

The Klondike Sun

December 19, 2007 Online Edition

Dawson City, Yukon



We're Getting that Pre-Christmas Rush

Story & Photo by Dan Davidson

Open houses and Christmas themes marked the second weekend of December here. As always at this time of year, there were way too many events going on for anyone to be able to make it to them all,

The Dawson City Museum Christmas open house would hardly be the same without carol singing in the lobby. This year's event was combined combined with a Parks Canada bonfire and wiener roast just across the street. At -28° C even a blazing fire didn't cut all the evening's chill, but it was pleasant to sit or stand around for awhile.

The Robert Service School choir was kept busy for an hour or so, moving to the bonfire for a bit of singing after a carolling visit to the Macdonald Lodge seniors' residence,

and then across Fifth Avenue to the Museum, where they took up their usual station on the grand stairway to the old legislative chambers and led an enthusiastic group in a selection of carols.

For those who required sustenance there were bonfire goodies supplied outside, after which there were hot cider and a vast selection of desserts to be found inside. our of the chill.

In the midst of all this, Santa arrived, courtesy of the Dawson City Fire Department. Then, since the cab of the fire truck made an awkward place from which to greet the children, the Jolly Old Gent made his way to a sleight on the Museum's front lawn and visited there for a while.

Back inside, the museum's AV room was busy showing

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Christmas cartoons. It's a much more popular spot to sit and watch a show now that those hard benches have been replaced by comfortable chairs, courtesy of Holland-America.

Saturday morning held a breakfast treat of pancakes and sausages at the Dawson Curling Club for anyone who could make it between nine and noon. This was a fund raiser, but at \$5 a plate, it was a real bargain.

Saturday afternoon was filled up with the Last Minute Bazaar at the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Community Hall and the Old Fashioned Christmas celebrations at Diamond Tooth Gerties. The latter event was sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Dawson, the CIBC, the Klondike Visitors' Association, Klondike Centennial Society and Parks Canada.

The Association franco-yukonnaise offered maple taffy in a steamy wall tent Cabane à Sucre outside and French themed games in the hall later on.

Inside, kids enjoyed face painting, making Christmas cards and another visit with Santa while the Dawson City Singers entertained, the RCMP staffed the food line, passing out the fixings for turkey on a bun with potato salad and the KVA handed out door prizes.

A busy weekend, indeed.

ICSP Awaits Approval from Two Councils
by Dan Davidson

The future of the Integrated Community Sustainability Plan for the Klondike region remains a little uncertain as of the last City of Dawson council meeting of 2007.

Council had reviewed the plan, which was developed under a program jointly managed by the City of Dawson and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in over the last year, and had planned to give it a final ratification vote on December 4, but tabled the issue on learning that the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in council is still discussing its final position.

Mayor John Steins felt that, since the ICSP plan, called "After the Goldrush", was to be a joint proposal, it would be premature for council to officially adopt the plan until its partner was ready.

"If we adopt this now, and then changes are made later by TH it will be awkward if we're not all on the same page," Steins said.

The report was originally handed to the respective councils in late August, and was brought forward to the council table at the November 5/07 meeting.

The purpose of the ICSP is to assist local government in accessing revenue from the federal Gas Tax Rebate program. This required local governments to develop a clear community vision statement and as well as definitions and principles related to the the concept of sustainability.

Of the \$35 million in Gas Tax Revenue expected to come to the Yukon, the City of Dawson stands to receive \$1.9 million while the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in would receive \$0.9 million.

Development of this report began in December 2006 and consultation took place over the next 8 months.

Coordinator Jim Taggart indicated that he had received written and verbal responses from around 300 community members in that time.

The report recommends the adoption of the following formal definition of sustainability, adapted from the World Council on the Environment and Development's 1987 report: "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

This is similar in sentiment to the language of the TH Final Agreement, which advocates "beneficial socioeconomic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and societies are dependent."

The report identified seven proposed community value statements, which are listed in no particular order.

