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# COMMODITIZATION VERSUS CULTURAL INTEGRATION: TOURISM AND IMAGE BUILDING IN THE KLONDIKE

ROBERT JARVENPA

*In honor of Catharine McClellan and in memory of James G. E. Smith*

**Abstract.** "Cultural commoditization" may be seen as an insidious aspect of capitalist development in international tourist markets. As Greenwood (1977, 1989) argues, the appropriation of a culture's rituals and symbols for external consumption may unwittingly deprive local people of the meanings by which they organize and interpret their lives. This paper seeks additional ethnographic grounding for such arguments. Is an association between commoditization and destruction of social-cultural integrity identifiable in northern communities? Can the commoditization process reinforce, rather than undermine, local cultural themes and values? May deleterious and beneficial effects play out differently across different classes and sectors of a community experiencing transformation by tourism? These questions form a framework for interpreting interethnic exchange and the developing tourist economy in Dawson City, an Athapaskan Indian/EuroCanadian community and historical gold mining center in the Klondike region, Yukon Territory.

## Introduction

The complexities of tourism as an international social process are increasingly under scrutiny by anthropologists. While there is general agreement that tourist enterprise and promotion may be seen as part of larger systems of economic development, social exchange and cultural change (Nash 1981:466–467; Nunez 1989:265–267; Smith 1989a: 6–11), theoretical integration has not kept pace with proliferating ethnographic case materials on tourist settings and behaviors.

Indeed, two seminal essays codify the divergent, if not opposing, themes characterizing anthropological approaches to tourism. Graburn's (1989) "Tourism: The Sacred Journey" emphasizes

universal aesthetic impulses, rendering tourism as a pilgrimage-like reversal of the ordinary and profane.<sup>1</sup> Somewhat less benignly, Nash's (1989) "Tourism as a Form of Imperialism" identifies systems of transaction between metropolitan centers and dependent tourist peripheries, regions and countries whose externally-oriented service economies often are constructed at great social and psychological cost to the hosts. As noted by Lett (1989:275–279), these two approaches mirror the prevailing symbolic and materialist paradigms in anthropology at large.

An interesting variation on the materialist or political economy theme is Greenwood's (1977) initial statement on "cultural commoditization," a view which interprets tourism largely as an ex-

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tension of capitalist economic interests. He is concerned particularly with the dilemma that results when local culture, rather than tangible factors of production (such as land, labor, and natural resources), is treated as a commodity for promotion and sale by the tourist industry. Greenwood's analysis of tourism's impact upon the Spanish Basque community of Fuenterrabia, therefore, proceeds at the cultural level of shared meanings, moral tone, and ethos. Such meaning is dramatically summarized and reaffirmed in major public rituals, like Fuenterrabia's centuries-old *Alarde*, evoking powerful sentiments of community solidarity and collective nobility. However, when the *Alarde* was commoditized as a "show" for external consumption, its authenticity for local residents was compromised, thereby depriving people of the meanings by which they organized and interpreted their lives.

As Greenwood (1977:136–138) notes, "cultural commoditization" can be a peculiarly insidious aspect of capitalist development. Unlike the marketing of concrete products or services, the commoditization of cultural meanings can proceed without the consent of local participants. Moreover, once the process is initiated, it is difficult to reverse. Cultural forms and performances which evolved over many generations may be distorted and sacrificed in a matter of minutes by the marketing decisions of government tourist ministries, municipal boards, and tourist businesses hoping to exploit "ethnic flavor" or "local color" for profit. In some instances, the host population already may be suffering from the material deprivations and dislocations of incipient urbanization and industrialization, factors which perhaps paved the way for development by tourism entrepreneurs. The appropriation of meaning, therefore, may be among the most pernicious of the many stressful impacts accompanying economic acculturation.

In a later epilogue to his work, however, Greenwood (1989:181–185) tempered his position by noting that in *some cases* the objectification of local culture via tourism can be positive and transformative rather than destructive. The dilemma facing researchers may well be accounting for the conditions which give rise to one result or the other or indeed even distinguishing between putatively "destructive" and "positive" outcomes.

Keeping Greenwood's revision in mind, this paper eschews both the a priori assumption that tourism is inherently detrimental to host societies, and the attempt to make tourism a whipping boy in some larger sermon on the horrors of capitalist penetration. Rather, the goal here is to explore further the implications of Greenwood's notion of "cultural commoditization" as a process in tourism. If the concept is transferable

to other ethnographic settings of developing tourism, what are the empirical manifestations or expressions of "cultural commoditization?" Is the association between commoditization and the destruction of social-cultural integrity identifiable in these other contexts? Can the commoditization process reinforce, rather than undermine, local cultural themes and values? May the deleterious and beneficial effects of cultural commoditization play out differently across different classes and sectors of a community experiencing transformation by a tourist economy? These questions form an analytical framework for interpreting the developing tourist economy and culture of Dawson City, a multicultural Athapaskan Indian/EuroCanadian settlement and historical gold mining center in the subarctic Klondike region of the Yukon Territory, Canada.

The Canadian case will serve as a counterpoint to Greenwood's Basque materials, suggesting where the framework of cultural commoditization can be generalized and where it may need modification or revision. Data derive largely from ethnographic field research conducted in the Yukon Territory and adjacent eastern Alaska in 1970 (Jarvenpa 1971) and 1988. Arguments unfold in a generally chronological order, running from Dawson City's cultural complexion and tourist economy in the early 1970s to an analysis based on the situation in the late 1980s.

## Cultural Context

Dawson City is located at the confluence of the Klondike River and Yukon River in west-central Yukon Territory (Fig. 1). Near 64° N latitude, this arid and mountainous area of the western Subarctic is marked by short warm summers and long bitterly cold winters. This environment formed part of the home range of the Han Indian people, an Athapaskan-speaking group who numbered about 1000 at the time of early European contact in the mid-nineteenth century and whose population was localized in several riverine bands along the Yukon drainage. Like many Pacific drainage Athapaskans, Han society was heavily influenced by intense summer exploitation of migratory salmon species. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the Han were organized into both exogamous matrilineal clans and moieties, the latter facilitating redistribution of resources through reciprocal funerary potlatching (Osgood 1971:26–27, 40–42; Crow and Obley 1981:507–508).

The Han were among the very last of the northern Athapaskan groups to directly encounter Europeans. Nonetheless, once European interests intruded into this region in the late nineteenth century, ensuing changes occurred on a massive scale and with overwhelming swiftness.



**Figure 1.** Dawson City and the upper Yukon River valley (1970).

The recency and magnitude of change are especially significant in this study because they form part of the historical consciousness of both natives and whites in the Klondike region and thereby shape the cultural milieu in which tourism now develops.

The English-controlled Hudson's Bay Company had established its Fort Yukon post in 1847 to the northwest in Yukon Flats Kutchin country, and its Fort Selkirk post in 1848 to the south in Tutchone territory (Murray 1910). The former establishment served as a distant and irregular point of trade for some Han until its closure in 1869 after the United States had purchased Alaska. Then, in the mid-1870s to early 1880s rival firms established the first, albeit short-lived, trading posts within Han territory at Fort Reliance and Belle Isle (McQuesten 1952; Mercier 1986:1–11). Ignoring the new international border, the Alaska Commercial Company sent traders into this region capitalizing on the vacuum left by the Hudson's Bay Company (Coates 1985:63–64).

These developments brought the fur trade and a livelihood based upon commercial trapping more firmly into the annual economic cycle of the Han.

No less significant in the period between 1875 and 1898 was an influx of white prospectors who gathered in ephemeral gold mining settlements arranged in a linear fashion along the Yukon River: Seventy Mile (or Nation), Sixty Mile, Forty Mile, Twelve Mile, Eagle City (or Eagle), Star City, and Circle City. While these placer mining settlements attracted few native residents, they reinforced the growing infrastructure of commercial trade in the region (McConnell 1891).

Yet, settlements such as Forty Mile were faint microcosms of the gaudy, cosmopolitan mining camp culture emerging nearby. The discovery of rich placer deposits in the southern tributaries of the Klondike River in 1896 triggered an unparalleled stampede which peaked in 1898 and was essentially over by 1900. The magnitude of the event was reflected in the size of Dawson City



which became the focus of the world-renowned Klondike gold rush. Despite its isolated location, Dawson City was the largest population center west of Winnipeg and north of Seattle at the end of the nineteenth century. As many as 17,000 to 18,000 people occupied the new town site by the summer of 1898, with another 4000 to 5000 in the mines or prospecting along the Klondike River and its gold-bearing tributaries (Adeny 1900:386). Most of these ephemeral fortune seekers were white males and American citizens.

