

Back to the River

CELEBRATING OUR CULTURE



KWANLIN DÜN FIRST NATION

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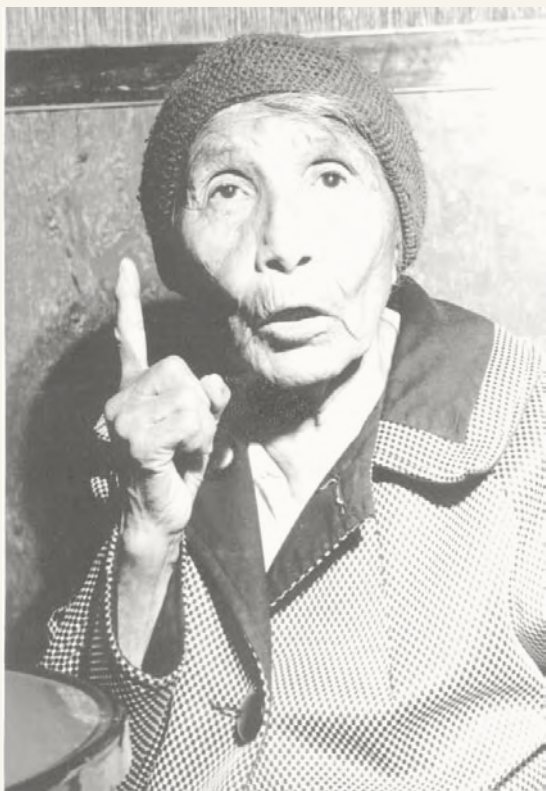
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Front cover: Frank Slim (seated with hat) accompanied by friends and family aboard the *Drew* on the Liard River.

Photo by Willie Broeren, 1940. YA 82/429, PH0 60 "Their Own Yukon" Collection *Born on Marsh Lake, Frank Slim worked on the major waterways of the north. The vessels he steered ranged from small gasboats to large sternwheelers such as the S.S. Klondike. Slim was the only Yukon First Nations man to become a licensed captain and pilot. But it came at great sacrifice as he had to give up his First Nations status. Slim was also a trapper, miner, fur buyer, mail carrier and cat skinner. In 1960, Frank Slim had the honour of piloting the S.S. Keno on its last voyage from Whitehorse to Dawson.*

Title page: Christopher Smith at the Gathering of Traditions Potlatch, 2003.

Back cover: Nathan Dawson (left), age 8, and Cheyenne Bradley, age 7, at a barbecue hosted by the Cultural Centre Steering Committee, June 20, 2003.



Jenny LeBarge

Celebrating our culture

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Lily Kane

Lily Kane was born in 1911 and spent most of her life in Teslin and Champagne. She says there weren't many native people in the Whitehorse area when she was a teenager. Those who were there "lived in a big village down river, where that curve is." She only spent a short time growing up on the waterfront. "They used to play a lot and it was quiet. They used to hunt for moose, way back, on the other side."

Lily remembers that a long time ago, "they got buckskin clothes, all skin clothes.

"We used to go fishing at M'Clintock, lots of fish, and make big party at Marsh Lake."

Speaking of the Whitehorse waterfront, Lily remembers, "There was not much houses, lot of tents. There was just three stores, Taylor and Drury, Jack Sewell's and I forget the other one. They sell groceries, anything, clothes. There used to be not many people that time, white people.

"My brother, Frank Slim, he worked on the boats. He carry freight." Lily said she never rode the boat because the trip to Dawson cost too much.

*"We used to go fishing at M'Clintock, lots of fish
and make big party at Marsh Lake."*

Background: Yukon River



Honouring our past, planning our future

“You think about your grandma and grandpa. You listen. They are going to tell you lots of good things and you’re really going to be interested when you grow up later on. You’ll think about it then. It will be really good to learn.” Mary McLeod, 2003



Annie Smith

For generations, our people have lived along the Chu Nínkwàn (today, the Yukon River). Stone tools tell of our ancestors who were here just after the last ice age, harvesting salmon and hunting caribou and buffalo. The banks of the river were lined with fish camps, lookout points, hunting trails, burial sites and meeting places. Our values, language and traditions are rooted in this land.

Ancestors of the Tagish Kwan and Kwanlin Dün moved freely over a vast area extending well beyond today’s Whitehorse city limits. They welcomed other First Nations from as far away as Atlin and Tagish to the southeast, Little Salmon to the northwest and the Kluane area

to the west. And in the late 19th century, they were here to greet and assist many of the early explorers and prospectors.

In 1900, life changed with the building of Whitehorse. Our people still made much of their living on the land but they now came to the new town to trade fur and find work. Usually, they stayed where they always had, along the waterfront. Our elders remember the “old time people” — Jessie Walker, Charlie Smith and Jenny LeBarge — who would welcome them into their riverfront homes.

But as the town grew, many people living on the banks of the river were pushed away. This continued throughout the last century.

Today, we are reclaiming our place by the river and we want to share and celebrate our culture. In this book, we have stories from Kwanlin Dün and other First Nations citizens. In our own words, these stories tell of our history on the waterfront.

“We all know this river is old and it goes back thousands and thousands of years, but the people always stayed there, lived here, always lived near the water. I was thinking, you know, through the years, the generations past, we don’t really know the stories and that’s one of the things we want to do is get those stories back.” Ron MacIntosh, 2003

Panorama of Whitehorse from the western shore of the Yukon River, 1900.



Goetzman photographer. Yukon Archives, University of Washington Collection, #1334

Our river home

“They call it *Kwanlin*. That’s what they call it long time ago because when people came into town they would *Kwanlin*. They would go to Whitehorse. That’s what they would say they were going, *Kwanlin*.” Annie Smith, 2003.