The citizens of Dawson value:

- The historic character and heritage of the community - celebration and enhancement of the area's history and the community's heritage
- The natural environment - protection of natural resources through careful stewardship, including reduction, reuse and recycling.
- Our inclusive community - growing a safe, supportive community that encourages resourcefulness, diversity, tolerance and independence.
- The vibrant arts and cultural scene - using our creativity to inspire the community.
- A strong First Nations community -celebration of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in identity.
- A healthy community - physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth through varied education and recreation opportunities.
- A sustainable society - management of resources, and partnerships, for the long-term health and prosperity of the community.

"After the Goldrush" recommends that the following community vision statement be adopted by both councils:

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“Honouring the past. Sharing the present. Embracing the future”.

Appendices to the main document go into detail regarding responses that were submitted, methodology used in gathering the data, timelines for the study and an outline of the process.

Once this report is accepted locally it moves on to a territorial review committee. Dawson and a number of other communities have already missed the fall intake period for submitting these plans. City manager Paul Moore told council the next deadline date will be sometime in January 2008.

Council looks to toughen regulations for Seasonally Boarded Businesses

by Dan Davidson

It's been hardly a month since the City of Dawson began to promote its harder line on property maintenance with a new bylaw (Bylaw 07-03) and yet it seems to be time for an amendment to deal with a recurring seasonal issue.

This one is dear to the hearts of the active members of the chamber of commerce, as well as to the planning board and to a number of citizens who have made submissions to the Heritage Management Plan review currently in the works.

The issue is the boarding up of seasonal businesses and how that is carried out.



The British Yukon Navigation Co. Building is being touted as an example of what a seasonally boarded building ought to look like.

Currently, seasonal buildings are boarded up for the winter in a variety of ways, ranging through a spectrum of styles from tightly fitted painted plywood to unfitted plywood sheets and assorted, mismatched bits and pieces.

The former advertise that the building is part of the community's continuing future and is being looked after. At the extreme other end, the building simply looks abandoned.

City of Dawson Development Officer Mark Wickham, responding to numerous oral and written complaints, summarized the issues at stake in a November 27/07 memo to council, extending the concern to all vacant properties.

“Poor aesthetics is boarding up of vacant properties
- reduces ‘quality of life’ for permanent residents of Dawson

- portrays a ‘closed for business’ image with economic downsides

- detracts from value of neighbouring properties
- demonstrates lack of respect for permanent residents that are mainstay(s) of (the) community
- significantly reduces heritage value of community.”

Accordingly, council has drafted resolution instructing the town administration to “draft amendments to bylaw 07-03 to require higher minimum standards, including boards of a size that it tightly within window and door frames and painting boards black with symmetrical mullion patterns to simulated a real window ...”

Parks Canada already boards its windows in pretty much this way, but the example being held up to copy is the British Yukon Navigation Co. Building, currently in use as the NWT Visitor Centre during the tourist season.

The actual wording of the resolution is quite close to that proposed in a detailed letter which council recently received from resident Jim Leary.

“Unightly boarded up buildings make our community look and feel like it is doing much worse than it is. Positive images and positive re-enforcement contribute to helping people think in a positive way. Everyone would benefit from this improvement,” Leary wrote.

“Businesses that milk the tourist season and then leave their buildings looking unsightly for the remainder of the year are not showing any respect or consideration for the year around residents of Dawson City.”

Councillor Adam Morrison said he was glad that Leary's letter had helped bring this long standing issue to a head.

“I think it's a worthy initiative,” said councillor Ed Kormendy. “and it will reflect well on the community as we move closer to compliance.”

Councillor Diana Andrew agreed with the sentiment behind the resolution and was willing to support it, but wondered why it needed to be in a bylaw, as as why the bylaw would be needing an amendment quite so soon

Fear

Oh ugly, ugly, dark beast of my dreams following me around, as I run through my house, I feel your breath on my neck;

WHAT DO YOU WANT ugly beast!!!

What??

You want to talk to me???

Is that it???

