

Public Memory and Public Holidays

Discovery Day and the Establishment of a Klondike Society

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Public holidays and celebrations are important elements in the construction of public memory. As sanctioned annual events they are generally used to commemorate those elements of the shared past that reinforce the existing social order and to shape the community vision of the future.

The Discovery Day holiday in the Yukon Territory of Canada was established in 1912 to commemorate the fortitude of the early pioneers who discovered gold. The associated Discovery Day parade recounts the shared history of the pioneer community from this discovery through the economic development that followed. It is a re-consecration of the economic development vision that has fired the imagination of much of the newcomer population to the north ever since.

Over the last twenty-five years however, challenges to this exclusive history, especially from the Territory's aboriginal population, have led to a deeper understanding of the cultural diversity of the Territory's population and a gradual evolution of the shared history.

Introduction

In the late summer of 1896, a white-aboriginal family group camped on a minor tributary of the Yukon River in the northwest of Canada. While catching salmon and cutting wood, they also poked about the sandbars of the nearby creeks for placer gold. On the 17th of August, the three men found sizeable nuggets of gold. They immediately staked mining claims on what was soon to become known as Bonanza Creek.¹ Over the next four years tens of thousands of men and women from around the world stampeded to the Klondike.

The Klondike Gold Rush continues to be celebrated in the Yukon. It has also proven to be a major draw for tourists seeking to relive the mythic experience of the last western pioneers. For many, the gold rush epitomizes the highlights of late nineteenth and twentieth century western dogma - individual enterprise, the creation of a civilization in the wilderness, and an escape from the urban, industrial society. These are the basic elements of frontier history in North America and for many years shaped the Yukon identity.

In the Yukon they have been melded into an enduring story that acts as the foundation for contemporary Yukon identity. The challenging trip into the Yukon, the colourful tales of extravagance in Dawson City and the physical hardships associated with the development of the mining industry in the Klondike Gold Fields have become the common ground for the construction of a shared memory.²

The imagery and public celebration of this shared memory, however have been subject to re-evaluation during various commemorative events over the last decade. In the early 1990s, the Territorial Government established the Yukon Anniversaries Commission to organize and market the Gold Rush Centennial. As a dry run, the Commission planned celebrations around the 50th anniversary of the completion of the Alaska Highway in 1992. The Alaska Highway was the ultimate connection to the Outside, the final and irrevocable link between the Yukon and the rest of

¹Additional background can be found in D. Neufeld, "Trampled in the Rush", *Legion Magazine*, Jan/Feb, 1998, p. 22-25.)

²The best known example of the genre is Pierre Berton's *Klondike: The Life and Death of the Last Great Gold Rush* (Toronto, 1958).

the world.³ It fit well into the western dogma as the last stage of the frontier.

Almost immediately however, the Commission ran into serious local protests from Yukon First Nations. The aboriginal population of the Territory pointed out that from their perspective, the construction of the highway was at best, a mixed blessing. The Commission, to its credit, altered its plans and the celebrations became a more thoughtful set of commemorations. It was perhaps the first time there had been a significant popular challenge to the accepted story of Yukon history.

Public Memory and Public Holidays

The public memory of the Yukon past rests upon ideas common to the North American frontier. The strengthening of links to the Outside, back home, and the development of the regional economy were familiar themes to the pioneers of the Yukon. Dawson's idea of its past shared common origins with centres further to the south and was expressed in similar ways.

The late nineteenth century in North America was a period of dramatic change. In the 1860s, both the United States and Canada were raw, unformed nation states. Over the next half century the society in both countries faced several challenges. Massive immigration from different countries threatened the ethnic cohesiveness and security of the resident communities. The industrialization of the national economies also reduced the importance of the earlier independent business groupings and made major changes in the power relationships within society. Finally, there was a significant redistribution of the population from small rural communities to the fast growing urban centres where alienation from place and time seemed to isolate people from each other. In an attempt to maintain social stability and ensure a continuity of order through these changes, social groupings struggled to create new traditions of belonging, a new sense of identity.⁴

In San Antonio, Texas in the 1890s, business leaders worked to develop a single urban heritage to cement the population into a cohesive and positive force actively supporting city development.⁵ In her analysis of this development, Holly Beachley Brear focuses on the Alamo as a central shrine to identity. The associated invented traditions include a creation story for Texas which is reinforced by an annual fiesta to re-consecrate this myth. The new events and places evoked a common history, presented and supported through a set of community organizations, events and places. David Glassberg notes that "a shared history - elements of a past remembered in common as well as elements forgotten in common - is the crucial element in the creation of an "imagined community" through which disparate individuals can envision themselves as members of a collective with a common present - and future."⁶ Brear also points out, however, that these elements also reflect the power structures of the society constructing them and are intended to bolster their hold on power and the extension of their values.

