

KVA PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

The Klondike Visitors Association began as a publicity stunt in 1952 when Canadian Pacific Airlines revived riverboat service to bring tourists from Whitehorse to Dawson City. A group of eager Dawson residents dressed up for the occasion in gold rush era costumes to welcome the passengers on board—a new tradition was born. These dedicated volunteers soon organized themselves into the Klondike Tourist Bureau, the first tourism organization in the Yukon. In addition to costumed receptions, they hosted tours of Dawson and the gold fields and treated the visitors to coffee, tea, and home baking. Soon, the volunteers were hosting 'Klondike Nights' at the old Palace Grand Theatre, where visitors danced to live music, won or lost fortunes of phoney money at a casino, and enjoyed the antics of local residents who dressed up and performed theatre skits based on the rhymes of Robert Service.

Proceeds from Klondike Nights were used to create the first tourism pamphlets in the territory. The group bought the historic Palace Grand, which was turned over to Klondike Historic Sites who dismantled it, board by board, and reconstructed the present building at a cost approaching one million dollars. Klondike Nights returned to the refurbished theatre and became more popular than ever.

In the 1960's after the Yukon Travel Bureau was formed in Whitehorse, the Klondike Tourist Bureau changed its name to the Klondike Visitors Association (KVA), and renewed its commitment to attract visitors to the Klondike.

Over the years the Klondike Visitors Association has undertaken a great number of initiatives, many of which continue to this day. Some examples include:

- ❑ Marketing Dawson City as a visitor destination
- ❑ Diamond Tooth Gerties Gambling Hall
- ❑ Jack London Museum and Interpretive Centre
- ❑ Free Claim # 6 on Bonanza Creek
- ❑ Operation of seasonal Community Event Casino weekends that yield thousands of dollars in direct financial contributions to local not-for-profit organizations
- ❑ Provision of seed money to community organizations such as the Dawson City Museum and Dawson Day Care
- ❑ Ongoing partnership with the Writers Trust maintaining of Berton House residence
- ❑ Ongoing support for numerous non-KVA special events and community attractions

DIAMOND TOOTH GERTIES GAMBLING HALL

The building that houses Diamond Tooth Gerties was built in 1901 by the Arctic Brotherhood, a fraternal organization dedicated to improving social conditions in Dawson City and other northern communities. Over the years the building was the centre of Dawson's most important social gatherings. The City of Dawson obtained title to the building in 1951, and it operated as a community hall for many years.

In 1971, to further bolster tourism in the Klondike, gambling was legalized on a limited basis. At this time KVA leased the hall from the City of Dawson, and, after significant capital reinvestment, transformed it into the popular casino known as Diamond Tooth Gerties Gambling Hall. For many years, Diamond Tooth Gerties operated as Canada's only licensed casino, where patrons could drink alcoholic beverages, enjoy live entertainment and try their luck at blackjack, poker and roulette.

In 1992, under terms and conditions of a licensing agreement with Yukon Government, 52 slot machines were added to the casino. In 1996, recognizing the importance and expansion of gaming operations, KVA created a full-time, year round position of Casino Manager. In 1997, dollar slot machines were converted to tokens and four new slot machines were installed. An additional six machines were installed in 1998 bringing the total number to 62. Currently Gerties is licensed for a total of 64 slots machines.

KVA continues to lease the building from the City of Dawson. Net revenues from Diamond Tooth Gerties are re-invested in the community by the Klondike Visitors Association to fulfill its mandate of destination marketing in conjunction with development, support and operation of attractions and special events that revive and maintain the unique history and character of Dawson City and improve the quality of life for Klondike residents.

JACK LONDON MUSEUM & INTERPRETIVE CENTRE

Jack London entered the Yukon in September of 1897 as a 21 year-old prospector looking for gold. While he didn't strike it rich, he later turned his Klondike adventures into fortune and fame with legendary short stories and books.