While Dawson City's population declined to about 3000 by 1911, certain irreversible changes had been effected by the "boom frontier" economy (Dominion Bureau of Statistics 1957). The environment of the Klondike River drainage had been degraded by deforestation and overhunting so that the traditional livelihood of the Han (especially the Klondike or *tronic* band) was curtailed without providing viable alternatives. Under pressure from Anglican missionary William Bompas, the Department of Indian Affairs had relocated these Han to a small residential reserve called Moosehide three miles downstream from Dawson City (Coates 1988:239–240). At the same time, Indians from other Athapaskan groups in the vast interior of northwestern Canada had been attracted by the phenomenon of Dawson City (McClellan 1981; Slobodin 1963). Minimally, these included Tutchone, Tagish, Hare, Upper Tanana, and especially Peel River Kutchin (or Gwich'in). In this sense, the native community was becoming more heterogeneous as the EuroCanadian population rapidly declined in the post-rush years.

The subsequent diminution of gold production in the Klondike, the consolidation of claims by large dredging companies, and the steady depopulation of Dawson City is not a classic example of extinction for a frontier mining settlement. Indeed, the community managed to prolong its death throes long after a score of smaller boom camps expired. It was only after 1941 that Whitehorse emerged as the largest population center in Yukon Territory as the result of World War Two defense road construction (Lotz 1964:17). The completion of an all-weather road between the two settlements, effectively ending steam-boat freighting, and the removal of the territorial government from Dawson City to Whitehorse in 1953, contributed further to the former community's economic and demographic decline. By the early 1950s, Dawson City had less than 800 residents.

During the late 1950s and through the 1960s most of the Indian families from the Moosehide settlement moved into Dawson City to acquire government-sponsored housing and to be near other government and commercial services. When the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation Limited terminated its dredging operations in 1966

(Findlay 1969:91–92), it appeared that a passive form of tourism would emerge as the most important feature of the local economy. Yet, because of its heavy dependence upon federal financial assistance for roads, schools, hospitals and other basic services, Dawson City, similar to other northern centers, was regarded by some analysts as a "welfare community" (Lotz 1964:189). Relief and transfer payments were becoming an important form of support for many white and Indian residents. During the long harsh winters mineral exploration, mining, and tourism ebbed dramatically, producing a marked seasonal out-migration of work force and population. By the time of my initial field research in 1970, Dawson City harbored about 700 residents during its summer employment peak, including nearly 200 people of native ancestry. Among the latter, 168 had federal Indian status as members of the Dawson Indian Band (Yukon Indian Agency 1969).

### The Rise of Tourist Enterprise

Broadly speaking, tourism began with the gold rush itself when a few aristocratic travelers and sightseers plied the Yukon River by steamboat (Berton 1958:316–317; Hitchcock 1899). Other early visitors occupied privileged positions in the arts and communications and helped create some of the imagery and mythology of the gold rush which appealed to later generations of tourists and which have become part of the process of cultural commoditization. Much of this discourse emphasizes the heroic dimension of the lone Euro-American or EuroCanadian enduring the isolation and privations of a "savage" frontier, privations sometimes ameliorated by the flamboyant, rollicking ambience of Dawson City. While differently rendered, such themes emerge in the romanticized poetry of Robert Service (1907, 1909), in the brutal narrative of Jack London (1903), in early travel guides and prospectors' manuals (Harris 1897), in the nostalgic accounts of numerous personal diaries, and in movie and television dramas.

Aside from these privileged travelers, there is merit in viewing many of the gold rush miners themselves as de facto "tourists." The odyssey of the stampede held appeal for some, and because very few among the thousands of miners who ventured to Dawson City became wealthy from their efforts or could even acquire claims to work (Berton 1958:417), there was little alternative other than enjoying the peculiarities of circumstance and the camaraderie of one's fellows. This may explain, in part, why a "communitas"-like tranquility prevailed in the Klondike mining camps and in Dawson City through the height of the rush, albeit reinforced by the presence of the

North West Mounted Police (Morrison 1985; Stone 1979).

Tourism in the conventional or contemporary sense, however, did not become a conspicuous part of Dawson City's summer lifestyle until the early 1960s. By that time tourism had become the most important input in the local economy after gold mining and exploration, despite the marked seasonality of the trade and a predominance of budget-conscious visitors (Lotz 1964: 125). The staging of a Gold Rush Festival helped attract a record 18,545 visitors to Dawson City in the summer of 1962.<sup>2</sup> It was organized around a preexisting community festival that arose in the early post-rush years. As described by Laura Beatrice Berton (1954:240) in 1926, for example, the earlier celebrations incorporated many of the key elements that persist in the contemporary form:

The town's great fall celebration came on August 17, the anniversary of the discovery of gold. Then the old pioneers had their parade and the children ran races and the garden harvests were exhibited and judged. Sometimes there would be few vegetables and flowers to display, for killing frosts could strike before mid-August, just as snow could fall in early September.<sup>3</sup>

The foregoing evolved into the annual Discovery Day celebration which pays romantic homage to the discovery of gold in the Klondike. While it still serves as a community renewal ceremony for local and regional Yukon residents, its rather extravagant resurrection as the Gold Rush Festival in the 1962 season was somewhat unique and largely an effort on the part of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources and other external parties to bolster the community's withering economy by attracting tourists. The centerpiece of that mission was the staging of a theatrical-musical revue and the rebuilding of the 1899 Palace Grand Theatre, a project which presaged a move in later years toward stabilizing and restoring Dawson City's historic architecture.

Nonetheless, the complex orchestration of the 1962 festival left many local residents bewildered, if not alienated, and the effort proved costly with \$1,637,000 in visible expenditures from the Canadian government and private sources (Lotz 1970:212–219). Those investments were barely recouped by the increased tourist trade in the 1960s, a fact which some local residents attributed to Dawson City's remote location, high costs, and the conservative spending habits of many visitors (Klondike Korner 1970:3).

Several patterns emerging in the early 1960s still apply to the structure of tourism in recent years. First, most tourists originate from the western United States, nearly one-third from California and neighboring Alaska. The majority of travelers

enter the Yukon in private cars, truck-campers, or recreational vehicles via the Alaska Highway from British Columbia and points southward. These are often two- or three-member parties with a high proportion of retired or semiretired adults of professional or skilled occupational backgrounds traveling through the Yukon for the first time (Parsons 1964). Some visitors opt for bus travel, usually linked to the tight itineraries of tour groups.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, there is a tendency for visitors to spend only one or two days in Dawson City, a constraint imposed by tightly planned schedules linked to long distance driving. Hence, for many, Dawson City is seen not as a final destination but rather as an 809-kilometer "side trip" or "loop" off the Alaska Highway or as an interesting stop-over on the way to Fairbanks, Alaska. Finally, many tourists arriving in private vehicles are rather self-contained and self-sufficient. Other than expenditures for gasoline and fees for public campgrounds or privately owned RV parking lots, such visitors expend relatively little for food, lodging, and related services (Lotz 1964:125–137, 1970:96; Parsons 1964:40–45).

Despite the development of special tours, dance-hall revues, casino gambling, and other active forms of entertainment in recent years, the general character of tourism in Dawson City has been "passive" (Lotz 1964:137). That is, the scenery of the Yukon and Klondike valleys, and the historical amenities of the region, including gold rush era architecture and mining relics, provide the focus of attention rather than "active" commercial attractions and services. For many, this involves strolling the boardwalks of Dawson City, gazing at deteriorated and refurbished buildings, and attempting to capture some nostalgic feeling, however fleeting, of the Klondike experience at the turn of the century.<sup>5</sup>

## Klondikephilia: Themes and Images

As will become apparent, part of the cultural commoditization process in Dawson City involves appropriation of local lore and reinterpreting and repackaging it for external consumption. This lore, or "Klondikephilia," is not a discrete, unchanging body of utterance and belief. Rather, it embraces a diverse and malleable spectrum of discourse, attitude, and imagery regarding the origins of the Klondike gold rush, the significant actors in the drama, and the social-cultural legacy of their history.

As the following excerpts illustrate, different members of the community may invest the same events or behaviors with variable shades of mean-

ing. In speaking of the original "discovery" of gold, a middle-aged Indian man notes:

Long time ago Siwash Joe came down to the mouth of the Klondike where the people were fishing in the summer. He saw the people cutting fish, and they said there was gold nearby. But the Indians had no use for it. Gold by itself is not worth anything, you know. You can't use it for a metal or anything. After the fishing was over Siwash Joe went up to Bonanza Creek and found gold on August 17. That was in 1896. He wrote a letter, but it took two years to get to Seattle, and the rush was in 1898. That's how the gold rush started.

