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91



A HISTORY OF RUBY'S PLACE, DAWSON, Y.T.  
WITH SOME COMMENT ON PROSTITUTION AT  
THE KLONDIKE 1896-1962

by Hal J. Guest

1983

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## Abstract

Ruby's Place had a number of functions in the years between its construction in 1903 and purchase by the crown in 1970. This study traces the use of the building as a lodging house, hotel, brothel and lodging house. The chapters examine the context in which the building performed its functions, the owners and residents who used the edifice, and the structural changes which have occurred since 1903. The conclusion suggests that Ruby's Place reflects the processes of change and continuity in Dawson's social history

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## 1 The Context

The contemporary town of Dawson hardly resembles the burgeoning metropolis which took shape at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers in the late 1890s. In terms of size, function and appearance, Dawson is a mere shadow of what it was during its brief heyday as the largest Canadian city west of Winnipeg. Today, few structures remain from that mythic era. There are, however, a number of buildings which date from the early years of this century, a period of greater historical significance than the summer of 1898. When the great stampede had passed its crest, the ramshackle sprawl of log and canvas gave way to a smaller community of settled prosperity and permanence. Between 1899 and 1904, Dawson acquired municipal services, the appurtenances of a modern urban centre and a stock of buildings which were occupied for decades.

One example of those structures is simply known as "Ruby's House" or more often as "Ruby's Place". It is a two storey platform frame structure with a two slope gable and a boom-town facade, standing on Second Avenue lot 3-J-2 (N35'). At first glance, it seems to be an unprepossessing building, only important because of "the mere accident of survival". Yet Ruby's Place was and remains significant in Dawson because the changes in its form and function coincided with and reflected less perceptible changes in the wider community.

In many ways, the Dawson of 1902 was different from the Dawson of 1898 but in others there was a remarkable continuity. In the summer of the earlier year, the town floated on a bog. A flood in May had put most of the site under five feet of



water and the streets remained quagmires until they froze solid in the fall. Sidewalks and dry places were littered with piles of rough lumber and bales of canvas, and the right of way was blocked by sawhorses, scaffolding, sawdust and stumps. Newcomers were assailed by heat, muck, filth and stink, and pedestrians were forced to wade kneedeep through the vilest kind of slop. Tents covered the riverbank, spilled out from vacant lots and spread upward on the hillside at the back of the town. Many of the larger buildings were simple log structures, transplanted from locations up or down river, or hastily built of scrub spruce and whatever else was available. Apart from an ad hoc committee appointed by a redundant territorial chief executive, there was no municipal authority to preside over a community becoming urbanized with extraordinary speed. Anarchy was everywhere, save in matters of law enforcement where the mounted police ruled with an iron fist.

In the following five years, Dawson underwent a profound transformation. By 1902, a network of sewers and ditches had rendered the townsite dry, or at least drier. The streets were lined with wooden sidewalks, kept clear by local regulations. All thoroughfares were graded, some were about to be macadamized and there were plans for electric lights to be positioned at busy corners. The riverfront was cleared of tents, and steamboats disembarked passengers and cargoes at a series of impressive docks. A city council of sorts took charge of local affairs and did its best to resolve a variety of urban problems. The most serious one remained the threat of fire. Fires regularly consumed original buildings and in their places rose more lasting structures of frame and clapboard, tin sheeting and plate glass.

Fires caused dramatic changes in the landscape. In the

early years, whole blocks went up in flames, but there were fewer fires as building materials and designs improved and as the fire department became efficient. Still, on the last day of 1902, the biggest fire of the year destroyed a row of small shops on Second Avenue. The temperature of  $-40^{\circ}$  created difficulties for the fire brigade, and in two hours the blaze reduced to ruins two small hotels, a saloon, a café, shoe store, barber shop and a handful of shacks and cabins.<sup>1</sup> The block was rebuilt with better structures in the spring of 1903. It appears from photographic evidence alone (appendix, figure 1) that the building later known as Ruby's Place was erected at that time. In the Dawson system of street numbers, the structure became 233 Second Avenue and that address appeared in a business directory prepared in 1903.<sup>2</sup>

While the exact date and identity of the builder remain unknown, it is entirely possible that the structure was erected by John H. Ogara. Ogara was a miner or mine labourer who spent most of his time outside of Dawson. The land titles files record that on 11 August 1900 his wife Eva registered her ownership of "N $\frac{1}{2}$  lot 2" in Block J on Second Avenue.<sup>3</sup> There is evidence that the building was put up in 1903, the one year, coincidentally, when John Ogara appeared in a Dawson directory. He was described as a carpenter.<sup>4</sup> It is tempting to assume that the enumerator from R.L. Polk and Company encountered Ogara at work on the structure but there is no evidence to support this suggestion. On the other hand, there is none to contradict it.