The construction of such a collective identity has two parts, one explicit, one implicit. First, it defines the society. It identifies the shared elements - ethnicity, business links, religion or common sets of shared experiences - which mark

³Outside is still a common local term, dating from the gold rush, describing Vancouver, British Columbia and Seattle, Washington and the rest of western world connected to the Yukon through these points.

⁴This theme has been developed by Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions", E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger ed. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983) p.4-5. and Michael Wallace, "Visiting the Past: History Museums in the United States", S. Porter Benson, S. Brier and R. Rosenzweig ed. *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia, 1986) p. 139-140. Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order 1877-1920* (New York, 1967) also describes the general trend of social transformation as the United States was changed from a country of small towns to a nation run by a bureaucratic minded urban middle class.

⁵Holly Beachley Brear, *Inherit the Alamo: Myth and Ritual at an American Shrine* (Austin, 1995).

⁶David Glassberg drawing on Benedict Anderson, "Presenting History to the Public: The Study of Memory and the Uses of the Past", *CRM*, Vol. 21, No.11, 1998, p.5.

the boundaries of the community. Through their elaboration of a creation myth community leaders are able to reinforce the existing social hierarchy and make their aspirations for the community the logical development of the past. Thus by controlling the collective vision of the past, the creators of new tradition shape public memory in their own image and make their goals the central feature of the shared future.

Although rarely explicit in the creation of a shared history is the sense of boundary. There are generally groups who do not belong, who do not share in the collective. The exclusion of those powerless or those with distinctly different visions of the past, and the future, is common. And these groups are rarely heard from, in fact they are written out of history or cast as other. Their voice only gains public acknowledgement when there is a shift in the power base of the community.⁷

The shared history of the Yukon is a case where such an exclusion, and challenge, has taken place. The public awareness of the territory's history has been largely economic in nature. Small scale hand placer gold mining was superseded by industrial dredging early in this century and later complemented by hard rock mining, all underlain by gradual improvements in supporting transportation and communication links to the outside world. This understanding of the shared history is deep and unquestioned. At a community heritage event one local historian asked rhetorically, "What is the most important event in the history of the Yukon - the Klondike Gold Rush or the construction of the White Pass & Yukon Railway?"⁸ The shared history is the gold rush and its results. The shared future is continuing economic development through resource extraction industries.

The study of public commemoration in the Yukon offers some significantly different perspectives on the history of the Territory. By studying the creation myth and the associated hierarchies, the structures of social power are made visible. Further by considering the dynamics of change within these structures it is possible to see how Yukon people are rebuilding a more inclusive shared past and future.

The Foundations of an "Imagined Community"

Public holidays are important parts of the shared identity that binds a community together. National holidays were instituted in the nineteenth century to reduce local loyalties and enhance a sense of pride in the larger nation state. Regional holidays, however, remain important today, reminding people of their own local identity. In the Yukon the community does not celebrate the civic holiday in early August like the rest of Canada. Instead, the people of the Territory have their own late summer holiday - Discovery Day, the 17th of August, commemorating the initial discovery of gold that sparked the Klondike Gold Rush.

The Klondike Gold Rush was a turn of the century mass movement of people to a remote, from the western world's perspective, location in the central Yukon. The gold rush created a community of about 30,000 Stampeders on the banks of the Yukon River. Although well over 20,000 of these were Canadian and American citizens, more than two-thirds of these were recent immigrants to their adopted countries. These newcomers remained a distinct and quite separate body from the indigenous population of the Yukon, estimated at approximately 5,000 people.⁹

This new gold mining community of the Yukon was set in a challenging and isolated environment. Not surprisingly the group sought to establish some identity - some sense of community and of boundaries between their civilization

⁷Martha Norkunas, *The Politics of Public Memory: Tourism, History and Ethnicity in Monterey, California* (New York, 1989) describes such a power shift in local Monterey politics and the resulting adjustments in public commemoration, chapter 4 "Nature, History, and Ethnicity".