Discussing the same episode in its 1970 Discovery Day Program leaflet, the Yukon Order of Pioneers (Y.O.O.P. 1970:6), a EuroCanadian fraternal organization, observed:

Robert Henderson . . . , a Nova Scotian, had been prospecting in the area for about 11 years before he found gold in the spring of 1896 on a creek he named Gold Bottom. On a trip back for supplies he chanced to meet a fisherman who lived with the Siwash Indians, fishing at the mouth of the Klondike, George Washington Carmack. Like all good prospectors Henderson told Carmack of his find, but unfortunately for him, made a bad remark about Carmack's Indian friends. On Henderson's tip, Carmack and his two Indian brothers-in-law, Skookum Jim and Tagish Charley, trudged through the swamps of Rabbit (later Bonanza) Creek. On the 17th of August, 1896, the trio discovered gold in quantity and staked four claims. Carmack, without telling Henderson as he had supposedly promised, rushed off down the Yukon to spread the news.<sup>6</sup> The news spread southward . . . contributing to one of the world's greatest gold rushes.

Yet, much of "Klondikephilia" is less formulaic, less codified than the foregoing tales. What local residents say, think, and feel about their lives and history is often diffuse and contained in layers of verbal, visual, and written imagery. It is the task of the anthropologist to interpret this symbolic landscape and tease out meaningful patterns or themes. "Theme," in this context, includes some of the qualities of Geertz's (1973:126–127) phrasing of *ethos* and Hoebel's (1954) notion of *postulate*. A theme is the researcher's abstraction of ideological tendencies in a particular social setting, but an abstraction which captures some of the affective and stylistic dimensions of life in that time and place. The thrust of the following analysis is, therefore, hermeneutical.

Two major themes of the "Klondikephilia" complex will be explored here as they have become intertwined with tourist enterprise: (1) Infatuation with material wealth: the search for Eldorado and the ghettoization of the Han;

(2) Frontierism and the ethic of individualism: sourdoughs, old-timers, real Indians, and others.

At first glance the themes seem anachronistic, since they reflect a value system prevalent 90 years ago when gold production was reaching a peak in the Klondike and when the economic and cultural tension between indigenous Athapaskans and encroaching Europeans was pronounced. However, these ideas are continually reworked to fit extant conditions. What may appear to be a romantic motif, a mere glorification of past circumstance, has symbolic and behavioral impact in the present setting. Indeed, the impact may be emotionally heightened by the powerful sense of nostalgia which many tourists experience in Dawson City. Moreover, while these themes primarily give voice to white or EuroCanadian visions and aspirations, they cannot be understood apart from subthemes and contradictions with native Canadian understandings of the Klondike experience.

### Infatuation with Material Wealth

That the Klondike region has been viewed popularly as a forbidding place is largely the interpretation of Europeans deriving from more temperate locales (Adeny 1900:352; Schwatka 1894:247). Harsh extremes in climate and animal behaviors form a central element in the perceptions and conversations of local white residents. In particular, the embellishment of cold weather incidents in standard stories is likely to capture the attention of visitors.

Yet, it is the allusion to gold which transforms Dawson City from a pedestrian northern settlement into an exotic anomaly worthy of the tourist's thirst for the unusual. Gold, and all that it symbolizes in Western culture, becomes a thematic counterforce to the environmental construction discussed previously. The knowledge that such wealth is concealed in often permanently frozen ground adds sweetness to the search and a sense of cultural arrogance:

For centuries all the wealth of the Klondike lay within the radius of a day's hike from the home of Chief Isaac<sup>7</sup> and his people, yet endowed with the wealth equal to the ransom of a king, they knew not of its existence or its value until the white man came (Alaska Weekly 1932).

While the world view of local natives has been affected by intense association with Europeans, generally they do not interpret familiar features of climate, landscape and environment as "marginal," with its attendant connotations of socioeconomic position, class, and wealth. Richard Martin, a Peel River Kutchin and 90 years old in 1970, recalled his own arrival in the Klondike in a way which distances him from white aspirations:



All the way down when I was 19 years old I come the first time in November (1901). That's the gold rush, but I come here not for gold rush because I don't know about that. White man makes prospect. He makes money. But I living in the woods for game, all kinds of game—moose, caribou, and trapping.

There is little doubt that the Han, the Kutchin, and other Athapaskan groups historically experienced periodic famine which provided one basis for native lore regarding cannibalism. Yet, these stories appear to be less common in local Han oral traditions than, for example, tales about a beneficent race of people dwelling inside nearby mountains who occasionally reward lone hunters with gifts of ready-dressed game. In some accounts, the mountain dwellers care for Indians after the latter are magically induced inside the earth (Williams 1970). The motif of finding material salvation within the earth, whether from mountain dwellers or "Mother Lode," might suggest some syncretism of native and European beliefs. The latter interpretation gains some credence from one Han elder's view that the race of mountain dwellers actually may have been the first white people in the area.

The intellectual flexibility alluded to above has been noted for neighboring Athapaskan groups, such as the Tagish at the headwaters of the Yukon River. McClellan (1963) demonstrates how two traditional Tagish supernatural beings, Wealth Woman and a Frog spirit helper, are adapted to explanations of the original discovery of Klondike gold by the Tagish men Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie. Thereby, the fabric of Tagish ideology is maintained even while their lore incorporates new information from externally derived change. In a similar vein, Cruikshank (1990:63–65, 186–189) notes how the oral biographies of Tagish-Tlingit women interpret the discovery of gold in terms of customary male responsibilities for female relatives in a matrilineal society.

Similar dynamics, no doubt, affect Han interpretations of their historical experience. The Klondike gold rush and subsequent events necessitated an almost complete rupture with previous economic pursuits. At the same time, the Han were segregated in Moosehide and denied direct participation in the very activities which were responsible for radically altering their existence. Thus, while the Han were aware of the great value EuroCanadians and EuroAmericans accorded to gold, that commodity was not a realistic symbol of wealth for themselves. Costly Western technology and trade goods were available, but opportunities for achieving positions in the mining boom economy were limited, largely by cultural-class stratification, to poorly remunerated

servile roles such as seasonal hunters, guides, woodcutters, or steamship crewmen.

As Europeans assumed the role of supreme provider, they also may have been transformed in Han thought into surrogates for the "mountain dwellers." Moreover, an early emphasis upon servility and dependency gave birth to the view of Dawson City Indians as "deprived citizens," a common notion by the time tourism began flourishing in the 1960s. In the absence of viable employment in recent years, the Dawson Indian Band has depended upon transfer payments from the federal government to provide social welfare, housing, and other basic needs. The marginal position of Indians in the gold economy became a historical precedent for their continuing peripherality in white-dominated affairs.

Until recently, the ghettoization of Dawson City Indians has restricted their contacts with tourists. Indeed, directed sympathy toward Indians by tourists may generate hostile reactions from some impoverished white residents without access to Indian Affairs transfer payments.

### Frontierism and the Ethic of Individualism

Perhaps it is the stark reality of depleted gold fields and the heavy dependence upon government revenues which make the "sourdough" such an appealing and omnipresent image for local whites and for visitors in contemporary Dawson City. Songs, poems, and stories praise the courage, tenacity, and self-reliant qualities of the veteran gold prospectors or sourdoughs who withstood the hardships of the original 1898 Stampede. Historically, the terms "sourdough," "stampeder," "Klondiker," or "old-timer" have been used in a contrastive manner to distinguish pioneer miners, who spent several years in the Klondike or Yukon region, or at least wintered over long enough to experience "freeze-up" and "break-up," from the new arrivals, novitiates or "cheechakos" (Adeny 1900:268). In recent years such appellations have been decidedly honorific and refer to: (1) one or two living centenarians who actually participated in the gold rush, (2) respected prospectors of more recent times, and (3) other highly regarded senior citizens who have lived in the region for many years. The image connoted is often that of an older white male. Esteemed older male Indians are not identified as "sourdoughs," although the title "old-timer" may be applied to them by whites and Indians alike.

A stylized visage of an aging man with a grizzled beard, miner's hat, and gold pan adorns postcards, restaurant murals, and a spectrum of tourist wares (Fig. 2). It is the most prominent visual symbol of the self-reliant European facing enormous hardships yet, presumably, enjoying great personal freedom. As will be seen in later





**Figure 2.** The sourdough image graces a drive-in restaurant (1988).

discussion of the annual Discovery Day celebration, efforts to maintain this image of frontier individualism may attain revivalistic dimensions.

Emulation of the sourdough is more than a simple glorification of the past. Dawson City residents are painfully aware of the political and economic forces shackling the Klondike and the Yukon to the Canadian state. Rather, an attempt is made to locate traditionally valued qualities in transformed social circumstances:

Few of the original Klondikers remain to march in the annual parade every August and share the friendship and comradeship that is freely taken and given by members of the Order. But a new and younger breed of men has taken the dauntless pioneering qualities of the original Stampeders (Y.O.O.P. 1970:5).