It is possible to establish the rough date of construction since the boom-town facade with its primitive oriel windows is visible in panoramic photographs allegedly taken in 1903 (appendix, figure 1). It also appears in the proper place

in the "Bird's Eye View of Dawson" of 1903 (appendix, figure 2), perhaps based on the panorama aforementioned. In any case, the building somehow survived a major fire which devastated the northern two-thirds of its block on Second Avenue on 24 September 1904. This conflagration levelled the Cecil, Central and Stockholm hotels, two boarding houses and a handful of shacks and cabins which fronted the street.<sup>5</sup> Photographs of the ruins were taken from a perspective which eliminated 233 Second Avenue, the implication being that that edifice had been left relatively unscathed. The newspaper reports do not refer to the buildings which remained untouched.

Fires represented one element in the continuity which Dawson experienced after 1898. In the following years, whole districts annually went up in flames. But there were other factors reflecting continuity of greater significance. It must be emphasized that in its first 70 years, Dawson had an extraordinarily fluid population. The community mushroomed to the apex of its population in the summer of 1898, when a police census found just over 16,000 people in Dawson.<sup>6</sup> Thereafter, the population seemed to trickle away "like water from a leaky barrel."<sup>7</sup> But appearances were deceiving, and there is now ample evidence to suggest that the "great stampede" did not end as quickly as it had begun.<sup>8</sup> A comparison of census figures for 1900 and 1901 reveals that there was a heavy influx of people to the Klondike and that migration continued for years after the gold rush supposedly ended. An investigation of the period between 1903 and 1918 found that the demographic pattern established in the 1890s underwent very little change. At any given time, a significant portion of Dawson's population consisted of new arrivals.<sup>9</sup> There was, then, a remarkable influx annually and the community experienced a net loss of population only because the number

of departures outran the number of arrivals. Moreover, the rate of demographic change remained relatively constant right through until 1920. Dawson clearly had a population which was chronically unstable. Throughout this early period a vast majority of the people of Dawson spent less than a decade in the town and the average period of residence was less than four years.

Dawson reached the nadir of its existence in 1919 and 1920. The transition to capital intensive mining had depopulated the goldfields of the Klondike valley and eliminated the market upon which Dawson's merchants had depended. The First World War had curtailed mining activity in the district and the departures of young men for the European front reduced the size of the community dramatically. The ravages of wartime inflation and strict measures of austerity drove Dawson further into decline and many of its long time residents resolved to quit the territory. To make matters even worse, the wreck of the Princess Sophia took the lives of 125 people on their way from Dawson, including several pillars of the community. By 1920, the town just barely managed to survive.

A reorganization of the mining companies revived Dawson within five years, but the town never enjoyed the prosperity of its first decade. In 1923, the Canadian Klondike Mining Company, Dominion Mining and Big Creek Mining amalgamated to form the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation, and for the next 40 years Dawson served as a company town. The recovery, however, was not immediate and it took the best part of the decade for the company to expand its operations and to become profitable. The results were apparent in the 1930s. As the world economy collapsed, the demand for gold increased and

Dawson once again became the centre of a thriving industrial region. The YCGC increased the number of its dredges and created opportunities for work at a time of continental unemployment. Men swarmed to the Klondike and Dawson was revitalized. Hundreds found jobs with the company, others on the riverboats or in the woodcamps which supplied their fuel, and still others came to prospect on their own.<sup>10</sup>

The boom of the depression era restored Dawson to its function as the commercial centre of the Yukon, but the town itself changed very little. The demographic pattern of the 1930s and 1940s was similar to the pattern of the earlier period although there were, of course, differences in degree. In this era, Dawson's population seldom exceeded 1,000 and it remained chronically unstable. In the years between 1935 and 1947, when data are available, less than 20% of the residents could be regarded as permanent.<sup>11</sup> People still went to Dawson to seek their fortunes and left after only three or four years. Few of the newcomers put down roots in the community and settled with their families. Instead, Dawson remained what it always was, a place where those expecting golden opportunities encountered the hard face of economic reality. There was work to be found at Dawson, but enormous fortunes were not so readily available.

In the 1930s, however, a new factor was injected into Dawson's demographic pattern in that the YCGC employed a seasonal labour force. Seasonal labour was nothing new to the Klondike but after 1930 it assumed special significance for the town. For the next 30 years, between 400 and 750 labourers arrived each year to fill the company's requirements.<sup>12</sup> The townsfolk became used to seeing the new arrivals who spent their summers at the dredges and who took their

accumulated savings with them when they left for home before winter. These men provided a seasonal market for the service industries of Dawson and for the entrepreneurs who met the demands of the deprived men of the hinterland.