This land is our ancestral home. In the summer, our people navigated the waterways by raft, sprucebark and cottonwood dugout canoe, and mooseskin boat. They travelled by foot over a vast network of trails extending thousands of square kilometres.

In the fall, they hunted moose, sheep, elk, caribou and woodland bison. In the winter, when pelts were in prime condition, families trapped fox, mink, lynx, marten, coyote and wolf.

Fishing

Fish have always been an important food source. Depending on the time of year, our people travelled to fishing spots on lakes, creeks and rivers to harvest grayling, ling cod, whitefish, pike and lake trout.

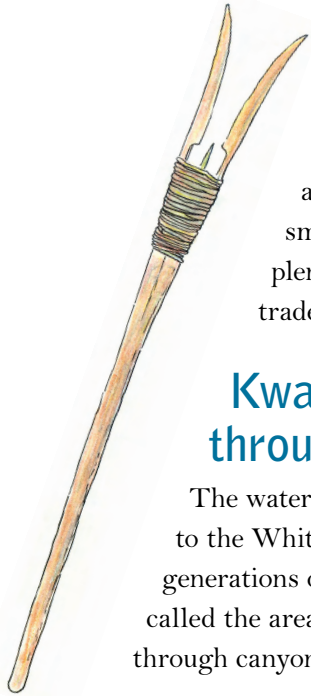
The most prized fish, however, were the salmon that migrated upriver during two annual runs. At the rapids, skilled fishers

FISH AND THE SELF-GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT

Fish are still central to First Nations people. Over the years, salmon harvests have been affected by industrial development and pollution. Kwanlin Dün’s land claim addresses fishery issues to ensure our cultural tradition continues for generations. The Kwanlin Dün final agreement has provisions for:

- the development of a management plan for freshwater fisheries in important waterbodies in our traditional territory;
- fish stock rehabilitation; and
- the redevelopment of the Whitehorse fishway and hatchery.





hauled them out of the churning waters using gaffs and spears. At summer fish camps, women cut up fish and hung them to dry on racks over smoky fires. The salmon run was a time of plenty, when people met to feast, visit and trade.

Kwanlin: running water through canyon

The waterway now called Miles Canyon through to the Whitehorse Rapids was well known to generations of First Nations people. Our ancestors called the area Kwanlin, which means “running water through canyon” in Southern Tutchone.

Not only was this section of the river an excellent area for fishing, but well worn trails on the banks of the canyon tell of centuries of people travelling overland in search of game.

Justin Smith



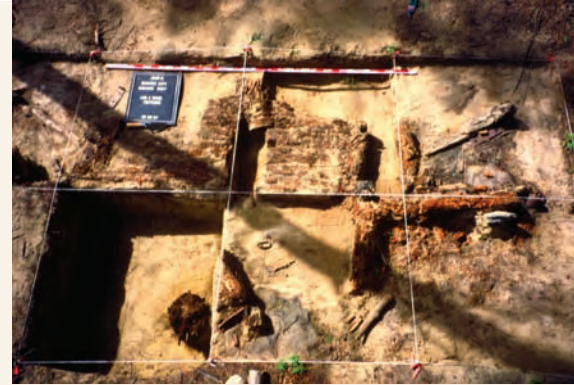


Riding a lumber scow through Whitehorse Rapids.
Hamacher Collection, Yukon Archives, Pho 289 85/75

Canyon City

Although the recent history of Canyon City tends to focus on the Klondike gold rush, our cultural history here goes back countless generations. Thousands of years before the gold rush our people camped in this area. They left behind stone tools used to spear fish, scrape hides and cut up meat.

Kwanlin Dün youth, working with archaeologists, have found stone spear points and scrapers in this area, dating back more than 2,600 years.



Excavation
at Canyon
City.
Government of
the Yukon

CULTURAL HERITAGE AND THE SELF GOVERNMENT AGREEMENT

Kwanlin Dün's land claim ensures our key heritage sites are protected. The final agreement also provides funding for Kwanlin Dün to share our history and cultural heritage with the community. Specific provisions in the agreement include:

- the development of a management plan for the Canyon City Heritage Site;
- a 4.27-acre land parcel on Whitehorse's waterfront, a portion of which will be used for the Kwanlin Dün cultural centre; and
- \$650,000 for Kwanlin Dün to promote our cultural heritage and history throughout downtown Whitehorse.

“My parents told me a long time ago, in the gold rush days, you’d have to go a long way to hunt. They cleared all the game around towns and where the routes people took to Dawson. No way could you find your own meat. Wasn’t canned goods in those days. Had to live off the land.” Ronald Bill, 2003



Justin Smith



Kwanlin Dün youth working on a dig at Canyon City. Government of the Yukon

Louie Smith

Louie Smith was six years old when he arrived in Whitehorse in 1939. "I listened to Dad and Mom. It is good to have a mother that tells you lots. My dad was pretty good. Raised me good.

"Miles Canyon there. It is beautiful. Indian people had trails everywhere. Salmon close to shore. I worked by the river and used to see salmon right close. Before that dam, on Whitehorse side there was an Indian camp by railroad tracks.

"That old chief of Lake Laberge would get salmon before Whitehorse. Set fish trap there by island, some small place, a fish wheel — an Indian fish trap. He'd get tourists to take pictures of fish heads being cooked right there in front of him. Tourists would pay \$50. That was really good money then! He did that for about two, five years. Every year in July he would do it. He died there and they buried him on the hill my dad told me.