Yet, there exists in Dawson City an underclass of white males displaying an almost anachronistic foot-loose independence and distaste for the constraints of southern, urbanized Canada. Without exception these men originated outside

of Dawson City from all regions of Canada, the United States, and from central and northern Europe. Some came to the Yukon in the 1930s as prospectors and have remained as fiercely independent and sometimes austere eccentric bachelors. Others have migrated northward more recently, a few of them marrying local Indian women. Generally, these men are employed in positions of temporary semiskilled labor with a marked preference for self-employment, as indicated by the comments of a transplanted Nova Scotian in Dawson City:

I mentioned earlier I was leaving town tonight. I'll try to find work in Whitehorse. This town (Dawson City) is dead now, and it would be hard to buy a job. Not that I have tried too hard. I haven't. I had a job here, a firebreak around the hillside, but it turned sour. I was lied to, bamboozled, danced around the bushes and suckered. So the hell with it.

From an external view, this contemporary group of transient males might be seen as a con-

tinuation of the occupational mobility which originally drew "fringe types" and colorful "frontier personalities," such as Swiftwater Billy Gates and Arizona Charlie Meadows, to the Klondike from shrinking mining frontiers all along the North American cordillera (Adeny 1900:331–332; Berton 1958:6). The earlier migrations represented a sudden importation of a well-developed mining camp culture into the western Subarctic, replete with western American and western Canadian architectural elements such as false-front saloons, hotels, and boardwalks. Many of the surviving structures have attained "relic" status in the eyes of local residents and the federal government and, in turn, evoke a frontier-Victorian ambience for tourists. These Old West associations transfer only partially to the image of the sourdough. The romantic epical qualities of the cowboy in popular thought (Smith 1950:23) are somewhat at odds with the sourdough whose appeal derives less from swashbuckling feats of heroism than from endurance and resourcefulness that permitted simple survival.

Within Dawson City society itself, however, today's transient workers are not regarded as contemporary embodiments of the sourdough. Their status is fraught with ambiguity, marginality, and contradiction. In part, this is a product of their uneasy relationship with legal authority. By contrast, the self-reliant element in sourdough imagery is tempered by a politico-legal tradition that runs counter to the kinds of grass roots democracy, local autonomy, and occasional violence characteristic of other mining communities in the Northwest and Old West.

The British tradition of uniform mining law demanded an absolute governmental authority in the form of local detachments of the North West Mounted Police. Such external enforcement was unfamiliar to many American miners in Alaskan territory where often the only governmental machinery was the miners' meeting which operated in a manner similar to the New England town meeting (Wickersham 1938:125). Since many of the veteran Klondike miners were Americans with previous experience in Alaska, there was considerable cultural tension in early Dawson City (Adeny 1900:268).

The Sourdough and the Mountie, therefore, represent two conflicting personas and sets of values: the former is a symbol of indulgence in self and detachment from larger society while the latter symbolizes submission to externally imposed canons of order and attachment to conventional society. It is suggested here that the most enthusiastic creators and consumers of sourdough imagery attempt to resolve this contradiction by recasting the sourdough as both rugged individualist and civic-minded community member.

A case in point is the Yukon Order of Pioneers (Y.O.O.P.), a men's fraternal association which was founded by pioneer miner-settlers at Forty Mile in 1894 and remains active in Dawson City. It functions as both a social-civic improvement organization and as a ritual lodge honoring esteemed "pioneer" elders of the community. However, as the number of sourdoughs, veteran miners, or "oldtimers" with late nineteenth-early twentieth century experience approaches the vanishing point, Y.O.O.P. must select younger recruits. Recently inducted members are likely to be middle-aged white males with prominent positions in local business or government.<sup>8</sup>

These fraternal pioneers comprise part of Dawson City's bourgeois and, in effect, become symbolic surrogates of the veteran prospectors. Respectability is a key theme in this new construction of the sourdough. Y.O.O.P. members are more likely to value law and law enforcement than to resent them. It would be socially degrading for a Y.O.O.P. member to be arrested for drunkenness or unruly behavior, for example. Thus, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.) are seen as allies in the maintenance of one's social standing.

Transient workers in Dawson City, however much they share the independence and grittiness of the earlier prospectors, are not honored as symbolic sourdoughs by the respectable middle class. Such men marginalize themselves by occasionally marrying Indian women and by their inclusion in Indian social networks. Their attitude toward the R.C.M.P. is one of indifference or hostility. In part, this is due to their own social conventions which involve conspicuous binge-style drinking, reminiscent of the mining camp "spree," and which often overstep the bounds of legal decency.

The cult of frontierism places Indians in an equally peripheral position. Indeed, the image of the sourdough, in his self-reliant quest to conquer the Klondike, represents the collective force that has maintained native social and economic subservience for more than a century. Local Indians recognize and resent this reality, but they are also ambivalent about their experience because white constructions of pioneer history occasionally recognize notable Indian personalities. The following eulogy was written for Chief Isaac, the leader of the Klondike band of Han in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

He was a great chief—and although his skin was red, his heart was white—not a sourdough of that vast throng who passed this way fails to hold a kindly thought for him today and silently and sincerely say unto themselves, "He was a friend to the whites in a far land—what's more he was every inch a man" (Alaska Weekly 1932).

Invariably, such recognition of natives refers to historical achievements of material benefit to early white pioneers, whether serving as guides, hunters, special constables, or trusted companions. Much of this adulation is conferred upon only a handful of older Indian men who were active in the early 1900s and are now regarded affectionately as "old-timers." As these "old-timers" diminish in number, however, the Indian community loses the tangible symbols that provide it with a modicum of status in the view of local whites.

A variant on this ascription is the "real Indian," a designation used by some whites to refer to native individuals or families who engage in extensive commercial fishing and trapping or, more specifically, in historically familiar patterns of winter subsistence hunting. Since the latter has declined sharply among Dawson City Indian families in recent years (Tanner 1966), the "real Indian" is a rare commodity. Ironically, the few to be ascribed in this way are not Han but Peel River Kutchin, some of whom spend the winter hunting in the upper Blackstone River drainage north of the Ogilvie Mountains. The presumptuous notion of "real Indian," of course, dismisses as false or less than worthy those who have changed or departed from some static ideal.

As white constructs, Indian "old-timer" and "real Indian" are not as malleable as "sourdough." Unlike the active white businessman who may achieve ritual sourdough or pioneer status, the educated-entrepreneurial Indian is likely to be perceived as losing "real Indian" characteristics. Indeed, he or she may be seen as becoming "socially white," sometimes by both white and Indian members of the community. The dilemma for most Indians then, and perhaps especially for the Han, is the double standard contained within this discourse on honor and prestige. The categories are restrictive and exclusionary for natives, flexible and expansive for whites. In this way, language reflects the white community's power to continually define itself apart from and above most local Indians. It remains to be seen how these themes are expressed in a situation of active tourism.

### Discovery Day: Mobilization of Frontier Themes

The most dramatic event in which Dawson City residents regularly participate is the Discovery Day celebration, an annual community renewal ceremony which combines the elements of country fair, small town jamboree, and mining camp spree in a romantic homage to the sourdough. It is held each year for three days around August 17th,

the latter commemorating the specific date on which the first major Klondike gold deposit was discovered. As noted previously, the celebration was revived and revamped in 1962 as part of a conscious effort to increase tourism, but it also serves integrative functions within the community.

An array of exhibits, parades, athletic contests, speeches, and ritual-recreational events become vehicles for establishing emotional attachment to the past through the key symbols of gold and the sourdough. Reenactments of "gold stampedes" as theatrical contests dramatically highlight such symbols. An aura of the bustling boom camps is recreated with stylized 1890s-vintage costumes: prospector's attire for men, Victorian dresses or dance-hall outfits for women. Dawson City is inundated by hundreds of tourists as well as visitors from other Yukon and eastern Alaskan communities seeking reunion with friends and relatives. The general flurry of activity and the massing of people along the waterfront and in the town's commercial district physically and kinetically resurrect sights and sounds associated with the euphoric peak "rush" days of the late 1890s.

The anticipation of Discovery Day generates considerable enthusiasm and concern among local residents, whites and Indians alike, weeks prior to the celebration. Extra lodging facilities have to be prepared since existing hotel and motel space will not accommodate demand. For example, in 1970 a large area in the north end of town was specially cleared for tent campers while recreational vehicles were directed to parking lots and street shoulders. Much pre-celebration conversation eagerly anticipates the Dionysian pleasures to come: three days of drinking and merry-making which reinforce a spree-like atmosphere. For some, the third day is affectionately regarded as "recovery day." Among some jaundiced individuals, for whom heavy drinking is either routine or unamusing, the annual celebration may seem less than remarkable: "It's just another big drunk."<sup>9</sup>

Many formal components of Discovery Day are not everyday occurrences, however. Traditionally, the Yukon Order of Pioneers sponsored the celebration, but in the 1980s the Klondike Visitors Association (K.V.A.) and the Discovery Days Committee, part of municipal government, became more active in the preparation and organization of activities. The following schedule from 1970 indicates the scope and structure of the festival:

#### *August 14*

1. Men's, women's, and children's softball tournaments.
2. School art exhibition.
3. Arrival of showboat and dance hall girls.