After 1930, Dawson's future was tied to the YCGC and the community felt the repercussions when the company cut down its operations. The company produced over \$3 million worth of gold and had 400 men on its payroll in 1942 but those numbers fell by half in the year that followed.<sup>13</sup> As the demand for gold fell during the Second World War, the YCGC abandoned its less profitable dredges, sometimes permanently. When the community had just begun to cope with that reduction, the construction of the Alaska Highway tossed a spanner in the works. The road bypassed Dawson and the focus of economic activity in the territory began to shift to Whitehorse. As early as 1946, there were rumours that the government intended to relocate the capital in that upstart railway town that now had a road to Alaska.

The war years and the immediate aftermath were a time of crisis for Dawson and marked the beginning of another prolonged decline. In 1951, the town's population fell below 800 while the territory's rose beyond 9,000.<sup>14</sup> As the Yukon was being developed, Dawson was being left behind. In 1953, the community received the first of a series of blows when Whitehorse became the capital. The departure of 50 civil servants and their families reduced the solid core of permanent residents and precipitated the relocation of commercial outlets that did business with the government. The construction of roads took traffic from the river and drove the steamboats into drydock. Roads put woodcamps out of business and they also allowed people to leave Dawson anytime they wished and especially in winter. By 1960,

Dawson was dependent as never before on the fortunes of the Yukon Consolidated Gold Company. Yet the company's equipment was getting old, its costs escalated annually and its profit margin grew thinner because the price of gold was fixed. It closed its thawing plant on Hunker Creek in 1963, broke no new ground in the next two years, and in 1966 ceased operations altogether. But until then, the YCGC had provided the mainstay for Dawson's population and economy. For two decades after the end of the war, the company had employed upwards of 300 men, most on a seasonal basis, and provided a market for Dawson's merchants. The demographic pattern in the 1960s was much like it had been 65 years earlier. The population fluctuated dramatically each year and its size and nature were entirely dependent on the activity in the goldfields.

Given this extraordinarily fluid population, Dawson always had a much larger number of hotels and boarding houses than other communities of comparable size. In 1903, when Dawson's population was about 10,000, the town had 30 hotels and 34 identifiable boarding houses. Eight years later, when there were just over 3,000 residents, Dawson still had 25 hotels and a similar number of boarding houses. In later decades, many of the small hotels went out of business but a few larger ones took their place. The number of houses offering room and board remained high in comparison to the number of permanent residents and the quantity of accommodation in later years remained uniformly large. Second Avenue was a popular location for hotels but especially for boarding houses. In 1903, there were eight hotels on Second, most at major intersections, and 18 boarding houses. In the 200 block, between Princess and Queen, there were three hotels, the Cecil, Ottawa and

Lamar, and five boarding houses. The Bartlet House stood at 209 with the Stockholm at 211 and Edith Butler's furnished rooms at 215. Across the street, Dora Bennett ran a boarding house at 212 and Ida Dahl and Josephine Nichols operated the Vancouver at 232.<sup>15</sup> Late in 1903 or early in 1904, these establishments were joined by another at 233 Second Avenue: the St. Clair Lodging House of Eva Ogara.

Eva Ogara's house originally contained a laundry on its main floor and she resided in one of a handful of cabins at the rear of the lot. According to the 1903 directory, the laundry was operated by one Lee Sharts, a misspelling perhaps of Schwartz, and employed two laundresses. The laundresses, Flossie Cave and Ellen Day, resided in cabins at the rear, as did a seamstress, Mary Hodgkin, and a cook, Edward Martin. Sharts had a room above his premises, as did a Mrs. Gertie Mitchell. Gertie Mitchell may have been "Babe" Mitchell, a popular dance hall girl and sometime prostitute. There have been rumours that the laundry was in reality a front for a house of prostitution but there is no evidence to support this allegation other than the suggestion that other "laundries" served that purpose. The fact that Flossie Cave resided with her husband at the rear rather belies the notion that 233 Second Avenue was a disguised resort of ill fame.

The laundry, in fact, lasted only a short time, perhaps less than a year. In the 1905 directory, Eva Ogara appeared as the proprietress of an unnamed boarding house. A fire department inspection report of that November described the building as the 'Sinclair Lodging House'.<sup>16</sup> The same report noted that Ogara occupied the ground floor and that the second floor consisted of furnished rooms. The building was actually named the "St. Clair Lodging House", as a sign



bearing those words extended out over the sidewalk. It is clearly visible in a 1904 photograph of Second Avenue (appendix, figure 3). Although the structure changed hands on later occasions and was renamed, it continued to serve as a respectable boarding house under its subsequent owners. The best evidence for this assertion lies in the fact that a prominent mining engineer, J.B. Hughes, resided there from 1907 to 1912.

