



South Dawson City Walking Tour





Introduction

Dawson City is very fortunate that a combination of factors contributed to the preservation of a significant portion of early building stock. One of the factors in this preservation, was the rapid decline of population and economic activity after the Gold Rush that lead to the abandonment of buildings rather than their demolition for redevelopment.

A number of heritage structures have been restored or rehabilitated for use by federal and territorial governments, non-profit groups, businesses, and private individuals.

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

We hope that you enjoy your hike and are able to learn more about our heritage and gain a sense of the vitality of South Dawson City.

Historical Sketch

William Ogilvie, Commissioner of the Yukon, chose the name “Dawson City” to honour Dr. George M. Dawson. Dawson was the director of the Canadian Geological Survey and provided the first comprehensive survey of the Yukon Territory.

People arrived in the Klondike from around the world during the Klondike Gold Rush. Dawson City’s population reached nearly 30,000 people at its peak in 1898, making it the largest city west of Winnipeg.



In 1899 the community boasted telegraph, electricity, telephone, and many other amenities for its citizens. The gold rush had created a thriving “boomtown”. Dawson City was incorporated in 1902 and was the territorial capital from 1898 until 1953 when government administration was moved to Whitehorse. Today the town’s year-round population is approximately 2,000 people.

Architecture in Dawson City

The architectural history of Dawson City includes many different styles. Log cabins and canvas tents built by stamperders early in the gold rush characterized the period from 1896 until 1899. Simple in design and economic to construct, log buildings were quickly built and provided ample protection from the sub-zero temperatures. There are still many historic and contemporary log buildings in Dawson City today.

From 1900 to 1903, the prosperity of the gold rush was reflected in more elaborate designs with decorative detailing in both residential and commercial structures. Dawson City’s “boomtown” days are evident in the false fronts often erected to give simple wooden buildings the illusion of affluence and importance. These façades also allowed for advertising and large store-front windows.

The Classical Revival style was predominately used for government buildings during the construction boom from 1900 to 1902. Examples are the Territorial Administration Building and houses like the Black Residence. The columns, capitals, pediments, symmetry, and advancing façade are common features of Classical Revival architecture.

The two churches on Mission Street are Gothic Revival, a style preferred for churches in the last century. The pointed arches, buttresses, tracery in windows, gable roof, and tower help identify the Gothic Revival style.





South Dawson City and the Federal Reserve Area

South Dawson City is located between Harper Street on the north, the Yukon River on the west and the Klondike River on the south. The Federal Reserve, established in 1900 for government use, was situated south of the core commercial area because the land was cheaper and considered to be less threatened by fire.

The Federal Reserve is bounded by Front Street on the west and south sides, Seventh Ave. on the east, and Church/Mission Street on the north. Federal buildings in this area include the Administration Building, (where the Museum is currently located), the Commissioner's Residence, the Court House and Fort Herchmer, containing the North-West Mounted Police residence, the Jail and Stable. Other buildings near the Federal Reserve include the Black Residence, St. Andrew's, and St. Paul's churches and the original Telegraph Office.

The Old Territorial Administration Building



The Dawson City Museum has operated in the Old Territorial Administration Building since 1962. A fire in 1960 had destroyed the original facility and collection that was located in the former Fire Hall on Front Street. Constructed in 1901, the Administration Building was designed by federal architect, Thomas W. Fuller who also designed the Court House, the Telegraph Office, the Old Post Office, a school and the Commissioner's Residence. The Administration Building housed 60 federal officials working in the Mining Recorder's office, the Gold Commissioner's office and the Yukon Territorial Council Chamber. The Legislative Assembly of the territory was located on the second floor. Fuller designed the Administration Building to be the most impressive federal building west of Winnipeg to emphasize Ottawa's presence and symbolize Canadian sovereignty in the northwest.

This magnificent heritage building covers nearly nine thousand square feet and cost \$100,000 to construct. It was the most expensive of all federal buildings in Western Canada and its costly construction was somewhat controversial. The Administration Building was the hub of government when Dawson City was the capital of the Yukon.