"In 1939, Whitehorse was a small town. We would see weather to 60 below. People were

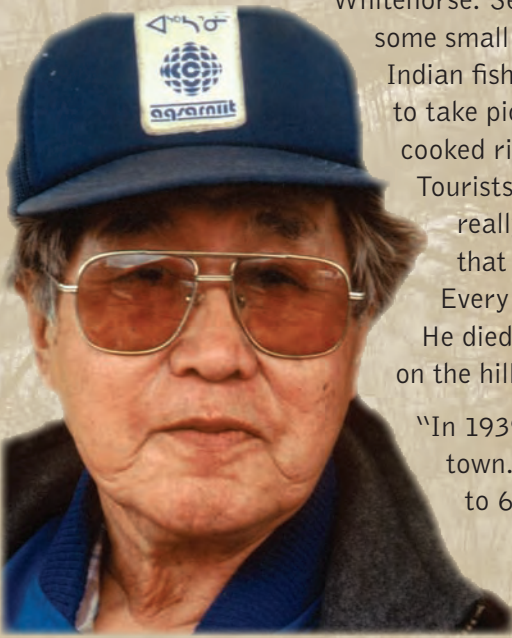
*"Listen to the stories.
It's good to listen, kids."*

scattered around places by Dairy Queen through up in the bush by hospital. 2000 people.

"People came from Carmacks, Big Salmon and set up camps by shipyards. In the summer, lots of Indian people around. In the fall they'd go back. That's what we used to do. The Yukon River meant a lot to Indian people. We used to travel by skin boat. Lots of trails everywhere."

Louie remembered how far people travelled on the land. "Indian people used to use most of the land around here and the lakes and the rivers. Marsh Lake, along the riverbanks to Lake Laberge, that's where we got a lot of fish. That's what we do all the way along, in every slough we set a net.

"Listen to the stories. It's good to listen, kids. It's like what is being said about the waterfront and right here in Whitehorse, in 20 or 30 years from now, you people will be around. That's why you gotta listen to the stories. And that school is good too. Don't forget you gotta finish it."



Background: Trail near Schwatka Lake

Barbara Fred

In 1952, Barbara Fred was six years old and living in the Shipyards, with her mom (Susie Fred), dad (Ralph LaVallée), sisters (Eileen Fred, Violet Fred) and brothers (Alfie LaVallée, Howard Fred). "We were staying in that area by the boats. We had this little two-room house. It was a quiet place."

Barbara was fascinated by the sternwheelers. "When our dad wasn't around, we used to climb those paddlewheels. Same with the barges, we used to try and jump from barge to barge or play Tarzan and try to swing on those big ropes. We'd pretend we were the captain or passengers. We knew those boats inside out. It was really an exciting place; so many places to play hide and seek.

"As children we always entertained ourselves 'cause my dad was working and my mother did a lot of sewing at home. There wasn't any other kids in that area when I think about it.

The odd time some friends of Mom's would come from Sleepy Hollow and they would bring their kids, so when they came to visit we would play with them.

"We used to be able to just pick up, or Dad would anyways pick up his gun, and go for a walk down the tracks, towards Sleepy Hollow, around the pond where Wal-Mart is now. He would hunt beaver, ducks, and if we saw gopher we would get them too. And Mom would come with us and she would be picking mushrooms as we walked. It was just out your back door really. We kids had fun skipping along the tracks. We'd make the scoop, go around and walk back and have our dinner.

"We could tell how old we were or the seasons, depending on what our parents were doing at that time. We would stay out of town during the winter months so my dad could cut wood 'cause in the summertime he used to work up at the Whitehorse dam as a demolition guy. I



Barbara (right) and her sister, Eileen, in the Shipyards area, 1964.
Barbara Fred Collection

“Everybody sort of helped one another; if somebody got a moose or something, they shared it. It was like a big family. Everybody was related to everybody.”

remember him taking us to work 'cause Mom wasn't around. He would tie us to a tree so we didn't wander very far. And then at lunch hour or breaks he would come and give us dry meat or dried fish, whatever, to keep us quiet. They used to do that all the time when they didn't want us to wander around, tie us to a tree. We'd have enough string to move around, but it was just so we couldn't get away while they were busy setting up tents or whatever. There was a lot of bush and there was no babysitter.”

Barbara remembers when life started to change. “I remember people crying, upset, and this was from across the hospital 'cause there was a village there. We stayed in the

Shipyards then because Dad was non-native, we weren't allowed to go to the village. But I remember the people and my sister, Annie, moving down to where Home Hardware is, that whole area was the village then.

“After that they were moved down to where Lot 226 is. We were in town; it was Easter time. I went with Annie to her place down in Lot 226. She lived in a tent frame. It was so quiet down there.

“Everybody sort of helped one another; if somebody got a moose or something, they shared it. It was like a big family. Everybody was related to everybody. If somebody chopped wood for one, they chopped it for everybody.”



Barbara (right) and her sister, Violet. Handwritten on the back: “Me and Vi (my sis) Taken near our place! September 1964, Shipyards.”
Barbara Fred Collection

Background: Sternwheelers in the Shipyards.
Yukon Archives, 89/31-2, 118, Phelps/Scott Collection

How life changed

“...towards the riverbank there was another store. They call it Jack Sewell’s store. From there it was all village. It was all oldtimers. I remember that. We’d visit around. I was really young but they would honour me coming from a different community.” Martha Van Heel, 2003

Stories of the waterfront have been passed down from generation to generation. Elders tell of a time when only First Nations people lived along the river. They tell of the Whitehorse hospital and Riverdale as being “camp,” while the west side of the river was a place to catch and dry fish.

The arrival of newcomers and the building of the White Pass railway and Alaska Highway all caused great changes to the way our people lived. Some families continued to follow the seasons, hunting and trapping. Often their travels took them back through the Whitehorse waterfront. Here they were welcomed into homes by family and old friends. No matter how difficult the changes, First Nations people continued to come together to help and support each other.