According to the land titles files, in 1910 the property came into the possession of E.O. Finlaison, manager of the Bank of British North America and owner of the lot adjacent. It is not clear whether Ogara sold it to Finlaison or whether he purchased it after repossession by the bank. The building still served as a boarding house although it may have been vacant for long periods. The cabins at the rear, which ranged in number from two to seven, seem to have been occupied continuously. The land titles files also reveal that Benjamin Stone acquired a share of the property in 1911. Stone preferred to describe the house as an hotel and it was listed under that category in business directories of the period. In 1914, Elvin J. Edwards acquired the land and buildings, including the hotel, and in 1917 he turned them over to Mrs. Dona Gordon.

Gordon held the property for the next 15 years and under her ownership 233 Second Avenue underwent the transition from hotel back to boarding house and then, perhaps, to house of prostitution. One oral source, resident in Dawson from 1905 to 1924, was quite certain that Gordon "had run a little business on the side."<sup>17</sup> There is little to substantiate this allegation apart from the fact that prostitution became an accepted part of the community in the decade after 1920.

Prostitution had been a fact of life at Dawson right from the beginning. It was a natural concomitant of the isolation of the town and of the nature of its population. Dawson's population always was predominantly male. There were women in the Yukon when the gold rush was at its crest but they were a very small minority of the local residents. As the rush subsided, the balance shifted toward a more natural distribution but there were still far more men than women. According to a police census in 1900, 12% of Dawson's population was female.<sup>18</sup> The 1901 Census of Canada reported that the Yukon population was 15% female, but it did not include a table of distribution by sex for Dawson. The 1911 Census revealed that the territory was 24% female, and in 1921 the proportion was 32%. The Yukon remained 33% female in 1931 and 36% in 1941. In 1951, however, women comprised nearly 40% of the territorial population and the number rose to 44% in 1961. Through its first 65 years, then, Dawson had a preponderantly male population and the annual arrival of 400 men tipped the balance even further. Under those circumstances, prostitution was unavoidable.

There were prostitutes in Dawson as early as 1896. The first rush to the townsite included prostitutes from camps up and down the the Yukon River. In 1897 and 1898, they were joined by dozens of others from the cities of the American west coast. At the height of the gold rush there were at least 150, since the police rounded up and fined that many in September 1898.<sup>19</sup> At first they were allowed to roam the streets and locate their cabins without police interference. A new police commander, however, resolved to make Dawson "tolerable for respectable people". But even Sam Steele recognized that prostitution could not be eliminated without causing serious repercussions. Thus Steele had his men haul the women

into court each month to pay \$50 fines. In 1898, after Steele's recommendation, the Dawson Board of Health began a program of regular medical inspections of the inmates of "all houses of ill fame". The board directed the territorial health officer and the NWMP surgeon to examine the "harlots" fortnightly and to issue certificates of good health.<sup>20</sup> This practice followed the example established in the British Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869.<sup>21</sup> The board's position was that there was a need for prostitution but that something had to be done to regulate the health and conduct of the "demimondaines" in order to safeguard the public from venereal diseases. Thus, infected women were detained in custody. This system worked reasonably well as venereal diseases never approached epidemic proportions. But it also protected the public interest through a form of discrimination against women which allowed infected men to evade blame and responsibility. This enlightened policy thus confirmed a double moral standard.

In 1898, prostitutes were settled among the prime business locations in Dawson. Many had cabins on Second Avenue, with signs and banners which advertised the names of their occupants. That fall, the Klondike Nugget began an editorial campaign at least to have the signs removed if the police could not close down the "maisons de joie".<sup>22</sup> Steele agreed that the prostitutes should not have been allowed to live on Second and in the spring of 1899 he ordered the women to move to new premises in the two city blocks bounded by Fourth and Fifth avenues and First and Third streets. In the next four months, all the prostitutes were located there.<sup>23</sup>

Once the women were resettled, the police cracked down on men who lived off the avails of prostitution. The first of

these men, then described as "macqueros" or "macques" and now as "pimps" or "ponces", received 30 days in gaol and \$50 fines for "having no peaceful occupation".<sup>24</sup> Others received heavier fines and long sentences at hard labour. The police concern with men who lived on the earnings of prostitutes, ironically, illustrated a second double standard in Dawson. The police, and the townsfolk generally, regarded a souteneur as a parasite who deserved to feel the full weight of the law, but a madam who made her living in a similar fashion could become a respected member of the community.

