. By 1896, the diggings produced \$800,000 for the season. The town of Forty Mile sprang up to service the miners. In 1893, a strike on the American side of the border, 250 miles down the Yukon from Forty Mile, on Birch Creek in Alaska, sparked another rush. By 1895, the new mining camp of Circle City surpassed the population of Forty Mile. These discoveries had important consequences for the would-be prospectors heading for the Klondike in 1897 and 1898.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 80-84; Haycox, *Alaska*, 203; Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 24.

<sup>66</sup> Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 52-58; Haycox, *Alaska*, 203; Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 12-17; Robert Wallace, *The Miners*, 200.

Word of the Klondike strike hit the west coast of the United States like a bolt of lightning. The steamship *Excelsior* brought the news to San Francisco on July 16, 1897, while the *Portland* brought nearly two tons of gold to Seattle two days later. However, the general rush did not begin until 1898. It took countless newspaper reports and magazine articles to convince the rest of the nation that the news was true. In all, nearly one hundred thousand people started for the Klondike from all over the world. The news that most of the gold was placer<sup>67</sup> in nature inspired men who believed that anyone might obtain it with only a pick and a shovel. Furthermore, the United States was still recovering from the Panic of 1893, and news of the strike bolstered flagging American spirits. In addition to the prospect of riches, many headed north in search of freedom, simplicity, and adventure.<sup>68</sup>

Most prospective miners elected to depart from Seattle. Seattle had a number of advantages over other cities. The city was already a hub of commerce and trade for the Pacific Northwest. Its steamship lines and railroad connections serviced a burgeoning hinterland that supplied lumber, animals, and foodstuffs to the west coast. Furthermore, Seattle residents had mastered the art of boosterism and propaganda. Led by Erastus Brainerd, the Seattle Chamber of Commerce inundated post offices and libraries nationwide with literature promoting both the Klondike gold fields and Seattle itself. Seattle boosters distributed over three hundred thousand copies of a special edition of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* throughout the country. Boosters in rival cities like Tacoma, Portland, and San Francisco could not match Seattle's effort.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Easily obtained surface gold.

<sup>68</sup> Haycox, *Alaska*, 203; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 117; Wallace, *The Miners*, 205-206.

<sup>69</sup> Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 169-186.

Seattle wholesalers and outfitters offered every item the prospector needed: clothes, tools, and food, as well as some things they did not need: “ice bicycles,” x-ray machines, and gophers said to be specially trained to tunnel for gold. Overzealous Klondikers also nearly denuded Seattle of its canine population. They considered any unchained dog fair game, and some desperate folks even resorted to dog-napping. Miners in the North liked to relate stories about unscrupulous Seattle merchants. One of the favorites involved a deceased businessman. Neither St. Peter nor the Devil wanted to receive the man. Both parties remained adamant, until they decided to flip a coin; the loser had to take the Seattlite. St. Peter flipped the coin up into the air, but before it could land, the merchant snatched the coin out of the air and sprinted away. Even without this coin, Seattle businessmen made an enormous amount of money outfitting prospectors. In the fall and winter of 1897, even before the largest rush, they cleared \$16,000,000 in profits, more than their entire intake for the whole year 1896.<sup>70</sup>

Outfitting was the easiest part of the trip; Klondikers still had a long journey to the gold fields. Unfortunately, all too many travelers were physically unprepared for the trail. Many enthusiastic gold seekers came from the city and led sedentary lives. For many of these men, the trip would be exceptionally difficult. There was an alternative for those with extra money. The all-water route avoided the rigors of the overland trails. Passengers boarded steamers in Seattle. The steamers carried them to St. Michael, the Alaskan town at the mouth of the Yukon River, a trip of about 2,750 miles. From St. Michael, sternwheelers ascended the Yukon 1,700 miles to the main gold camp, Dawson

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<sup>70</sup> Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 167-168; Wallace, *The Miners*, 207; Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 271.

City. Overall, this trip took about six weeks to complete. At the height of the rush, nearly two hundred and fifty craft plied the waters of the Yukon.<sup>71</sup>

Travelers unable to afford the all-water route faced a much more difficult trip. Some boarded steamers in Seattle that took them up the Alaskan Panhandle to the trailhead towns of Skagway and Dyea. Those unable to afford packhorses for their gear took the trail out of Dyea. This trail led over the Chilkoot Pass, the most infamous pass in gold rush lore. The trail began easily enough, but climbed steadily. Over the last four miles of the trail, the grade reached thirty percent, an extraordinarily taxing climb that tested climbers to their limit. A half-mile below the summit of the pass the travelers reached a ledge known as The Scales. Here, they rechecked their baggage and prepared for the final push. Many travelers could carry no more than fifty pounds at a time. The final ascent to the summit took nearly six hours. Once at the top, they dumped their baggage in a pile, marked it with a flag and descended to repeat the process. It often took three months to carry the required provisions, at least a ton per person, to the summit of the Chilkoot.<sup>72</sup>

Some travelers sought to avoid the backbreaking Chilkoot route by taking the trail over White Pass from Skagway. The White Pass route was six hundred feet lower than the Chilkoot. However, the trail was about fifty miles longer. More importantly, it passed through woods, swamps, and mountains. The combination of rain, melting snow, men, and horses turned the trail into an almost impassible quagmire. Progress ground to a halt as overburdened horses gave out in the knee-deep mud. Gold-crazed travelers pushed on, leaving the beasts to die where they fell. During the winter of 1897-1898 over

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<sup>71</sup> Wallace, *The Miners*, 207; Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 58; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 84.

<sup>72</sup> Wallace, *The Miners*, 207-213; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 50.

three thousand animals died along the length of the trail.<sup>73</sup> The situation on the White Pass Trail nearly reached an impasse before a group of London investors financed the construction of a narrow gauge railroad over White Pass. Completed in February 1899, the railroad provided quick, cheap transportation to the Klondike. Furthermore, it meant that no one needed to take the Chilkoot route again.<sup>74</sup>

Travelers crossing both passes next faced a long string of lakes and rivers. During the 1897 rush travelers converged on Lake Bennett, only to find it frozen solid. Some ten thousand travelers erected a massive tent city along the shore. While they waited for the spring break up, the adventurers set about building boats to carry them to Dawson. Very few of these men qualified as master ship builders, and spring saw a motley armada of several thousand vessels cast off into the lake. From the northern outlet of Lake Bennett, the aspiring sailors traversed a series of narrow channels and lakes. The deadly White Horse Rapids smashed over 150 boats and killed ten men before travelers found a suitable portage around the stretch of dangerous water. After about two weeks, the flotilla reached the Yukon and sailed downriver to Dawson. The total length of the trip was nearly sixteen hundred miles from Seattle to Dawson. The number of boats docking near the city was so great that in many places they tied up two and three deep for a length of nearly two miles along the riverfront. The arrival of the Klondike fleet inflated Dawson's population to nearly thirty thousand in the summer of 1898, a total population that nearly matched that of cities like Seattle and Portland.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Wallace, *The Miners*, 210; Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 94; Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 46.

<sup>74</sup> Haycox, *Alaska*, 206; Wallace, *The Miners*, 210; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 61.

<sup>75</sup> Wallace, *The Miners*, 213-215.

Soon after arrival, eager miners set about their search for gold. The first step was the purchase of a miner's license for \$10. This authorized the prospector to stake a legal claim along a creek and begin working his work. Miners staked out a plot of unoccupied ground and returned to town to file their claim. The miner then paid a recording fee to process his claim. In return for the \$15 fee, the miner received a one-year lease to his claim with an option for annual renewal provided the owner worked to develop it.<sup>76</sup>

Once he completed the paperwork, the miner began the physical work. In the early days, placer gold formed the backbone of the mines. Placer gold formed through a complex geological process in which the earth's folding, faulting, and eroding jarred particles of gold loose from the surrounding rock. Water carried the heavy particles down streams and rivers, where the gold lodged itself in the gravel of the riverbed, caught on sand or gravel bars, or collected in still pools. To obtain this gold, Klondike miners utilized techniques perfected during the California gold rush. The easiest method was panning. Miners scooped gravel and water into a pan and worked the dirt in a circular motion to wash off any excess dirt. The miner then emptied the water from the pan and searched the remaining gravel for flecks of gold. The second method was the rocker box. The rocker resembled a baby's cradle with a screen for a bottom. The miner shoveled dirt into the rocker, poured in water, and rocked the device vigorously back and forth. The water washed the dirt away, while the screen held the heavy gold. The final method was the sluice box. Shaped like a trough, the sluice usually measured at least six feet in length. Prospectors set the sluice up on a downward slope. Miners loaded in dirt and

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<sup>76</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 72-74.

water. The water washed the dirt down the incline while the gold lodged against crosspieces called “riffles” attached to the bottom of the sluice.<sup>77</sup>

Placer gold was not inexhaustible, and soon prospectors had to search elsewhere for the precious metal. Miners knew that if there was no gold on the surface they must dig deeper. The heavy gold worked its way down through the soil until it reached a substratum known as bedrock. Miners who reached bedrock could then pan or sluice its gravel. However, Klondike soil initially stymied the gold seekers. The climate was so cold that the ground never completely thawed. Thus, just a few inches below the surface, the miners hit a frozen layer of soil known as permafrost. There might be anywhere from ten to fifty feet of permafrost between the topsoil and bedrock. Prospectors solved this problem through a tedious process. During the evening, they built fires over the permafrost. Overnight, the fire might loosen up six inches of soil. The process repeated itself until the prospector hit bedrock. Unfortunately, he had to wait until spring to pan or sluice the enormous piles of dirt that accumulated over the course of the winter. Once the creeks began to flow, the dirt might reveal an abundance of nuggets, or absolutely nothing. One never knew.<sup>78</sup>

Placer mining required a great deal of work. Often, one miner alone was unable to work his claim effectively. Many entered into partnerships, while others hired laborers. The labor pool was large, and the jobs in the gold fields generally paid better than work in town. Miners unable to hire laborers sometimes worked a “lay.” This

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<sup>77</sup> Webb, *The Last Frontier*, 77-82; Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 57.

<sup>78</sup> Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 56, 103; Wallace, *The Miners*, 205; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 101.

involved a prospector “working a claim for an absentee owner and receiving a percentage of the gold removed.”<sup>79</sup>

Success varied in the mines. A number of the claims proved exceptionally rich. Stories reported individual pans yielding up to \$1,000, though this was very rare. A few miners reported fortunes in excess of \$100,000, but again, this was a rarity. Unfortunately, those who arrived in the spring of 1898 discovered that prospectors already in the territory had staked almost every inch of ground in 1896 and 1897. Many men left the country entirely; others sought to lose themselves in the one hundred twenty thousand gallons of whiskey imported in 1898; others returned to Dawson.<sup>80</sup>

Named for the head of the Canadian Geological Survey, Dawson City grew up along the banks of the Yukon to service the needs of the Klondike prospectors. The town grew rapidly until it reached a peak population of between twenty-five and thirty thousand people in 1898. Real estate along the main street sold for as high as \$500 a foot. Dawson’s stores provided goods to prospectors at astronomical prices. Hay went for \$1,000 a ton, while salt and eggs were literally worth their weight in gold dust. The number of stores and businesses provided a large job market. Most men in Dawson worked as paid semi- or unskilled-laborers. Competition for business was fierce. Larger trading companies often forced smaller businesses to take their operations elsewhere, usually to the smaller mining camps scattered throughout the area.<sup>81</sup>

People coming to Dawson did not cast off the accepted social standards of more civilized surroundings in order to create something new. Instead, residents quickly created a social structure and hierarchy that resembled towns to the south and east, on

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<sup>79</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 76.

<sup>80</sup> Hunt, *North of 53 Degrees*, 79; Webb, *The Last Frontier*, 123; Wallace, *The Miners*, 219.

<sup>81</sup> Wallace, *The Miners*, 205, 214; Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 97, 169.



both sides of the border. A social system rapidly formed around the business and professional classes of Dawson. The latter group included doctors, lawyers, and government functionaries, most of them Canadian. This group, based on job description and professional connections, moved rapidly to set themselves off from the meaner sorts of the town. One historian notes that “Dawson residents drew lines clearly, and the upper crust created an elaborate social life that made these class distinctions very clear.”<sup>82</sup>

Contrary to the popular image of mining camps as the exclusive domain of single males, Dawson contained a large number of women and children. Families tended to migrate as complete units and they usually settled in the community for several years. This gave Dawson a sense of permanence and stability often lacking in American boom camps. An 1898 census conducted by the Northwest Mounted Police revealed that females composed twelve percent of Dawson’s population; the 1901 census showed that the number had increased to nearly twenty percent.<sup>83</sup>

The rigid social structure allowed middle-class residents of Dawson to establish their own institutions. Middle-class citizens formed and supported a number of religious and philanthropic organizations in the town. Religious foundations were particularly prevalent. With the support of Dawson’s “best” citizens, religious groups quickly founded churches, hospitals, and schools. Dawson had four large churches representing both Roman Catholics and Protestants by 1900. The city also had two hospitals, associated with the churches, and five schools by 1901.<sup>84</sup>

Despite these bastions of middle-class respectability, men of all sorts easily found more earthly entertainment. Single males dominated Dawson’s population, and they

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<sup>82</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 15-16, 137-164, 188-194, 197.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 20, 98, 194.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-155.

sought a good time. Although technically illegal, gambling and prostitution flourished, employing nearly a thousand people. However, the Mounties sought to regulate vice or look the other way instead of banning it. They feared that a crackdown would drive illegal activity underground. As long as gamblers and prostitutes plied their trades discreetly, the authorities generally ignored them. Prostitution was especially popular. While most clients were undoubtedly prospectors and laborers, evidence suggests that even those occupying the highest social and professional positions in Dawson patronized the “soiled doves” from time to time.<sup>85</sup>

Many stampeders who reached Dawson in 1898 looked around and decided they did not like what they saw. To their dismay, the adventurers realized that they could no longer stake claims in the immediate area. The disappointed horde had three options: stay in Dawson and find a job, go home, or go somewhere else and search for gold in unprospected regions. Some stayed, many more left. Those disinclined to return home empty-handed generally went west, into Alaska. There, they discovered gold in many places: the Koyukuk River, Rampart, Iditarod, Fairbanks, and most famously, Nome.<sup>86</sup>

The gold fields of the Klondike were very rich. They produced around \$300,000 in 1896; \$2,500,000 in 1897; \$10,000,000 in 1898; \$16,000,000 in 1899; and over \$22,000,000 in 1900. In later years, large companies brought hydraulic mining and heavy dredging equipment to the region. With the help of industrialized machinery, the gold fields eventually produced about \$300,000,000. However, despite these statistics, would-be prospectors spent nearly \$60,000,000 just getting to the Klondike. Some experts estimate that about one hundred thousand people started north; only about one-

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 100-133.

<sup>86</sup> Haycox, *Alaska*, 204-206; Webb, *The Last Frontier*, 140.

third reached the Klondike. Of these, only a few hundred, mostly old-timers, found enough gold to make themselves truly rich. The rest drank, swore, gambled, left for Alaska, or returned home with little but a story to tell of their experiences in the frozen north.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Haycox, *Alaska*, 205; Wallace, *The Miners*, 188, 222-223.

## CHAPTER III

### “VIRTUOUS MASCULINITY” AND THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

Adherents to the ideal of virtuous masculinity had to have a very good reason to leave home and family for the Klondike gold fields. Many critics pointed out that there were more reasons to stay at home. Some were practical reservations. They argued that few men stood a chance to strike it rich, because the best claims were already staked. Furthermore, prospecting was not honorable work for middle-class professionals. It was far better to stay at home and hold down a steady job with regular pay than to succumb to the power of greed and hope for luck in the gold fields. Beyond that, the trip was exceptionally hard; men had to climb mountains, shoot rapids, and cope with bone-chilling cold before they even reached the Klondike. Perhaps most importantly, though, a Klondike trip meant that men neglected their familial obligations. Men should be husbands and fathers; they should be at home, not traipsing about the wilderness. Most positive arguments for the Klondike involved moral and religious idealism. Klondike critics argued that if men chose to go, they should go intending to do mission work and spread the Gospel to the degenerately sinful prospectors. Finally, once there, middle-class men needed to erect the rudiments of civilization: churches, schools, and a rigid social structure that set them apart from the meaner sorts. In conclusion, many social critics who endorsed the idea of virtuous masculinity cautioned against going to

the Klondike for a number of reasons: there was no assurance men would strike it rich, the trip was long and difficult, and the whole enterprise represented a lack of commitment to home and family. If men went, they needed to go for the correct reasons: the cause of God and on behalf of respectable middle-class civilization. Underlying both sets of arguments, positive and negative, was an ideal of masculinity that emphasized thrift, responsibility, domesticity, and respectability-- a commitment to Christian, middle-class morality.

Even critics of the gold rush had to admit that the strike was a rich one. Although completely reliable information was sometimes difficult to obtain, reports from the North indicated that the extent of the gold fields was tremendous. One source was exceptionally optimistic, writing that, "the Klondike district is without a doubt, the richest placer district ever discovered in the world."<sup>88</sup> Even magazines hostile to the rush dutifully reprinted tall tales of incredible gold discoveries. *The Watchman* reprinted a story about a woman who prospected in between household chores. She reportedly collected ten thousand dollars in nuggets, "as easily as a hen picks up grains of corn in a barnyard."<sup>89</sup> Other stories told of steamers docking in Seattle that sagged under the weight of the gold dust in their holds, while another story told of three prospectors who found so much gold so fast that they died from the shock of their sudden wealth.<sup>90</sup>

On the whole, however, such optimism was rare. Many more accounts argued that the glowing stories from the North were exaggerated and unrepresentative. Critics

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<sup>88</sup> No Author, "The Yukon Gold Field," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 16 September 1897, 361; A. E. Ironmonger Sola, *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New El Dorado*, by A.E. Ironmonger Sola (London: The Mining and Geographical Institute, 1897).