In the Shipyards area. (left to right) Susie Fred, Lily Kane, Ralph LaVallée, Annie Smith, Pardon Kane, Johnnie Smith, July 1965. Barbara Fred Collection



Joe Smith, age 5, with his great-grandmother, Nellie Johnny, on their way gopher hunting, around 1950. Kitty Smith remembers, "They were walking on tracks with Grandma to Wolf Creek to hunt gophers. They were coming from Shipyards. They used pack dogs all the way up the train track. That's where they bump into white people. 'They take me picture. Joe got big bag of candy,' Grandma told me. Grandma Nellie got five dollar. Joe is 59 years old now. In those days dogs pack groceries, blankets, dishes, everything. No vehicle; you had to pack like hell too." Hougen Collection

Many First Nations people worked along the waterways. Families cut wood to fuel the steamboats. At that time, the going rate was two dollars a cord. Others hauled freight for Taylor and Drury or worked to load barges.

The steamboats at the shipyards were a playground for children living or visiting the waterfront. People remember the boats

as their favourite playground for climbing and playing hide-and-seek. Many elders rode on the steamboats as children and tell of the captain blowing a whistle so travellers could watch the wildlife on the river's edge. Kwanlin Dün elders still recall the excitement and pride they felt, as children, whenever they spotted Captain Frank Slim piloting a boat.

Waiting to load firewood onto a steamer, along the Yukon River, July 1900.

Yukon Archives, MacBride Museum Collection, 4135



Ronald Bill

Ronald Bill was born in 1936 at 52 mile on the Old Dawson Road. He is half Southern Tutchone and half Northern Tutchone and belongs to the Crow clan. In 1943, Ronald moved from Carmacks to the Whitehorse waterfront. "My dad wanted to work as a longshoreman, so it was quite a walk, we just take our time. We camp on the way. We started in the wintertime, we work our way up, we hunt, dry fur and then we move to different place."

They arrived in Whitehorse in the spring and moved into a tent frame across from where Food Fair is now. "Lot of people built their house there. It was so cheap, maybe it was a lot of money in them days, but they build a house, two or three bedrooms there for \$1500."

Later, the family moved across the river, straight across from Kishwoot Island. Ronald's step-dad, Ole Wickstrom, ran a wood

camp employing many First Nations people. "It was big business in them days when the army and air force came in. They had an order for 350,000 cord a year. That's quite a bit. They had bunch of people working in the summertime. They have people working night and day. They had a ferry back and forth where the bridge is and they would haul wood with trucks. They used all the wood for stoves; they didn't have no gas or oil or stuff like that."

During the building of the Alaska Highway, the U.S. Army moved onto the Whitehorse waterfront, living in makeshift camps. "North of Long Lake, there's a big camp there. I went there when I was a little kid. You know, I crazy, I used to walk up there, bug the cooks to get pie and stuff like that."

Living on the Whitehorse waterfront was one of the most memorable experiences of Ronald's life. "There was people from all different places, they come there to get work. There was no booze or anything like that, people didn't drink. It was good life. They used to hold dance on Saturday. Nobody get drunk or anything, they just dance.

"When people leave home, they didn't lock their doors. They got saw, everything outside, they come back, nobody touch it.

“We lived out in the bush at an early age. People had a lot to eat. It was depression days, but it really didn’t affect the First Nations because they lived in the bush.”

“At Whiskey Flats, it was only bush there, no streets, only foot trails. I used to come across in boat. People lived there, we go and visit. In summertime, they go out hunting. They call it *Shakat*, Indian way. They kill moose, get gophers and things like that, caribou, sheep, they dry ‘em up. They keep long time. Even fish they dry and keep in gunny sack. They build a cache and store the food in it.

“We lived out in the bush at an early age. People had a lot to eat. It was depression days, but it really didn’t affect the First Nations because they lived in the bush. They just buy sugar, tea, rice, things like that. When people killed moose, they shared a lot of stuff.

“My grandmother, Violet McGundy, told me we are river people. We live on the river. We migrated up the river she said, long time ago. When you look at the river, it sustains life. If you look at it, the way some First Nations describe it, it’s just like your bloodline coursing through this land and it’s nursing all the trees and the animals. You got all the watersheds coming into this river and these watershed are in turn feeding animals and helping plants grow and things like that. They talk about it spiritually because it’s a growth, everything is moving.”



Violet McGundy. Yukon Archives, Father Tanguay Collection, 88/151, 15

Pat Joe

As a young girl, Pat Joe lived with her family in Whiskey Flats where the *S.S. Klondike* is today. "There was a group of us who couldn't live without seeing each other every day. If we never saw each other the next day, it was devastating. We played hard. We had no toys, but we were so close. We were very close and we played along the river bank and on the boats.

"Later on we started playing in the three boats. Wintertime we didn't go in there, it was pretty slippery; it was too cold, no heat, but in spring, summer and fall we were always in those boats. We were just like monkeys swinging back and forth. We'd jump from boat to boat and we had secret hide-a-ways in every one of them.

"I don't recall anybody drowning. We were taught to have a lot of respect for the river. We skipped rocks, met people, and swam in the river.

"In Lot 226 or Whiskey Flats, we knew everybody. We knew the children's names, we knew when they were born, who had a birthday, if there wasn't a birthday planned, we kids planned it."

"My grandmother said most of the fishing was done in Canyon City. There was a big village down in that area too, a fishing village. The fish would come through the canyon and they would have to rest. That, she said, was the easiest way to catch them."

Talking about people who lived in Whiskey Flats, Pat recalls, "The houses were warm. I remember the big woodstoves. I especially recall going to Andy Hooper's place where he had an old army truck. I used to wear white pants but would return home black and greasy. That truck was a Whiskey Flats icon.

"There are two distinct graveyards. If you're looking at the graveyard from the city or from across the river, it looks like two or three graves. But behind it is a hundred graves or more. Where the hospital is today was a traditional village and they buried their people on a hill. Seke, my grandmother Julie Joe's mother, is buried there. She was Tagish Kwan and the eldest child of Marsh Lake Chief."

Pat's family's traditional area is Marsh Lake. "My grandmother, Julie Joe, is Marsh Lake Chief's grandchild."