Prostitution was tacitly accepted and controlled while the police were commanded by Sam Steele, but Steele left Dawson in September 1899. His successor continued his policies but requested a detailed report on the district east of Fourth Avenue. The investigation revealed that most of the women located there were "French" and that they were "an untidy outfit". Some were wives who had abandoned their husbands and all but one had "macques". Some had come from as far away as France, South Africa and Australia but most had migrated from the American west coast. The report listed the names of 43, most of whom had arrived in the spring and summer of 1898. The investigating constable also suggested that there were three "houses of ill fame" operating in the guise of cigar stores on Second Avenue but the inmates offered no affront to their neighbours. On the whole, he concluded, the system of medical inspection worked well and the community had little cause for complaint.<sup>25</sup>

While the people of Dawson accepted the presence of prostitutes in their midst, reform agencies in southern Canada, whose members were not acquainted with the situation were not as tolerant or pragmatic. Indeed, a general

pattern emerged in which reform movements aimed at Dawson were directed by outsiders at perceived evils or by persons seeking to advance or maintain their careers by tilting at the wind-mills of immorality. The latter group included policemen, politicians and ministers of religion. Superintendent A.B. Perry, Steele's replacement, prompted the first reform effort. In a long letter to the minister of the interior, Clifford Sifton, Perry declared that prostitution was "rampant" at Dawson, and he outlined the procedure by which the women received health certificates.<sup>26</sup> Sifton realized that the practice was tantamount to official licence for the women to engage in their "nefarious calling" and he ordered it stopped at once. His reasoning was entirely political: he did not want immorality in Dawson to be an issue in his campaign for re-election. Sifton telegraphed the Yukon authorities to cease issuing certificates and at his order the practice was discontinued.<sup>27</sup>

The number of prostitutes in Dawson fell suddenly in 1900 after the town heard news about the discovery of gold at Nome, Alaska. A large group of prostitutes joined the exodus downriver and the police were not sorry to see them go. Paradoxically, the agitation in southern Canada reached greater heights. Representatives of the Women's Christian Temperance Union charged that Dawson was beset by dens of iniquity and overrun by women of ill repute.<sup>28</sup> In the absence of a visible problem with prostitutes, the authorities deflected the agitation toward the evils of the dance halls, which they had intended to regulate before the pressure was applied in Ontario.<sup>29</sup>

At the height of the campaign against the dance halls, prostitution again became an issue for the police. The construction of a public school only blocks from the

segregated area led parents to complain about the district through which their children had to pass. Their solution was to relocate "the disreputable element" in an isolated area away from the centre of town. This demand put the police in a dilemma, since the district in question had been deliberately reserved for prostitutes. At first, the police responded by limiting the hours when there might be "singing and music and noise" and by establishing strict codes of behaviour for the women. They were not to appear at windows nor upon the public street while immodestly attired nor were they to attract the attention of passing pedestrians.<sup>30</sup> In the spring of 1901, however, the Yukon Council acceded to the parents' requests and decided to have the prostitutes moved beyond the Dawson city limits. All who resisted relocation would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.<sup>31</sup>

This decision aroused the hostility of the residents of Klondike City, on the opposite bank of the Klondike, and of those at West Dawson, across the Yukon. They objected to the women being planted in their midst but their protests were to no avail. Moreover, the decision to move the prostitutes to those two districts had the desired effect of reducing their clientele. Prospective customers could not reach their destinations without making themselves conspicuous on a long open bridge or on the Yukon ferry. In a short time, many prostitutes gave up and left for the outside. By October 1901, there were few more than 30 in the vicinity of Dawson.<sup>32</sup>

The effort to drive prostitution out of Dawson was not entirely successful. Some of the women who had obeyed the law complained that others of their number had remained in Dawson operating behind the fronts of laundries and cigar stores. When the police took no action until the new city council discussed the issue, some of the law-abiding ones moved back

into Dawson. Their reappearance aroused further complaints and forced the police to lay charges. In June, three prostitutes were fined \$50 and costs and given severe warnings for having occupied a building at the corner of Princess and Second Avenue.<sup>33</sup> Their convictions, however, did not deter the others. In August, the city council investigated charges that there were prostitutes using a house on Second between Princess and Queen as well as several other places.<sup>34</sup> By the fall of 1902, as the civic election drew near, the aldermen resolved to enforce the existing legislation and they had the police issue explicit instructions for the prostitutes to be out of Dawson by the first of December. Those who refused to leave were hauled into court and fined into compliance.<sup>35</sup>