⁸Roy Minter, YHMA Awards event, 1991.

⁹Canada, *Sessional Papers 1894*, Annual Report of the Northwest Mounted Police, Charles Constantine's Report on the Yukon for 1894.

and the surrounding wilderness.¹⁰ In constructing the “imagined community”, the people of Dawson City were able to draw upon a number of common features. These included race, isolation from their homes, work and an annual round of work shaped by the climate.

Although diverse in national origin, the bulk of the Stampeders population was northern European in cultural origin and shared a Christian religious heritage. They were also believers in the associated value of material progress - a necessary prerequisite for participating in a gold rush. The development of the frontier was considered not only an opportunity, but a racial duty. Dr. Alfred Thompson, the Yukon’s Member of Parliament, spoke at the 1912 Discovery Day celebrations, evoking the racial card; “Not content with the conquest of California, when the Klondike was discovered [that virile race] trekked north to encounter Nature in her fiercest moods.... they will not be content until every part of this great territory is explored, prospected, examined and either accepted or rejected. Such is the genius of the race, that all the elements combined cannot stop the wanderlust!”¹¹ With additional colourful allusions to heroes of the past, Thompson linked the present population with a glorious and directed past of conquest through time.

The extraordinary journey of the Stampeders to the gold fields, up the Pacific coast, through the rugged mountain passes of the Coastal Range and down the Yukon River, was an experience which stayed with them for their whole lives. The journey reinforced their sense of isolation and their separation from their home place. During the height of the rush, newspapers, even weeks old, and books were precious reminders of the “real” life still continuing Outside. Similarly rootless, the community shared the pleasures, and triumphs, as communication and transportation links were gradually extended and tightened. In the early days, the delivery of mail and the arrival of river steamers were cause for community celebration. The completion of the Yukon telegraph in 1901 was an especially important milestone in tying the community to the larger metropolis. These links became physical signs of the shared success of the community’s work in civilizing the north and developing the Yukon by overcoming distance.¹²

The community of Dawson City existed for one reason, mining placer gold. Everyone there was either a miner in the goldfields or working in the supporting infrastructure - government, banking, transportation or service industries. There was a broad and direct community interest in the economic and administrative objectives of the miners. One of the powerful statements of this shared interest was the preparation and broad distribution of the annual “gold clean-up edition” of the *Dawson Daily News*. This common investment in the fortunes of the mining industry was a powerful force in building a vision of a shared future - tighter links to Outside and a cohesive and positive community outlook attracted more capital investment and more extensive, and thus more successful, mining.

Finally the newcomer community in the Yukon shared an annual work cycle determined by the dramatic seasonal changes of the north and the techniques of mining. Mining was initially done by hand labour and involved sinking shafts to the “paydirt”. To avoid flooding, all work was done in winter when water was frozen. By spring, large piles of gold bearing gravel were ready to be “washed” using the spring run off. “Clean-up”, the collection of the gold dust, was generally completed in early June and all the miners were paid out of the winter’s take. This was also about the time of “break-up”, when the ice finally melted and moved downstream. The year’s first river steamers, carrying fresh supplies and liquor, made it to Dawson. Another winter of work was done and it was time for a holiday.

The primary holiday of the Gold Rush was a week long festival of mining success celebrating the clean-up on the creeks. It was centred on the Canadian and American national holidays, July 1, Dominion Day, and July 4,

¹⁰Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York, 1991) p.4. Hobsbawm also describes the creation of social identity as an important element bringing stability to a community undergoing rapid change or establishment. Hobsbawm, “Introduction”, p. 2.

¹¹*Dawson Daily News*, August 17, 1912.

¹²Brigid Hains, “Mawson of the Antarctic, Flynn of the Inland: Progressive heroes on Australia’s ecological frontiers”, in T. Griffiths and L. Robin ed., *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies* (Keele Univ. Press, Australia, 1997) p. 161 also notes the importance of technological linkages between outpost and metropolis.

Independence Day. Although imported from the south, this pair of national holiday played an important role in submerging the many different cultural and social identities making up the Stampeder society. They fostered a single Yukon fraternity by building on the shared race and annual round of work of its members. However, over the first decade of the new century these imported identities faded and new factors shaped peoples' celebrations.