Pat remembers her grandfather, John Joe, telling her about the abundance of fish in the Marsh Lake area. "His children were scared to stand on the wharf 'cause it used to be so red from sockeye salmon coming up the Yukon River into Marsh Lake.

"The people I was raised with in Whiskey Flats are still connected to me today. Every time I go to Rotary Park, someone will say, 'Remember, Pat, we did this. So and so lived right here, so and so lived there. Remember we used to crawl under the bridge and pretend we were the three billy goats gruff?'

"I believe things started to change and started to lose that close connection when the White Pass removed us from the waterfront. We were all asked to move. I just remember some of my friends moving to the end of Black Street, some moved to Porter Creek and some went back to their traditional territories. We lost our home, we lost our friends, we lost our safe haven."

Pat recalls that there was a spiritual connection to the river.

"In Lot 226 or Whiskey Flats, we knew everybody. We knew the children's names, we knew when they were born, who



Grandma Julia Joe with her granddaughter, Azalea Joe, on the banks of the Yukon River near Canyon City, 1994.

Government of the Yukon, Yukon Archives, 7084/Tidd Collection

had a birthday. If there wasn't a birthday planned, we kids planned it."

Then, in the 1980s, Pat was part of the push to move from Lot 226, where there was no sewer and water. "It was a health reason why we made the move to leave Lot 226. Those shacks along the riverbank, if they could only tell a story. I don't think the City today would wreck one because they definitely had a lot of history. This was our home."

Evalena Beisser



Evalena was four and a half years old when she moved to Whitehorse. One of her favourite memories was riding the steamboats. "It was like going to a peaceful place where everybody was nice. Grownups treated you like the kid you were, but they didn't ignore you. I can remember when I was really small, being in the captain's cabin. I was steering the boat. I didn't know at the time the captain had control, I just thought I was steering it. And when I got off the steamboat I was telling everybody, 'I steered the steamboat up river you know.'

"The house my mother was living in had a porch on one side, just for storage and another porch on the other side for wood because people like to help themselves at night. So you had to pile all your wood in the woodshed.

"Riverdale was bush. Where the hospital was, was an open hill. They call them gopher hills because there's dried grass and everything like that."

Evalena found a wonderful use for her mother's hair nets. "Us kids used to play down at the riverbank. There was an old, old steamboat, just the skeleton left on the shores there. First Nations people tell us not to go down there because the water made the boards slippery. But we'd go there when no one was watching and there was little tiny fish, I'd say not even an inch long. And us kids used to steal Momma's hair net and we used to go down there and pretend we were fishing and we'd catch those little fish in Mom's hair net.

"I don't miss anything from back there. It was nice to have the boats, but you had to give it up. And I think even from at that point in time when I was a little girl I was looking to the future and I'm still doing that."

*"I think even
from at that point in time
when I was a little girl I was
looking to the future
and I'm still doing that."*

Background: Whitehorse waterfront, 1900. Yukon Archives 6305/Roozeboom Collection

The waterfront communities

“When I was little we used to come into town and go to Grampa Ralph and Grandma Susie’s place right across from the Shipyards. I remember at Grampa Ralph’s he grew those little sweet carrots in a garden. We used to eat them as kids. They were so good.” Dianne Smith, 2003

The colourful communities that became known as the Shipyards and Moccasin Flats began in the early 1900s. Cabins, built by shipyard workers and First Nations people, were located between the British Navigation Co. and the

stockyards. These communities became home for many families over the years.

Whiskey Flats was in the area between a bend in the river and the railway tracks. In the *Canyon City Oral History Report*, Sweeney Scurvey said that, “Whiskey Flats was once outside



Whiskey Flats looking north.
Yukon Archives, D. Wahl Collection, 83/98, 8



the city limits and a conglomeration of buildings sprang up... Dick Bean and Mary Charlie raised their children there. Jim Shorty and family, Renee Peter and Field Johnny, Stanley Smith and many others lived there... Jim Shorty's house was a popular place when it was located at Whiskey Flats. Now the steamer, the *S.S. Klondike*, sits where the house used to be."

In the 1950s, as Whiskey Flats filled up, the Shipyards area expanded, moving further downriver to form a cluster of dwellings known as Sleepy Hollow.

Whiskey Flats was split into north and south Whiskey Flats when a bridge to the new subdivision of Riverdale was built.

PHOTOS LEFT TO RIGHT

Bridge to Riverdale splitting Whiskey Flats. Hougén Collection
Field Johnny, Renee Peter

(opposite) Taken at 30 Mile about 1940.
(LEFT TO RIGHT) BACK: Gertie (Shorty) Tom,
Ida (Shorty) Carlson, Mary Shorty, Jessie Shorty, Jim Shorty;
FRONT: Elizabeth (Shorty) Wilson, Billy Shorty, Mabel Shorty, Joe Shorty.



Leonard Gordon, Sr.

Born in 1936 near Carcross, Leonard Gordon lived by what used to be called the White Pass turnaround, near to the Food Fair mall. It was a swampy area.

“There used to be a lot of oldtimers alive then that used to live around there. There was a lot of natives live up and down there. I don’t know how many times the natives moved, maybe five times by then. I remember where the courthouse is, in 1941, that was the village. And they keep moving people.

“There was a few live in tents, we had a log cabin where the highway went through. That was way before 1942, far as I remember I can barely reach the doorknob. I remember those things, [I was] pretty small.

“I used to walk all over there. I remember Front Street. Everything was bush, mud and swamp and trails.”

Leonard recalls that there was a mix of people here and it was a difficult life. “It was mostly hard times. It was just getting over the hungry thirties in them days. It was rough and tough, no jobs, no nothing, as far as I remember. Railroad is the only thing my father was working on and that

was three dollars a day. My mother used to scrub floor for the old White Pass on her knees, just to keep us alive. People used to live off of the bush here, a lot of them. Rabbits, whatever we can get.