4. Yukon Golden Gloves boxing tournament.
5. Dance at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall and Gold Poke raffle.

#### August 15

1. Klondike River raft race.
2. Annual parade and float competition.
3. Speeches by local and visiting dignitaries.
4. Horticultural exhibition.
5. Adult field sports competition:
  - A. Tug of war
  - B. Nail driving
  - C. Greased pole climb
6. Visiting softball tournament.
7. Pioneers' Annual Miners' Ball and costume and beard judging.

#### August 16

1. Log burling competition.
2. Klondike Mini-Gold Rush Stampede.
3. Literary contest.
4. Final softball tournament.

The prominence of competition and material reward is evident throughout the festivities. Except for the softball tournaments, where winning teams are rewarded with beer, most contests involve the struggles of individuals. Victors in these competitions often receive cash prizes, but there are also awards in the form of simulated gold pokes, "nuggets," Klondike gold spoons, and other trophies with golden properties. Gold is featured as an ultimate aspiration and possession, and the symbolism is far from subtle in this regard. Children are socialized as juvenile sourdoughs as they prospect for gold in a model stampede structured as a competitive field sport.

The parade, while not the final activity, is perhaps the climactic event in the Discovery Day renewal process. It is the only event which physically draws together most local residents and large numbers of visitors and tourists in a massive congregation. The sheer spectacle of numbers is exhilarating and lends dramatic tension to the occasion. At the head of the procession is a core of conspicuous nobility, the honored sourdoughs or "old-timers" of the community assembled for the admiration and approbation of the crowd.

In 1970 this contingent included about two dozen individuals, mostly older white males and most of them Y.O.O.P. members of long standing who wore the official insignia of that association. This group marched solemnly behind a car containing a few very elderly and enfeebled "old-timers," including two Indian women of wide renown. The assemblage moved quickly out of sight and, compared to the boisterous display of floats that followed, was decidedly unspectacular. However, the presence of these ceremonial sourdoughs in a single marching formation touched a profound emotional chord with onlookers. The marchers were the embodiments of the ethic of frontier individualism and, on a symbolic level,

the *raison d'être* for the gold rush. Their significance was amplified by the regimental music of an accompanying Scottish pipe band.

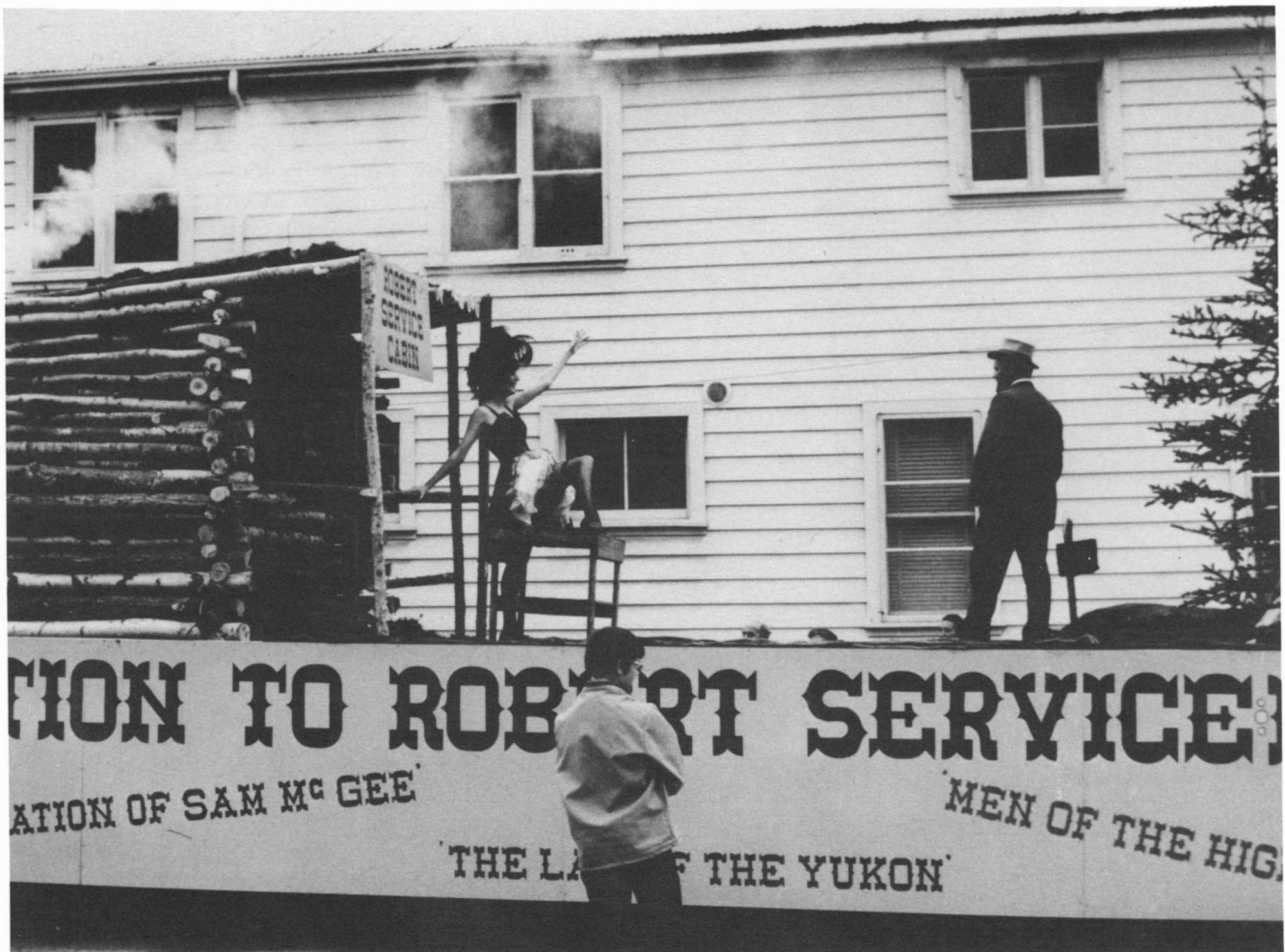
The ensuing procession of floats, by contrast, was marked by frivolity and levity (Fig. 3). A few entries attempted a visual recreation of gold rush era scenery, such as the bard Robert Service's cabin or a tableau of prospectors working a claim, but most of them were sparsely decorated vehicles for communicating an air of uninhibited celebration. The men atop the fire department and highway department trucks brandished liquor bottles in an exaggerated display of intoxication. Such allusions to a magnified mining camp "spree" were reinforced by overflow crowds of patrons at the two public bars.

In keeping with the passive nature of tourism in Dawson City, visitors are not integrated as active participants in the cycle of Discovery Day rituals. With the exception of some dances and concessions, tourists adopt the role of sideline spectators. The *dramatis personae* of the parade and the competitors in virtually all high-profile contests and athletic events are Dawson City residents and people from other Yukon communities. Moreover, locals transform themselves physically. Their 1890s-style apparel and other formal clothing separate them from casually-attired tourists. Beyond their important commercial patronage, however, the tourists serve as witnesses to the community's reaffirmation of itself and its values.

When Klondikephilia has once again been dramatically interpreted in a public forum and the Klondikers' ethos has been renewed, the brief summer tourist season is virtually at an end, and the multitude of guests is free to depart for another year. This influx and outflow in itself resurrects a central feature of the Gold Rush. Of course, local residents become their own witnesses during Discovery Day, giving the renewal process its most profound legitimacy. It is suggested here, however, that the presence of large numbers of nonlocal, "impartial," and essentially cooperative guest-witnesses reinforces rather than diminishes this cultural legitimacy. Why this is the case will be explored in ensuing discussion.

## Indians and Recent Changes in Tourism

Indians and Indian culture are conspicuous by their virtual absence in the Discovery Day renewal. Aside from the presentation of a few token "oldtimers," the festival does not include events, activities, exhibitions, or ceremonial occasions organized specifically for native participation or designed to project themes of indigenous life-style or history. Local preoccupation with the



**Figure 3.** A Discovery Day float evokes frontier themes (1970).

Gold Rush as a EuroCanadian achievement has eclipsed the impetus to present or promote native people in this manner. This is coupled with overt ethnocentrism by some white residents in positions of influence upon visitors, further discouraging interactions or transactions between tourists and natives.