<sup>89</sup> No Author, "A Woman on the Klondike," *The Watchman*, 19 August 1897, 17.

<sup>90</sup> No Author, "Industrial," *Christian Observer*, 20 June 1900, 23; No Author, "Odds and Ends," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 9 December 1897, 823.

pointed out that such accounts told only one part of the whole story. While no one could argue that there was no gold in the Klondike, some noted that newspapers printed only positive material about the largest finds. The mainstream media failed to tell their readers that for every successful prospector, there were many more unsuccessful ones. *The Youth's Companion* grumped that "the story of the great 'finds' has been told so often and in so many different ways that every nugget has practically been magnified into many nuggets."<sup>91</sup> Historically conscious writers pointed out that most past mining rushes proved transitory. This argument was especially applicable to gold fields based on placer mining. Geologists warned that placer gold was a notoriously unreliable indicator of wealth. Once prospectors exhausted the surface gold, that might be the end, until larger corporations with capital came in to develop any hardrock quartz deposits.<sup>92</sup>

A bit of accounting work seemed to show that the resources poured into the Klondike venture exceeded its gold output. Some observers wondered if the whole thing was really worth the money. Everyone who started out for the gold fields had to outfit, an expensive task. Of those who started, only a few reached the Klondike, and of this group, even fewer discovered enough gold to cover their expenses.<sup>93</sup> The financial aspect was only part of the problem. Other issues were not quantifiable. The sheer amount of backbreaking labor involved in the venture was incalculable. Furthermore, what of the lives ruined by the gold rush, what of the lives lost? Could any amount of yellow metal

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<sup>91</sup> No Author, "No Title," *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1898, 40; No Author, "Keep Away from Klondike," *The Youth's Companion*, 24 February 1898, 94.

<sup>92</sup> No Author, "Keep Away from Klondike," 94; John E. Bennett, "Placer Gold and How it is Secured," *The Cosmopolitan*, November 1898, 33; G. Frederick Wright, "Alaska and Its Resources," *Christian Observer*, 1 September 1897, 20.

<sup>93</sup> No Author, "Current Comment," *Christian Observer*, 22 February 1898, 9; No Author, "Secular News: Domestic," *Christian Observer*, 6 September 1899, 23; Ernest T. Williams, "Klondike – A Study in Booms," *The Living Age*, 23 September 1899, 826.

justify broken lives or lost husbands and fathers? It seemed that the Klondike ledger book showed far more debits, financial and otherwise, than credits.<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to popular hopes and conceptions, the Klondike placers were no place for the poor or inexperienced. Ideally, all a man need to succeed in the placer gold fields was a pick, shovel, pan, and determination. Equipment was relatively inexpensive, and the panning method was fairly easy to learn. However, the Klondike placers fit few of these conventions. First of all, the Klondike venture cost a great deal of money. One guidebook warned that “the Yukon is not entirely a poor man’s country,” and that it was preferable to have some capital before going.<sup>95</sup> Furthermore, experienced miners pointed out that placer mining was not easy, popular images notwithstanding. The harsh Klondike climate exacerbated the already backbreaking work. One guidebook concluded that Klondike mining, “is the toughest kind of work. It compels great sacrifices of comfort and constant attention to business. It is no child’s play.”<sup>96</sup>

It was also quite possible that would-be prospectors might never get the chance to even turn a shovelful of gravel. In order to prospect, one needed a claim, and claims were in woefully short supply in the Klondike. In fact, prospectors in the Canadian Northwest already staked out most of the area before the great rush from the States arrived in the summer of 1898. Often, the only options available if one wished to

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<sup>94</sup> No Author, “Current History,” *The Congregationalist*, 18 August 1898, 207; No Author, “Current Topics,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 23 September 1897, 442.

<sup>95</sup> North American Transportation and Trading Company, *Alaska and the Gold Fields of the Yukon, Koyukuk, Tanana, Klondike and Their Tributaries* (Chicago: s. n., 1899), 58.

<sup>96</sup> John William Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America; the Story as Told by Ladue, Berry, Phiscator and Other Gold Finders. With Maps, Diagrams and Illustrations* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis and Company, 1897), 99; Charles Alexander Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development and Future Possibilities. Illustrated by Isaac B. Beales* (Baltimore: Maryland Publishing Company, 1897), 19; *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska; With Maps, Routes, Cost of Living, Experiences of Those Who Have Been There and Much Other Valuable Information Indispensable to Those Contemplating a Trip to the Most Prolific and Richest Gold Fields in the World* (Philadelphia: The Progressive Publishing Company, 1897), 126.

prospect were leaving for another area, or trying to purchase a claim. Buying a working claim was no guarantee of success, though. Most newcomers knew next to nothing about prospecting. These “tenderfeet” sometimes fell prey to confidence men. These “nimble witted sharpers” passed themselves off as veteran miners. The conmen then sold gullible fellows a “salted” mine. Salting a mine involved scattering trace amounts of gold throughout the claim in order to convince his dupe that the claim must be rich. Another pessimist speculated that any available claims would eventually, and inevitably, pass into the hands of wealthy men and large corporations.<sup>97</sup>

Many concerned critics argued that mining was not responsible work. One guidebook stated that “it would be foolish for a man to give up all he has on a chance, to leave a good position here and risk all his money there.”<sup>98</sup> Virtuous men earned money through a combination of hard work, patience, and sound judgment. Wealth accumulated slowly but steadily, dollar by dollar. These men did not leave a steady job to run off wherever their fancy took them to pursue mirages and golden dreams. Virtuous men had an ironclad sense of responsibility to their families and their employers.<sup>99</sup> Steady, though unexciting work benefited not only the worker himself, but his family as well. Money meant food, shelter, clothing, and a few luxury items. Breadwinning was the virtuous man’s top priority. They heeded the warning that, “Any man who has a good home here and a good occupation should not be carried away with the idea that he can pick gold off the bushes in that country.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> No Author, “The Klondike Gold Fields,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 12 August 1897, 376; *Klondike: The Chicago Record’s Book For Gold Seekers* (Chicago: The Chicago Record Company, 1897), 529; Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development and Future Possibilities*, 23.

<sup>98</sup> Sola, *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New El Dorado*, i.

<sup>99</sup> No Author, “Book Notes,” *New York Evangelist*, 24 August 1899, 10; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 55.

<sup>100</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 176; Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 13-14; *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska; with Maps, Routes, Cost of Living*, 126.



Some publications pointed out that men could make money more easily and much closer to home than the Klondike. The farmer, the shopkeeper, and the clerk who worked hard and saved were bound to make money. If they kept at it steadily, one publication predicted, they would have more in five years than the average Klondike prospector. Furthermore, industrious fellows who stayed close to home to work did not have to face the rigors of the trip or the harshness of the climate.<sup>101</sup> *Outlook* magazine concluded that “the man who stays at home and plods on his farm or in his shop or office is, in the vast majority of cases, better off, healthier physically and morally, and has had indefinitely more enjoyment of life than the man who devotes his life to the calling of everyday placer mining.”<sup>102</sup>

Prospecting seemed fit for the lazy and the greedy, not the responsible. Prospecting offered “crazy people” a shortcut to wealth; those who could not rest with their company salaries risked life and limb to get rich quick. One magazine lashed out, “the Klondikers are simply looking for a short road to luxurious inactivity.”<sup>103</sup> The idea of gold, critics claimed, had a diabolical power to alter men’s behavior. If virtuous men were steady, reliable, temperate, and clear-headed, the desire to obtain gold kindled passions completely antithetical to these ideals. Horrified writers used words like “rage,” “fury,” and “lust,” to describe the change the yellow metal effected in men.<sup>104</sup> Irresponsible males staked everything on the slim hope that they might strike it rich.

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<sup>101</sup> No Author, “*Massachusetts Ploughman Farmers Meeting*,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 5 February 1898, 4; No Author, “No Title,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 5 February 1898, 7; No Author, “*Massachusetts Ploughman Farmers Meeting*,” 2 April 1898, 4.

<sup>102</sup> No Author, “No Title,” *Outlook*, 11 September 1897, 105-106.

<sup>103</sup> Alva Agee, “True Living,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 5 February 1898, 2; No Author, “The Vacation Fund,” *Outlook*, 4 September 1897, 17.

<sup>104</sup> No Author, “Outlook on the Yukon,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 23 December 1897, 876; No Author, “Yukon Gold Fever,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 16 September 1897, 361; *Official Guide to the Klondike Country and the Gold Fields of Alaska: With Official Maps* (Chicago: W. B. Conkey Company, 1897), 62.

They would let nothing, not cold, storms, or starvation, stand in the way of their maniacal quest. *The Independent* lamented that, “The greed of the Spaniards of Pizarro’s day for the shining metal was no greater than that which was manifested in the wild rush....The news of gold discovery seems to have the power of creating a fever in the blood, and men, in these latter days, women as well, hurry off at mad speed to have their chance, often a slim one, at fortune.”<sup>105</sup>

The opportunity for sudden wealth in the gold fields seems to have touched a raw nerve among the spokesmen for responsible, virtuous, middle-class men. Rich though the Klondike soil might be, it was not likely that many men would profit from its bounty. Critics carped about exaggerated stories of wealth. They pointed out the scarcity of claims, and the intense physical labor involved in placer mining. Perhaps most importantly, though, get-rich prospecting was not labor befitting a man with serious business and breadwinning obligations. Far better for husbands and fathers to stay close to home and rely on a steady job and frugal money management, than for them to stake everything on a get-rich-quick scheme with only marginal chances of success.

In 1897, editor G. Wharton James spoke for many Klondike critics when he wrote, “I am fully satisfied there is gold there, tons of it, but too much has been said and written about it, and much too little about the hardships and perils to be encountered.”<sup>106</sup> Many publications urged potential prospectors to think through their options thoroughly before leaving. Why should comfortable middle-class men risk all the privations of the North when they could stay safe and comfortable at home? Authors warned that anyone

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<sup>105</sup> H.K. Carroll, “The Klondike Gold Fields,” *The Independent*, 12 August 1897, 7.

<sup>106</sup> James G. Wharton, ed., *The Klondike: A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields* (Los Angeles: B. R. Baumgardt, 1897), 49.

sitting safe and warm beside his fireplace could dream of striking it rich. In theory, dreamers thought, the trip sounded straightforward enough. In practice, it was far more difficult than any parlor prospector or armchair explorer realized. More experienced men warned these adventure-seekers to curb their enthusiasm for a few moments. There was no reason to hurry, and every reason for prudence. Anyone could look at a map, or read a newspaper account, but maps did not tell of subzero temperatures, or the dearth of facilities for the traveler along the trail. Furthermore, the glowing stories of wealth did not guarantee that everyone would succeed, for they told only of the lucky.<sup>107</sup> One writer put the issues in the starkest terms, pointedly asking would-be prospectors “if they are willing to undergo solitude, the darkness, coarse food and manual work attending a winter’s diggings on a claim. It means not only grit, but patience of the heroic order, for the odds are always against you through it all.”<sup>108</sup>

It followed from these warnings that men going to the Klondike must have certain qualifications. Considering the dangers and privations, men should be experienced outdoorsmen. The Far North was no place for the soft or the inexperienced. In order to survive, a man could not be lazy or expect others to do his work for him. Prospecting required energy and exertion. In addition to a strong work ethic, miners needed patience. It was easy for headlines to lull men into complacency with stories of easy gains. In fact, prospecting was usually exceptionally tedious and boring work. Finally, the prospector

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<sup>107</sup> Sola, *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New El Dorado*, 81-82; Department of the Interior, Canada, *Truth About the Klondike. Information Respecting the Yukon District From the Reports of William Ogilvie* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1897), 3; Ernest Ingersoll, *Golden Alaska; A Complete Account to Date of the Yukon Valley; Its History, Geography, Mineral and Other Resources, Opportunities and Means of Access* (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Company, 1897), v; Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development and Future Possibilities*, 6; James William Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West* (Chicago: Britton Company, 1897), 13, 21.

<sup>108</sup> Henry Laurenz Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them* (Portland: H. L. Wells, 1897), 37.

had to deal with isolation, sometimes complete, and loneliness. If he loved an active social life, he had better to stay at home. Yet the combination of all of these characteristics and skills still did not guarantee success.<sup>109</sup>

Potential Klondikers also had to deal with information problems. Some rushed off, headless of warnings, with no conception of what lay before them. The overly impetuous knew nothing, and did not care. Even men seeking information sometimes ran into trouble. Reliable information concerning the trip and the conditions in the gold fields was often frustratingly hard to obtain. Critics charged that those with special interests in Klondike development deliberately spread exaggerated stories that left enthusiastic Klondikers woefully misinformed. Even as far north as St. Michael, speculators and confidence men still duped the gold-crazed crowd, sometimes over the vigorous protests of those actually familiar with the situation upriver.<sup>110</sup>

Sources privy to reliable information wrote desperately in an attempt to dissuade men from going north. In February 1898, *The Independent* printed a joke in which two men discussed the gold rush. The first fellow reported that he was going to start a “Klondike club.” The other man assumed this meant his friend was leaving soon. Not so, said the first man: “We are organizing to keep one another from going.”<sup>111</sup> Such superficially lighthearted banter carried a grim message that others echoed in more strident and dour tones. Repeated warnings came that the Klondike was “no vacation tour,” and that it was ridiculous and dangerous for men to think so. Such stupidity and

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<sup>109</sup> Sola, *Klondike: Truth and Facts of the New El Dorado*, i; No Author, “An Alaskan Tragedy,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 17 February 1898, 3; *Chicago Record*, 239-240.

<sup>110</sup> Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 19; No Author, “Current Topics,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 28 August 1897, 4; John Sidney Webb, “The River Trip to the Klondike,” *Century Illustrated*, March 1898, 692.

<sup>111</sup> No Author, “Pebbles,” *The Independent*, 17 February 1898, 28.

hubris might cost them dearly.<sup>112</sup> More realistic authors used the images of war and battle to describe the experiences of the trail. Most who attacked the mountains and rivers would fail. Some men did emerge victorious, but only after a heroic and harrowing struggle. Even the victors claimed they would never return again, not even for twice the gold. As to the others, Edward S. Curtis wrote, “Nature took almost the entire assaulting host as prisoners. When she released them, many there were who fell back, broken in purse, worn in body, and despondent in mind....the wreckage of the first Klondike rush.”<sup>113</sup> Another critic warned that the Klondike would not yield its riches voluntarily. Men must wrest them from the earth by sheer force, and that effort left many aching, bleeding, and defeated. He proposed that every man heading north should be fit enough to pass the entrance examination for the German Army or the Northwest Mounted Police.<sup>114</sup>

The trail over the Chilkoot Pass was the most difficult part of the entire trip. This portion of the journey inspired some of the sternest warnings to potential travelers. Simply reaching the point where the true ascent began was an arduous task by itself. The trail was poor. It led through a series of snaking canyons and steep gullies. It wound through a heavy forest littered with huge boulders and carpeted with a soupy mess of mud and slush. It was easy to lose footing under such conditions. Travelers reached the base of the pass tired, worn, and winded. And the true test had not even begun.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Carroll, “The Klondike Gold Fields,” 8; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 101.

<sup>113</sup> Edward S. Curtis, “The Rush to the Klondike Over Mountain Passes,” *Century Illustrated*, March 1898, 697.

<sup>114</sup> Hamlin Garland, “Ho, For the Klondike,” *McClure’s*, March 1898, 453.

<sup>115</sup> Charles Frederick Stansbury, *Klondike, the Land of Gold, Illustrated: Containing All Available Practical Information of Every Description Concerning the New Gold Fields: What They Are and How to Reach Them, a Short History of Alaska, a Synopsis of the Personal Testimony of Miners Who Have Been on the Ground, a Digest of Mining Laws of the United States and Canada, the Latest Authentic Maps, with a*

Scaling the Chilkoot pushed men to their utmost limit. The trail was exceptionally steep, its grade often over thirty percent. At one point, the grade reached forty-five degrees. At this place, travelers could reach out and touch the trail in front of them. The trail was rarely in good condition. A.C. Harris remembered “the now almost perpendicular mountain of ice and half-thawed snow,” and the “struggle upwards, sometimes up to our knees in slush, sometimes clinging with hands and feet to the slippery mountain.”<sup>116</sup>

The trail was bad enough to cross unencumbered by gear, but for prospectors toting their outfits, the trip was even more arduous. The steepness of the trail meant that men had to carry everything themselves; there was no way for packhorses to make it over the mountain. Men set up block and tackle rigs to lift their gear from one shelf (a narrow, flat area) to another, one hundred pounds at a time, backbreaking labor. At one point, the heavily laden climbers encountered a virtual wall of ice. For six hundred feet of trail, the men had to cut steps into the ice in order to continue. The trail was so steep, men had to constantly lean forward to maintain their balance and equilibrium.<sup>117</sup> Some men reached the lakes on the other side of the pass so exhausted that they could not continue further. One guidebook, *The Routes and Mineral Resources of Northwestern Canada*, reported

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*Review of the Famous Gold Rushes of the World* (New York: F. Tennyson Neely, 1897), 11; Ingersoll, *Golden Alaska*, 45; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 120-121.