The building is characterized by its symmetrical Classical Revival style and its commanding formality and dignity. Fuller positioned this building to be impressive by elevating it above street level and setting it back from the street in the midst of a park setting. This imposing heritage structure was designated a National Historic Site of Canada in 2002, just over a century after it was opened to the public in December 1901.

Black Residence



The Black Residence was one of the more elaborate homes constructed in Dawson City in 1900 and reflects the period of prosperity after the gold rush. It was an upper middle class residence occupied at different times by a barrister, bank manager, and the resident manager of the Yukon Gold Company from 1908 to 1929. It is named after its most illustrious residents, George and Martha Black.

In it, we can see the influence of Classical Revival architecture that is also apparent in the Court House, the Administration Building and the Commissioner's Residence. The columns by the entryways, the dormers, the trim over the windows and decorative cornice are distinguishing elements.

George and Martha Black purchased the property in 1929 and lived here until 1949. Mr. Black, a New Brunswick lawyer, had an extensive political career. He became a Yukon Council Member for three consecutive terms, the Yukon Commissioner from 1912-1916, and Yukon's Member of Parliament for the terms 1921-1935, and 1940-1949. He was elected Speaker of the House of Commons from 1930 - 1935 and was appointed to the Privy Council in 1945. Martha Black left her social position, her security, and a failed marriage to join the rush for Klondike gold in 1898. She married George Black in 1901. Mrs. Black was recognized by the Imperial Daughters of the Empire in Dawson City for her volunteer work in Britain during the First World War. Martha also served in Parliament when she took her husband's place for 5 years when his health temporarily failed. She went on to become the second woman ever elected as a member of the Canadian Parliament. The Blacks lived here during parliamentary recesses, entertaining friends and hosting social events.

In the 1930s, Martha's garden, on the south side of this lot was among the floral showpieces of Dawson City. Her interest in flora resulted in several pamphlets and one book on the subject. The Royal Horticultural Society honoured her efforts by persuading the King of England to award Mrs. Black the Order of the British Empire (OBE).

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

The Court House 3

Constructed between March and August 1901, the Court House was also designed by Thomas Fuller. Although not as elaborate as the Administration Building; the



Court House was also designed in the Classical Revival style. The building's symmetry has been affected by an addition on the north side. In 1901 it contained two offices for barristers on the second floor. The ground floor housed the library, offices for judges and sheriffs, a judge's chamber, and rooms for jury and witnesses. The construction cost was \$50,000 including heating system, lighting, fittings, and furniture.

In 1910, the Court House was closed during the winter to eliminate the high cost of heating and its functions were transferred to the Administration Building. It continued to be used occasionally by the Crown until St. Mary's Hospital burned in January 1950 and it was transformed into a 35 bed hospital, complete with operating rooms. The Court House is owned by Parks Canada and is leased to the Yukon Territorial Government for offices.

St. Paul's Anglican Church 4

Frederick Flewelling was the first Anglican minister to arrive in the Klondike. He settled at Klondike City in 1896 and then moved to Moosehide village north of Dawson City with his First Nation parishioners. In 1897 Rev. R.J. Bowen was sent to Dawson City to hold services for the gold miners. Bowen came to the Yukon in 1895 and already had considerable experience in northern parishes. He erected a canvas tent church that was replaced by a new house of worship 5 years later.



St Paul's Anglican Church was built in 1902 on the same site as the old canvas tent. The new church cost \$9,000 and had a seating capacity of 150 people. Like most of the churches of the last century, it is in the Gothic Revival style characterized by pointed arches, a spire, and tracery in the front window. The tower, however, is Romanesque in style. This building has been designated a National Historic Site of Canada. Tours can be arranged.

Yukon Hotel 5

The Yukon Hotel is one of the oldest remaining buildings in Dawson City. This two-story log building was constructed in 1898 by J.E. Binet and was known as the Binet Block. It was rented as office space for the Crown timber and land agents for \$1,000 per month to Commissioner Ogilvie. The Binet Block continued its use as government offices and also as a residence until it was sold in 1909 to Henry Freeman who changed the business from office space to the Miner's Rest Hotel. In 1913 it was renamed the Freeman Hotel. The Freeman was purchased by Miss Emma Wilson in 1934 after her adjacent hotel burned. She renamed the Freeman the Yukon Hotel and operated the business until 1957.