Given such constraints, it is not surprising that Indian initiatives in the tourist economy have been highly circumscribed. One strategy adopted by a few elderly Han men involves catering to white stereotypes of Indianness. One practitioner referred to this as "playing chief." Such "professional Indians" attire themselves with a few items of late historic native regalia (ceremonial headdress, Hudson's Bay Company sash, bow and arrow) and engage in impromptu street confrontations with tourists which sometimes lead to group photographs or story telling in exchange for a small fee. In some cases, it appears that the social and emotional rewards of "playing chief" exceed its modest economic returns. Such entrepreneurship is not organized beyond the individ-

ual, and the intermittent transactions lack an institutionalized, routinized character (Fig. 4).

The most direct and enduring native involvement in the tourist economy involves manufacture and sale of craft items. While these include snowshoes and fish spears constructed by Indian men, the most common items are native clothing produced by women: beaded, fur-trimmed mukluks and moccasins, mitts, gloves, and hats.

Several factors tend to retard native artisanship as a vital aspect of tourism, however. Since the logistics of travel are expensive, tourists in Dawson City are conservative in discretionary spending. Most transactions for crafts have been centralized in one shop owned by Yukon Native Products, an organization based in Whitehorse, so that few visitors ever deal with or appreciate the actual artisan producing the work. Compared to Inuit soapstone carvings, Northwest Coast native artwork, Navajo silverwork, and Pueblo pottery, Klondike or subarctic native art generally has limited visibility, reputation, or cachet in collecting





**Figure 4.** Han elder Charlie Isaac wearing a sash inherited from his father, the late Chief Isaac (1970).

circles (Graburn 1976; Lee 1991). Moreover, the growing public sentiment against fur trapping and fur garments in recent years compounds the image problem for northern clothing crafts. Under such conditions, only the most skilled and industrious women can regularly supplement family income by selling their wares.

Between the early 1970s and late 1980s the collective identity and social consciousness of the Dawson Indian community experienced a renewal. This may be interpreted as a reversal of decades of marginalization by the EuroCanadian political economy, on the one hand, and as an effort to cope with immediate and ongoing changes in tourism, on the other hand. Several aspects of this process are noted here.

Feelings of exclusion from white rituals of community recognition had built up over decades. Perhaps it was not coincidental that immediately after the Discovery Day celebration of 1970 local Indians staged the grand opening of a "native hall." Its overt purpose was to provide a

social and recreational center exclusively or primarily for Indians, an alternative to the bar and drinking scene that seemed to be ruining many lives. However, there was a tacit hope that the hall would encourage a renewed interest in native cultural heritage, especially for young people. Traditional songs and dances which had not been performed locally in many years, were vigorously staged by elders at the opening ceremony.<sup>10</sup> Some stray tourists witnessed the event, but the initial performances were not directed to outsiders. This was a ritual of renewal and spiritual awakening by and for the native community.

The term *Han* itself became a more self-conscious form of identity or self-ascription for a large segment of the native community. Prior to the 1970s, *Han* barely existed as an ethnonym. It was an external usage deriving from *Han Kutchin* or *Han Gwich'in* ("people of the river"), which is the Kutchin or Gwich'in expression for the original inhabitants along the Yukon valley between the Klondike and Kandik rivers. Those elderly Han who still spoke their native Athapaskan language in recent years have tended to identify themselves by local band designations, such as *Troncik Kutchin* (Klondike River people) or *Ezan Kutchin* (Eagle people), rather than by more encompassing labels.

Colloquialisms like "Moosehide Indian," "Yukon Indian," or "Dawson Indian" have also been significant forms of identity for many natives in and around Dawson City. As we have seen, however, these terms can become pejorative when contrasted with white constructs such as "real Indian." It is tentatively suggested here that the emergence of a self-conscious Han identity in the 1980s was, in part, a rhetorical means of legitimizing one's Indianness in the eyes of the non-Indian community. For the first time *Han* began appearing as a label in official and commercial contexts. In 1982, for example, *Han Fisheries* was established by the Dawson Indian Band to organize the salmon fishing business for its members. Knowledgeable elders were now identified as Han and occasionally recruited to teach the Han language to their youth through the local Yukon College campus.<sup>11</sup>

While the construction of Han identity is surely part of a peoples' own cultural revitalization, its role in interethnic communication must be seen in the light of Dawson City's distinctive history. The presentation of oneself as Han is to assert a sense of Indianness that was taken away, denied, or devalued. To be Han is to claim validity as "real Indians," the honored status often conferred by Dawson City whites upon Peel River Kutchin. The process has counterparts in many Native Canadian and Native American communities where the forging of new general identities



becomes a means of coping with limited resources and vexing relationships with whites (Jarvenpa 1985).

At the same time, the native community has become very active in promoting its own business enterprise. With the assistance of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Chief Isaac Incorporated was established, a corporation which is legally separate from the Dawson Indian Band but serves as its business arm. In 1984 the corporation opened the Chief Isaac Memorial Centre which houses the band's administrative offices. However, it also houses a soda fountain, laundromat, travel agency, Yukon Native Products store, and other services which are heavily utilized by tourists. By 1988 the Dawson Indian Band was exploring possibilities for constructing a hotel, an RV campground, and for making their old village of Moosehide accessible to visitors. For the first time in history the native community was significantly tapping the tourist economy.

The cultural renewal, rise of Han identity, and participation in tourism seem to be mutually reinforcing factors generated within the native community. Yet, the coalescence of these factors in the 1980s can be explained by larger political and economic changes. When the Mulroney administration came to power in Canada and the New Democratic Party wrested control from the Conservatives at the territorial level in the 1980s, the Yukon enjoyed increased federal financial support for tourism development, some in the form of loans and some in grants to preserve and stabilize historical structures.<sup>12</sup> Much of the latter was earmarked for Gold Rush era architecture in Dawson City. This added fuel to the efforts of Parks Canada which had been purchasing, stabilizing, and restoring key commercial and civic buildings in Dawson City since 1974. Historical Dawson City was now managed as the Klondike National Historic Sites, and Parks Canada introduced stringent guidelines for upgrading existing homes and building new homes to provide "historic facade integrity" (Konkle n.d.). In a few years many homes, for Indian and white families alike, were constructed in the manner of log cabins or Victorian/Edwardian cottages of the 1896–1902 period.

As the tourist trade expanded, new hotels and other facilities were constructed.<sup>13</sup> Some of these had a "glitter and glamour" gaudiness that stood at odds with historic preservation philosophy. Conflicts emerged in the mid-1980s between private developers and Parks Canada regarding the management of Dawson City's visual landscape (Figs. 5–6). New forms of entrepreneurship diversified the service sector with trendy restaurants, boutiques, bed-and-breakfast establish-

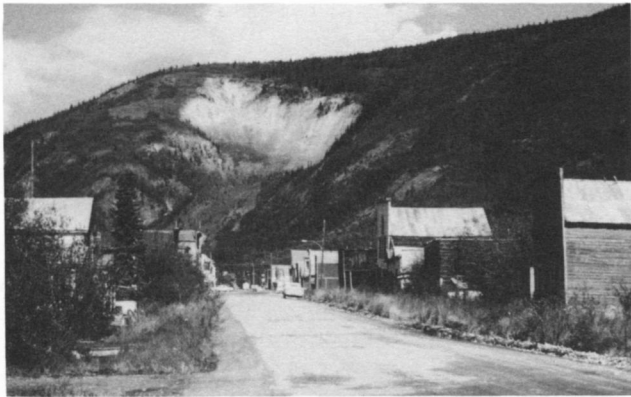
ments, and shops hoping to capture an upscale or unconventional clientele.

By the late 1980s, prepackaged tours were becoming more common so that many visitors arrived in Dawson City already having paid an agent for booking a Yukon River boat cruise, a salmon barbeque, a gold fields tour, and perhaps an evening at the Gaslight Follies vaudeville show or Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall. Parks Canada opened a large new Visitor's Reception Centre to provide tourists with an orientation to Klondike history and information on local accommodations and services. By 1987, 56,000 tourists were passing through this facility during the summer season (June 15 to August 15), nearly three times the number of annual visitors in the mid 1970s. The number had increased from 27,634 visitors in 1981 to 34,000 in 1986.

While tourism emerged unquestionably as Dawson City's major industry in the 1980s, gold mining rebounded during the same period as a result of a dramatic rise in the international gold market. The value of gold had been depressed for many years making mining unattractive for all but those with the most productive claims. When the price reached a historic high near \$800 per ounce in the early 1980s, Dawson City was inundated with speculators and miners. By the late 1980s, gold's value had stabilized at around \$445 per ounce, but that was still high enough to permit highly marginal lands to be mined at a profit. The rebounding of the gold economy contributed to a year-round base of 1548 permanent residents and an expanded tax base that provided infrastructural support for the growing tourist industry. In turn, the Klondike Placer Miners' Association was becoming a strong presence in the community.