“It’s when we didn’t have anything we were happy. When we could go out in the bush, hunt or whatever. We didn’t have lots of money. We didn’t know what beef steak was or pork chops or boiled potatoes. We were happy.”

As a young man, Leonard stood by helplessly as his home was destroyed. “They pulled up with a bulldozer and the rest of the people were packing up. That was right alongside of Canadian Tire and the Bumper to Bumper, through there. They parked the bulldozer there and said, ‘Well, we’re going to take this land. We’re going to bulldoze you whether you move or not. So you better take what you got and move on.’ Not knowing where we’re going to go, not knowing what we’re going to do. But my mother knew of a cabin years back, out in McCrae.

“I watched our house got bulldozed, I watched all the other people, their house bulldozed into swamp. I never forget the people that did it because I didn’t understand. Put hatred in their hearts, not knowing. I didn’t know what to do. Whose

Background: Relaxing at the BYNCo. shipyards, Whitehorse.
Yukon Archives, Hamacher Collection, 85/75, 40B

land, we never thought. I don't think anybody knew what was happening to them. They kept moving and moving and moving.

"When you're about 13 years old and you put up a garden for your mother, you put up a bird nest on your house, you make the place look nice and you're a young feller. But when you see a bulldozer, bulldozing things over and you don't realize nothing, can you say you're happy or can you say you'll NEVER forget?"

*"It's when we didn't have anything
we were **happy**. When we could go
out in the bush, hunt or
whatever. We didn't have lots of money.
We didn't know what beef steak was
or pork chops or boiled potatoes.
We were happy."*

"I'd like to see people compensated for this, it's not going to leave me, I still have to bring it out and that's before I leave to my happy grounds. I want something set up for our children."



Phil Gatensby

Phil Gatensby, born in 1950, was nine or 10 years old when he lived on the Whitehorse waterfront. "We lived in a two-bedroom house straight down from where Domino's Pizza is located now.

"For a kid at that age, it was kind of a magical place. There was tons to explore and adventures to have. The riverboats used to go up and along there and we used to go and find old bottles along the shore and just pieces of stuff. They were like treasures to us at that time.

"We did all kinds of things, we swam down there in them days against our parents' warnings. We used to go up there by where 20/20 used to be and jump off in the water, let the current take us down, we'd ride the currents.

"At that time it was a really tight community. Everybody knew each other, everybody took care of each other.

"What I miss most about that time probably is the sense of freedom. Nobody was worried about their kids and stuff 'cause everybody had a sense of community. At that time anybody's parents yell, you'd run for the hills. I miss that kind of relationship. It's almost like it doesn't exist now.

"The river was all things. If you look at it in a traditional sense, it's hard to separate the spirit, mind, body, all those things, cause they're all the same. I think that the water had a sense of connectedness that was important."

Phil remembers hunting in the Kishwoot area. "We used to go across there and hunt rabbits and things like that. My mom was a single parent so we didn't do much moose hunting but we get a lot of gophers and rabbits and grouse hunting, small game stuff."

Phil remembers when life changed abruptly. "White Pass bulldozed my mom's house down. My mom bought this house. She worked doing different jobs like cooking and

stuff like that. So it was really difficult for her. I remember knowing that she finally finished paying for her house and it was her house and she owned it. It was really a sense of accomplishment for her. At the same time White Pass was making a claim to that land. Why they did that I'm not sure but they came and said you can't be here, this is our land. And they gave her a certain amount of time to move out. And we didn't actually even move out. We got some things out and they came with a front end loader and they crushed the house, but they crushed it just so it was unlivable.

"It was a hard time for my mother. Looking back on it now, the sense of accomplishment, and all of a sudden, WHAMO! It's gone. Things became really unstable after that. Not just for us, but for everybody, because nobody knew if they would be there. They got up in arms kind of, in a sense lived with the fear. You know, the idea somebody would come and just do the same thing.

"My mom did move down to Tlingit Street [Lot 226]. It was a tiny house. It's still there. It's the size of somebody's living room, the whole house. It was like a trapper's cabin, you could reach everything from the bed.

*"The **river** was all things. If you look at it in a traditional sense, it's hard to separate the spirit, mind, body, all those things, 'cause they're all the same.*

I think that the water had a sense of connectedness that was important."

"When I think back on the good times, we knew everybody. You walk up town and you say hi to everybody and there was a friendship, a sense of connectedness with the people that doesn't exist today. It just doesn't. We never had a phone when we were there, we never had a TV, that kind of stuff. You go over to someone's house instead of calling 'em up and say, hey what's up! I guess in some way, being in the Shipyards was like being in another era. It was back in a time where you all looked after each other. Across the tracks it was another world."

Background: Whiskey Flats looking north. Yukon Archives, D. Wahl Collection, 83/98, 8

Emma Shorty

The waterfront holds very special memories for Emma Shorty. "Me and my late husband, Norman Shorty, lived with our in-laws. My mother-in-law, Jessie Shorty, bought a tiny little shack which must have been a storage shed owned by the army. My husband and I worked hard rebuilding it into a cozy little two-room shack. The house was located right where the *S.S. Klondike* sternwheeler sits today. It was good living there, I enjoyed it, we had a good neighbourhood. There was mostly First Nations people from different parts of the Yukon. There was quite a few. Everybody was friendly. Everybody shared. Everybody knew each other."