The gaol records of these women provide a composite portrait of Dawson's prostitutes in this period. They ranged in age from 20 to 37, but most were between 26 and 34. There were a few from Europe and Australia but the majority were American. Several had migrated westward across the continent, working in one city or industrial town for a short time before moving on to another. Very few had been in Dawson since the turn of the century. Some had come directly from San Francisco or Seattle after reform movements in those ports had launched assaults against the "social evil". The most striking revelation in the gaol records is the suggestion that for some women prostitution was a seasonal occupation. According to the records, a few women had come to Dawson to engage in prostitution from April to September and they had spent the other six months outside.<sup>36</sup>

The second attempt to banish prostitution was no more successful than the first. Some women remained in Dawson and, according to the police records, they did a brisk business.

In 1903, the police raided the Bartlet House, charged four women with "conducting a house for immoral purposes" and arrested two men for living off the avails. When their cases came to trial, the women entered guilty pleas and the police did not produce their evidence of "moral depravity seldom heard of in the very lowest ranks of slum life". The women were sentenced to two months hard labour but the men received \$50 fines and six months in the penitentiary.<sup>37</sup> In the same month, the police charged Dora Wells with keeping "a disorderly house" in the San Francisco laundry, at 229 Second Avenue.<sup>38</sup> This case may have provided the source of the rumour that the laundry at 233 Second was a blind for a house of prostitution. In any case, the convictions of Wells and the others demonstrated that the authorities were serious indeed and the macques and prostitutes quickly went across to Klondike City.

For the next five years, prostitutes were not visible features of Dawson's streets. They remained in Klondike city and their behaviour prompted few complaints. Prostitution was no more evident in Dawson than it was in any comparable town in southern Canada and it might have been much less. In that era, according to James H. Gray, the new cities and towns of the prairie west had segregated areas filled with brothels. As the west was urbanized, prostitution flourished and became a major industry.<sup>39</sup> Dawson had its segregated area but the handful of women hardly constituted a major industry. They were not even a major nuisance.

Paradoxically, in 1907 a supposedly reform-minded clergyman made public allegations about prostitution in the Yukon capital. The Reverend John Pringle was no stranger to Dawson as he had ministered to congregations at the Klondike since 1898. A Conservative in politics, he had taken an interest in public issues and had served as a Yukon Councillor.



His partisan background might explain why he embarked on a campaign of malicious misrepresentation against the Yukon administration. Pringle charged, quite without foundation, that in Dawson the laws against prostitution were not enforced. In letters to southern newspapers, all Tory organs, he charged that "lewd women" lured men off the streets and he told the Presbyterian General Assembly that Dawson was "an open and offensive moral sewer". His allegations were palpable nonsense but political dynamite and they provided a springboard for his theological career. He was roundly denounced by the people of Dawson, including the Church of England bishop, censured by the Yukon Council and dismissed as a crank by the House of Commons. But he was elevated within the church and moved to a better charge in Nova Scotia.<sup>40</sup>

In the following years, prostitution ceased to be an issue in Dawson. There were occasional complaints but the police explained that charges could not be based on idle gossip. A few women slipped back into Dawson and conducted their business as cigar stores. In the strictest sense, Dawson had no brothels because by law they had to have two or more inmates and places occupied by a single woman could not be prosecuted.<sup>41</sup> But the police did not hesitate to act against "macques", directly and indirectly. On the occasions when they could not prove a case, they took the women into custody to deprive the men of further income. In the years after 1910, the police used provisions of the immigration act to deport undesirables and the macques were soon driven from the district.<sup>42</sup>

Prostitutes, however, received a kind of unofficial approval to operate in Dawson as long as they behaved themselves and caused no complaint. Those who disturbed their neighbours

or who offered an affront to the community were quickly punished as a warning to all others.<sup>43</sup> The few women who accepted these conditions knew the limits of their behaviour and they became as quiet and as inoffensive as possible. The incidence of prostitution went down during the war as Dawson entered its prolonged decline but it never disappeared completely. But a new era in prostitution began when Dawson started its resurgence after 1920.

Changes in the nature of prostitution coincided with economic and demographic changes at the Klondike. The years before 1919 had seen the character of gold mining change as the individual miner working a small claim gave way to mining corporations using advanced technology on huge concessions along gold bearing creeks. The transition from labour intensive to capital intensive mining coincided with the emergence in Dawson of the individual prostitute who conducted business on her own. A second change occurred late in the 1920s. The reorganization of the mining companies and the recruitment of a seasonal labour force coincided with the establishment of brothels where a madam presided over two or more prostitutes. It is difficult to establish the relations between these changes but one may assume that there was a connexion.