<sup>116</sup> Joseph Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets; Being a Brief Description of the Famous Gold Regions of the Great Canadian Northwest and Alaska* (New York: American Technical Book Company, 1897), 25-26; A. C. Harris, *Alaska and the Klondike Gold Fields. Practical Instructions for Fortune Seekers. Including Mrs. Eli Gage's Experience of a Year Among the Yukon Mining Camps; Mrs. Schwatka's Recollection of Her Husband as the Alaskan Pathfinder; Prosaic Side of Gold Hunting, as Seen by Joaquin Miller, the Poet of the Sierras. Embellished with Many Engravings Representing Mining and Other Scenes in Alaska* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1897), 141.

<sup>117</sup> Stansbury, *Klondike, The Land of Gold, Illustrated*, 15; Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, *To the Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific Railway* (Vancouver: n.p., 1897), 18; Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 12; *Klondike and All About It. By a Practical Mining Engineer* (New York: Excelsior Publishing House, 1897), 33.

the words of a globe-trotting adventurer: “I have roughed it,” he said, “for the past fifteen years in Siberia, in Borneo, and in Chinese Tartary, but I can safely describe that climb over the Chilkoot as the severest physical experience of my life.”<sup>118</sup>

The Chilkoot also experienced violent storms which made the trip even more hazardous. Many storms blew up suddenly and without warning. Furthermore, they might strike at any time from September to May. The storms might last only a couple of hours, but might continue for days or even weeks.<sup>119</sup> One traveler recalled the fury of a storm on the Chilkoot, saying, “The blinding snow rendered it dangerous in the extreme to attempt the descent....A misstep meant death....[I] lay down to listen to the howling of an Alaskan storm, which seemed to shake the very mountain with its violence.”<sup>120</sup> The storms, and the avalanches that sometimes accompanied them, could turn deadly. A couple of magazines speculated that the spring thaw would reveal a trail strewn with the corpses and skeletons of unfortunate Klondikers.<sup>121</sup>

Although not as taxing as the Chilkoot Trail, the route over White Pass was far from easy. Many travelers took the White Pass Trail because they believed it would be an easier trip. Although a thousand feet lower than the Chilkoot, the route offered its own challenges. A good deal of the trail wound through marshy areas. Rain, melting snow, and the tread of hundreds of feet turned the trail into a sticky gumbo. Men and horses sank to their knees in the mire. Klondikers had to clamber over boulders, stumps,

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<sup>118</sup> Colliery Engineering Company, *Placer Mining. A Hand-Book for Klondike and Other Miners and Prospectors* (Scranton, PA: The Colliery Engineering Company, 1897), 26; E. Jerome Dyer, *The Routes and Mineral Resources of Northwestern Canada* (London: G. Philip and Son, 1898), 240.

<sup>119</sup> Stansbury, *Klondike, the Land of Gold, Illustrated*, 9-10; H.H. Paramore, compiler., *The Practical Guide to America's New El Dorado, Klondike Gold Fields: Being a Compendium of Reliable Information Bearing Upon the Gold Region of Alaska* (St. Louis: S. F. Myerson Printing Company, 1897), 30; No Author, “Perils of the Klondike,” *The Watchman*, 12 August 1897, 18.

<sup>120</sup> *Klondike and All About It*, 97-98.

<sup>121</sup> No Author, “The Rush to the Klondike,” *Outlook*, 14 August 1897, 934; Carroll, “The Klondike Gold Fields,” 7.

and logs. Travelers tried various methods to improve the trail. They corduroyed the deepest mud holes with logs, and blasted boulders with dynamite. Even after nearly three months of grooming the trail, most groups had a difficult time making headway. A trip of a dozen miles felt like fifty at the end of the day.<sup>122</sup>

The dangers of the trail did not end with the crossing of the passes; Klondikers still had to negotiate the treacherous White Horse Rapids. This stretch of river, about a half-mile in extent, was the culmination of nearly six miles of whitewater. Men could, and did, shoot these rapids successfully. However, prudence dictated that no one challenge the rapids unless by accident. Experienced rivermen highly recommended portaging around this turbulent water. Some men failed to heed the warnings, and paid with their lives. Estimates of the number of drowned men ranged as high as thirty. Passing a crude grave or lonely wooden cross became a disturbingly common occurrence on this part of the river.<sup>123</sup> One writer recalled sadly,

Many lives have been lost at these various points of danger, and along this section of river many graves dot the shore....Niches cut in the frozen ground mark the lonely graves of fathers and sons whose return is waited for in vain by loved ones in the realm of civilization. It is a sad thing indeed to lay your friends away in that desolate region, where only wild beasts congregate to mourn a requiem over their graves.<sup>124</sup>

Those who succeeded in climbing the passes and navigating rivers and rapids entered a harsh country of incredible extremes. Cyrus Adams of *The Chautauquan* griped, “The gold quest probably never took fortune hunters to so desolate a region and

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<sup>122</sup> Louis Arthur Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country, a Description of Our Alaskan Land of Gold From the Latest Official and Scientific Sources and Personal Observation. With a Chapter by John F. Pratt. New Maps and Photographic Illustrations* (Philadelphia: H. Altemus, 1897), 191; Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 50; Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets*, 32.

<sup>123</sup> Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets*, 46; William Ogilvie, *The Klondike Official Guide: Canada's Great Gold Find, the Yukon District, Prepared by William Ogilvie; With Regulations Governing Placer Mining* (Toronto: The Hunter, Rose Company, 1898), 119; Wharton, *The Klondike: A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 17-18; Dyer, *The Routes and Resources of Northwestern Canada*, 241.

<sup>124</sup> *Klondike and All About It*, 103.



so wretched a climate.”<sup>125</sup> The extremes of the Yukon climate amazed and baffled prospectors. The Arctic summer, although quite short, was often incredibly hot. Temperatures sometimes soared to over one hundred degrees. The heat melted the snow, which collected in stagnant pools in low lying areas. The water and mud often caused the humidity to increase. These conditions also brought another problem: a plague of mosquitoes, of almost Biblical proportions, caused pain and intense irritation along the whole course of the sinuous Yukon River and its tributaries.<sup>126</sup>

Men knew the Yukon country was cold, but the severity of the northern Canadian winters shocked many of them. Temperatures dropped to fifty and sixty degrees below zero with alarming frequency. On rarer occasions, the mercury plunged to nearly eighty degrees below zero. At this point, a man might throw a pan of hot water into the air, and watch it freeze before it hit the ground. Winter temperatures in the United States sometimes matched those in the Klondike, but never for an extended period of time. Winter sometimes began in September, and the mercury might not rise above zero for months.<sup>127</sup>

Prospectors also faced the potential problem of food scarcity and starvation. Critics predicted that many Klondikers would scrimp on provisions in order to save money and make better time on the trail. This shortsightedness could cost them dearly with the onset of the Arctic winter. Men also arrived worn down from the hard trip. The combination of fatigue and malnutrition predisposed them to serious health problems.

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<sup>125</sup> Cyrus C. Adams, “Gold Fields of Alaska and the Yukon,” *The Chautauquan*, October 1897, 56.

<sup>126</sup> Garland, “Ho, For the Klondike,” 443; H.M.F., “All About the Klondike: A Man Who Belongs Nowhere and Everywhere,” *New York Evangelist*, 11 November 1897, 7; Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 18; No Author, “Real Life in the Klondike,” *The Living Age*, 12 March 1898, 762.

<sup>127</sup> *Chicago Record*, 226, 267-273; No Author, “Perils of the Klondike,” 18.

Still, the *New York Observer and Chronicle* wrote, “neither toil nor frost nor danger of starvation will keep men from following the sources of wealth.” The same publication lamented that the latest supply shipment to Dawson consisted of boots and hard liquor. Men could not eat boots, and liquor would only make existing problems worse.<sup>128</sup>

Anyone who planned on hunting to supplement his supplies was in for a hard time. The crush of hungry prospectors wiped out game for miles in every direction. Furthermore, it seemed that privation brought out the worst in some men. Louis Arthur Coolidge reported that some greedy men refused to give away any of their possessions to help their starving fellows. If this continued, Coolidge mourned, “God only knows how many frozen corpses will make food for wolves on Klondike this year.”<sup>129</sup>

Dawson was not an especially healthy place. Some observers pointed out that the city was built on a swamp. Frenzied construction, as well as sheer laziness, precluded any sanitation infrastructure from taking shape. Sewage disposal was unregulated and primitive. People dumped waste wherever they pleased, often in the streets. The streets turned into a muck of mud and manure, animal and human. The hot summer sun baked the concoction hard. These unsanitary conditions led to bouts of fever in Dawson City. A lack of fresh fruits and vegetables combined with a monotonous diet of beans and flapjacks led to many cases of scurvy amongst the miners. There was also a shortage of

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<sup>128</sup> No Author, “Current Topics,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 21 August 1897, 4; No Author, “Yukon Gold Fields,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 16 September 1897, 361; No Author, “Notes,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 23 December 1897, 878.

<sup>129</sup> No Author, “Klondike,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 28 October 1897, 544; Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country*, 73.

doctors and medical facilities in the area during the early days. Often, the only place for patients was a flimsy tent, drafty and buffeted by the elements.<sup>130</sup>

In conclusion, many practical factors made it difficult for men to reach the Klondike gold fields and survive there. The risks of the trip, critics contended, should make virtuous middle-class men think twice before leaving home, family, and work to try their luck on the trails and in the gold fields. Many men left home with only the vaguest idea of what lay before them. Experts cautioned men to think through their decision thoroughly before deciding whether or not to go. Sometimes, reliable information was hard to obtain; in other cases, men ignored it. The overland journey was extraordinarily hard. Men faced a precipitous ascent, storms, and avalanches on the Chilkoot Trail. Klondikers on the White Pass Trail slogged through miles of mud. A number of men lost their lives trying to shoot the White Horse Rapids, while the more prudent portaged around them. In the Klondike country, men faced a climate characterized by extremes, searing heat in the summer, and bone-numbing cold in the winter. The specter of starvation and disease was always present. In short, men faced almost overwhelming obstacles to reach, and survive in, a place where only the luckiest struck it rich.

John Sidney Webb was not impressed with Dawson City. He saw it as disorderly, hell-raising frontier town, largely unfit for respectable middle-class citizens. However, many other observers commented on the orderliness of the region's largest gold camp and the "respectable" middle-class institutions that rapidly took shape along the banks of the Yukon. After a nearly two- thousand-mile trip up the Yukon from St. Michael, Webb

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<sup>130</sup> No Author, "Current Topics," *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 9 October 1897, 4; Frederick Palmer, "Gold and Society in the Klondike," *Forum*, December 1898, 611; No Author, "Klondike Doctor," *Harper's Bazaar*, 6 August 1898, 672.

expected better. “Dawson City seems like a joke,” he wrote. Amidst one of the largest, richest gold fields in history, the citizens lived in squalor. He complained that the city was built upon a swamp. Despite the profusion of gold, Webb concluded that “the negroes in the cabins of a Southern plantation live better than the richest man in the country.”<sup>131</sup> Another traveler, Frederick Palmer, lamented the condition of the trailhead towns of Skagway and Dyea. It seemed that these towns acted as a powerful magnet for all sorts of riffraff. The shiftless, lawless, and rowdies all gravitated to the towns. Not possessing strong force of character, these men rested content and immoral at the base of the passes, while “better” men passed through on the way north. An article in *Zion’s Herald* cried that in the Klondike, “the condition of affairs favors lawlessness and robbery.” The *New York Evangelist* lamented the low character of the mining camps. In the early days, it warned, the camps were particularly vulnerable to lawlessness and low morals. After passing this judgment, the author concluded with a prayer of supplication for the miners: “May God be the Protector of the new land of gold, and in due time may there come out of all of these mingled elements a community that is not only rich in the treasures of the earth, but clean and pure and white as the snows on these Northern mountains.”<sup>132</sup>

On the whole, however, the evidence examined reveals a shock of a very different nature: a shock at the orderliness of the mining camps, especially Dawson City. *The Official Guide to the Klondike Country and the Gold Fields of Alaska* exclaimed,

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<sup>131</sup> Webb, “River Trip to the Klondike,” 684-685.

<sup>132</sup> Frederick Palmer, “The Pilgrimage to the Klondike and its Outcome,” *Forum*, September 1898, 49; No Author, “The Klondike Rush and Routes,” *Zion’s Herald*, 9 February 1898, 163; H. M. F., “All About the Klondike,” 7.

“Dawson City is one of the most moral towns of its kind in the world.”<sup>133</sup> How could this be so? One theory for the maintenance of law and order was the existence of the miners’ meetings. In the early days before the arrival of government functionaries, the miners themselves formed *ad hoc* courts to adjudicate disputes between their fellows. These courts might address claim disputes or issues of theft. The miners’ tribunals functioned fairly well. They handed down very harsh sentences, including banishment for theft. The Yukon experienced few, if any, lynchings or other acts of vigilante justice.<sup>134</sup>

The presence of the Northwest Mounted Police was probably the single most important reason for the maintenance of law and order in the Klondike. Perhaps the most important reason for the peaceful condition of Dawson was the Mounties’ enforcement of a no handgun policy within city limits. Compared with American mining camps, the contrast was remarkable. Amazed observers wrote that whereas a revolver was seen as an absolute necessity in American boom towns, the case was just the opposite in Dawson. Weapons for self defense were unnecessary. Furthermore, the native population was peaceful, and a rifle or shotgun was more effective for hunting game. Frederick Palmer wrote that anyone who violated firearms regulations was “punished with the commendable promptitude of British justice.” He went on to claim that the Mounties enforced law and order more effectively in the Klondike than any number of United States Marshals could do in any American mining town.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> *The Official Guide to the Klondike Country and the Gold Fields of Alaska*, 126.

<sup>134</sup> Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country*, 64; Robert Oglesby, “The Klondike Gold Region,” *The Cosmopolitan*, September 1897, 528.

<sup>135</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 147; *Direct Route, Yukon and Klondike; San Francisco Best Place to Outfit* (San Francisco: n. p., 1897), 10; Palmer, “Gold and Society in the Klondike,” 613-614.

Other observers argued that the basic good character of the prospectors themselves was the reason for the peace and order in the Klondike. To this way of thinking, the Mounties were fine, but they had very little to do in enforcing the law, because hardly anyone was inclined to break it. The miners, as a group, seemed like a fine bunch of fellows. They were hardworking, but more importantly, scrupulously honest. No one locked their doors. If a stranger happened upon a cabin while the owner was away, the visitor was free to help himself to anything in the place, provided he left a list of what he had taken, and that he took steps to repay the owner. In the early days, men left large amounts of gold lying about their dwellings in pails, baskets, and empty food cans, and no one took any of it. However, the incoming rush from the south brought more unsavory characters, and their arrival led more prospectors to lock their cabins and guard their sluiceboxes. Still, compared with earlier American gold camps in California, and later in Nome, things in the Klondike were quite orderly.<sup>136</sup>

Respectable middle-class citizens, Canadian and American, moved quickly to set up a social structure that replicated that of the cities and towns they left behind. Social lines were clearly marked, separating the middle- and upper-class from the menial laborers, prospectors, prostitutes, and saloon men. The middle-class residents of Dawson drew upon an elaborate network of connections to set themselves apart and hold on to their status. Some connections reached back to familial relations, while others fostered newer contacts based upon business and social interactions in Dawson. These elites dominated “respectable” social life in the community.<sup>137</sup> This has led historian Charlene

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<sup>136</sup> Lincoln Steffens, “Life in the Klondike Gold Fields: Personal Observations of the Founder of Dawson,” *McClure's*, September 1897, 964; A.A. Hill, “The Klondike,” *Munsey's*, February 1899, 720-724; No Author, “No Title,” *The Independent*, 19 July 1900, 1755.

<sup>137</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 137, 195-197.

Porsild to conclude that, “From the onset, Dawson residents moved within a set of social relations similar to those in much older Canadian [and American] settlements and this assisted them in feeling at home in the new town.”<sup>138</sup>

The business sector played an important role in Dawson City. Dawson boosters wrote that the tundra echoed with the sounds of saws and hammers. Houses and businesses were springing up, and the city began to take on a more organized look. Dawson contained a number of large mercantile houses that did brisk business with both the prospectors and professional classes. A.S. Allen exulted that the Standard Oil Company chose Dawson as its base of operations in the North. That Mr. Rockefeller’s behemoth chose Dawson seemed a sign that the world had faith in the Klondike and saw a clearly established permanence to Dawson City. Allen went on for nearly fifty pages, describing and advertising Dawson businesses, and glorying in their number and diversity. He listed them off: Emil Stauf, realtor, Brimston and Stuart, undertakers, Hicks and Thompson, a freighting outfit, the Northern Commercial Company, a wholesale merchandising firm, and jeweler C.H. Lindemann, to name a few. It seemed clear that Dawson was meant for greatness.<sup>139</sup>

Women also chose to go to the Klondike. Contrary to the popular image of the gold camp as an exclusively male domain, Charlene Porsild notes that “Dawson City was always home to a significant number of women and children.”<sup>140</sup> Although not everyone recommended that women make the difficult journey, many embarked anyway. In some cases, women succumbing to the “Klondike Fever” clamored to join expeditions heading

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>139</sup> A. S. Allen, ed., *Dawson, Yukon Territory, the Golden City. A Glance at Her History, a Review of Her Commerce, with Illustrations of the City and Some of Nature’s Grandest Perspectives* (Dawson, Yukon Territory: Press of the *Klondike Nugget*, 1901).