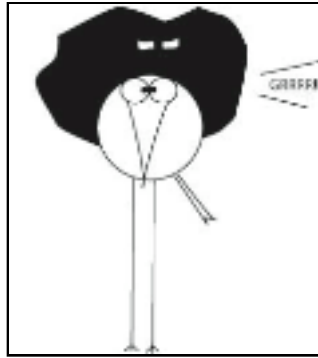
The things we don't want to face grow in our backs and pursue us. Buddhists, the Gnostics, the Albijois all thought that suffering could be removed with understanding. Well for sure, once you know the origins of a problem, it becomes easy to remove the cause.

We have to look at our fears and understand them so that we can work on the cause.

It is easy to do within the realm of our daily lives but

when we look at broader issues, it's not as easy any more. All the troubles we are faced with are so beyond us that it is usually pointless to look at them.

One thing though, modern sciences proves over and over that things are more connected than we thought they were before. The creation might indeed be the unity described in religions.



Modern economy is probably the most obvious aspect of that unity. Every time we spend a dollar, we vote for everything that went into the item; the way the raw material has been harvested, the philosophy of the company that shaped it, the way it has been moved from a place to the next,....

Everything you do matters.

Before changing anything we have to change our understanding of ourselves. Things are connected. Natives have known it for as long as they live. Let's shed our modernist disbelief and embrace the whole world as our home.

hopla

Uffish Thoughts: A Lament for the Sand Dune Pony

by Dan Davidson

As as I was walking home from school last Thursday I couldn't help but notice that there were bits of the sand dune pony scattered all over the street, as if some deranged Hansel had run out of bread crumbs while foraging in the forest and needed to mark his way home.

I should clarify, I suppose. In actuality I'm talking about pieces of *Sand Dune Pony*, and the italics will have alerted you that it's a book title, one of a boy's adventure series written by Troy Nesbit (a pseudonym for a journalist specializing in archeology named Franklin Folsom) that first appeared in hardcover editions from Whitman Publishers in the late 1950s and early 1960s and have been kept available in a number of paperback editions from a succession of publishers since then.

Out of curiosity I googled Nesbit/Folsom and found he had also authored a number of novelizations based on television programs like *Fury* and *Wagon Train*. I think I read some of those when I was quite young.

How the book got to be in pieces all over the street is a question I can't answer, but I can make a few guesses.

It was probably one of the older, tattier paperbacks that had reached what the school librarian (my wife) and the public librarian (it's a joint facility) had determined was the end of its useful loan life. They do cull the shelves from time to time to make room for new material, and books that are in

bad shape and haven't been borrowed for a few years get put on a shelf by the door with a sign on it that invites people to give them a home.

I've picked up a few worn John Grisham and Ken Follett novels from that shelf. In their case it was because the library already had several copies of those particular books still on the racks - copies that were in better shape. I took them home and read them in our trailer while we were travelling last summer.

Last week however, someone decided to see if books could be used as frisbees, or perhaps as a stand-in for a discus. They don't work well either way. The flapping pages tend to distort the smooth, lenticular shape needed to achieve real distance after the toss.

I collected eight of them from the fenced in school lawn (we're trying to get the grass and some bushes to grow there) on Wednesday as I was walking back from the post office. Those books had simply been thrown whole.



Sand Dune Pony turned up the next day. It had been dismembered and dribbled in pieces along the street in a straight enough line that I could probably have followed the trail to someone's home if I had been so inclined.

There's something sad about a dismembered book. It's so helpless. What can it do in self defense? Give you a paper cut? Get glue under your fingernails while you tear it apart?

All it wants is the chance to activate a few of your brain cells and share a story with you, whoever you are. Why not give it a chance?