It is also difficult to establish when the brothels first appeared in Dawson. There are indications that some were operating in the 1920s but there is no question that they were an accepted fact in the community by 1935. In that year, Mathilde Scott acquired the building at 233 Second Avenue,<sup>44</sup> and she operated it as a house of prostitution for the next 27 years. Scott, ever known as "Ruby", was one of a number of brothel-keepers, the best known others being

"Bombay Peggy" Duval and a woman named Bertha whose surname remains unknown.

Interviews with long time residents of Dawson found a consensus that Ruby, Bertha and "Bombay Peggy" provided a vital service for the community. One explained that "something had to be done because of all the single men who worked for the mining company." A policeman's wife asserted that "it was a godsend to have people like that because there were so many men and that made it so much safer."<sup>45</sup> Another source added that the brothels were a good thing as they gave the men "somewhere to go " when they came into town.<sup>46</sup> Significantly, none of the sources had any negative comments about the presence of brothels in the community.

The police adopted a similarly pragmatic attitude. They, like the townspeople, unofficially recognized the women for what they were and only took action when complaints were laid. Prostitutes kept out of sight, seldom appeared on the streets and never attended social functions in the town. One source recollected, "as long as they kept their noses clean and didn't make a fuss, the police did nothing." The responsibility for overseeing their behaviour was left to the madams and it was in their best interests to keep their women inconspicuous. Several people commented that Ruby Scott particularly had "made her girls toe the mark" and would "cut them off" and evict them if they stepped out of line. One old timer added that Ruby ran "a decent place" where even the customers had to behave. It was generally agreed that "the system" was a good one and it worked for the benefit of the community.<sup>47</sup>

It is clear from the interviews that Dawson's "sporting houses" were nothing like the glamorous institutions of

recent Hollywood portrayals. Nor were they the sordid and exploitive places described by social reformers. Instead, prostitution was a business, plain and simple. The town doctor, who came to know the prostitutes through his professional capacity, related that the women thought of their "work" as just a job. There was no real stigma attached to them, but he conceded that "you wouldn't want your daughter to be one".<sup>48</sup> A policeman's wife recalled her surprise at meeting one of the women from Ruby's Place because "she was pretty -- she was nice!"<sup>49</sup> But on the whole, the women kept to themselves and their behaviour did not alter Dawson's character as a very quiet town.

Ruby's Place was more than just a brothel. It also was a speakeasy and it was ideally located for that purpose. Several sources remembered that men attending dances or dinners at the IOOF Hall adjacent would "nip over for a drink at Ruby's".<sup>50</sup> A former city councillor added that all the "hookshops" sold liquor and that men drank there because the surroundings were more congenial than the unfurnished "snake-rooms" of the hotels.<sup>51</sup> Another source remembered that Ruby's prices for libations were better than the snakerooms but the variety was hardly as extensive.<sup>52</sup> As with her other business, Ruby ensured that her customers behaved themselves and the policeman's wife could not recall her husband having to deal with her for bootlegging.

In the years after 1935, the official attitude was pragmatic but firm. There are interesting parallels between the period after 1898 and this later one. In both eras, the nature of prostitution in Dawson was determined by policemen, politicians and ministers of religion. In 1937, for example, there was a change in police commanders as Supt. T.V. Sandys-

Wunch replaced Supt. T.B. Caulkin.<sup>53</sup> Soon afterward, the police charged Ruby Scott with "keeping a disorderly house". The charge may have been laid to let the community know that a new officer had taken over and the police may not have been very concerned with getting a conviction. To defend her, Ruby Scott hired George Black, former Yukon Commissioner, ex-Member of Parliament and immediate past Speaker of the House of Commons. When they went to trial, the case was dismissed.<sup>54</sup> But Sandys-Wunch may have made his point.

As in the earlier period, in the 1930s and 1940s the police took precautions to preserve public health and to prevent epidemics of venereal diseases. Much of the responsibility for those matters fell to the medical doctor in Dawson, Allen Duncan. Duncan spent the years between 1936 and 1947 in the Yukon but especially at Mayo and Dawson. In addition to his private practice, he served as the territorial health officer, was commissioned as medical officer for the RCMP and was retained by the YCGC to look after its men. Part of Duncan's work was to carry out inspections. Every Sunday, for example, he examined the policemen. His official duties also took him on regular tours of inspection through the brothels. If he found any of the occupants infected with a venereal disease, he exercised his authority as an officer of the RCMP and as territorial health inspector "to put her out of business". Infected women were detained in the town hospital but it was difficult to cure them because penicillin was not available. The women obviously wished to avoid lengthy detention and thus they took the necessary precautions, but those who became ill followed Duncan's instructions because he had the full weight of the RCMP behind him. Duncan recalled that there had been no serious problems with venereal diseases because of his careful control of the women and because of their