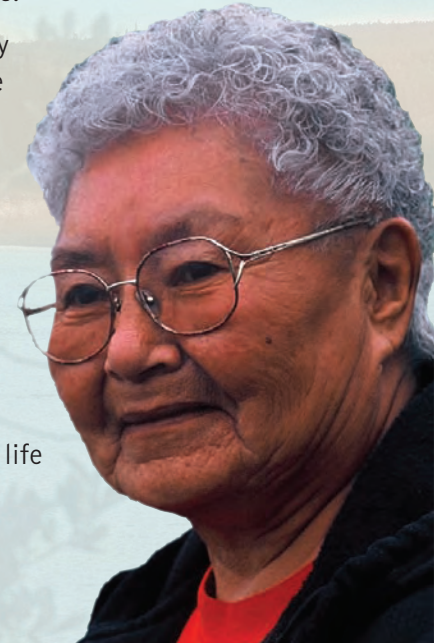
Emma, her family and in-laws were told to move from the waterfront sometime in the mid-1960s. "We had to move from there is when the bridge went in going across to Riverdale. They said we had to move because they were going to build a park there. Most of us didn't like to move, but it was the government and the City of Whitehorse. My mother-in-law moved to Marsh Lake and we moved to Black Street."

Today, when Emma looks at the *S.S. Klondike* she doesn't hold any bitter feelings. But it does bring back some very fond memories. "I like it because my husband worked on it. He worked on all of them. He was first mate, I have his seaman certificate. He was trained by Frank Slim. Many times my

"For First Nations people, living by the water is very spiritual because it gives us a lot."

husband used to say Frank Slim helped him to go through Five Finger Rapids. Even after the boats quit running we used to always go down to Lake Laberge to visit with Frank and his wife. We were really close. I really treasure the times that I spent with them. And in later years, when my daughters were grown up, Norma, Elaine and Jackie all worked on that boat as tour guides.

"For First Nations people, living by the water is very spiritual because it gives us a lot. If I'm feeling down I go to the water and I sit for a while and collect all my thoughts. I pray near the water. This is what really draws us to the water. We are a part of the water. We get our food from the water. We quench our thirst from the water. We are born into the world from water. We receive our life by water."



On the move

“You know that’s what people did, make the move from there. Now we got that place back. We should be proud!” Gertie Tom, 2003

Over the years, the waterfront communities continually came under threat as the City of Whitehorse expanded and White Pass found other uses for the land. As urban development increased, our people were relocated again and again. Many times we were moved to sites not of our own choosing. The most aggressive change took place in the 1960s, when the federal government chose South Whiskey Flats as a park for the sternwheeler, *S.S. Klondike*, and the city cleared North Whiskey Flats to create Rotary Park.

To some, the waterfront was an eyesore. They saw the old shacks and abandoned vehicles and never saw beyond



Whiskey Flats, 1950s.
Whitehorse Star Collection



This log cabin was built near Fish Lake Road by Jim, Norman, Gertie and Ida Shorty. In the 1960s, Jessie Shorty was given a choice of moving to the old village or accepting a small amount of money to move the cabin. She asked Andy Hooper, a well-known resident of Whiskey Flats, to move her house to Mile 898 by the Yukon River at Marsh Lake where it is today.

that. But to the First Nations people, it was home. We hunted, trapped, fished and raised generations of children along the river. We celebrated the life of the river and gave thanks for what it gave us in return. The river defined us as a people.

Today, the community of Kwanlin Dün is located away from the river, in one of the many subdivisions of Whitehorse. Some of our citizens still long for the day when we can return to the waterfront. We know we cannot go back in time, but we are determined to regain our rightful place along the river.

Jimmy Shorty and Elmer Jackson, in the old village, 1966.

Yukon Archives, Whitehorse
Star Collection, 82/527
CS688, W21-6



View of Moccasin Flats and Sleepy Hollow, 1997. Cathie Archbould



Margaret Peterson

Born in Old Crow in 1932, Margaret Peterson moved to Whitehorse in the 1950s. After she married Lawrence Bill, they settled across the river, not far from where the present hospital is located. "Oh it was nice and quiet where we lived. Nobody drink. We'd go for long walks. It was beautiful. I had a small little house across there, with a fence around it. My grandfather, Ole Wickstrom, and grandmother, Annie, lived just a few steps from us."

Ole ran a sawmill there employing a lot of First Nations people. "He was a good man, hard worker. I cut wood too. Me and Eileen Johnnie. She used to saw, and I used one side and we saw like this, going back and forth. We didn't have a babysitter so we make a swing between the trees for our kids and then we'd work. We had lots of fun together."

"There was no bridge then. Everybody go across on boat. Me, I row the boat across; sometime, oh it's swift water. Sometime I land way down, sometime way up. Then we go store, get groceries and come back."

Margaret also used to do the laundry for the sternwheelers. "I have to row

"I enjoy looking at the water, seeing the boats come in. Lots of native people lived down near the river."

my boat across every day to get to work. It made me strong. Me and Daisy Hall, we fold sheets and stuff, pillowcases for the boats. There was lots of Indian people who work there. I worked there 'til the boat finished; after that I got a job in a restaurant.

"It was nice. I enjoy looking at the water, seeing the boats come in. Lots of native people lived down near the river. I used to visit them all the time. They all were good, respect one another. They were good people. I used to visit this Chinese [man] they call 'Little Gopher' who lived down in Whiskey Flats. He had long coat on, gopher coat. He was kind to everybody. All kinds of people lived there."

"When they build the bridge, that's when we moved away. I just miss the good old days."



Margaret (left), with her sister, Ida.

Background: Whitehorse Steam Laundry.

Kitty & Fred Smith



Kitty and Fred Smith met in 1949 on Tanana Reef (Old Takhini Crossing) while hunting squirrel. “I fell in love right away — should have seen her. We got married the Indian way, break stick,” says Fred. That love has lasted for 52 years.

The waterfront is a special place for the Smiths. It is where they started dating and eventually raised a family. Fred was raised on the waterfront, in Whiskey Flats. “My dad died when I was two years old. Stay down there with my sister, Annie Miller. We lived in a tent frame. We go fishing lots at Fish Lake, Jackson Lake sometimes. Walk back that way.”