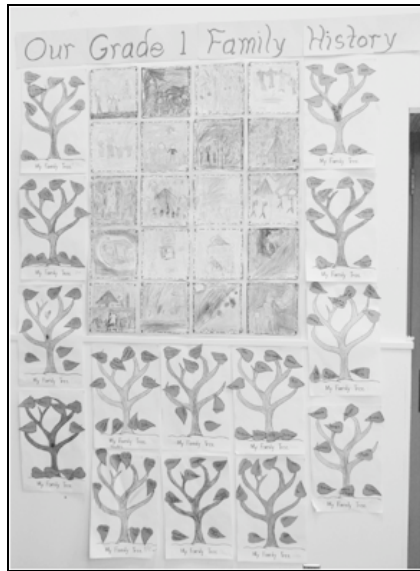
RSS Students Dig into History

by Dan Davidson

The ancillary room at the Robert Service School was full and busy on the evening of December 6 as the annual fall History Fair opened to public view, putting on display the projects that elementary school students had assembled while learning how to use the school library under the watchful eyes of their classroom teachers and school librarian Betty Davidson.

Projects took many forms. The Grade 3 class had been around the town doing monument rubbings and reports on the people who inspired them.

Grade 2 did a series of personal time lines, chronicling their lives so far in words and pictures. Grade 1 designed a sort of Family Quilt surrounded by family trees.



There were lots of Klondike flavored exhibits. Individuals such as Inspector Constantine, Robert Henderson and Belinda Mulrone were the subjects of poster displays. Canadian history was represented by the travels of Leif Eriksen and Simon Fraser and displays about Confederation

and the 1972 Canada-Russia Hockey series.

That all history doesn't have to be ancient to be interesting was proven by the detailed display on the life of surveyor, trapper, fisher and miner Jack Fraser, done by his grandson.

A panel of local judges picked the winning entries from the exhibition and these students will attend the regional history fair in the spring.

Writing Closer to the Bone

by Dan Davidson

Vancouver based writer George K. Ilsley had about a year to prepare for and anticipate spending three months in Dawson City as part of the Berton House Writers' Retreat program, but he was expecting it to be colder.

Early in December he told the audience of ten at his reading in the Dawson Community Library that he was happy the weather had changed.

"It's great that the weather has finally turned cold enough that I can send emails out to people in Vancouver and brag about it."

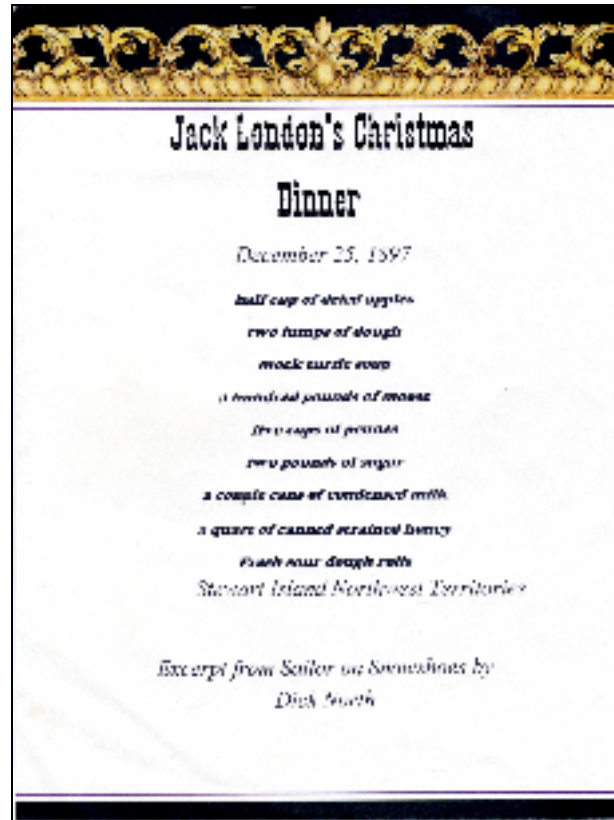
At that point he still hadn't seen the Northern Lights, but he remained hopeful.

Originally from a small town in Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley, George has moved about since then, living in Toronto, Montreal, Tokyo and Paris before settling in Vancouver.

In addition he has travelled, biking around the Adriatic Sea, hitchhiking to Mexico, teaching in Japan and ambling through the Himalayas.