His original log cabin was built on the North Fork of Henderson Creek, 120 km south of Dawson City, just prior to the gold rush of 1898. London's cabin was abandoned after the gold rush. It was re-discovered by trappers in 1936 that noted London's signature on the back wall. Yukon author Dick North organized a search in 1965 and eventually had the cabin dismantled and shipped out. Two replicas were made from the original

logs. One is at the interpretive site in Dawson City, while the other was re-assembled at Jack London Square in Oakland, CA, London's hometown.

Dick North, KVA and the Yukon Government developed the Dawson site. It contains photos, documents, newspaper articles and other London memorabilia. The center is operated and maintained by KVA and is open to the public seven days a week, May through September. Dick North retired this past year but KVA will always be grateful for his remarkable efforts to keep London's memory alive in Dawson. We sincerely thank Dawne Mitchell, who shared interpretive duties with Dick for many years, and continues to an excellent job in that role, welcoming visitors from around the world and generously sharing her encyclopaedic knowledge of London and the cabin.

BERTON HOUSE

The original house was built in 1901, and was purchased for \$500 in 1920 by mining recorder Frank Berton. For 12 years it was the family home of Frank, his wife Laura, their son Pierre and daughter Lucy until they left Dawson in 1932. Thanks to a generous donation of \$50,000 from the late Pierre Berton, a respected author and former broadcaster, the dwelling was acquired by the Yukon Arts Council in 1989.

In a joint project involving the KVA and the Yukon Arts Council, Berton House was completely renovated by the KVA at a cost of more than \$100,000. Thanks to the proceeds of a major fundraising campaign organized in Toronto by the Berton House Writer's Retreat Society, KVA was able to finish paying off the mortgage assumed after the renovations were complete.

Since 1996, the Berton House Writer's Retreat Society (devolved in 2008 to The Writer's Trust of Canada) and the Dawson City Community Library have worked together to host a writer-in-residence program in the home. The program continues to successfully attract a variety of Canadian authors who appreciate the unique opportunity to reside in a remote northern community and concentrate on their work.

KVA's long-term lease on the property expired in 2004. The house and property are now owned by the Writer's Trust of Canada but KVA continues to assist the ongoing Writer-in-Residence program with building and grounds maintenance.

KVA FREE CLAIM (NO. 6 ABOVE DISCOVERY)

In 1966 the KVA acquired a placer claim at No.6 Above Discovery on historic Bonanza Creek. This claim was first staked by F. Ladouceur in October 1896, not long after George Carmacks made his famous discovery about a half-mile downstream. Prior to the KVA acquiring the claim it was owned by a variety of miners and mining companies, including Dredge No. 8 of the Yukon Gold Company.

The Klondike Visitors Association now welcomes visitors to pan for free and can keep any gold that they find. Panning is restricted to hand tools only and many visitors do find gold at the site. Recent improvements have been made to road and site signage and access to "paydirt" on the claim.

STRAIT'S AUCTION HOUSE (AKA 'GUNS AND AMMO' BUILDING)

This Klondike Gold Rush relic at the corner of Third Avenue and Harper Street is one of the most photographed structures in Dawson.

Historical information shows that it was built by Ebenezer S. Strait in 1901, and that it operated for years as a second-hand store. It later had a series of owners, mostly property speculators who let the building deteriorate to the point that the city declared it unsafe and scheduled it for demolition in 1971. This raised the ire of Dawson resident Albert Fuhre, who raised over \$600 in donations to buy it and donate it to the KVA.

In 1998, KVA stabilized the building and installed some interpretive signage. In 1999 a Whitehorse businessman came forward with a proposal for future development and, based on an agreement with KVA, made some progress on structural repairs over the next few years. However, the agreement has since lapsed. KVA continues to maintain the property in its current rundown but stabilized condition as a photogenic example of an actual gold rush structure. KVA has no plans of its own but remains open to viable third party ideas for possible development.