<sup>140</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 194.

north. Lonely miners could surely benefit from some female company, and the *Chicago Record* wrote that “a carload of girls would go like hotcakes [in the Klondike].”<sup>141</sup>

Character was more important than numbers, though. Not every female would benefit society. “Highly respectable” women would be a distinct benefit to the Klondike.

Upstanding women could domesticate unruly men, and turn them into useful members of society.<sup>142</sup>

Upstanding professionals and respectable women needed their own social institutions, set apart from the ruder entertainments of the prospectors and those who serviced them. An expanding population and the growth of businesses led writers to conclude that Dawson had shed its mining camp image and assumed the identity and conveniences of a modern city. A.S. Allen wrote enthusiastically that, “Where once the city lay in a miry bog it now rests upon a solid foundation – the product of immense labor and expense.”<sup>143</sup> Life was not as rude as a newcomer might expect. The Mounties kept the peace, and the arrival of upstanding women and their families helped to spur the growth of many institutions patronized by the respectable middle-class citizens of Dawson City. Churches, social and literary clubs, and respectable dancing halls sprang up under the aegis of the middle-class community. These gave their patrons a place to gather and associate with civic and moral “equals.” Concerts and literary societies offered a chance to expand cultural horizons and engage in polite conversation. A.A. Hill summarized, “Social and literary clubs have been formed, whist rivals faro, and society is

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<sup>141</sup> *Chicago Record*, 272.

<sup>142</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 101, 140; *Klondike and All About It*, 48; *Chicago Record*, 486.

<sup>143</sup> North American Transportation and Trading Company, *Alaska and the Gold Fields of the Yukon, Koyukuk, Tanana, Klondike and Their Tributaries*, 50; Allen, *Dawson, Yukon Territory*, 22.



gradually resolving itself into the usual classes. Not that the gambling houses do not continue to thrive and be a power in the town, but they do not rule.”<sup>144</sup>

In summary, Dawson City society offered a number of important benefits to upstanding middle-class men. While observers might have expected a wide open hell-raising mining camp devoid of morals and manners, many reported something quite different. Observers commented upon the orderly, businesslike nature of Dawson City. Dawson was not a violent place and the community was generally peaceful, a product of the miners’ meetings, but especially the presence of the Northwest Mounted Police. It had a thriving business community. Virtuous middle-class men found a social structure quite similar to the one they had left, and assimilated themselves into it. The “respectable” female population and the order provided by the Mounties allowed the middle class of Dawson to set up their own social institutions, in order to provide insulated spaces in which virtuous men might more easily replicate the activities and values of true civilization.

Men traveling to the Klondike for base means drew the ire of Christian magazines, which criticized the Klondikers for misplaced priorities and a neglect of Christian duty. The fever for gold and its greatest symptom, irrational greed, clouded men’s judgment and distorted their ideals and goals. True Christian men should seek to serve God, not themselves. The gold rush represented a colossal misallocation of talent and resources. The *New York Observer and Chronicle* mourned, “If only men were as

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<sup>144</sup> Harris, *Alaska and the Klondike Gold Fields. Practical Instructions for Fortune Seekers*, 454; Allen, *Dawson, Yukon Territory*, 23-24; *On to the Klondike! and the Great Alaska Gold Discoveries: A Concise Treatise Answering Two Questions, How to Get There and What to Take With You; Also Containing Much Essential Information Including Maps and Illustrations. By a Practical Mining Engineer* (New York: A. Marks, 1897), 23; Hill, “The Klondike,” 728-730.

eager to walk the golden streets of the heavenly Jerusalem as to grasp the nuggets of Klondike, how much richer they and humanity would be!”<sup>145</sup> The *New York Evangelist* was a particularly harsh critic of the gold rush. The Beatitudes, it wrote, enjoined men to hunger and thirst after righteousness, not gold. Furthermore, only through service to God could men truly satisfy their deepest longings. Finding God was not as difficult as finding gold, yet men seemed to sacrifice far more to satisfy craven desires. Men were ready to brave cold, starvation, avalanches, and potential economic disaster to find gold. Yet these same men would skip church on Sunday because of inclement weather. They were ready enough to face the howling storms of the Chilkoot, but buckled under a brief gust of unpopularity or peer pressure during the week. The Reverend Henry McEwen set up St. Paul as an example for emulation. McEwen wrote that the saint pursued righteousness with the same vigor as men in the late nineteenth century sought gold. Men should take a lesson from the great evangelist, and realign their priorities. The reward for St. Paul’s quest was far greater than any earthly treasure.<sup>146</sup>

Some critics complained that the money men spent on the Klondike venture could be spent with far greater benefits in the mission fields, both foreign and domestic. China, for example, contained millions of benighted idol worshippers, who, if given the chance to hear the Gospel, would surely abandon the superstitions of their ancestors. Christianity, missionaries argued, could be an unstoppable force for good in the world. Missionaries were dedicated, yet usually sadly under-funded, servants of God. If Christians would divert the funds they spent on the selfish, soulless quest for gold into

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<sup>145</sup> No Author, “Notes,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 18 November 1897, 670.

<sup>146</sup> Reverend Theodore L. Cuyler, “Christ-Constrained Christians,” *New York Evangelist*, 28 October 1897, 4; Reverend Henry F. McEwen, D. D., “Christian Endeavor: The Beatitudes,” *New York Evangelist*, 13 January 1898, 16.

missionary work instead, the results would be astonishing. Americans had the potential to raise millions of dollars to support hospitals, churches, and schools in faraway lands. The Women's Board of Home Missions joined their voice to the chorus condemning the neglect of Christian duty. The Board told horrified readers of the consequences of underfunded mission schools. Schools turned away many girls and young women eager to learn the Good News because the schools because of an inability to clothe, feed, and educate any more students. Horrible things followed: poverty, bondage, and prostitution. *The Watchman* expressed the hope that, "If Christians could see in ...souls what men see in Klondike treasures, what a different world this would soon become! and its joys would be echoed around the throne of heaven."<sup>147</sup>

To those willing to support mission work, the future seemed bright. Enterprising men like Dwight L. Moody and his companions sought to spread the Gospel to all corners of the earth. The Presbyterian A.J. Pierson spearheaded a missionary training effort that recruited some three thousand young people for the cause of Christ. Influential author John R. Mott laid out a plan for Christianizing the world in his widely read book, *The Evangelization of the World in This Generation*. Protestant mission work expanded as the American empire grew. Furthermore, women's participation fostered an increased interest in religious work. Historian Mark Noll has summed up the American proselytizing mood this way: "To many American Protestants at the end of the nineteenth century and in the early years of the twentieth, it seemed as if the evangelization of the

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<sup>147</sup> Albert A. Fulton, "Cities That Bow Down to Wood and Stone," *New York Evangelist*, 10 February 1898, 5; H. E. B., "Women's Board of Home Missions," *New York Evangelist*, 28 April 1898, 19; No Author, "Young People's Work," *The Watchman*, 30 August 1900, 21.

world was within reach....it seemed that the rising tide of America also marked the rising tide of Christian expansion throughout the world.”<sup>148</sup>

The Klondike rush seemed like a perfect opportunity for Christians to spread the Gospel. The churches needed to be aggressive proponents of missionary work in the North, a field which many critics felt had been largely neglected. The Klondike country needed the steady moral guidance of Christianity. The gold discovery led some to examine more deeply their duties as Christians. Some people searched the pages of history and found wonderful encouragement. Never was there a time, the *Christian Observer* claimed, when the servants of God did not heroically answer the call to service. From Sudan to China to Armenia, dedicated men and women sacrificed much, sometimes even their lives, to spread the Word. Now the “heralds of Christ” had an opportunity to do the same in the Klondike. If Christians enacted the provisions of the Great Commission in a “simple and manly fashion” they could not but succeed and win souls for the kingdom.<sup>149</sup>

Critics who complained that there was no religion in the Far North exaggerated. The Russian Orthodox Church’s presence in Alaska dated to the 1790s. Orthodox influence, however, was generally confined to the lower Yukon, and that church had no impact on the Klondike. The Church of England had more success. William Carpenter Bompas arrived on the Yukon in 1865 and began ministering to the Kutchin Indians. In 1873, the Anglican Church placed Bompas in charge of affairs in the Yukon country, and made him Bishop of Selkirk. Bompas’s main focus was Indian missions, and he feared

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<sup>148</sup> Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 291-294.

<sup>149</sup> No Author, “Our Own Work: Two Recruits for Alaska,” *The Congregationalist*, 14 April 1898, 554; No Author, “Missionaries for the Klondike Country,” *New York Evangelist*, 2 September 1897, 7; Basil, “A Simple Fact: Men and Women in Church,” *Christian Observer*, 5 January 1898, 10.

the influence of the miners who poured into the country following the Forty Mile strike. He sought to move his mission to Dawson, but the discovery there handicapped his ability to instruct the natives. In 1884, the Roman Catholic Church moved to counter the Protestant influence on the upper Yukon. Charles John Seghers, Archbishop of Oregon City, journeyed to Rome to present a plan for evangelization before Pope Leo XIII. Leo agreed to support the plan, and made Seghers Bishop of Vancouver. Unfortunately, a mentally unstable traveling companion murdered the bishop on the journey north. This tragic event served to redouble the Catholic commitment to the Yukon country. In 1894, William H. Judge, a Jesuit priest, arrived at Fortymile. When news came of the Klondike discovery, Father Judge moved to Dawson. There he founded the first Catholic church in the city as well as a badly needed hospital. In general, mission work on the upper Yukon dealt with the spiritual needs of the prospectors and white townspeople rather than with the Native population. In addition, few of the missionaries remained settled in one place for long. The transitory nature of placer mining necessitated flexibility and mobility. By the late 1890s, Yukon residents with a spiritual bent had many options. Historian Melody Webb writes that “the upper river consisted of several competitive denominations scrambling for dominance among the large white population.”<sup>150</sup>

American Protestants also answered the call to mission work. Fearing the growing influence of Roman Catholicism in the Yukon, the American Episcopal Church took steps to establish a presence in the mining area. In 1895, the church chose Peter Trimble Rowe to fill the post of Bishop of Alaska. Rowe was a fine choice. He was a strong and athletic outdoorsman. In 1896, he gained the respect of his traveling companions by facing the Chilkoot without complaint, building a boat, and shooting all

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<sup>150</sup> Webb, *The Last Frontier*, 174-187.

the whitewater on the trip. Rowe's initial work was in Circle City, on the Alaskan side of the border. In Circle, Rowe held his first meetings in a saloon. He managed to gain a number of converts, and in a little over a month, he raised the necessary funds to purchase the saloon as the base for his missionary operations. Rowe spent forty-seven years as Bishop of Alaska. In that time, he established schools, hospitals, and twenty-four missions.<sup>151</sup>

Another American missionary was the Reverend S. Hall Young. A Presbyterian from Ohio, Young set out to do religious and medical work in the Klondike. Like Rowe, Young was a good choice for Arctic mission work. He already had extensive experience traveling in Alaska before he returned to the States to take up the ministry. Young was also a hard worker. The *New York Evangelist* wrote that he possessed "an eagerness and energy scarcely to be understood by people in these parts."<sup>152</sup> Things did not go well for Young when he first arrived in Dawson. Initially, he had a hard time finding a suitable place in which to hold services. After a good deal of searching, Young found a house in which to meet. Unfortunately, the house burned to the ground. However, a group of civic-minded individuals stepped forward and offered to finance the construction of a public meeting hall, in which they allowed Young to conduct services. Soon Young's flock began to expand. By early 1898, he headed a substantial and quite ecumenical congregation, complete with a choir. The congregation also sponsored a number of social organizations including regular Bible study and prayer groups, a Sunday school, a

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<sup>151</sup> No Author, "No Title," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 26 August 1897, 272; Webb, *The Last Frontier*, 187-190.

<sup>152</sup> No Author, "Missionaries for the Klondike Country," 7.

Christian Endeavor Society, and a YMCA.<sup>153</sup> Young provided a model for unselfish Christian men. Dedicated to God and Christian service, “He did not go to Alaska for gold and is happy in a ‘find’ of souls more precious than [a] continent of nuggets.”<sup>154</sup>

The missionaries did not neglect young men. In fact, ministering to their needs was especially important. Faced with loneliness and boredom, young men had plenty of opportunities to experiment with sin in the gold fields and mining camps. The *New York Evangelist* complained that, “Thousands of young men are finding their way to this region and will winter here. So far there has been no place outside of his own cabin in which a young man can find companionship or recreation weekdays or Sundays, but the saloon, dance hall, the gambling den, and other demoralizing places.”<sup>155</sup> Men tried to remedy this low state of affairs by establishing a YMCA in Dawson. YMCAs sought to establish a “home away from home,” in which young men could associate with their fellows, engage in cultural activities, and receive Christian instruction, all at a safe distance from the flesh pots and gin palaces. The YMCA represented what David Macleod called “a rival world of recreation,” set off from the world, a spiritual island in sea of worldly sin and corruption.<sup>156</sup> The task of founding the YMCA in Dawson fell to W.A. Reid and Dwight H. Robinson. They would bring everything needed to equip and operate the organization: “Christian and current literature and reading supplies, musical instruments of various kinds, stereopticon, phonograph, athletic appliances, etc.” The building would include a reading room in which to hold Bible studies, “Gospel services,”

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<sup>153</sup> S. Hall Young, “Church Work in the Klondike,” *New York Evangelist*, 3 February 1898, 7; No Author, “Life in the Churches,” *Christian Advocate*, 3 March 1898, 357.

<sup>154</sup> H. E. B., “Board of Home Missions,” *New York Evangelist*, 24 March 1898, 20.

<sup>155</sup> No Author, “The Klondike,” *New York Evangelist*, 9 June 1898, 11.

<sup>156</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 156-165; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 33.

and other social gatherings.<sup>157</sup> In April 1898, the *Congregationalist* reported on more reinforcements heading for the Klondike. These groups of dedicated men were members of the “noted Klondike Gospel Band,” led by one Captain De Soto. The group intended to establish a hospital, Christian newspaper, and “rescue home,” and hold religious services in Dawson; all this in an attempt to “seek by Christian methods to counteract the baleful influences of mining life.”<sup>158</sup>

Christianity seemed to have a salutary effect on the Yukon country. At least that is how the religious press saw events. By 1904, *Christian Advocate* could exult that the Far North “owes much to the Churches...for their efforts to carry the Gospel to its pioneer settlements and to conserve the forms of civilized life.”<sup>159</sup> To others, the Klondike discovery and the resulting missionary work was only one piece of a larger cosmic puzzle. Some believed that the gold rush combined with other world events, including the Spanish-American War and Russian military activity in the Far East, all pointed to the end of the world. All of these events, *The Congregationalist* wrote, “indicate plainly an Almighty Ruler, moving nations like men upon a chessboard, and slowly preparing a new world, wherein, we believe, will dwell righteousness.”<sup>160</sup>

To conclude, Christianity and the duties of a Christian man occupied an important position in Klondike literature. Numerous religious magazines criticized prospective Klondikers for their greed and misplaced priorities. Men seemed to neglect their Christian duties. They should spend money on supporting churches in China and mission schools in the United States, not buying shovels in Seattle or whiskey in Dawson.

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<sup>157</sup> W. A. Reid, “YMCA to be Opened in Dawson, *New York Evangelist*, 9 June 1898, 11.

<sup>158</sup> No Author, “The Interior: Ohio,” *The Congregationalist*, 7 April 1898, 516.

<sup>159</sup> John Parsons, D. D., “Contributions: Glimpses of Alaska,” *Christian Advocate*, 26 May 1904, 840.

<sup>160</sup> No Author, “Russia in the East,” *The Congregationalist*, 5 May 1898, 646.



However, if middle-class men did decide to go north, they should go as missionaries, or at least make religious work a big part of their goal. The presence of a number of churches and a YMCA meant that middle-class men had no excuse for neglecting religious obligations once they arrived in the Klondike.

If virtuous middle-class men went to the Klondike, they could not fulfill their roles as husbands and fathers well. “True” men had a number of roles that made their presence in the home crucial. They loved their wives and sought to spend as much time with them as possible. Middle-class men also had fatherly roles to fulfill. Middle-class men provided for their families’ material well-being as well as offering moral instruction and nurture to their children.<sup>161</sup> It can be inferred from this ideal that men who trekked off in search of gold neglected their domestic duties.