It was his intention to be a lawyer, and he graduated from Toronto's Osgoode Hall after undergraduate work at Acadia University, but got sidetracked and became a writer instead, supporting this career choice by taking work as a wok cook, house husband, props-maker, rabbit rancher, proofreader, and roof sealer at various times.

George presented four different readings from phases of



his career, noting that he has tended to become more overtly autobiographical over time.

"When I started out everything was fiction. I called it 'fiction' and everything was 'fiction' and it was very comforting to do that because I didn't feel I was exposing myself so much. I could write about things ... and hide behind this label of fiction, although at times I was writing close to the bone, writing about my own background.

"There was lots of stuff that was made up, but there was also lots of true stuff."

An early piece of creative non-fiction was "Basket will always be Basket", about the life of Gertrude Stein and her dog, which was published as a prose poem even though it was intended as a short story.

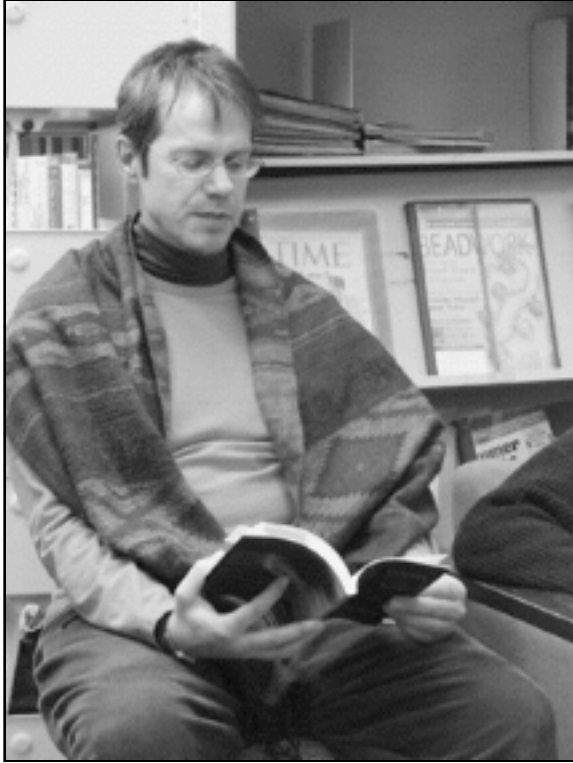
His collection *Random Acts of Hatred* (2003) contained quite a bit of material related to what Ilsley referred to as his "mother issues".

"She died 19 years ago of a combination of black ice and bingo."

From this period came "The Boy Who was Christian During Puberty," part of a series of what he called "faux fairy tales".

A more obviously autobiographical work was the more recent "Birds in the Hand," a collection of memories about birds he had known between the ages of 13 and 26. The most amusing piece concerned the antics of a Casanova parakeet.

From the novel *Man Bug* (2006), Ilsley read some of the description of the life and development of Sebastian, one of the main characters in the story, a man who has a touch of



Asperger's Syndrome, is obsessed with insects and becomes an entomologist.

The last reading, from his work in progress, which currently goes under the title *Like Gods*, concerns the potential for natural disasters such as earthquakes. Ilsley read from a section of the novel dealing with the life of Charles Francis Richter, co-founder of the famous Richter Scale, who was also an avid hiker, nudist and amateur poet. This humorous passage speculated on ways that one might devise a scale to tell when a poem was about to occur.

Dawson Power Outage unexplained

by Dan Davidson

The day after the event, Yukon Energy was uncertain as to the cause of the power blackout that hit part of Dawson City at 5:18 on Tuesday, December 5.

Spokesperson Janet Patterson confirmed local observations that the power went out in some sections of the town for about 22 minutes right around the supper hour.

"It affected 473 customers in the central residential part of Dawson City," Patterson said on Wednesday, "We are continuing to investigate the cause."

It was -42°C in Dawson at the time.

Christmas Memories:

These stories were set down by adults (mostly) who attended the Parks Canada/Dawson City Museum celebration on December 7. Yukon College's Adult Literacy Centre was part of the event.