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



South Dawson City Walking Tour



1. The Old Territorial Administration Building
2. Black Residence
3. The Court House
4. St. Paul's Anglican Church
5. Yukon Hotel
6. Strait's Auction House and Second Hand Store - "Guns & Ammo Building"

7. St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church
8. Fort Herchmer
9. North West Mounted Police Commanding Officer's Residence
10. Berton House
11. Robert Service Cabin
12. Jack London's Cabin
13. Old Telegraph Office

Strait's Second Hand Store - "Guns & Ammo Building"

Strait's Auction House and Second Hand Store was a "boomtown" structure built

by Strait in 1901. Its simple wood frame construction with false-front façade is typical of many of the commercial buildings in Dawson City that date from the turn of the century.

Mr. Strait transferred the property to Dawson Trading Company Limited, a business he managed. He operated from this location for many years selling groceries, hardware, tobacco, furniture, clothing, guns and ammunition. The business became known locally as the Guns & Ammo Building because of signs on the exterior that advertised these products. The store had two paid employees during 1902 when the incorporation of the City of Dawson caused taxes to increase from \$150 to \$500. Mr. Strait was one of the 41 merchants that kept their business open after this tax increase.

Strait's Second Hand was abandoned for several years and slated for demolition in 1971. Albert Fuhre, a local artist, headed a citizen's group to save it and they raised the \$600 purchase price. The building was donated to the Klondike Visitor's Association who added temporary bracing. In 1998, Strait's Second Hand was sold to a Yukon businessman who installed additional bracing and hopes to restore it.



St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

The first Presbyterian missionary to reach Dawson arrived in October 1897 from Alaska. The first church and the manse were completed in 1898 and were constructed with squared logs of local spruce. Unfortunately the church burned down the same year.

St. Andrew's Church was built in 1901 by Dr. Andrew S. Grant who was resident minister from 1898 until 1930. The church and the manse were designed by Skilling, an American architect. The new church had an oak interior, a seating capacity of 600 and a massive pipe organ. The construction cost was \$16,250 for both buildings.

St. Andrew's Church was built in the Gothic Revival style characterized by a massive appearance, asymmetry, openings with pointed arches, and the use of a corner tower with buttresses. The Gothic Revival style was associated with morality and goodness in the early 1800's. Skilling designed St. Andrew's Manse in the more modern Second Empire style as defined by its Mansard roof.

Dormer windows in the second floor and the bay window also reflect its Second Empire design. The Classical Revival design can be seen in the columns, pilasters, and trim over the front door, the pediment, the entablature, the cornice, and the stairway. Why did Skilling use different styles for the church and the manse? Perhaps to give a sense of history with Gothic Revival style and inject a sense of modernity with Second Empire influences mixed with Classical Revival style.

This Presbyterian Church amalgamated with the Methodist and other churches to form the United Church in 1925. After this church closed in 1932, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.) continued to use the Manse as a meeting place and office. These buildings are owned by Parks Canada and the Manse serves as staff housing.



Fort Herchmer

Charles Constantine established a North-West Mounted Police post in the Yukon, at Forty Mile, in 1895. After

gold was discovered on Bonanza Creek, Inspector Constantine moved the detachment to Dawson City in anticipation of the 1897 gold rush. The government was concerned with enforcing laws and Canadian sovereignty during a time when the Klondike was flooded with American miners and prospectors. The new post, named after Police Commissioner Lawrence Herchmer, had 5 log buildings constructed of local spruce with wooden slab or sod roofs. By 1903, the post had grown to 12 log structures.

Three buildings from the original fort remain: the Jail, the Stable, and the Married Officers' Quarters. The Jail, built in 1898, originally served as a hospital for both the police and the public. In 1904, the hospital had a general ward, a private ward, operating theater, dining room, kitchen, orderly's room, sergeant's room, and dispensary. It was transformed into a jail in 1910 and used until approximately 1917 for prisoners serving short-term sentences or as interim housing of individuals accused of more serious crimes. The bars on the windows are still visible.