Discovery Day

The stampeders successfully established a new community in the north. However, with the continuing entry of new people and things the early arrivers began to formalize the social hierarchy. This was done to reinforce the primacy of gold mining by honouring the original pioneers who led the way north. This desire for structuring the internal order of the community, that is, for defining the shared history, pre-dates the gold rush. The Yukon Order of Pioneers, the YOOPs, a mutual-aid society limited to those whites who were in the Yukon before 1888, was established in 1894, as a reaction to the many new miners coming in. During the gold rush, the YOOPs established themselves as the "leaders" of the newcomer community by their experience and knowledge of the region.¹³ Membership became a sign of social acceptance, it was a line between the "sourdough" and the mass of "cheechakos".¹⁴ The YOOPs became the definers and carriers of the shared future that brought people in over the trail to tough it out in the mines.

And the future of the Stampede society was built on a vision of entrepreneurial and independent freeholders developing natural resources and getting rich - not unlike the farmers settling both the Canadian and American west. The regulations governing size and holding of placer claims re-inforced this ideal - if a miner was off his claim longer than 72 hours it was legally open for re-staking - no speculation - and the size of claims, supposed to be geared to a man's capacity to work and gain an income from it, varied with the Government's perception of the ground's richness.¹⁵ However, there was a catch. There is more to placer gold than staking a claim - a miner needed water, to separate the gold from the dirt. And water in the dry interior of the Klondike was, and still is, hard to come by and have in the right place.

The growing investment of outside capital in mechanical mining equipment allowed significant changes to the annual work schedule. Mechanization, especially the application of water pumps, allowed digging to take place year round. Activity only slowed in late summer when the water supply was low. As mining techniques were upgraded through the application of steam power and summer open pit mining, the shortage of water became the bottleneck in production. The nationalist holidays of early summer holidays lost their importance. Everyone was too busy working.

Large Outside corporations began serious investments in the Yukon, building upon the existing infrastructure of river boats, railways, towns and services. In the goldfields they purchased large groups of claims to work them more effectively with hydraulic monitors and dredges. They began to investing large sums of money in water management with significant consequences for the idea of an independent freehold society in the north.

Through the first decade of the century, there was increasing vocal opposition by the independent miners to the "monopoly" practices of the vertically integrated corporations. The local population felt they were being robbed of their birthright, of control of the society they had built in the wilderness. Forced to limit the time for the earlier holidays in early July by introduced mining practices, the community leaders sought a holiday in the new slow time of the year.

¹³Hobsbawm, "Introduction", p. 10-11.

¹⁴Sourdough is a reference to sourdough bread, the staple of the early prospectors. A variety of colourful achievements exist to define this status, but these all rest upon knowledge and experience of the north. *Cheechako* is a combination of Chinook *t'shi* (new) and Nootka *chako* (to come).

¹⁵Canada, Order in Council No. 1189, 21 May, 1897, *Yukon Placer Mining Regulations Governing Placer Mining along the Yukon River and its tributaries in the Northwest Territories*. Changes in claim size are noted in Yukon Archives, *Mining Recorder's Records (Placer) 1894-1972 Finding Aid* (Whitehorse, 1983) p. 4.

In 1911, the YOOPs persuaded the Territorial Commissioner to make August 17 a holiday. The new holiday was immediately known as Discovery Day. Discovery Day however, was a significantly different event than the turn of the century gold clean-up celebration of mining success. The editor of the *Dawson Daily News* opined in 1912; “Everywhere the people are catching the spirit of the day, and are determined to sidestep drudgery and the chase after the glowing dollar long enough to have a grand time.”¹⁶ Discovery Day became a remembrance of the entrepreneurial spirit and ideals of individualism that had driven the first prospectors “over the Trail” into the Yukon.¹⁷ In fact, Discovery Day, and the related symbol of the Sourdough gold panner, were a mixed reaction to the loss of local control of the Klondike to Outside corporations combined with a vigorous pride in the development of the region.