Medical and social advisors in the late nineteenth century admonished middle-class men to balance their careers with home life. Men worked hard during the day, but home offered a soothing balm to comfort him after a hard day on the job. Klondike critics complained that the gold rush was indicative of a spirit of restlessness within the male soul. The *New York Observer and Chronicle* referred to the “discontented of all lands,” preparing to invade the Klondike in an unorganized horde reminiscent of the First Crusade. The Reverend W.J. Kirby warned restless men that no amount of treasure could satisfy their longing for satisfaction. He felt sympathy for those who charged off on a

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<sup>161</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 110-111, 156; Frank, *Life With Father*, 31.

rumor, leaving steady work and home. Surely the Lord intended something better for men, Kirby wrote.<sup>162</sup>

It was better for men to stay at home. At least there they were warm and loved. *The Congregationalist* recommended thinking on Klondike sufferings at the dinner table. Think on the cold, hungry, lonely men straining their muscles and wallets on the slim “chance of drawing a prize in the lottery of gold,” it admonished. The publication felt sorry that it had to focus on the sufferings of others. However, such thoughts allowed men to gain a greater “appreciation of the ordinary gifts of shelter, food, and reasonable comfort, which we are too apt to leave out of account” because they seemed so mundane.<sup>163</sup>

A poem published in the *Christian Observer* is especially useful in laying out the meanings of virtuous manhood and its relation to the Klondike. The poem, entitled “Not All the Gold in Klondike,” is worth quoting in its entirety.

Within my little cottage  
Are peace and warmth and light,  
And loving welcome waiting  
When I come home at night;  
The polished kettle’s steaming,  
The snowy cloth is spread –  
And close against my shoulder  
There leans a smooth brown head!  
Her eyes are lit with laughter  
(They light the world for me) –  
“For how much would you sell me?  
Now tell me sir!” cries she.  
‘Tis then I answer somehow,  
Between a smile and a tear;  
“Not for all the gold in Klondike!  
The gold in Klondike dear!”

When cozy tea is over,

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<sup>162</sup> Frank, *Life With Father*, 2; No Author, “Outlook on the Yukon,” 876; Reverend W. J. Kirby, “He Hath Put Eternity in the Heart,” *Christian Advocate*, 17 August 1899, 1296.

<sup>163</sup> No Author, “Realizing Home Comforts,” *The Congregationalist*, 17 March 1898, 383.

With many a frolic fond,  
I sit and read my paper  
And from the room beyond  
I hear the clink of china,  
The tread of nimble feet,  
And broken bits of singing  
That somehow ripple sweet.  
I hear a rush and rustle  
Behind my easy chair;  
Short, chubby arms enclasp me  
And choke me unaware!  
Into my arms is tumbled  
A crinkled golden head,  
A ball of fluffy whiteness,  
That ought to be in bed,  
She asks her mother's question –  
I kiss the answer clear –  
“Not for all the gold in Klondike!  
The gold in Klondike dear!”

In dim and dusty office  
I dig my bits of gold  
I suffer not with hunger  
Nor perish with the cold.  
My nuggets needs be tiny  
(I dig them with a pen)  
But the gold of Yukon's gravel  
I leave for other men.  
My treasure lies exhaustless  
My claim is staked with care;  
What is all the gold in Klondike  
Since I'm love's millionaire?<sup>164</sup>

This poem throws into sharp relief the domestic activities and attitudes of truly virtuous men with their irresponsible fellows. Men were meant to be fathers and husbands. This meant being at home. Men used mealtimes to interact with their families. Following dinner, families often retired to the fireside. There, the father might, as in the poem, read his newspaper or a book while his wife knitted and the children read or played. Fireside time offered a good opportunity for family bonding. Sometimes, the father might read aloud, or play games with the children. Men might also use Sundays as

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<sup>164</sup> No Author, “Not All the Gold in Klondike,” *Christian Observer*, 2 March 1898, 20.

an opportunity for moral instruction. The key, though, was availability. Men had to be physically present to engage in these important activities.<sup>165</sup>

Men in the Klondike enjoyed none of these activities. Theirs was a hard, lonely existence. Many pined for the comforts of hearth and home. Miners suffered from overwork, bad food, and the elements during the day, not all of the pain was physical. Edward S. Curtis noted that many miners suffered from the feeling that they had abandoned a better life at home. He noted that some left their families without means in order to pursue the quest for gold. Now these men paid for their decision in sweat, tears, and regret.<sup>166</sup>

The noted poet and essayist Joaquin Miller left some of the most wrenching depictions of lonely, homesick prospectors. Miller wrote that evenings were usually the worst part of the day. Often, during the winter, prospectors spent much of the day in bed. There was little work to do. Wood and candles were sometimes prohibitively expensive, and there was generally little reading material available. Men lay in bed with little to do but think and remember. Miller reported that few prospectors used these hours to think about gold or plot business strategy. Rather, their thoughts drifted to times long ago and places far away. They thought about sweethearts and wives. Prospectors marooned in their isolated cabins had to take pleasure in small things. Miller recalled the joy he and his fellows felt watching the antics of three Douglas squirrels who chattered and played on a snowdrift outside the window. Then, one day, they disappeared, leaving the men even lonelier than before.<sup>167</sup> Miller described the situation poignantly:

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<sup>165</sup> Frank, *Life With Father*, 32, 68-69; Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 90.

<sup>166</sup> Curtis, "Rush to the Klondike Over Mountain Passes," 697.

<sup>167</sup> Joaquin Miller, "In A Klondike Cabin: What a Lonely Man Thinks About," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, January 1899, 293-295.

I have never seen such homesickness as here. It is more than homesickness; it is heart-sickness. It is a sighing for and crying out for sunlight, warmth, birds, children, the touch of a woman's hand, the sound of a human woman's voice. Little wonder we go away back in our dreams and look up our long forgotten little sweet-hearts of the time when we first began to learn the alphabet.<sup>168</sup>

Another poem told of a lonely prospector on Valentine's Day. He had rushed off to search for gold, leaving his sweetheart behind. Now, as he took stock of his surroundings, he became increasingly downcast. He trusted his sweetheart, but feared all the attention she would receive from other, would-be suitors. Harry, Ned, Larry, Fred, and "that idiot, Somebody Hall," would shower his beloved with flowers, poems, and volumes of literature. What could the lonely prospector send to prove his love? He could not send candy, nor was he much of a poet. He had to send something, or else "she'll be just heart-broken." The only thing he could find was a deck of playing cards. He lamented that this was, "Not a very appropriate token/ Nor suggestive of Cupid's darts/ But I know what I'll do/ To prove I'm true," he sent her the ace of hearts.<sup>169</sup>

Aspiring bards back in the East gloated that they had had enough sense to stay put. They composed eminently forgettable poetry praising the joys of love, and wondering why anyone would ever go North. Why risk arctic hardships in an arduous struggle for riches? At home, young men could gaze upon the riches of Mabel's blushing ruby cheeks, the diamonds that were her eyes, her ivory neck, and her golden hair. Even with all this, the smitten author declared, "I've not exhausted half her charms."<sup>170</sup>

Another enraptured lover sang Mollie's praises. He claimed that as long as he possessed her heart he was wealthier than Croesus. He rhapsodized, "Go seek the Klondike all ye

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>169</sup> Carolyn Wells, "In the Klondike," *Life*, 16 February 1899, 133.

<sup>170</sup> No Author, "My Klondike," *Munsey's*, May 1898, 640.

wights/ Who've not seen Mollie's eyes/ I'd rather gaze in their brown depths/ Than win the Midas prize.”<sup>171</sup> What man in his right mind would leave such treasures behind, they wondered.

There were ways to simulate the Klondike experience much closer to home. Men, indeed, entire families, could learn and have fun without experiencing any hardship. *The Ladies Home Journal* suggested a Klondike-themed church social. The activity could take place in a church fellowship hall. The author suggested covering the walls with yellow bunting, and added that this “will serve still further to emphasize the fact that gold is the keynote of the entertainment.” Young women clad entirely in cheesecloth, trimmed with tinsel, could collect the admission fee: a silver coin wrapped in gold foil. This fee entitled the guest to “stake a claim” anywhere in the room. “Claims” consisted of flower boxes and potted plants. Some claims contained treasure – bonbons wrapped in gold foil. For the sake of authenticity, not every claim should produce. At the end, the “prospector” with the most “gold” should receive a pick-shaped watch charm. This prospecting was hungry, thirsty work. Refreshments came in three colors: yellow, symbolizing gold; white, symbolizing snow; and brown, symbolizing earth. Refreshments could consist of ice water, oranges, cake with yellow frosting, and bonbons, all of which, apparently, suggested “the frozen North.”<sup>172</sup> Another option was more educational in nature. Exhibits at the Boston Food Fair promised to be “pleasing, fun-provoking...instructive, thought inspiring, and educative to a high degree.” Visitors might see monkeys, a baby elephant named Topsy, and the breathtaking aerial feats of the daring trapeze artist “Herr Granade.” The most important exhibit featured the “little

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<sup>171</sup> No Author, “The Mollie Mine,” *Harper's Bazaar*, 25 September 1897, 812.

<sup>172</sup> Annie Wright Duncan, “A Klondike Church Social,” *Ladies Home Journal*, November 1897, 20.

Twin Eskimo Sisters; from the Klondike.” The young natives gave “civilized” children and their parents a chance to experience an alien culture by utilizing their senses of touch, sight, and hearing. It would be edifying, the advertisement wrote, for white children to gawk and wonder at “those funny, pretty, quaintly dressed little Eskimo sisters,” and their “strange, broken English.” The promoter claimed that, “They alone are worth going many miles to see.”<sup>173</sup>

Even young children might display the hallmarks of virtuous masculinity. One story told of a boy named Tommy. Tommy’s little sister was ill, and the doctors told Tommy’s parents that the little girl needed to move to the country in order to recover. However, Tommy’s father was out of work and could not afford the move. One evening, Tommy walked down to the docks with his beloved dog, Laddie. Here, Tommy found a discarded newspaper that carried a story about how prospectors in the Yukon needed sled dogs. After much anguished thought, Tommy decided to sell his precious Laddie to help defray the cost of his sister’s medical expenses. The next day, Tommy sold the dog to a colorful prospector, Nugget Jim, for sixty dollars. Yet, as Tommy watched the boat pull away from the dock, Laddie jumped the rail and swam to shore. Weeks later, Tommy received a letter from Nugget Jim. The prospector told the boy to keep the money and the dog. He had plenty of gold already, and knew that Laddie would be miserable without his old master. The story ends predictably enough. The family moved to a pretty little cottage in the country, the little girl got well, Tommy loved school, and “Laddie is the happiest dog for miles around.”<sup>174</sup> This story illustrates the characteristics of the truly virtuous man. Although only a young boy, Tommy possessed a keen sense of

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<sup>173</sup> No Author, “Advertisement,” *Massachusetts Ploughman*, 9 October 1897, 5.

<sup>174</sup> No Author, “For the Children: Klondike Gold,” *The Watchman*, 31 May 1900, 22-23.

responsibility towards his family's wellbeing. He was willing to sacrifice his most prized possession to help them. In the end, his efforts brought success.

In summary, virtuous men felt they had an obligation to their families and loved ones. Society expected men to provide money and love to their wives and children. This required men to stay close to home. Critics felt that those men who left their families for the Klondike abandoned these duties. Writers from the North noted the guilt and loneliness of those who left loved ones behind. Writers safe and warm in the East wrote poems celebrating love and their own choice to stay near kith and kin. Furthermore, men did not necessarily need to travel thousands of miles and endure countless hardships to get a Klondike experience. Recreational and educational opportunities closer to home allowed men to experience the rush vicariously.

It seems clear that critics of the gold rush had a number of important facets to their argument that men were better off staying at home. Many of these arguments figure prominently in the idea of virtuous masculinity. The prospects for wealth in the Klondike were not necessarily good. Placer mining was hard work, with no guarantee of success. Furthermore, men faced the additional challenge of finding an unstaked area on which to file a claim. In addition, critics argued that mining was not honorable work. It seemed fit more for the greedy and lazy; men should work steadily at a job with a regular, assured salary. This was a more responsible way to fulfill one of the virtuous man's most important roles: breadwinning. The trip was also very dangerous. Men had to put forth an almost superhuman effort just to reach the goldfields. Once there, they faced a harsh climate, poor healthcare facilities, and the possibility of starvation. Some writers also claimed that spending time and money on the quest for gold was a neglect of men's



duties as Christians. It was far better to use the money to support mission work, and to put their energy into serving God rather than Mammon. If men had to go, they should go as missionaries. However, if they did not choose missionary work, they should not forsake their religious obligations. Contrary to many people's expectations, Dawson City was a relatively orderly place. Order allowed men and women to erect a rigid social structure and civic institutions that allowed them to perpetuate Christian, middle-class values amongst themselves. Finally, some observers argued that going to the Klondike represented a disregard for men's domestic responsibilities. Virtuous men must be available to their wives and children, and being available meant not going North. Klondike critics mustered a number of arguments to keep men at home, including financial, emotional, physical, and religious reasons. Those men who disregarded these arguments and the obligations that they entailed did not qualify as virtuous, middle-class men.

## CHAPTER IV

### “VIGOROUS MASCULINITY” AND THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH

Men bored with the moral and social constraints of middle-class life needed few excuses to seek adventure and excitement in the Klondike. The gold rush offered them a chance to put the newer ideal of vigorous, aggressive masculinity into action. The rush allowed men to express this idea in a number of ways. The trip itself was a test of physical endurance. Yet for all the danger and pain, the trek had a distinct aura of adventure. It allowed men to unleash the primitive “natural” self. In the gold fields, proponents of this idea claimed, a man was his own boss. Furthermore, the hit and miss nature of prospecting appealed to a sense of adventure. Activities like drinking and gambling also offered a chance for men to flout the conventions of “respectable” social norms. Patronizing the saloons and card tables allowed them to associate with their fellows in a relaxed, convivial, and male-dominated atmosphere.

The Klondike Gold Rush came at an important time for men seeking to experience a more vigorous lifestyle. For decades the frontier offered some men a chance to escape “civilization.” Men might tramp the mountains and prairies for weeks or years; the duration of their stay was not as important as its desired result: self-reinvention. The weak, sickly, or simply bored seemed to return fresh, strong, and healthy. Theodore Roosevelt and Owen Wister were two prime examples of the

frontier's mythical power to reshape and reinvigorate. As long as the frontier remained an outlet for masculine renewal existed. However, in 1890, the announcement came that the frontier was closed. The result for masculine ambitions was devastating. Historian David Macleod writes that "the purported closing of the frontier by 1890 punctured the dream of endless space for manly self-assertion. Yet to an era rife with notions of survival through superior fitness, the wilderness appeared as a vital source of virility and toughness."<sup>175</sup> Now where could men go to escape society and reshape their lives?

For some men the gold discovery in the Klondike offered the chance for adventure and self-renewal many so desperately craved. The rush came at a time when it seemed to some social critics that men had become soft and lazy. Now, they might flex their muscles and test their competitive and survival skills against both nature and other men. *The Practical Guide to the New American El Dorado* hearkened back to earlier days when it proclaimed that, "The spirit of '49 lives again!" *Forest and Stream* welcomed the rush because it gave men one more opportunity to live again the "old, self-reliant days of the frontier." The magazine feared that those days had ended forever, but here was a chance for the present generation to have their chance at getting rich and testing itself against a new wilderness in the Far North. Writers claimed that for sheer excitement nothing matched a quest for gold. Look at mythology, one wrote; was any story more thrilling than that of Jason and his Argonauts seeking the Golden Fleece? Now mythology appeared as reality. Men of the late 1890s could live out the stories that their fathers and grandfathers told of California, Montana, and the Comstock. Things in the gold fields would inevitably take on a more orderly, businesslike air, as they always

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<sup>175</sup> Kimmel, *American Manhood*, 135; Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 45.

did; but that was all in the future. *Life* declared that for adventure seekers in 1897, the rush for gold was still purely an adventure.<sup>176</sup>

The prospects for wealth and adventure drew all the best men to the Klondike, promoters claimed. The Klondikers came from all walks of life: they were doctors, lawyers, farmers, and rugged outdoorsmen.<sup>177</sup> Archibald Coolidge described the motley crew:

There were, indeed, many sorts and conditions of men: veteran miners, who had prospected and mined for years in more than one state of the Union, and pale shop clerks, vainly trying with the aid of flannel shirts, broad-brimmed hats, and pipes not to have the stamp of the “tenderfoot.” There were lawyers and doctors, a candidate on the Populist ticket in Tacoma last autumn, two Yale graduates, a prize-fighter known as the “Montana Kid,” an ex-judge, and an ex-governor of a territory. There were men with grey beards, mere boys, and even a few women, not mostly of a best kind; there were many with attractive but rough faces, and here and there one who looked as if he had seen the inside of a jail; but all were now full of the same thought, the same desire to rush to the gold fields, the same dreams of fabulous wealth.<sup>178</sup>

*Forest and Stream*, one of the staunchest supporters of the gold rush, posted almost constant bulletins about good men leaving for the Klondike. The adventurers came from all over the country. Mr. Joe Bourke of Long Island resolved to “try his luck among the icebergs and mosquitoes of Alaska.” His friends had no doubts that he would succeed. He was a strong, experienced outdoorsman, and his time spent “roughing it” in New York surely prepared him for the Yukon. If there were any nuggets lying about, Joe Bourke was sure to find them. From Arkansas came Mr. Arthur Trickett, an “owner of good

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<sup>176</sup> Veazie Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, by V. Wilson, with Maps and Many Illustrations (Seattle: The Calvert Company, 1895), Paramore, *The Practical Guide to the New American El Dorado*, 3; E. Hough, “Two Views of the Klondike,” *Forest and Stream*, 4 September 1897, 183; *To the Klondike Gold Fields and Other Points of Interest in Alaska* (San Francisco: Alaska Commercial Company, 1898), 36; Clarence Pullen, “The Romance of the Klondike,” *The Cosmopolitan*, August 1898, 417-424; No Author, “Klondiking,” *Life*, 26 August 1897, 164.