Kitty grew up at Hootalinqua, but she and her family often came into Whitehorse by boat as it was the only place where people could get medical attention. Kitty recalls being accidentally shot in the leg. It took about four days to get help since the river was the only way to get there.

“I got shot in the leg down the river, .22. I pull it down on top of cache. Rain pouring. I grab it in the front, I pull it down, shot right through here [upper right leg]. Then Daddy brought me up to hospital with boat. Indian doctor, my grandmother, stop that blood. Blood was shooting out down here. Policeman, doctor, everything waiting on the beach across there.”

Years later, Kitty and her family moved to Whitehorse. “We come in fall by truck from Carmacks. Uncle Taylor McGundy got big truck. We cut wood, we got money and then we hire him to drive to Whitehorse. That was 1949. Irene Johnson come too, she was pregnant so she come to hospital.

“First time we come to Whitehorse, we live in shipyard because Jenny LeBarge got a house there, two rooms. We rent it off her, just \$10 a month, that’s all, cheap those days, no electric lights.

“We stay shipyard, Daddy go across river with boat. He stay three nights one time, gamble all night. Night time I wake

“I really miss it, wish it was long time ago again. Lot of moose, lot of fish. Everything. I never see anything like that again.”

up I could hear drum. They sing with it too and they stick gambling. Daddy, come back with big pile of money, about \$1,000 in three nights.”

When they decided to marry, Fred built Kitty a house further upriver. “We lived up there Whiskey Flats. That’s where he build house,” Kitty recalls. “Then Ann born, he say we got to have a house, so he build a little house there.”

Fred went to work for White Pass. “Used to push cart, for freight for steamboats. We go down the river, Dawson, Mayo. I work on every boat. The Carcross, Nisutlin, Aksala, Casca, Whitehorse, Klondike, Keno. We used to deliver just down the river, haul groceries, fill right up to front, 150 tons.”

Kitty remembers all kinds of people living on the waterfront. “I can’t figure out where all the people come from. Mary Etzel had her first baby in the shipyard; she don’t want to go to hospital. Many people live there; from Ross River, they go right straight to there. Uncle Joe Ladue he come from Ross River. My grandfather too, he always make a trip to Whitehorse down from Hootalinqua.”

Kitty remembers when they were told to move. “We got kicked out all at once, but they buy those house off us. Then they tell us to move out. Some people they move their house. When we moved from Whiskey Flats we had no place to go. We moved to across where Beaver Lumber area is. Used to be village area. Build a log cabin, we sold that one. From there we move to the village in the Marwell area.”

From the old village, Fred and Kitty moved to the east side of the Yukon River where they still live today. “We lived in that little house, still there, we got generator, we got lights, seven years we stayed in that little house.”

Kitty says she really misses the old days. “I really miss it, wish it was long time ago again. Lot of moose, lot of fish. Everything. I never see anything like that again. Lot of dry meat. My grandmother dry meat, dry salmon, everything. Gee I’m hungry now. We help each other out lots. Some kill moose, invite everybody go up and everybody get meat.”





Back to the river

“Our elder, Charlie Smith, would tell me, ‘This used to be our centre where we share everything together. This is where marriages happened. This is where naming take place. Lots of things go on here. People used to come from all parts of the Yukon. We’d stay here from April all the way ’til September, sometimes August.’” Sophie Smarch, 2003

A key element of our land claim is the land parcel on the Whitehorse waterfront for our cultural centre. With the formal ratification of our land claim, our citizens will have title and

control of this 4.27-acre parcel and the 100-foot waterfront reserve. We are now preparing and planning for our return “back to the river.”



The Kwanlin Dün Cultural Centre

“This cultural centre would make all of us proud, including our children and our grandchildren.” Billy Giroux, 2003

Kwanlin Dün wants to continue our ancestors’ tradition of welcoming and hosting First Nations and non-First Nations people on these waterfront lands. Through our land claim, we want to create a modern space on the waterfront with activities that draw people together and celebrate Kwanlin Dün’s rightful place back on the river.

The cultural centre will be an active and exciting learning place. Our culture, history and heritage will be celebrated through a

gathering and performance space, artists’ workspace and an interpretive exhibit area that will educate generations of people about our rich cultural history.



Johnnie Smith

Johnnie Smith was born in 1922 at Marsh Lake, where the dam now sits. “A real important thing is our life here now for many thousands of years. They talk about the waterfront. The waterfront is real important to Indians. The water comes from the mountain clean down to ocean. Salmon come up. That’s the reason when you go down to Carmacks with your boats, you see trails come down like that, for the fish. Dry fish. Used to load salmon up, I don’t know how many tons. Pile them right up. Salmon were running there. That’s where they used to dry salmon for everybody who travelled distances.

“That’s the reason we have to talk about the waterfront. It’s

where we used to dry salmon to make money. We travelled it. Someday, you kids grow up and talk about the waterfront. So that’s why we got to have part of the waterfront. You go around Tagish, around that way, we used to land the boat. Now you see signs in there. Private property. Private property straight down to B.C. We have to pass on our traditions and culture. We have to share this land with people, our children, grandchildren. That’s where we make our living. Don’t forget. Think about that.

“I know the stories about the way we used to live along the Yukon River. Right from the top of the mountain where the water comes down, right to the ocean. Indians got rights to the river to fish. It is where we catch our salmon. That’s why waterfront is real important to us. To our people, our history, grandma, grandpa. We’re part of the river.”



“I like this salmon because it’s starting to jump. I remember the elders talking about catching salmon.”
Cheyenne Bradley, 2003

Background: Fish camp, 1960s.
Yukon Archives, Anglican Church Collection,
89/41, PHO 380, 1201.

Cheyenne Bradley

Celebrating our return to the river...





Kwanlin Dün
Back to the River Celebrating Our Culture