Discovery Day quickly acquired all of the usual summer holiday activities of southern communities. In 1912, the day started at noon with photos of the Pioneers, a parade followed by speeches and a sports day. In the fair grounds there were balloon ascensions, refreshments and free shows for the children, and a football match in the evening. Still later the day wrapped up with a town dance.¹⁸

However, the main feature of the Discovery Day celebrations was, and still remains, the parade. In the early days, the parade was always led by two Pioneers carrying large Union Jacks. They were followed by a group of Mounted Police on their horses and the musical strains of the Dawson Brass Band. The main body of the parade was a collection of floats, representing the businesses and industries of the region. In 1912, these included the mining industry, the Northern Commercial Company, the Cascade Laundry and the always popular wagon from the O’Brien Brewing and Malting Co. Other floats showed off a full-size replica of the first log cabin in Dawson, a sourdough boat and even Olof Olsen’s “great wooden cart, the first wheeled vehicle made and used in Dawson.”¹⁹ Chasing behind the floats were the children of the Klondike, “between 100 and 200 strong, many of them born in Dawson or on the gold creek, all radiant in their glowing health.” In later years the children’s part of the parade became a decorated bicycle competition. After them came the Eagles and, “the hardy men who opened the Yukon to the world”, the almost 500 members of the YOOP. The parade was to be ended with the Dawson fire department rigs.

A grand parade and only slight variations of it have wound through the streets of Dawson annually since then. The parade is a pageant of Yukon history and an important element in the imagined community’s shared history. First, the Pioneers enter the wilderness - the space and time before the parade, carrying forward British sovereignty. Their position at the head of the parade, at the point of creation in the Yukon, reinforces their place at the apex of the community’s social hierarchy. They are supported by the Mounties on horseback, the para-military representatives of the Canadian government, who arrived in the Yukon in 1894, just before the gold rush. As the carriers of law and order, the Mounted Police lay a foundation of order for future development.²⁰ The Stampede itself is represented by the big brass band which in its turn announces a tidal wave of civilization, and connection to the Outside.

With the connection there is the opportunity to take advantage of the innovations of history - a log cabin and the wheel. These however, are merely the prelude for the arrival of the real benefits of modern life - economic development. The floats of the mining industry and the various related businesses are ordered by their time of arrival in Dawson, their contribution to the structure of a modern community in the wilderness. And with this structure,

¹⁶*Dawson Daily News*, August 13, 1912.

¹⁷The term was used by the YOOPs to describe their membership initiation rite. *Dawson Daily News*, August 17, 1911.

¹⁸*Dawson Daily News*, August 13, 1912.

¹⁹*Dawson Daily News*, August 19, 1912.

²⁰In an interesting side light to the dynamics of social hierarchies, members of the Dawson Discovery Day parade committee recently reported that the Mounties said they would no longer ride behind the YOOPs. If they were not at the head of the parade, they would not participate. Personal communication, Louise Ranger, November, 1998.

there is a possibility for a future - the children. Finally, after the remaining stalwarts of the fraternal order of the Eagles and YOOPs have been acknowledged, there is the highest order of civilization - the local organization of self-government for the common good, the fire trucks.

With the representation of an established social hierarchy and the various elements of the civilization they have built, the parade is a microcosm of the imagined short history of the Yukon. The parade is the annual re-birth of the Territory, the start of history and the progress of its citizens in a new land. It fulfills and reinforces the set of values forwarded by the imagined community.

Challenging the "Imaged Community"

Through the teens, twenties and thirties the social identity of the Yukon remained relatively stable. It was only the startling transformations of the Yukon in the mid-1940s and 1950s that began to challenge the shared identity of the Yukon. As in earlier days, these changes were driven by a series of externally driven events.

The construction of the Alaska Highway during the war integrated the Yukon on two levels - first, there was the more direct connection to the Outside further reducing isolation and fulfilling the collective future. The second, however, was of a very different character. The highway and expanding road network started to break down the old separation between newcomers and Yukon First Nations.²¹

Postwar inflation also made serious inroads into Canadian gold mining as costs inflated in the post war boom while the price of gold remained fixed at \$35/oz. Yukon companies started closing down their operations. The business community in the Klondike began looking for economic alternatives. With the Alaska Highway the rising demand for urban recreation of the late 1950s was an accessible market. The attractions of Gold Rush history and the natural beauty of the region made tourism an obvious choice for the diversification of the northern economy.²²

Finally Canadians once again looked north. By the mid-1950s, there was increasing interest and investment in the north as it appeared to be the future of Canada. John Diefenbaker's election as Prime Minister of Canada in 1958 was built on a platform including a northern vision. A new "gold rush", marked by massive development of northern resources, defence initiatives and southern immigration into the north, was spurred on by government support.²³

In the Yukon this revival played out in several ways. While mining remained an important player in northern development there was a conscious and concerted effort to broaden the base of the northern economy. This generally focused on tourism. In 1952, a Dawson City community organization set itself up as a tourist association. They offered visitors tours of the town by guides in old clothes and an evening dance. This activity evolved into the Klondike Visitor's Association (KVA) that remains today as the single largest, and most effective, group in selling "the Klondike" to visitors.