<sup>177</sup> Harris, *Alaska and the Klondike Gold Fields. Practical Instructions for Fortune Seekers*, 51.

<sup>178</sup> Archibald Coolidge, “With the Rush to the Klondike,” *The Nation*, 12 August 1897, 125.

dogs,” joined by two of the Sisterville West Virginia Rod and Gun Club’s “best members.” The publication also sent one of its own men, reporter J. B. Burnham. Burnham’s job was to report on all aspects of the trip: weather, trail conditions, mining, native inhabitants, and the prospects for hunting and fishing. Burnham was a fortunate choice. Not only was he a fine reporter, he also “possessed...enterprise, pluck, and endurance.” In its article “Chicago and the West,” *Forest and Stream* concluded enthusiastically, “It seems...all the good men are going to Klondike, and we who stay behind are not much account...the man who doesn’t want to go along has something wrong with him.”<sup>179</sup>

Advocates believed that men desiring to go North had to possess certain characteristics including physical toughness, health, and steady nerves. Few Klondike enthusiasts called the trip an easy one. Indeed, the Klondike challenged even the hardest. But those with the requisite skills stood a far better chance of succeeding on the trails and in the gold fields. The *Chicago Record* advised, “Men should be sober, strong and healthy. They should be practical men, able to adapt themselves quickly to their surroundings.”<sup>180</sup> Health was very important. Without it no one could succeed. Men needed to make sure that their lungs were sound and their joints free from rheumatism. Healthy men need not worry overly much about the rigors of the journey. Prospectors also needed the right temperament. Only optimists should embark for the gold fields. A hopeful disposition helped men endure cold, aching muscles, and difficulty finding gold. The morose and pessimistic stood a lesser chance of succeeding, Klondike advisors

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<sup>179</sup> Edward Banks, “Drivers and Twisters,” *Forest and Stream*, 12 January 1898, 136; No Author, “No Title,” *Forest and Stream*, 19 February 1898, 158; No Author, “Points and Flushes,” *Forest and Stream*, 5 March 1898, 192; No Author, “No Title,” *Forest and Stream*, 1 August 1897, 1; “No Author, “Chicago and the West,” *Forest and Stream*, 6 November 1897, 366.

<sup>180</sup> *Chicago Record*, 231.

wrote. As soon as the novelty of the adventure wore thin, melancholy men were more likely to give up on the Klondike and return home with little to show for their efforts.<sup>181</sup>

Klondike advice-givers wrote that anyone failing to meet these criteria was better off staying at home. For the physically unfit the trip usually meant serious injury or even death. The rigors of the trail and the Arctic climate might actually prove beneficial to the hardy traveler, but they would wreak havoc upon those with “weak hearts and weak lungs.” Also, anyone not used to physical labor had best stay away. James G. Wharton noted sadly that far too many men unqualified for Klondike life arrived in the gold fields anyway. He speculated that while some of these men might adapt and even find gold, most would suffer extreme hardships due to the harsh climate and hard work.<sup>182</sup>

Furthermore, prospecting required skills that few “salaried men” possessed. Guidebooks pointed out that, at present, there was no need for clerks or bookkeepers in the territory. John William Leonard wrote that, “If you are a professional man your training will do you no good. An ounce of physical culture is worth ten pounds of classical or scientific training so far as placer mining is concerned.”<sup>183</sup>

Race, some Klondike proponents claimed, also played a key role in determining who succeeded. Frederick Palmer wrote that, “All [enduring prospectors] were peculiarly the product of the natural bent of Anglo-Saxon civilization for overcoming

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<sup>181</sup> Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, xiii; *Chicago Record*, 168; Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development, and Future Possibilities*, 4, 47; Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 68.

<sup>182</sup> Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 37, 68; Wharton, *The Klondike: A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 29.

<sup>183</sup> *Official Guide to the Klondike Country and the Gold Fields of Alaska*, 55; Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, *To the Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific Railway*, 3; Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 12; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British North America*, 100.

obstacles.”<sup>184</sup> Life in the Klondike was quite difficult to be sure. Men faced a harsh climate, scarce supplies, poor transportation, and bad living conditions. However, Anglo-Saxon ingenuity and determination could overcome any obstacle the Far North presented. John William Leonard exulted, “Given a sound constitution, a stout heart, and American grit, and mere physical obstacles will have little weight so that gold in plenty rewards the pursuit, and the hard knocks of experience are paid for in want-dispelling affluence.” The weak might fall by the wayside, but those standing at the pinnacle of Anglo-Saxon manhood would succeed. After all, these men came from a distinguished lineage of explorers, conquerors, and empire builders. Nothing could stop these noble men from doing the same along the banks of the mighty Yukon.<sup>185</sup>

Proponents claimed that those men who possessed all the proper characteristics stood a better than even chance of success in the Klondike. The physically fit, the patient, and the hardworking Anglo-Saxon had wonderful opportunities in the gold fields. Natural conditions insured that only the fit could remain in the Far North for long. Before the fit stretched a vast gold field criss-crossed by miles of unexplored and unstaked gulches and creek bottoms waiting to yield up their treasure to those willing to work hard to obtain it. The *Klondike and Yukon Guide* concluded, “At the diggings there is gold for everyone, and if you have good health, plenty of pluck, and endurance, and are not afraid of rough work and many hardships, you should be able to make a comfortable stake in a few years. The principal thing is to make the right start.”<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Frederick Palmer, “Government and Society in the Klondike,” *Forum*, December 1898, 603.

<sup>185</sup> Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 41; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British North America*, 13; Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development and Future Possibilities*, 8; Harris, *Alaska and the Klondike Gold Fields. Practical Instructions for Fortune Seekers*, 126.

<sup>186</sup> Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 2-3; Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, *To the Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific Railway*, 3; *Klondike and*

Part of making the “right start” was choosing traveling companions. The journey to the gold fields allowed men to associate with each other on a daily basis in a masculine environment. Intense, even intimate, relationships during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not restricted to women. Evidence suggests that similar relationships existed between men. Men built close friendships based upon common interests, dispositions, and shared experiences. Oftentimes these relationships provided security, love, and mutual understanding for males separated from home and familiar surroundings.<sup>187</sup> No one suggested that men travel to the Klondike by themselves. However, guidebooks wrote that traveling parties ought to be small and composed of only trustworthy fellows. Traveling as a group helped defray the expenses of the trip. By working together, men could get by with fewer tents, stoves, tools, and other expensive and bulky equipment. Men need not dissolve their partnerships once they reached the gold fields. By partnering up two to a cabin, men cut expenses and household chores in half.<sup>188</sup> Partnerships also included social benefits. The *Chicago Record* recommended that every traveler find himself a “pardner,” not to be confused with a “partner.” Partnership implied a businesslike, professional relationship. “Pardners,” on the other hand, were something more. They stuck together in every situation, good and bad. Success and hardship formed an indissoluble bond between men “far from families and friends.” Eventually, “pardners” became “closer than messmates in the army or navy.”<sup>189</sup>

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*Yukon Guide. Alaska and the Northwest Territory Gold Fields. Compiled and Published by Alaska Illustrators* (Seattle: Press of the Pioneer Printing and Publishing Company, 1898), 6.

<sup>187</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 98, 233; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 76-77, 86.

<sup>188</sup> L. W. Buckley, “Outfitting for the Klondike: A Practical Paper,” *Overland Monthly*, February 1898:171; Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They are and How to Reach Them*, 19; *Tacoma Citizens’ Klondike Free Information Bureau, Klondike Gold Field Realtors and Outfitting Information* (Tacoma: s.n., 1897), 2; *Klondike and All About It. By a Practical Mining Engineer* (New York: Excelsior Publishing House, 1897), 18; *On to Klondike! and the Great Alaska Gold Discoveries*, 21-22.

<sup>189</sup> *Chicago Record*, 91-93.



The gold rush gave men the chance to live what Theodore Roosevelt called the “Strenuous Life.” Roosevelt was a firm believer in competition and physical self-assertion. Supporters of his idea claimed that industrialization and sedentary life weakened American manhood. Previous generations of American men tested themselves on the frontier or the battlefields of the Civil War. With the frontier “closed” and the nation at peace, men increasingly turned to competitive athletics and outdoor activity. Regarding the gold rush, historian Kathryn Morse writes that it “attracted young men looking for adventure as a remedy for a growing sense of weakness and emasculation.”<sup>190</sup>

The most important step in living the “Strenuous Life” was getting out of the cities. Some social critics and exercise enthusiasts equated city living with softness and effeminacy. Cities were too civilized, and too much civilization weakened and corrupted men. The wilderness, not the corporate office, was the place for “true” men. Physical activity and exposure to hardships and danger would strengthen muscles atrophied by desk jobs, and nerves frayed by time-clocks, schedules, and deadlines.<sup>191</sup> This held especially true for the rising generation of young men. *Forest and Stream* wrote that young men belonged on the trails and in the gold fields, not in the city. True, the young man might leave a “tenderfoot,” but the wilderness experience would surely turn him into a hardy man. “The game is a grand one,” the magazine trumpeted, “the boldest and best in which any man can engage.”<sup>192</sup>

Danger was part of the game. True, some adventurers might not come back. But every man died eventually, so why not die doing something worthwhile instead of

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<sup>190</sup> Kimmel, *American Manhood*, 187; Filene, *Him/Her/Self*, 79-80; Morse, *The Nature of Gold*, 119.

<sup>191</sup> Macleod, *Building Character in the American Boy*, 55; J. B. Burnham, “Yukon Notes,” *Forest and Stream*, 25 February 1899, 144.

<sup>192</sup> Hough, “Two Views,” 183.

expiring at the office or in bed? Furthermore, as far as dangerous places went, was not the large city more dangerous than the Canadian wilderness? *Forest and Stream* assured its readers that Chicago and New York were far more hazardous than the Chilkoot Pass or the White Horse Rapids.<sup>193</sup> J. B. Burnham summed up the advantages of living the vigorous life, saying,

It would be hard for the city man with his familiar round of comforts and cares to put himself in our place and realize the compensations which come to men in situations like ours- the freedom from responsibility and the perfect sense of being one's own master, the charm of days and nights close to old Mother Earth, basking in her sunshine or buoyant at breasting her storms, with the game of existence reduced to its simplest terms in the assurance that as long as we have food we hold trumps. It is so much better to have tired muscles than tired nerves. With sound sleep and an appetite and digestion capable of everything and satisfied with anything, it is a keen pleasure just to live. One rises in the morning, eager for work, and, if there be a spice of danger in it so much the better. There is zest and vim to the simplest occupation and worry such as the city man feels is an unknown quantity.<sup>194</sup>

Gold rush enthusiasts also used the language of Darwin and man's animal nature to describe the experiences of the trail. Social theorists who adhered to Darwinian-inspired philosophy saw life itself as a struggle between men. The struggle reduced them to their simplest, most primitive nature. The battle went to the strong, courageous, fierce, and resourceful. Primal instinct overwhelmed reason and self-control. Vigorous men sought to reconnect with their primal selves, to throw off the trappings of civilization and devolve into what Michael Kimmel calls "pure animality." Men might leave all the constraints of respectable and civilized society in order to live a life reduced to the tooth and nail struggle for survival on the trails and in the gold fields.<sup>195</sup> Primitive outdoor life let men unleash the animal within, to regress, to scratch and claw and bite for every

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> J. B. Burnham, "The Sportsman Tourist, Some Yukon Notes," *Forest and Stream*, 18 June 1898, 482.

<sup>195</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 254; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 152, 155.

advantage. Such action and such a mentality almost guaranteed survival in a harsh and unforgiving land. One author spoke for Darwin's social disciples when he wrote that on the trail, "It is a hard matter to kill a man when he turns himself loose and begins to rustle like an animal. These men will get through all right, and every minute of their trip will be a joy forever to them."<sup>196</sup>

The overland journey to the gold fields was a taxing one, even for the experienced traveler. Danger and death stalked the mountains and rivers, especially for the "tenderfeet." However, men the caliber of a *Forest and Stream* reader should have little difficulty. After all, had they not hiked, camped, and roughed it before? They were used to exertion, they had keen survival skills. Mud was no problem; mountains would shrink to small hills and raging rapids to babbling brooks before a "determined front." In fact, *Forest and Stream* assured its readers, the only pressing danger was that by the time men reached the Klondike they might not be able to stake a good claim in the gold fields.<sup>197</sup>

The very mention of the Chilkoot Pass was enough to make lesser men quake with fear, but not the hardy hunter or woodsman. Unexpected and furious storms might swoop down on unwary travelers. Some storms could turn deadly, but that was a risk Klondikers were prepared to take. Storms aside, strong and vigorous men should have no trouble ascending the pass. A couple of guidebooks claimed that the grade of the trail was not excessively steep. Indeed, if travel stalled it was due to the fact that Indian packers charged an exploitative price to help convey the miners' outfits over the pass.<sup>198</sup> If men possessed steady nerves, E. Jerome Dyer wrote, the pass was not an exceptionally

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<sup>196</sup> Hough, "Two Views," 183.

<sup>197</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 98; Hough, "Two Views," 183.

<sup>198</sup> Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 14; *Klondike and Yukon Guide. Alaska and the Northwest Territory Gold Fields*, 14; *On to Klondike!*, 9.

difficult ordeal. A chorus of voices condemned accounts saying that the Chilkoot was well-nigh impassible. Such tripe was the exaggerated nonsense of weaklings and cowards. *Scientific American* argued that a winter's journey in the North was no more difficult than an excursion in Maine or upstate New York. George Chapman of the *Overland Monthly* gave his considered opinion that the Chilkoot was no different from any other mountain pass. James Steele gave readers a useful analogy about how difficult the trip really was. Consider Pike's Peak, he wrote. Climbing the Chilkoot was no more hazardous than going halfway up the Colorado mountain. Hundreds of soft tourists made that climb every year. "And that is all there is to say to the horrors of the Chilkoot Pass," he concluded.<sup>199</sup>

Travelers who chose the White Pass route had their own unique challenges to overcome. Nearly one thousand feet lower than the Chilkoot, Veazie Wilson guaranteed readers that the route was accessible all year round. The trail gradually ascended for about four miles until travelers reached a canyon where the pass truly began. The next seven miles wound steadily up the side of a mountain, but Charles Henry Lugin claimed that those seven miles were "the only hard part of the trip." J. B. Burnham vividly described the White Pass Trail's most distinguishing feature: mud. Burnham wrote that the trail turned to a "river of mud." The muck was especially hard on horses, which died by the hundreds. The reporter speculated that a Klondiker might travel the whole forty-eight mile length of the trail on the backs of dead packhorses without once touching the ground. Travelers used the bodies to corduroy the deepest mud holes along the route.

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<sup>199</sup> Dyer, *The Routes and Mineral Resources of Northwestern Canada*, 238; No Author, "The Alaskan Gold Fields," *Scientific American*, 18 September 1897, 180; Edward Spurr, "From the Coast to the Golden Klondike: The Record of an Official Journey," *Outing*, September 1897, 539; George Chapman, "Mining on the Klondike," *Overland Monthly*, September 1897, 268; Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 74.

The work taxed men as well. Still, even though they might strain harder than ever before in their lives, as long as they remembered why they traveled in the first place they would succeed. Burnham philosophized, “You can’t kill a man by work while he has hope. Our boys more than held their own with the procession.” Burnham also used scientific language to describe the battle against the trail. Men, he observed, devolved into amphibious creatures to cope with the constant rain and mud. Eventually, they got used to the conditions and made a lark of the whole situation, laughing off their ordeal.<sup>200</sup>

The White Horse Rapids presented travelers with their next challenge. Men needed steady nerves and common sense when facing the whitewater. If travelers had a solid boat and an experienced boatman, the trip was more exhilarating than dangerous.<sup>201</sup> James Wharton wrote that, “The roar of the water as it plunges through this place is like a continual roll of thunder, and the speed of the current is something frightful.” Such a sight caused many men to reconsider their options. Some guidebooks cautioned the inexperienced against shooting the rapids. Men needed skill to navigate this stretch of river. The stakes were high, and no one should launch into the rapids trusting luck alone.<sup>202</sup> However, the combination of nerve and experience almost guaranteed success. H. H. Paramore scoffed that the rapids looked worse than they actually were. A. A. Hill

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<sup>200</sup> Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, 53; Charles Henry Lugin, *Yukon Gold Fields. Map Showing Routes From Victoria, B.C., to the Various Mining Camps on the Yukon River and its Branches. Mining Regulations of the Dominion Government and Forms of Application, Together with a Table of Distances, Extracts From Mr. Ogilvie’s Reports, and Other Information* (Victoria, B.C.: The Colonist Printing and Publishing Company, 1897), 20; Burnham, “The Sportsman Tourist,” 482-483.

<sup>201</sup> Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 54; Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, 26, 29.