The Stable, west of the Jail was erected in 1903 replacing an earlier building to accommodate more horses and cattle.

Parks Canada acquired the three remaining buildings of Fort Herchmer in 1972 and continues to maintain and interpret them.

North West Mounted Police Commanding Officer's Residence

This structure was built in 1902 as the residence for a North-West Mounted Police commanding officer, Superintendent Cuthbert, who led 250 Mounties stationed at Fort Herchmer. It has a rectangular plan, low-hipped roof, and small rectangular windows. The verandah was constructed at Superintendent Cuthbert's request in the summer of 1903. By 1912, the house was in a state of disrepair. The foundation had settled, wallpaper was split in every room, most of the water pipes leaked, the verandah was warped out of shape, and the wiring was unsafe. Prison labor was used to do many of the repairs and maintenance. The Mounties occupied the building until World War II. It now belongs to Parks Canada and serves as administrative offices.



Extended Route

Berton House

The Berton House is named for the family of Pierre Berton, a noted author of many books on Canadian history. This home was built in 1901 and became the house of the Berton family in 1920, the same year Pierre Berton was born. The family lived here until 1932.

The Berton home was rehabilitated in the early 1990s to provide housing for the Writer's in Residence program, operated by the Yukon Arts Society and Klondike Visitors Association. Since Berton House opened in 1996, authors from as far away as Japan have resided there for periods of a few months to a year.

Robert Service Cabin

This log cabin is typical of the many small residences that were common in Dawson City in the early 1900s. The local spruce logs and the sod roof are typical of early construction techniques. Parks Canada maintains and interprets this National Historic Site.

Robert Service is heralded as the "bard of the Klondike". He was a teller for the Canadian Bank of Commerce, while he lived in Dawson City. He resided in this log cabin from November 1909 to June 1912. In 1909, Service tendered his resignation at the bank to follow a more independent life and pursue his writing career. He left Dawson City in 1912 and moved to France. He never returned to the Klondike.





Jack London's Cabin

Jack London was born in California. He arrived in the Klondike during the year 1897. Disillusioned with gold mining and afflicted with scurvy, he returned to California in 1898. London wrote two very successful novels about the north, *White Fang* and *Call of the Wild*. They are still in print and have been translated in 50 languages. The Jack London Interpretation Centre is operated by the Klondike Visitor's Association.



Conclusion

We hope you enjoyed your self-guided walking tour. For those who are interested in learning more about the built heritage of the Klondike, mining history, or your ancestors in the Yukon, the Dawson City Museum's Klondike History Library can help you in your research. Interesting books on the history of this region can also be found for sale in the Museum's Gift Shop. The Dawson City Museum is a non-profit organization, therefore, we encourage donations to support our operations aimed at preserving and educating people about the rich heritage of the Klondike. Thank you, and enjoy your stay in the heart of the Klondike!

Old Telegraph Office

The Telegraph Office is another Classical Revival design. (Note the symmetry, tower, small columns, capitals on top of the columns, and window head casings.) This building was the first to be designed and constructed by the Canadian government architect, Thomas W. Fuller in 1898. Fuller overcame the northern challenges of permafrost, long cold winters, a short building season, the scarcity of materials, and the cost of labor.



In 1899, the federal government installed a telegraph line that linked Dawson City to the outside world through Quesnel, where the southern government telegraph line ended. This building was originally located just east of the Court House and operated here for 15 months before telegraph operations were relocated to the telegraph annex of the Post Office, a more central place in town. The building cost \$14,000 and initially housed the telegraph facilities, battery room, drafting offices, storehouse, architect's office, and sleeping apartments for Dept of Public Works staff. There were at least six people living in the building, 3 telegraph operators, one telegraph clerk, and one member of the architect's office. The original office continued to be used by Fuller as the architect's office, construction headquarters, and residence. In 1908, the McLaren family bought and moved the structure from the Government Reserve to its present location. The property is now owned by the Yukon Government and is undergoing stabilization and rehabilitation.

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