As part of this expanding tourist marketing the goldpanner was added to the Yukon license plate in 1956. Pierre Berton's best selling book, *Klondike*, was released in 1958. A territorial Department of Tourism, which fostered and marketed the Klondike theme around the world, was created about 1960. The Canadian Department of National Resources and Northern Development also contributed. In 1959 Dawson was recognized as a National Historical Complex, and the Federal Government invested heavily in the restoration of buildings, river boats and gold rush history. These all added fuel to the gold rush fervour, both in the revival of the original version as a tourist event and

²¹Julie Cruikshank, "The Gravel Magnet", in K. Coates ed., *The Alaska Highway: Papers of the 40th Anniversary Symposium* (Vancouver, 1985).

²²W.A. Fuller, "Management of Recreation Resources in the Yukon Territory" (mss report of 1956) noted in D. Neufeld, "Non-Park Interests, Ecological Integrity and Trans-boundary Management of Kluane National Park/Reserve" draft mss, Parks Canada, 1998.

²³K. Coates and W. Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun - A History of the Yukon* (Edmonton, 1988) p. 271.

the initiation of the second version of development. By the mid-1960s, the new northern rush was booming with high base metal prices supporting renewed prospecting and mine development and the expansion of the tourism industry. The earlier shared vision of the future appeared to have been revitalized.

What is striking about this new rush is the similarity between both the early commemorations and the 1950s revival of the gold rush. Both were almost exclusively stories of white males in mining, business or government - that is, they accurately reflected the social distribution of power in western society at the time. But by the late 1960s, First Nations, the other cultural group in the Territory, began working to change this distribution in the Yukon.

Until the major social disruptions following on the construction of the Alaska Highway and the big development push of the 1950s and 60s, there was actually only limited contact between newcomers and First Nations. However this changed rapidly after the war. Residential schools aggressively recruited aboriginal students from the communities, gold mines, short of workers in the depressed economic regime of the late 1940s, began to hire aboriginal labourers and First Nations began settling in the larger towns.²⁴

The spark that finally ignited this long simmering First Nation dissatisfaction with their lot was the release of the Canadian government's *White Paper* on Indian Affairs in 1969. The *White Paper* proposed that the special status of Aboriginal People under the Indian Act be rescinded and that Canada's Indians join into the mainstream national population. This proposal led to an uproar among aboriginal people across Canada. In the Yukon, First Nations organized what evolved into the Council for Yukon First Nations and prepared their own position paper - *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow - A Statement of Grievances and an Approach to Settlement by Yukon Indian People*. Much of this submission is a recounting of Yukon history from the aboriginal perspective. The submission quite correctly pointed out that the original peoples of the Yukon had been left out of history. "Public holidays now have little meaning to the Indian. August 17 - Discovery Day means to the Whiteman the day the gold rush started. It means to the Indian the day his way of life began to disappear."²⁵

In 1973 the Federal Government accepted this document as the basis for negotiating a comprehensive land claims agreement in the Yukon. The Government also accepted the Yukon Aboriginal Peoples' intent to establish a co-operative government model for both cultures in the Yukon.²⁶ As Roddy Blackjack, an Elder of the Carmacks/Little Salmon First Nation, has said, "Time for us to walk together, hand in hand."