Christmas on the Trapline

About ten days before Christmas one year myself, husband and daughter were at a line cabin on our trapline. We intended to spend a week there before coming back for Christmas to the main cabin where we had left all our Christmas 'fixings'. The temperature dropped to below -40° C and stayed like that for about eight or nine days.

On Christmas day, just as we were about to run out of food, the temperature warmed up to -15° C and we loaded up the skidoos and sleds and made a run for the main cabin. We made sandwiches with the last of the moose meat and bread. We intended to stop along the way and eat them.

We did stop, about three hours later, and had to thaw the sandwiches out over the campfire. That was our Christmas dinner.

Three days after we got back to the main cabin—that was when we had our roast turkey dinner.

Maureen Peterson

No Peeking at Christmas

I remember one Christmas, my sister Darlene and I peeked at the gifts.

Christmas morning, Daddy said I could give out the gifts! When I came to what I knew to be a ceramic dog for Darlene, I couldn't resist; I acted like I was going to toss it to her like I had the socks.

She stood up and said, "Don't throw it!" Realizing what she'd revealed about herself, she quickly looked from side to side to see if anybody had noticed and then sat down.

That part was fun, but we never wanted to peek again.

Elaine Gaudet

A Special Christmas Gift

When I was nine, my family was getting ready to go to Grandma's for the holidays. While my parents were packing the car, my three older brothers told me that they had a gift for me. They said that I could open it right away, as long as I didn't mind leaving it behind when we went to Grandma's. I agreed, so excited was I to be opening a gift before Christmas!

At the boys' insistence I hid my eyes and stayed in my room until they called me.

When I walked into the living room, there on the couch was the largest teddy bear I had ever seen! He was as big as I was, with beautiful friendly eyes and a big bow tied around his neck. I was thrilled and began to cry tears of joy. And...my teddy bear ended up on my lap, crammed in the car with the rest of us when we left for Grandma's. I held him the whole way.

I can still remember my family smiling at me, and my brothers looking pleased by my response to their gift.

I still have that teddy bear, although he's showing some wear these days.

Marni Bramadat

A Call from Santa

When I was in elementary school, Santa Claus called me on my birthday, as my birthday was so close to Christmas. Boy, what a surprise to hear, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Happy Birthday!"

Tracy Nordick

The Best Part of All

One Christmas all of us were together: Grandma and Nana, Grandpa and Aunt Darlene, my two sisters, my dad, mom...and I'm pretty sure, my Uncle Gord. I remember how when my aunt showed up a couple days before Christmas we were all surprised and happy because she lived in Saskatchewan and we hardly ever saw her. That year there were the most presents ever under the tree. They seemed to flow from the tree! But the best part of all was that my Aunt Darlene was there with us.

Megan Gaudet

A Community Building Christmas

Submitted by Cathie Findlay-Brook

The spicy aroma of Maneephan's amazing Thai Food wafted through the air at the Ten Thousand Villages Sale on December 1st. Shoppers enjoyed the festivities of this mini global village market buying from a selection of gifts, decorations, coffees and house wares from the 35 different countries at the Festival.

Ten Thousand Villages is a program of the Mennonite Central Committee since the early 70's fielding a network of retail stores & festival sales connecting North Americans with products – and stories – of thousands of villagers and artisans worldwide.

When you shop at Ten Thousand Villages you are joining a growing movement to support Fair Trade, promote social justice, dignity in life and peace in the world.

Ten Thousand Villages practices fair trade by networking with local community groups and especially disadvantaged people to determine a 'fair price' for their arts and handicrafts based on the cost of living in their respective countries. This helps to explain the apparently wide range of prices seen at the sale. 50% is paid in advance of orders to relieve the artisans of the heavy burden of loans on costs of materials. Prompt payment of the remaining 50% is paid on shipment. The organization also works closely with community members to build better infrastructure, health care, and education services.