<sup>202</sup> Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 16, 18; Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets*, 23.

assured his readers that, “With ordinary care and proper equipment...the danger is slight, as has been proved by thousands of travelers.”<sup>203</sup>

Enthusiastic Klondikers praised the healthful effects of hard travel. Burnham commented upon the lack of disease and sickness on the trails. If travelers expired, accidents usually accounted for their demise. Horses died, but that was the result of starvation and overwork. Indeed, it seemed that the fresh air and bracing physical labor increased men’s appetites. The correspondent wrote that work made him ravenous. He gained weight and took on a ruddy, healthy look. He remembered that a number of fellow campers pointed out that travel and work agreed with him. Despite several dangerous moments when his party had to act fast in order to escape close brushes with death, the trip was very beneficial. Burnham went to so far as to exclaim, “I should advertise Alaska as a health resort.” Hill seconded Burnham’s assertion and wrote that Klondikers would return home, “with a clearer head, a brighter eye, [and] a more buoyant step” than when they left for the Yukon.<sup>204</sup>

Even though the Klondike country and climate were harsh, vigorous men had little to worry about. The upper Yukon region was largely uninhabited. The topography was pockmarked with ridges and gullies and crisscrossed by mountains. There were no roads or facilities to aid the traveler.<sup>205</sup> John William Leonard warned the “weaklings, the timid, the easily discouraged, and roysterers,” to stay home because the cold would be too much for them. Guidebooks promised that strong, vigorous men had little reason to worry about the Arctic cold. Even though the temperature might plummet, it did not

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<sup>203</sup> Paramore, *The Practical Guide to America’s New El Dorado, Klondike Gold Fields*, 10; A. A. Hill, “The Klondike,” *Munsey’s*, February 1899, 718.

<sup>204</sup> J. B. Burnham, “On the Way to the Klondike,” *Forest and Stream*, 27 November 1897, 424; Burnham, “Sportsman Tourist,” 482; Burnham, “Yukon Notes,” 403; Hill, “The Klondike,” 737.

<sup>205</sup> Spurr, “From the Coast to the Golden Klondike,” 523, 543; Chapman, “Mining on the Klondike,” 267.

necessarily mean that men suffered accordingly. The only time that men really needed to worry about the cold was when the wind blew steadily. Proper equipment and clothing alleviated that problem. With the right outfit men had little to fear.<sup>206</sup> Veazie Wilson speculated that the lack of humidity in the Klondike allowed men to endure temperatures far lower than those along the Alaskan coast. According to Wilson, men in the interior had little difficulty working even when the mercury fell to forty below. Joseph Ladue seconded this opinion and took it even further. He reported that he suffered more in northern New York even though the temperature was considerably warmer. He related that in the Yukon he chopped wood outside during the dead of winter in his shirtsleeves with no adverse effects. He did this with the temperature settled at seventy degrees below zero.<sup>207</sup>

Other Klondike enthusiasts boasted that the Northern winters made men healthier. Anyone in good physical shape and sound health might benefit from the cold Klondike air. The dryness of the air offset the frigid temperatures, they wrote. Those with the ability to adapt themselves to climatic changes found the Far North beneficial. Snow and ice might not be pleasant for such extended periods of time, but science certainly showed that life expectancy increased the further north one went.<sup>208</sup>

Hunting and fishing offered men another outlet for aggressive action. Proponents argued that fields, mountains, and streams were fine places for men to practice a

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<sup>206</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 110-101; Lugin, *Yukon Gold Fields*, 24; British Columbia Development Association, Ltd., *Klondike. The Yukon Mines, and How to Reach Them* (London: Crowther and Goodman, 1898), 6; Allen, *Dawson, Yukon Territory*, 23.

<sup>207</sup> Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, 63; Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets*, 8.

<sup>208</sup> Harris, *Alaska and the Klondike Gold Fields. Practical Instructions for Fortune Seekers*, 180; Canadian Pacific Rail Road Company, *To The Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific*, 4; Ernest Ingersoll, *Golden Alaska*, 157; Colliery Engineer Company, *Placer Mining. A Hand Book for Klondike and Other Miners and Prospectors*, 11.

strenuous lifestyle. Hunting and fishing grew in popularity in the late 1800s. Theodore Roosevelt played a large role in this resurgence, especially through his activities in founding and supporting the Boone and Crockett Club, an institution that promoted big game hunting.<sup>209</sup> The Far North was especially good fishing country. The Alaska Commercial Company wrote that in the bay at St. Michael fishing was “merely a matter of dropping in a line with properly baited hooks,” the result being that “the creel of the angler will soon be full.” Arctic waters sustained a large number of species of fish including grayling, whitefish, and lake trout. Salmon were especially plentiful. Enthusiastic anglers reported that these giants of the Yukon sometimes weighed up to one hundred pounds.<sup>210</sup>

Klondike promoters and informants divided on the prospects for hunting on the upper Yukon. In May 1898 *Forest and Stream* declared that the Yukon was, “without a doubt the latest thing in big game ground.” The magazine expressed an envy of those who got there first to hunt and explore. Wilson recommended that Klondikers pack a large caliber rifle amongst their provisions in order to bring down big game. He reported that the upper Yukon abounded in all manner of trophy game including bear, moose, and caribou, as well as a great number of smaller species. John Sidney Webb recorded a hunting experience on the sternwheeler trip up the Yukon. The boat startled a moose which, in its confusion, plunged into the river. Almost immediately the deck with nearly seventy men brandishing their Winchesters. The aspiring hunters proceeded to open a withering fire upon the unfortunate beast. With so many bullets flying the moose

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<sup>209</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 136.

<sup>210</sup> *To the Klondike Gold Fields and Other Points of Interest in Alaska*, 25; *On to Klondike!*, 22; *Chicago Record*, 368; Canadian Pacific Railroad, *To the Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific*, 6.



eventually fell, and the hungry travelers eagerly consumed whatever was left of the creature. James Wharton spoke for the hunting enthusiasts when he concluded that, “As yet, the whole Yukon basin is almost a virgin field for hunters.”<sup>211</sup>

Others were not as optimistic. They argued that the upper Yukon basin had been a good hunting ground before the gold rush. However, the horde of hungry prospectors shot almost every animal that lined up in their sights. Large game fled the area. Occasionally, a stray moose or reindeer got separated from its herd and wandered into the mining region, but this was rare.<sup>212</sup> J. B. Burnham reported that large game was scarce along the trails as well. The rush forced most of the bears and moose west into the coastal mountain ranges of Alaska. He complained that the only game he bagged consisted of a couple of timber wolves and some game birds: grouse, ptarmigan, and ducks.<sup>213</sup> Some guidebooks warned prospectors not to rely upon the country to feed them. It was far more prudent to stock up on canned and dried goods than to reach the gold fields and starve because the country was empty of game. The *Chicago Record* glumly summed up the hunting prospects for the Klondike country: “Game is not so plentiful in the known gold placer area of Alaska as an enthusiastic Nimrod might wish.”<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> No Author, “Chicago and the West,” *Forest and Stream*, 7 May 1898, 317; Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields, Where They Are and How to Reach Them*, 19, 52; John Sidney Webb, “The River Trip to the Klondike,” 684; Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 73.

<sup>212</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British North America*, 79-80; Canadian Pacific Railroad, *To the Klondike Gold Fields of the Yukon by the Canadian Pacific*, 6; Canadian Department of the Interior, *Truth About the Klondike*, 41; *Chicago Record*, 367.

<sup>213</sup> Burnham, “The Sportsman Tourist,” 242.

<sup>214</sup> British Columbia Development Company, *The Yukon Mines and How to Reach Them*, 7; Ladue, *Klondike Nuggets*, 25; *Chicago Record*, 367.

Gold was everywhere, waiting for the right men to take it. Everyone knew that the gold fields were rich, so rich that the stories coming out of the Klondike sounded like something out of a fairy tale. Yet these reports came from reliable men, “staid officials and matter-of-fact pioneers,” not from the overheated imaginations of conmen and charlatans. The stories from the gold fields made John Leonard think of the wondrous tales of Sheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*. Not even the Arctic winters and the rock hard permafrost could keep men from getting rich, provided they were fit. Hardy, vigorous men, able to handle the harsh conditions, could tough it out. Through endurance and perseverance these men might make enough money to make them prosperous in a couple of years. Opportunities for the willing and able also extended to those unable to stake their own claim. The gold fields could provide employment for the strong and conscientious. The *Official Guide to the Klondike Country* pointed out that such men could hire themselves out to prospectors having a hard time maximizing their claim’s productive capacity or to those owning multiple claims. Vigorous men might make a good deal of money working a “lay.” The ready and willing had many options.<sup>215</sup>

Most guidebooks argued that there was no point to men working for wages; placer mining was something anyone could do. One of the great appeals of the gold fields was the chance for a man to work for himself, to be his own boss. However, *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska* suggested that mining novices might want to hire out as a laborer for a short time in order to learn the techniques and business of mining. This had the dual advantage that the man learned and made money at the same time. As

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<sup>215</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 43; *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska; With Maps, Routes, Cost of Living*, 78-81; Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 24; *Chicago Record*, 81; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 85.

soon as he felt sufficiently confident in his own abilities the hired man could stake his own claim. This was not the usual advice, though. Most placer mining enthusiasts insisted that men could work for themselves immediately, skipping the apprentice stage. There were a couple of reasons for such optimism. The basic techniques used in placer mining were not especially difficult to learn. Placer mining was considered “poor man’s mining.” It required little capital to begin. Miners did not need the expensive equipment necessary for hard rock quartz mining. Placer gold was also pure. It existed in flakes and nuggets that did not have to go through the time- and cash-consuming refining process. The only tools the placer miner had to purchase were a pick, pan, and shovel. Such implements were cheap and easily portable. The equation for success in the placer mines was a straightforward one: little experience plus cheap and simple tools plus persistence plus luck equaled success.

Luck played an important, exhilarating role in placer mining. The random nature of gold distribution gave the whole experience the aura of high-stakes gambling or a lottery drawing. Guidebooks pointed out that the complete novice stood as good of a chance of hitting a large strike as did the grizzled, experienced prospector. James Steele was especially prescient when he wrote, “In all placer mining there enters the enticing and unfortunate element of chance.”<sup>216</sup> Fishing was the best analogy some commentators came up with. The unfortunate miners were like those who sat on the pier all day and landed a measly perch while all those around him filled their creels with enormous bass. The lucky ones reminded one of the small boy with a stick, string, and bent pin who got strike after strike, while just downstream the experienced angler with all the best

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<sup>216</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 98, 100; Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 119.

equipment struggled to get even a nibble. *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska* was not surprised; it commented that this was not unusual. Rather, it was “in accord with the law of Nature.”<sup>217</sup> Several publications used the term “lottery” to describe mining. A “tenderfoot” might swagger in and stake a claim in the unlikeliest of spots. Wiser, more experienced prospectors guffawed at this ignorance, until the “tenderfoot” struck rich gravel and took out a fortune. Such success was most definitely not the result of skill, but rather, dumb luck. James Steele described the placer mining experience: men worked, waited, and hoped.<sup>218</sup> The next shovelful of gravel might reveal nothing, just like the hundreds before. It might also be flecked with gold; one never knew. Flush or bust, men were still eager to play the game.

Boomtowns were unique places and Dawson City was no different. Louis Coolidge called mining camps places “of intense human interest.” The prospect of wealth brought a vast array of differing and colorful characters from all backgrounds to the middle of a windswept wilderness to make money. This interplay between “wilderness” and “civilization” brought out the best in some men and the worst in others. Yet, they all came, good, bad, and indifferent. One never knew whom they might meet in Dawson. Appearances were often deceiving. The bearded, roughly-dressed prospector might be an uneducated drunk. However, he might be something entirely different: the product of a fine Eastern family with a degree from Yale or Princeton. He might converse knowingly on science or literature, and then return to talking of claims, gulch

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<sup>217</sup> North American Transportation and Trading Company, *Alaska and the Gold Fields of the Yukon, Koyukuk, Tanana, Klondike and Their Tributaries*, 27; Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 35; *Klondike and the Gold Fields of Alaska*, 7.

<sup>218</sup> North American Transportation Company, *Alaska and the Gold Fields of the Yukon, Koyukuk*, 27; Wells, *Alaska and the Klondike: The New Gold Fields and How to Reach Them*, 35; Steele, *The Klondike: The New Gold Fields of Alaska and the Far North-West*, 28.

diggings, and rocker boxes, swearing like a seasoned bullwhacker. Gold drew them all to Dawson. The city itself seemed as odd as its inhabitants. John Sidney Webb described Dawson as “Helter-skelter...[a] collection of odds and ends of houses and habitations....A row of barrooms called Front Street....dogs everywhere....men ‘whooping it up’....the scene...like the outside of a circus tent.”<sup>219</sup>

All the mud, noise and slapdash organization could not mask the intense optimism of the camp. The *Klondike and Yukon Guide* wrote that, “The air is full of hope.” Almost every day miners arrived from the outlying diggings bringing new reports of someone else striking a rich gold deposit. Such news gave hope to the despondent and galvanized new arrivals. Part of the “perennial charm of Yukon society” was its youth. The guidebook claimed that few men over thirty-five came to the diggings. Younger men, he wrote, were fresher, more vigorous, and more optimistic. Even the less fortunate, those down on their luck, accepted their plight like true philosophers. Life was a series of peaks and valleys. Today all the prospector might have to show for his day of work was a pile of worthless dirt and a collection of blisters. Tomorrow he might strike it rich. That night he could lose it all on the turn of a card. Such was luck, they reasoned. The experiences of the trails and the diggings deepened bonds between men, Frederic Marvin wrote. Nothing, not even the ceremonies of the fraternal lodge could bring men together like mining camp life.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country, a Description of Our Alaskan Land of Gold*, 63; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 136; Webb, “River Trip,” 684.

<sup>220</sup> *Klondike and Yukon Guide. Alaska and the Northwest Territory Gold Fields*, 22; Frederic R. Marvin, *The Yukon Overland: The Gold Digger's Hand Book* (Cincinnati: The Editor Publishing Company, 1898), 76.

Enthusiasts asserted that all men were equal in the diggings. The simplicity of mining life, promoters claimed, bred equality. There were no “snobs” in the Klondike. Men could not afford to put on airs. If they did so, they lost the respect of their fellows. No one was too rich, no one was too poor, wrote *On to Klondike*. Gamblers were the only thieves. Prospectors treated women like ladies, were kind to their less fortunate companions, and eager to lend a hand in any difficult situation. In short, *On to Klondike!* concluded, “One man is in literal truth as good as another.”<sup>221</sup>

Despite its wild reputation and ramshackle appearance, most observers noted that Dawson City was an orderly, law-abiding place. Authors advanced several theories about the reason for this situation. John Sidney Webb believed Dawson’s isolated location helped. He pointed out that only the good, determined, and honest would dare conceive of, let alone attempt, a trip such as the one required to reach the gold fields. No one who loafed survived long. Any of the “idle and dissolute” removed to more hospitable surroundings when they realized that they might actually have to work if they staked a claim. The miners expected each other to work hard and honestly. The *Official Guide to the Klondike Country* speculated that the reason for law and order was that “Lawyers and other disturbers of the peace are kept out.” The *Chicago Record* concluded that men were so busy trying to make money that they did not have time to break the law.<sup>222</sup>

Honesty was a very important virtue in the Klondike. “Stealing is practically unknown in the town,” claimed the *Chicago Record*. Men left cabins containing a fortune in gold dust and nuggets unlocked and unguarded. The miners, Louis Coolidge

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<sup>221</sup> No Author, “Seattle to Dawson: A Klondikers Diary,” *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly*, May 1900, 10; *On to Klondike!*, 23-24.

<sup>222</sup> Webb, “River Trip,” 683; Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 31; *Official Guide to the Klondike Country and the Gold Fields of Alaska*, 153; *Chicago Record*, 261.

reported, lived by their own set of commandments: the “Yukon Decalogue.” Some of its rules consisted of the following: “Thou shalt not avoid thy just debts; thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not covet thy neighbor’s claim, nor his sluice boxes, nor his cabin, nor his mission squaw, nor anything that is his.” Those who followed these commands - the vast majority of the miners according to most sources - had little to fear from anyone. Those who violated the Klondike creed faced stiff penalties. As soon as a man acquired a reputation for dishonest dealings or theft, he became a pariah in the mining region. Word spread rapidly amongst Klondikers and the miscreant found he had few options but leaving the area. Paramore claimed that miners might fight and even kill each other. But, as long as the fight was fair few except the overly squeamish said anything. However, if a man stole so much as a pick or a pan, he might face a “quick rope and a short shift.” Paramore wrote that mining camp justice was swift and merciless for the unrepentant thief. The threat of such action helped keep the situation calm. Change was coming, though. The gold rush brought thousands of new people to the Klondike, both good and bad. Old timers feared that the unsavory characters amongst the recent arrivals might ruin what had been an almost idyllic situation. From now on, residents lamented, miners would need to lock their doors at night and when they went away on business. Too many newcomers had nimble fingers and a desire for other people’s gold.<sup>223</sup>

The presence of the Canadian government also helped keep the peace in the Far North. For a time, the prospectors themselves executed their own laws in the form of the miners’ meeting. Under the watch of these informal tribunals, crime generally ceased to exist, according to one source. He went on to hail the miners’ meeting as a paragon of

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<sup>223</sup> *Chicago Record*, 261-262; Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country, A Description of Our Alaskan Land of Gold*, 64-65; Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 31, 34; Paramore, *The Practical Guide to America’s New El Dorado*, 43; Wilson, *Guide to the Yukon Gold Fields*, 72.

frontier democracy. They were, he praised, “one of the most notable examples of the ability of the people to govern themselves.” The Northwest Mounted Police played a crucial role in maintaining law and order. Most prospectors generally respected the police. The Mounties and the other Canadian government officials were strict, though courteous and efficient withal. The results of their law enforcement methods were readily apparent.<sup>224</sup> One of the chief reasons for Dawson’s peaceful existence was the ban on pistols. The Mounties confiscated any handguns they found within city limits. The result was a much safer place to live, work, and carouse. Observers marveled at this oddity. Typical mining camps, they wrote, were often violent places where a pistol was a necessity for self-defense, not so in Dawson. *On to Klondike!* concluded that, “So long as a man attends to his own business and does nothing calculated to bring down upon him the disapproval of law-abiding citizens [or the Mounties], his life and property are as safe as they would be anywhere in the East.”<sup>225</sup>

Miners needed entertainment. After a long day working their claims, many prospectors came to town looking to have a good time. Drinking, gambling, and prostitution offered men outlets for their money and pent-up energy. Most Klondikers were single males. Far from the prying eyes and strict rules of home and family, many men sampled the various taboo activities that nighttime Dawson offered.<sup>226</sup>

Many men enjoyed a drink after a hard day of work. They also craved social interaction. Saloons offered men a chance to drink and associate with other men. The

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<sup>224</sup> *The Klondike Gold Fields and Other Points of Interest in Alaska*, 35; Steffens, “Life in the Klondike Gold Fields,” 964; Paramore, *The Practical Guide to America’s New El Dorado*, 19, 27.