The resulting Umbrella Final Agreement, finally signed in 1991, outlines a cultural accommodation that establishes a framework for First Nations to more fully play a role in all aspects of Yukon Society. The heritage chapter is perhaps unique in the document in that it not only arranges for inclusion in decision making but also asks for the rebuilding of the Yukon's history to include them. Two terms of the Umbrella Final Agreement spell out the demand for change:

- term 13.4.1 - As the Heritage Resources of Yukon Indian People are under developed relative to non-Indian Heritage Resources, priority in the allocation of Government program resources ... shall... be given to the development and management of Heritage Resources of Yukon Indian People, until an equitable distribution of program resources is achieved.
- term 13.4.2 - Once an equitable distribution of resources is achieved, Heritage Resources of Yukon Indian People shall continue to be allocated an equitable portion of Government program resources ... for Yukon Heritage Resources development and management.²⁷

²⁴Cruikshank, *The Gravel Magnet*.

²⁵Council for Yukon Indians, *Together Today for our Children Tomorrow - A Statement of Grievances and an Approach to Settlement by Yukon Indian People* (1973, Brampton, Ontario) p. 17.

²⁶C. McClellan, *Part of the Land, Part of the Water: A History of the Yukon Indians* (Vancouver, 1987) p. 95, 101-102.

²⁷Council for Yukon Indians, *Umbrella Final Agreement between The Government of Canada, The Council for Yukon Indians and the Government of the Yukon* (Ottawa, 1993) Chapter 13.

These terms are known as the “catch-up and keep-up” clause. With this term both the Federal and Territorial Governments have accepted an obligation to invest in the aboriginal heritage of the Yukon until this investment equals the huge amounts already poured into the public commemoration of the Klondike Gold Rush and then to maintain a balance between the newcomer and aboriginal cultures. While the imagined community arises from social leadership in the community, this government sanction for and commitment to change is a powerful force in the re-shaping of the shared history.

The empty land idea of traditional Klondike discovery history and the old visions of development have to be rebuilt. And with the aboriginal land claim agreements this has begun. Yukoners are struggling to construct a new shared past. One that will include all the peoples that make up the society.²⁸

The construction of a shared past has been an important element in the Yukon. The study of this process offers insights into the character of Yukon social history. The nature of the original entry of newcomers at the turn of the century led to an exclusive social structure focussing on the exploitation of non-renewable resources and a culturally specific set of celebrations. Using mechanisms such as a shared race, their collective sense of isolation, a common workplace and the time of their arrival into the Yukon, the newcomer society was able to construct both a shared past and a social hierarchy. Their comprehensive shared history established a shared future emphasizing improved transportation connections to the Outside, the importation of capital for development and the enhanced integration of the territory into the world economy.

The resulting imagined community was an exclusive one. It has been challenged by various groups, such as aboriginal people, as noted in this paper, as well as women and environmentalists who have been either excluded from the shared past or who do not share the vision of the future. The process of defining the shared past and the social structure is a continuing one as “disparate individuals” work to be included in “a collective with a common present - and future.”

Biographical Note

David Neufeld started as the Yukon & western Arctic Historian for Parks Canada in 1986. He has worked with regional First Nations to consider the implications of national commemoration in the Canadian system of historic sites. At present he is working with the Tr’ondëk Hwëch’in, whose traditional territory straddles the Alaska-Yukon boundary, and the US National Park Service on an international cultural study of the Upper Yukon River. He has also panned for gold and enjoyed the Discovery Day parade.

²⁸Steps in this rebuilding of the shared past include Catherine McClellan’s *Part of the Land, Part of the Water*, Julie Cruikshank’s *Dan dhà tseldeninth’é - Reading Voices: oral and written interpretations of Yukon’s Past* (Vancouver, 1991), and the establishment of the Yukon Native Language Centre to study aboriginal languages and encourage their teaching and the government’s Aboriginal Language Services to foster the continuing use of aboriginal languages in the Yukon. The annual Yukon International Storytelling Festival is probably the best known celebration of aboriginal culture in the territory.

Discovery Day is a public holiday in Yukon, where it is a day off for the general population, and schools and most businesses are closed. Discovery Day is a statutory holiday in Yukon, where the Klondike gold rush took place. ©iStockphoto.com/Natalia Bratslavsky. What Do People Do? Discovery Day is celebrated in Dawson City, the heart of the Klondike gold rush, every year to recognize the discovery of gold in Bonanza Creek in 1896. Discovery Day is the main theme behind various events in the city at this time. This gold discovery also contributed towards the establishment of Yukon as a territory. Discovery Day in Yukon is not to be confused with Discovery Day in Newfoundland and Labrador on the Monday nearest June 24 each year. Symbols.