Some new items this year brought added flavour to the cultural experience of the sale. Marimba, African drums, guitar and voice by some of our talented local musicians mingled with the sounds of visiting and laughter. Then there were the beautiful painted masks, henna hands and colorful turtle art provided by the Kindergarten, Grade 2 and 3 school children, all making the line-ups somewhat more bearable. We'll be ready next year with a new strategy for processing sales more expediently for weary travellers.

Speaking of travellers one can support the principles of Fair Trade while travelling by buying handicrafts directly from artisans or artisan cooperatives themselves. The bonus is interesting side trips to villages, a glimpse into rural life and more traditional lifestyles.

Thank you to all who are working towards spreading peace & happiness.

Public Works Super Honoured for 25 years in the Trenches

by Dan Davidson

The Government of Yukon isn't the only organization which recognizes long service. The City of Dawson does so as well, and took the time on December 4 to honour Norm Carlson.

Carlson, who is currently the town's Superintendent of Public Works, has been with the town for 25 years, and was



presented with a plaque for his fine work by Mayor John Steins and councillors Adam Morrison, Ed Kormendy and (on speakerphone from out of town) Diana Andrew.

Earlier, Carlson had been ambushed by other members of the town staff, who had presented him with home cooked meal and collected funds to buy the avid hunter a new spotting scope to assist in his next hunting season.

The soft-spoken Carlson told council that he appreciated the honour and that it was still a pleasure serving the City of Dawson.

He didn't look quite so certain when Mayor Steins remarked that he could look forward to the next 25 years.

Percy DeWolfe Update

The Percy DeWolfe Memorial Mail Race is back on its feet again and looking forward to exciting times!

After much hard work, and support from our local community, we have now been debt-free for about a year. A big thank-you everyone who continued to support us through our difficult times- especially to the many businesses and volunteers who have sponsored our events and fundraisers. We couldn't do it without you!

Now that we are “back in the black” we are looking forward to having time and energy to do some new and exciting things.

We will continue to host our main events, the Percy DeWolfe Memorial Mail Run from Dawson to Eagle and back, and the shorter Percy Jr race which is named in honour of Percy DeWolfe’s son. We are currently working on ways to increase the profile of these events, with the hope of both increasing the number of mushers entering the races, and the number of spectators coming to watch.

We are also very excited to finally be able to focus some time and energy on the other goal of our organization, which is to promote dog-powered sports such as mushing and skijoring.

We are investigating the possibility of putting in some ski trails on the river similar to those that were done for the IFSS races in 2005. These trails were very popular with everyone, and we hope if we do something similar people will again be encouraged to get out there and get active!

We are also planning to hold a series of non-competitive mushing/skijoring events for the community this winter.

The first of these will be the Solstice Saturday Fun Run, on December 22. It starts on the ice bridge at 2pm. Everyone and anyone is welcome to enter, as long as you have at least one and no more than five dogs pulling you on some sort of device (sled, skis, leash, etc).

This is a free event, and we will have a bonfire with hot chocolate so even if you don’t have a dog come down to have a cup of chocolate and cheer on your favourite musher/skijorer!

These are just some of the ideas we are working on right now. If you have a suggestion for us, or would like to be involved as a volunteer, sponsor or board member, please contact one of our committee members. Our members currently are Ann Ledwidge, Sebastian Jones, Shelley Brown, Alex Brook, Anna Claxton, and Shirley Peirson.

BILL’S LIGHT

BY SYLVIA SANDS JOHNSON

When my neighbour across the street, Bill Heinrichs, bought a ten acre parcel of land in Rosswood, all I knew about him is that he was originally from Saskatchewan. I thought that was promising since I’ve always liked people from the prairies.

At first, Bill was a bit distant, but at same time, seemed busier than six beavers building a new lodge. So I thought to myself: “I won’t go over there too often because he seems to be a workaholic.” However, as our garden grew, along with Bill’s new house, we found out that he loved carrots. So just to keep things friendly, I took him some fresh carrots. He thanked me very much and promptly went back to work. I didn’t realize how much he had to do until he built his own small, but efficient, sawmill. Bill was planning on cutting his own lumber.