<sup>225</sup> No Author, “No Title,” *The Independent*, 22 July 1897, 10; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 131; Canadian Department of the Interior, *Truth About the Klondike*, 45; Paramore, *The Practical Guide to America’s New El Dorado*, 19; *On to Klondike!*, 31.

<sup>226</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 64.



clientele was not limited to the working class. Middle-class men also patronized drinking establishments. The social aspect was important, probably more so than the alcohol. Men gathered together to discuss business and politics. Saloons also allowed them to complain, swear, and tell dirty jokes in a relaxed atmosphere far from “respectable” women and uptight men.<sup>227</sup> Some Dawson saloons were jealous of their reputations and sought to provide patrons with the best of everything. Returning prospectors told stories of fancy watering holes stocked with every liquor imaginable, served over fancy bars. One saloon imported a lavish bar custom made in San Francisco. It cost \$750 to construct, plus shipping. Another establishment was said to have a bar just as spectacular. Not every saloon was so particular about its image. Many were quite spare, containing only the absolute necessities: a crude bar, tables, chairs, and cheap whiskey that sold for fifty cents per shot. Customers often had little else in their spare time but drink and gamble, especially during the long winters. Some men became concerned about the problems alcohol posed for prospectors. With such a plentiful supply of liquor, John Leonard cautioned, it was all too easy to become a shiftless and dissolute alcoholic. Such a condition could wreck any dreams the Klondiker brought with him to the Yukon.<sup>228</sup>

Prospectors could also gamble. Although moralists and social critics looked askance at gambling, games of chance offered prospectors a chance to kill time, socialize, and possibly make some extra money. To Charles Alexander Plempel, prospectors seemed obsessed with gambling, engaging in it at all hours of the day and night. He was

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<sup>227</sup> Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 108, 113; Kingsdale, “The Poor Man’s Club,” 265.

<sup>228</sup> *Chicago Record*, 263; Robert Oglesby, “The Klondike Gold Region,” *The Cosmopolitan*, September 1897, 528; Tappan Adney, “News From the Klondike,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 21 January 1898, 678; Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska*, 178.

quick to point out that gambling was generally the only example of “rowdiness” in town. Joseph Ladue related that any time not spent prospecting was spent gambling. However, most every game was straight. Saloon keepers did not permit cheating in their establishments. Doing so could seriously hamper business. Furthermore, honest miners would not stand for it. The combination of the Mounties’ handgun ordinance and the honesty of the gamblers meant that there was little chance of violence erupting over a card game.<sup>229</sup> Men could find any kind of game they wanted in Dawson. Most preferred traditional games like poker and faro. A number of accounts recalled that men wagered vast sums of cash and gold dust in these games. Paramore claimed, “As a gambling town I think it [Dawson] is equal to any that I have ever seen.” The bets placed testified to that observation. He reasoned that the volume of gambling and the amount of money bet were certain signs of a camp’s prosperity. Games went late and the stakes were high. Men sometimes bet hundreds of dollars just to see the third card in stud poker. Louis Coolidge reported that a \$2,000 pot was an ordinary occurrence. Such games provided plenty of exhilaration and heartbreak for prospectors on many a long Arctic night.<sup>230</sup>

Dawson City men patronized brothels as well. Clandestine sexual activity is difficult to quantify. Some historians agree that prostitution was growing in the late nineteenth century.<sup>231</sup> It is also known that prostitution played an active role in the social life of mining camps. Dawson City was no different. However, in all the primary sources examined here, there was only one reference to prostitution, and this reference is

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<sup>229</sup> Plempel, *The Klondike Gold Fields, Their Discovery, Development and Future Possibilities*, 62; Steffens, “Life in the Klondike Gold Fields,” 965; *On to Klondike!*, 23.

<sup>230</sup> Wharton, *The Klondike. A Complete Guide to the Gold Fields*, 34; Paramore, *The Practical Guide to America’s New El Dorado*, 32; Coolidge, *Klondike and the Yukon Country, A Description of Our Alaskan Land of Gold*, 70; *Chicago Record*, 264.

<sup>231</sup> Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 126; Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor*, 169-170.

indirect. John William Leonard wrote critically that, “In Dawson...the ‘dance hall fairies’ are among the most demoralizing elements of the town.”<sup>232</sup> This lack of direct evidence is not surprising. Magazines like *Forest and Stream* and *Overland Monthly* concerned themselves with hunting, hiking, and camping. Guidebook authors sought to promote the best aspects of the Klondike. They praised the healthy climate and the extent and richness of the gold fields, not the number, beauty, or sexual prowess of Dawson City’s prostitutes. As such, the information on this important aspect of the Klondike’s recreational life comes from Charlene Porsild’s thorough examination of the topic in her book *Gamblers and Dreamers*.

The sex trade played an important, if largely unacknowledged, role in Dawson’s economy. Prostitutes operated out of saloons and dance halls as well as brothels. It was a lucrative business for the proprietors of these establishments, which employed around one thousand people. As Dawson began to take on a more permanent, “respectable” air, some members of the community began to pressure the Mounties to do something about prostitution. The police realized that a harsh crackdown might drive the sex trade underground, making it even harder to regulate. They settled on a hands-off policy. As long as prostitutes and their clients conducted themselves in an orderly manner and broke no other laws, the Mounties left them alone. Although Hollywood images often portray dance hall girls and prostitutes as beautiful, gaudily-clad courtesans working for a prosperous clientele, most prostitutes were homely and abjectly poor. Prospectors probably made up the bulk of the sex trade’s customer base, especially after the spring when the miners washed the dirt they accumulated over the winter. However, Porsild

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<sup>232</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers’ Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 141.

points out that it is not unreasonable to assume that men from the merchant and professional classes enjoyed the company of prostitutes.<sup>233</sup> Prostitution was one more example of the risqué activities men might participate in when they came to town.

According to advocates, the Klondike Gold Rush offered an important chance for vigorous men to live out the ideas of the Strenuous Life. The rush came at a time when some social critics believed that American manhood had grown soft and effete. Throughout much of the nineteenth century men who felt confined and weakened by “civilization” escaped to the frontier to reinvigorate and reinvent themselves. In the years after 1890, some men feared that the frontier and its vivifying attributes were gone forever. The gold rush gave these men a chance to relive the frontier experience. Men with the right characteristics - strength, determination, nerve, and self-reliance - could go North and often succeed in reinventing themselves physically, psychologically, and financially. Vigorous men succeeded where the unfit and overcivilized failed. Leonard concluded, “The requisites then, are a sound body, a strong and willing arm, and a brave heart. Add to these industry and perseverance, temperance and a cool head, and a man is well-equipped for the journey and life at the end.”<sup>234</sup> In the gold fields prospectors engaged in “manly” activities like drinking, gambling, and sex without interference. Some found gold, many more did not. However, even if the vigorous man did not find wealth, the trip allowed him to test his wits and strength against Nature and his fellows, and that was no small consolation.

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<sup>233</sup> Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers*, 99-136.

<sup>234</sup> Leonard, *The Gold Fields of the Klondike; Fortune Seekers' Guide to the Yukon Region of Alaska and British America*, 100.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Two distinct ideals of middle-class masculinity existed in the United States at the close of the nineteenth century. The first was the ideal of “virtuous” masculinity. Virtuous men were responsible, sober, and god-fearing. Although industrialization and mechanization made it harder for middle-class men to aspire to self-mastery in the work place, the large corporations that they worked for offered steady employment with a regular, assured salary. Men needed only to work hard and save in order to support themselves and their families. Work allowed a man to clothe, shelter, and feed his family as well as leaving a little money left over for luxury items and entertainment. Familial obligations also loomed large in the lives of these men. Breadwinning was the central focus of their lives. Social theorists and advisors also pointed out that men should take a more active domestic role in their households. Marriage was increasingly based upon compatibility and love. Men also relished the opportunity to interact with their children. Fathers offered both moral advice and nurture. Virtuous men also shunned the temptations of the world. They tried to avoid alcohol and other risqué entertainment. They sought to be sober, temperate and upstanding Christians.

The second ideal was much different. Other theorists and commentators believed that American men must become more aggressive and assertive. They viewed the

changes in society and the work place with great trepidation. In previous decades work had offered men a chance for achievement and independence. Now corporations and cheap labor blocked this avenue for advancement and fulfillment. Critics also claimed that the hectic pace and rapid process of “civilization” made men weak and flaccid. Before 1890, men could usually escape to the frontier if they sought to reinvigorate or reinvent themselves. This no longer seemed like an option, so men had to look elsewhere. Many American men sought to live out the tenets of Theodore Roosevelt’s “Strenuous Life” idea. This ethic called for constant physical activity, competition, and manly self-assertion. Men sought to gain prestige and fulfillment in the gymnasiums and on the athletic fields. Others took to the countryside to hunt, hike, and fish. Many vigorous men also felt constrained by the norms of “respectable” society. They sought entertainment with their fellows in ultra-masculine environments. The saloon was one such environment. It allowed men to have a drink and socialize with their fellows in a relaxed environment. Others sought escape through gambling. Sex offered men yet another outlet for their energies and aggression. Anonymous sex with a prostitute let men fulfill any urges that they might not otherwise be able to satisfy.

The discovery of gold in the Klondike came at an important time for American men. It occurred at a watershed moment in American gender history. The two groups had widely differing perceptions of the gold rush, what they thought it meant, and the opportunities and obstacles it might present. To its supporters, the older ideal of responsibility and temperance seemed under attack. They looked askance at the rush North, and urged men to stay at home and not succumb to the temptations of easy riches. Adherents to the newer ideal of aggressive masculinity welcomed the gold rush. It

seemed to offer men in the late 1890s a chance to relive the glory days of the frontier. It also gave aggressive men a chance to put the theories of the Strenuous Life into actual practice in a wilderness environment. Both sides were quite vehement in presenting their arguments for and against the trip to the Klondike gold fields, and ideas about gender and masculinity played an important role in shaping these arguments.

Most sources geared towards “virtuous men,” especially religious magazines, urged their readers to stay away from the Klondike. The first set of anti-Klondike arguments were practical in nature. No one doubted the presence of large amounts of gold on the upper Yukon. However, procuring it was another matter entirely. Critics argued that gold was not always easy to find, and that the labor involved in procuring it was intense and difficult. Prospectors in the Klondike prior to 1898 had staked out most of the ground in the immediate area. Furthermore, placer mining, critics argued, was not honorable work for middle-class professionals. It seemed too much like gambling. It was far better for men to hold down steady jobs with a guaranteed salary than to go off chasing a dream. Steady work fed families, dreams did not. Another practical matter was the nature of the trip itself. Most sources reported that the trip was incredibly difficult. Travelers had to cross mountains, shoot raging rapids, deal with bone-numbing cold, and face primitive living conditions in the gold fields. Men risked all of this simply on the *chance* that they might find gold. Other arguments against the trip involved domestic, moral, and religious elements. Klondike naysayers argued that men who went to the gold fields neglected their familial responsibilities. Men needed to stay at home with their families if they wanted to be good husbands and fathers. Men who ran off to the Klondike could not provide money, nurture, or love to their families if they were not

at home. Religious leaders and writers argued that spending money on going to the Yukon represented a neglect of Christian duty. Men should spend any spare money on supporting mission work, not outfitting a mining expedition. If men chose to go, they should go intending to spread the Gospel as missionaries. If they chose not to take this path, they should not abandon their religious responsibilities and obligations once they reached the gold fields. Men had to maintain some semblance of middle-class morality and respectability in the midst of debauchery and degeneracy. Critics argued that most men who left for the Klondike abrogated the financial, familial, and religious ideals that were the foundation of middle-class, virtuous masculinity.

Other writers were much more enthusiastic about the gold rush. Klondike enthusiasts claimed that the gold strike could not have come at a better time. American manhood had grown soft and lazy, they claimed. Furthermore, with the frontier “closed,” men had nowhere to go to reinvent and reinvigorate themselves. The discovery on the Yukon seemed to solve both of these problems. The strike opened up a new frontier where men could both test and reinvent themselves physically, psychologically, and financially. The trip to the mines and the experiences in the gold fields offered men the chance to live the Strenuous Life for themselves in a new and difficult environment. The rush allowed men to leave the cities. Some social critics charged that city life was one of the major causes for the decline in masculine assertiveness and virility. Life on the trails and in the mines was healthier and more invigorating than life behind a desk, they wrote. Climbing mountains, running rapids, and panning for gold let men test both their physical strength and their nerve against both nature and their fellows. Although the trails might be threatening to the soft and unfit, men with the right amount of physical strength and



level-headedness should have little trouble succeeding. Life in the Klondike also offered men the opportunity to hunt and fish, two key elements in Roosevelt's ideal. In the mining camps, men might interact in a free, unconstrained, and predominantly male environment. The hit and miss nature of gold mining offered excitement and the element of chance; gambling at the tables in Dawson's saloons did the same. The mining camps had plenty of saloons in which men could drink, sing, and tell racy stories and jokes in a relaxed and convivial atmosphere. A large number of prostitutes offered their services as well. The Klondike Gold Rush seemed to have everything the proponent of vigorous masculinity could want: physical challenges, danger, chance, male bonding, and a chance to get rich.

This work opens up a number of other directions for further enquiry. The most obvious deals with class distinctions; this paper addresses only middle-class ideals. The working class almost certainly saw society and masculinity in a different light. It would be interesting to explore the working class ideal of masculinity, as well as their reaction to the gold rush. This approach will probably require intensive archival research into diaries and reminiscences from working class prospectors and travelers as well as investigation into what working class magazines and newspapers said regarding the rush. Researchers might also examine other largely untapped sources to see what they say regarding masculinity. Fictional accounts of the gold rush might be a good place to start. The work of Jack London, Robert Service, and Rex Beach could shed further light on masculine ideals. Children's and young people's fiction might to the same. A reading of sources written by women might also reveal further information about masculinity and how females viewed it. Another angle could involve comparative social history.

Researchers could use different gold rushes at different times to compare and contrast social ideas about masculinity. The most obvious example is to compare the California Gold Rush with the Klondike Gold Rush. This allows for a comparison of masculine ideals at the midpoint of the nineteenth century and at the end of the century. A final idea might expand upon the idea of vigorous manhood. What could vigorous men do once the Klondike Gold Rush ended? How else could they live the “frontier” experience? It might be worthwhile to examine activities such as hunting, fishing, and camping in both the East and West through the lens of social and cultural history. Did these activities become more popular as a substitute for frontier adventure following 1900? Did promoters and magazines use the language of the frontier experience to make these activities more appealing to men? Viewing the gold rush through the lens of masculinity and gender allows the future researcher to pursue many fruitful leads in the future.

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## VITA

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Scope and Method of Study: This thesis examines ideas about the true nature of middle-class masculinity in the late 1800s and early 1900s. It uses identifies two differing ideals about what constitutes true manliness, and uses the Klondike Gold Rush as a test case to observe how these ideas shaped men's behavior on the trails and in the gold fields. Chapter one offers an introduction to the different ideas about gender and masculinity at the close of the nineteenth-century. Chapter two also gives a brief sketch of the history of the Klondike Gold Rush. Chapter three examines the ideal of "virtuous masculinity" and its ties with the gold rush. Chapter four deals with the ideal of "vigorous," assertive masculinity and the gold rush. Chapter five is the conclusion.

Findings and Conclusions: Social critics and theorists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries identified two ideals of masculinity. The first type of masculinity emphasized thrift, financial responsibility, familial duties such as breadwinning and child-rearing, and Christian living. Most writers who adhered to this ideal cautioned middle-class men against going to the Klondike. Critics stressed the fact that there was no guarantee that men would strike a rich gold deposit. Furthermore, prospecting was not honorable middle-class work. Klondike opponents also stressed that fact that the trip was very difficult. They argued that if men went they should not forsake their religious responsibilities and obligations. Finally, some writers pointed out that a Klondike trip represented an abrogation of domestic duties. The second ideal of masculinity stressed aggressive, self-assertive behavior. Proponents of this style of masculinity urged men to get out of the cities and into the wilderness. In the wild, men might recoup themselves both physically and psychologically. If men were in good physical shape and possessed steady nerves, promoters claimed, the trip would be positively beneficial. Also, life in the gold camps allowed these vigorous men to take part in characteristically "male" activities such as drinking, gambling, and prostitution.

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