As noted above, the fortunes of the Dawson Indian Band improved with the surge of tourism in the 1980s. However, this was also a period when Indian women were becoming politically active. Key administrative positions, including those of band chief and band manager, among others, were occupied by women. Many whites and natives alike viewed these younger women as part of a new era of dynamic, progressive leadership with creative ideas about utilizing Indian Affairs appropriations. Paradoxically, some of these women were not of local Han background, and some were married to white men. There is a general perception in the community that Indian-white intermarriage has increased significantly since the early 1970s with Indian female-white male unions being most common. A possible linkage of Han political and economic resurgence with outmarriage for native women is an intriguing issue that warrants further attention but is beyond the scope of the present paper.

As the visitor population increased, efforts



**Figure 5.** Deteriorating structures along Dawson City's 3rd Avenue in 1970.



**Figure 6.** Part of Dawson City's renewed entrepreneurial landscape of the late 1980s.

were made to expand the short tourist season from late May well into September. At the same time, Discovery Day was becoming only one among many special events and celebrations filling out the summer calendar, as evidenced by a schedule for 1988:

Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall May 20–Sept. 24  
 Gaslight Follies May 27–Sept. 10  
 Klondike National Historic Sites June 1–Sept. 15  
 Jack London & Robert Service Cabins June 1–Sept. 15  
 Commissioner's Ball June 11  
 Yukon Gold Panning Championship July 1  
 International Dome Race July 6  
 Yukon Talent Night July 17  
 Music Festival July 23–24  
 Discovery Day August 12–15  
 Klondike Outhouse Race September 4  
 Mixed Slow Pitch Tournament September 3–5

Yet, this expansion of tourist attractions simply continued the longstanding emphasis upon

EuroCanadian history and cultural achievement in the Klondike. After many years of marginal involvement in Discovery Day, the Dawson Indian Band renewed its presence in the late 1980s by participating in that celebration's float competition, for which they took first prize in 1987. Nonetheless, the showcasing of EuroCanadian cultural achievements was still embedded in virtually all aspects of tourism, whether promotional or passive in nature. Thus, while the Indian community was benefiting from the growing tourist economy, it was doing this in a quiet way that did not involve showcasing or promoting native heritage. Even the phenomenon of "playing chief" seemed to be fading.

In recent years there have been other forms of individual entrepreneurship attempting to cultivate a more pointed interest by tourists in Han or Yukon native culture. Such efforts have been short-lived and, ironically, often kindle ambivalent feelings in local whites and natives. A case in point was a display of native heritage and history arranged in a small facility on the Dawson City waterfront in 1987. It was not a collective band initiative but rather the enterprise of several older Indian men. Like the private tour operators who guide visitors through the gold fields, these men envisioned that a business could be based on the interpretation of their own heritage. Hence, for a \$3.00 fee, tourists debarking the ferry or congregating near the Visitors Reception Centre were invited to examine a small gallery of native ethnographic items, historical photographs, and to visit with Han or Peel River Kutchin elders who occasionally stopped by the facility.

The venture closed down after one month of intermittent business. The organizers were disillusioned with what they perceived as an inherent disinterest in native culture. However, some local critics in the white business community interpreted the failure as virtually a concomitant of Indian culture:

These people here don't really think in terms of operating tourist businesses. This is all new to them. Oh, they're getting ideas, but it is still foreign to their way of thinking.

In a related vein, other detractors cited faulty organizational ability and even an inappropriate desire for profit as the root problems. Some critics emphasized foolhardiness in competing with established Klondike attractions:

People come here for the Gold Rush. Take away the Gold Rush and you've got nothing. People aren't going to travel all the way up here from the states or southern Canada to see something about Indian culture. Forget it. It won't happen. They won't come all the way up here to see something like that. It has to be a special, unique event.

Yet others attributed the demise to factionalism or apathy within the native community.

The business venture's impact on the economy of the community was less important than the criticism it evoked and the messages contained in that critical reaction. While much of the criticism is tempered by expressions of good will (e.g., "I appreciate what those guys were trying to do"), the pervading theme seems to be that by nature Indians do not have the wherewithal to run a business interpreting their own culture and history. A key subtext is the idea that Indians should not be profiting by such enterprise in any event, that individual entrepreneurship of this kind is appropriate for whites or, perhaps, for those who wish to promote familiar Gold Rush imagery and EuroCanadian history. As noted previously, white constructs like Indian "old-timer" and "real Indian" exclude most natives from positions of honor or worth in the white community. When this coercive language is combined with a discouraging attitude toward native involvement in tourism, the politics of exclusion are magnified.

The foregoing interpretation suggests that native involvement in tourism per se is not problematic, only those enterprises that attempt to highlight or showcase Indian history and culture. Indeed, there is widespread praise for the snack bar, laundromat, and other facilities contained in the Dawson Indian Band's Chief Isaac Memorial Centre. These serve native residents and tourists alike and yet are not seen as exemplars of Indian culture. As long as the Indians themselves do not become an attraction, therefore, there is a willingness to see natives compete for tourist revenues in the area of food, lodging, and related services.

However, the notion of an open competitive market in services is rather fragile. Chief Isaac Incorporated explored possibilities for building a hotel in 1987. The plan was warmly greeted throughout the community, until it was realized that the band was hoping to make the enterprise a tax-free operation. Other hotel owners, most of whom are local Dawson City residents, and other leaders in the white business community vigorously protested what they viewed as an unfair advantage. Even offers to run a hotel without a bar or alcohol, something of a novelty in Dawson City, failed to mollify the opposition, and eventually the band's plans were dropped.

Despite the growth of tourism in the 1980s, coupled with government inducements for tourism development, white business leaders in Dawson City are mindful of the community's "boom-bust" history, and they view the tourist economy as rather precarious. This contributes to the inter-ethnic or intercultural tensions already dividing the community and explains why rhetoric about

"competition" is frequently contradicted by efforts to exclude or marginalize.

The anxieties of the business community are rooted in the persisting "pass-through" nature of Dawson City's tourism. Nearly 80% of the visitors are Americans essentially traveling through the area en route to other destinations like Alaska. Through much of the 1980s Canadian currency was weakly valued against the American dollar making it feasible for more American vacationers to travel to remote locales in the Yukon and still afford hotel rooms at \$110 per night and gasoline at \$3.25 per gallon. There is fear that if the two countries' currencies approach parity, the number of visitors will fall off dramatically.

The unpredictability of the world gold market complicates the picture. Relatively high and stable prices for gold were a boon to Dawson City's economy in the 1980s, but there is fear that if the price drops below \$425 per ounce, many miners operating on marginal lands will go out of business. A decline below \$325 per ounce would result in a radical exodus of miners and a significant loss to the tax base that also benefits the tourist economy.<sup>14</sup> In some fundamental ways, therefore, the nature of Klondike tourism in the 1980s had not changed much since the 1960s.

Added to the foregoing concerns in the late 1980s was the possibility of a land claims agreement between the Indian bands of the Yukon Territory, represented by the Council for Yukon Indians, and Ottawa (Umbrich 1988; The Whitehorse Star 1988). Canada's treaty system had never been extended to the Yukon Territory, leaving the question of land ownership unresolved (Cumming and Mickenberg 1972:194-199). In 1988, after 15 years of negotiating with federal authorities, native representatives were on the brink of signing the Yukon Indian Land Claims Agreement, which would provide aboriginal title to large tracts of land, hunting and use rights on other lands, as well as a financial settlement and constitutional provisions for Indian self-government.<sup>15</sup> While native leaders looked hopefully toward a new era free of paternalism and economic colonialism, some white Dawson City residents dreaded, realistically or not, that any settlement would be achieved by federal withdrawal of several million dollars in annual subsidies to the Yukon Territorial Government. With a potential loss of subsidies for jobs, roads, and other basic services, they feared that the existing infrastructure for tourism would collapse. Perhaps the unstated fear in these projections was not a loss of tourists or business per se, but the concession of some political and economic power to the Indian community.



## Discussion and Conclusion

If we return to Greenwood's original (1977) notion of "cultural commoditization," there is abundant evidence in Dawson City of the packaging of shared meanings, moral tone, and ethos for external consumption. Predominant themes in local lore and world view, infatuation with material wealth and the ethic of individualism, are codified in the image of the sourdough, an amplified symbol of EuroCanadian and EuroAmerican achievements and Gold Rush history that, in turn, provides a compelling focus of attention for tourists.