I found out that, formerly, Bill had been a

‘refrigeration engineer’ in Prince Rupert. Basically, that meant that he had run and maintained the refrigeration equipment in a fish plant or plants. But as Bill reached retirement age, he decided he wanted to be closer to his family in Terrace. I also found out that if you were really stuck and didn’t know how to do something, Bill could be a wonderful neighbour in spite of all his ongoing projects. Amazingly, he seemed to know all the answers to anything practical, and since I’m artistically inclined, one thing I am NOT is practical. Not good at starting anything electrical or with a pull rope.

We were soon to find out that Bill would not be in residence year round.

Also, it wasn’t long before we found out why. It seems that Bill had found a girlfriend on Vancouver Island. But in the meantime, I offered to check Bill’s house once he was gone. The first winter seemed long and dreary without Bill’s hammer pounding away. But it was great when Bill returned with the Canada geese, along with Marge, his lady friend. Marge was just like meeting your long lost favourite aunt -- chatty, lots of fun, and just a wonderfully warm person.

It took me a while to realize how really clever Bill was, such as heating his house with a hot water system. So, of course, he built a side shed with a wood heater in it, and that was what heated up the water. The more I observed Bill’s ways, the more I realized how much I had underestimated him in the first place.

But it wasn’t until he left again one winter, that I realized he had left us a gift.

When I peered through a dazzling array of snowflakes, I saw this light glowing across the street. Suddenly, it was as if our neighbour had never gone. And what was truly astounding is that the friendly light lasted ALL winter. (Later, Bill told me that it was a 1000 hour bulb). Since I had once lived in isolation in a remote village in the Yukon, Bill could never know what that light meant to me. So I couldn’t wait to ask him about it the next Spring. I said to him, “Bill you have no idea what that light meant that you left on, throughout a terrible winter. It’s was as if I still had a neighbour here.” (There are not many people who live on this street during the winter). What he answered is this, “I know just what you mean.”

Who knows what Bill’s winters had been like in Saskatchewan, with neighbours, perhaps, living miles away. And every winter since Bill started travelling south, that light has become for me, a symbol of friendship, a beacon from a lighthouse no matter how isolated we feel, no matter how cold the temperatures. It has shone when the northern lights spread their glow, and the wolves filled the air with song.

So it was a wondrous surprise when Bill and Marge

returned from one of his winter sojourns, to tell us that they were married, both around 75 years of age. Marge had had a hip operation so it was late summer before they arrived. I knew how much Marge liked flowers so I couldn't wait to go into the garden and cut poppies, calendulas, roses, asiatic lilies, and anything else still growing at that time. It was a very mixed bag but I know Marge and Bill appreciated it.

Along with more carrots. And Marge and I had a Pink Lady to celebrate...

And now it has been a few years that we have known Bill, but there is one difference. Now as snow begins to

creep along the branches, I look across the way at night, and see, not one, but two lights burning. And Bill's son, Terry, of Terry's Locksmith, says he is coming out to convert the lights to fluorescent lighting to save on power, which I think a good idea, being a green fan.

Many winters of my life have been lit by coal oil lamps, and it was 18 years that we lived here without electricity. Who could imagine that a simple light shining through the darkness could mean so much? And what does it say about my neighbours?



Sun & Shadow on December 2

The winter has come on quite firmly
and the season is making its mark.
Minus 37 is the low point today
and it really is getting quite dark.

The sun is diminishing daily
as the daylight hours decline.
The town is now mostly in shadow
even when the weather is fine.

Old Sol creeps over the southern hills
less and less each day.

He touches the Dome with a clear, cold light
and then he slips away.

On days like this when we go outside
we're bundled from head to toe,
and we find that even our canine friends
wear booties to walk in the snow.

It's going to get darker for 20 more days
before the Earth tilts, and then,
as the light creeps down from the hill to the town,
the cycle begins again.

DD Dec. 2/07