As we have seen, renewal ceremonies like Discovery Day mobilize and dramatize sourdough imagery in an intensely emotional way, reaffirming the community's commitment to its values and ethos. As tourists have become increasingly prominent witnesses to such proceedings, moreover, the rituals have also become a commodity for external consumption. Unlike the Basque *Alarde*, however, there is little reason to believe that Discovery Day's authenticity has been compromised for local residents, or that they have been deprived of the meanings by which they organize and interpret their lives.

Indeed, the annual influx of tourists recreates the "rush" experience which is central in the local conception of history. The very fact that eight of every 10 visitors derive from the United States resonates with the predominance of American miners in the original stampede. This lends a pilgrimage-like quality to Klondike tourism as thousands of Americans journey to the remote locale each summer, in essence, to witness a re-enactment of a chapter of their own history. The ethic of frontier individualism is as poignant to middle class Americans as it is to white Canadians. The public witnessing of Discovery Day, therefore, is a form of cultural legitimation for hosts and guests alike.

If the "cultural commoditization" process applies in this case, its consequences are not uniformly sinister. Rather, it exemplifies Greenwood's (1989:184–185) revised thinking to the effect that "occasionally tourism engenders creative responses in local cultures and positively affects the trajectory of cultural development." While shared meanings and symbols have been interpreted and packaged by entrepreneurs and civic organizations, have they been appropriated or compromised? It is questionable whether something that is already shared between hosts and guests can be irrevocably distorted or destroyed. Indeed, one might argue that "commoditization" is the whole point, the *raison d'être* for the Klondike and its cultural landscape, an outpost of late nineteenth century capitalist specula-

tion. The quest for personal riches is at the heart of capitalist ideology, and surely this is celebrated by many residents and visitors.

Cohen's (1988:379–382) ideas about the negotiability of authenticity and the nature of "emergent authenticity" in tourism are apropos here. The Discovery Day celebration, for example, although at one time a socially "meaningful ritual for an internal public," has also emerged as a "culturally significant self-representation before an external public." In this sense, one might argue that commoditization of the festival has enriched rather than destroyed a field of meanings.

In most respects, however, this celebration does not embrace the Indian sector of the community. As we have seen, their visibility in community renewal ceremonies and their participation in tourism are muted, paralleling their marginal socioeconomic position. To date, very little of Indian culture has been commoditized for external consumption by either native or white entrepreneurs. The Dawson City Museum, a local nonprofit organization, added a small display on Han Indian culture as part of a new gallery in 1986. Items of historical material culture are exhibited in the context of a generalized annual subsistence cycle. While these materials are attractively presented, the accompanying text is scant, and there is very little labeling or identification of artifacts. More vexing perhaps, the display includes no historical or contemporary photographs of the Han or any written materials that would assist a visitor in seeing natives as part of Klondike social and economic history or as part of Dawson City's extant community.

Embryonic attempts to showcase native heritage for visitors have met with local resistance or ambivalence, possibly because such efforts offer a competing vision of the past. A concern with Indian culture deflects attention from the quest for gold and the cult of the sourdough. In this sense, multiculturalism is more of a threat to standard Klondike lore and ethos than their commoditization.

Cultural stratification, therefore, defines the uneven playing field for tourist enterprise. White entrepreneurs have free reign to exploit the symbolic world of myth, history, and EuroCanadian cultural achievement. Indians are restricted to tapping tangible factors of production, primarily their own labor and services. However, as the Han enter a new stage of economic and cultural renewal, they may finally reject the old order of stratification. Achievement of a revitalized Han identity may require validation beyond the restricted world of local whites. It may involve interpreting their own peoples' myths, dreams, and history for the larger universe of tourists, not just feeding and lodging those visitors. A desire on

the part of some Han to open their old village of Moosehide to tourists may reflect such desires.<sup>16</sup>

In summary, the Dawson City case suggests that cultural commoditization may unfold with variable intensity and with different impacts even within a relatively small community. The conditions that give rise to such differences may still elude general explanation (Greenwood 1989:185; Smith 1989a:9–10). Clearly, however, the potential for compromising local cultural integrity is lessened in situations where promoters and tourists, or hosts and guests, hold many premises in common. The commoditization of cherished symbols may foster cultural integration in such circumstances. At the same time, underclasses and minorities in deeply stratified communities may have reached a crisis stage in their collective conscience and self-esteem. For them, the promotion or commoditization of their heritage may be one viable path, among others, toward reestablishing a sense of worth and a place in the world (Cohen 1988:382). Some of these sentiments are captured in the words of a Han elder:

You know, the people around here are all kind of mixed up and from different areas. It's not like other areas where the Indian people understand their background. Lots of young people here don't really know much about their past way of life, especially after so many of the old people passed away around here. That gold rush kind of mixed things up for us. But now we're trying to get back our Han culture.

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## Endnotes

1. Crick's (1985) concern with the role of the “ludic” in fieldwork suggests that we might profit by an examination of the displacements, paradoxes and ambiguities shared by anthropologists, tour-

ists, and pilgrims alike. In a related vein, anthropologists can be viewed as prototypes of the tourist seeking authenticity in other times and places (Cohen 1988:375).

2. By comparison, there were 6000–8000 visitors in Dawson City in 1961 and only 4500 in 1963 (Lotz 1964:126).

3. Berton (1954:258–267) pointedly refers to the 1932 celebration as “Discovery Day.” At that time the parade of the Pioneers, mostly older white males “in their black suits and their big grey mustaches and their nugget chains dangling across their tight vests,” followed a winding route from King Street to Minto Park whereupon ensued a commemorative speech, children's races, a baseball game, judging of vegetables and home cooking, followed by an evening dance at the Arctic Brotherhood Hall. This essential structure still survived in 1970.

4. Other tourists enter the Yukon by plane, but the once popular White Pass and Yukon Railroad linking Whitehorse with Skagway and the marine ferry system of Alaska's “inside passage” was discontinued in 1982, only to be reopened on a limited basis in 1988.

5. Nostalgia for the gold mining era has also characterized tourism in northern communities like Nome and Skagway, Alaska, although, as Smith (1989b:64–66) notes, with different forms of entrepreneurship and sources of capital.

6. Carmack's (1933:7–11) own account of the discovery suggests that Henderson was invited to join the former's party in staking claims at Rabbit Creek.

7. Chief Isaac was a leader of the *Troncik* (or Klondike River) band of Han at the time of the gold rush.

8. Women's position in Klondike society deserves more critical attention than is feasible here. While servitude in dance halls or in prostitution was common in the peak rush years, some women shared in the enterprise of their miner husbands (Adeny 1900:355). Others, like Laura Beatrice Berton (1954), a school teacher in the early post-rush years, were part of Dawson City's elite social stratum.

9. By the late 1980s some public officials and business proprietors perceived that tourists were avoiding Discovery Day because of the amount and visibility of local drinking associated with the celebration. Efforts were made to scale back alcohol consumption.

10. Bendix (1985) insightfully discusses the role of “dying crafts” folk traditions and performances in underlining community identity, their creative

embodiment of both nostalgia and visions of progress, and the insecurities they hold for young people.

11. The emergence of a Han identity was probably reinforced by the Yukon Native Language Centre and other organizations such as the Council for Yukon Indians and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, all with intellectual, political or official interests in recognizing "bands" and band identity. A particularly concerted effort to revive the Han language began with a series of workshops in 1989. The Dawson Indian Band, now the Dawson First Nation, is currently searching for an appropriate expression or name in Han which "reflects the richness of their own language and culture" (Dannzha' 1993).

12. The New Democratic Party government came to power in 1985 taking a majority of the 16 elected positions in the Yukon Legislative Assembly. The fact that Yukon Indians generally have been well represented in the NDP may explain, in part, the late 1980s surge of interest and involvement in tourist enterprise by Dawson City Indians.

13. Dawson City had a total of eight hotels, motels, and rooming houses in 1970. By 1988 accommodations had expanded to 12 hotels and motels, three bed-and-breakfast establishments, and two RV campgrounds. The bulk of that expansion occurred since 1982.

14. As of this writing (late February, 1992) gold is valued at about \$349 per ounce.

15. Shortly after I left the field in 1988, the Yukon Indian and Land Claims Agreement was approved in principle (The Whitehorse Star 1988). By mid-March, 1993, the agreement's land claims and self-government bills had been passed by the Yukon Legislature and were awaiting final approval by the federal government (Vance-Duchense 1993; Mostyn 1993).

16. In recent years the Dawson Indian Band has refurbished some of the deteriorating structures in Moosehide and declared it a "dry village," making it an attractive haven for nondrinkers, children, and those wishing to avoid the crowds of tourists in Dawson City during the warm summer months. This reoccupation of their old village is firmly tied to the renewal of Han identity and tradition. It remains to be seen if some form of low-impact tourism can be reconciled with the revival of Moosehide.

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