own determination to stay out of trouble.<sup>55</sup>

This system of regular medical inspections lasted until the early 1950s. As Dawson underwent its slow decline after the war, prostitution flourished and was a boon to the community. In the words of one authority: "Road crews working in Alaska would nip over for some quick passion and spend a fair bit of money in the city."<sup>56</sup> The Dawson city council, reconstituted in 1953, recognized that brothels had a necessary function in the community but thought they ought to be licensed in some manner. As George Shaw, a council member, explained: "we felt that they should make their contribution to the coffers of the city so they paid a rooming house licence." That licence cost \$50 and Ruby Scott purchased one each year from 1955 through 1959. Shaw added that licensing her in that fashion was eminently fair because her place was a rooming house, too. "It was live and let live", he continued, and the city expected no problems with the licences.<sup>57</sup>

It was not long, however, before this system came under attack. As in 1907, the assault on prostitution was launched by a Protestant clergyman, this time an Anglican. On his arrival in Dawson, the Reverend Mr. Taylor of St. Paul's Church was amazed to find open prostitution and appalled to learn that the brothels had received licences from the city council. In a fury of moral indignation, he appeared before the council to demand that the houses be closed. When the councillors rejected his entreaties, Taylor wrote directly to Prime Minister St. Laurent to complain that the Dawson city council was aiding and abetting the crime of prostitution and to demand federal intervention. St. Laurent turned the letter over to the minister of justice who directed the RCMP at Dawson to disregard local opinion and to enforce the criminal code.<sup>58</sup>

By 1956, when the police crackdown began, Ruby's Place was about the only brothel still operating. Bertha had married and retired and "Bombay Peggy" had never offered much competition. The police, then, were able to concentrate their efforts on one house but the attempts to close it down were not well received nor very successful. The next five years saw Scott charged and fined almost regularly.<sup>59</sup> Rumour had it that the police corporal was sympathetic and advised her to move her "girls" out of town for a while until things quietened down and she could operate again. Understandably, she was very wary of informers and very selective in her clientele. Yet, despite the police harassment directed from outside, Ruby Scott remained in business.

By 1961, however, the writing was on the wall. In that year, the Census of Canada revealed that the Yukon population was 44% female, closest it had ever been to a natural distribution. The census also reported that there were only 881 people in Dawson. Those two statistics explain in part why there was only one prostitute at Ruby's Place where earlier there had been four or five. In the same year, the YCGC began to curtail its operations and to reduce its labour requirements. Before long, the annual influx of 400 men was a thing of the past and the labour force shrank each year. The final blow for Ruby Scott came in September when she had to appear in the territorial court at Whitehorse to face a charge of keeping a bawdy house. She pleaded guilty and was fined \$200. The Whitehorse Star reported that: "Despite the well wishes of many Dawson residents, the court pointed out laws cannot be picked and chosen...applying some and not others."<sup>60</sup> This fine, legal expenses and the costs of travel between Dawson and Whitehorse combined to convince Scott to reappraise the situation.

Thus, at the end of 1961, after nearly 27 years at one location, Ruby Scott decided to close her house of prostitution in Dawson. She remained the occupant of 233 Second Avenue for at least part of each of the following years and sometimes provided room and board to tourists or prospectors who drifted into town in the summer. After 1962, then, the house reverted to its earlier function as a boarding house but on a part-time basis. Scott remained the resident and proprietress until 1969 when, at 84 years of age, she decided to move into the Sunset Lodge for senior citizens. Thereafter, the building remained vacant until it was purchased by the crown.

For nearly 70 years, Ruby's Place was an accurate reflexion of the character of Dawson and especially representative of Second Avenue. In its first two decades, when the population was most fluid, the building served as a boarding house, as did many of its neighbouring structures. In later years, its function changed in accordance with the demographic transformation Dawson underwent. Ruby Scott turned the edifice into Dawson's best house of prostitution and she ran it with the community's consent. After 1960, the demand for brothels slowly fell and the building reverted to its original use as a lodging house. Ruby's Place may have lacked architectural significance but it was a clear reflexion of social change and continuity in Dawson.



## Notes

- 1 Klondike Nugget, 31 Dec. 1902, p. 1.
- 2 Polk's Alaska-Yukon Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1903, p. 444.
- 3 Parks Canada, Prairie Regional Office, Dawson land titles files, extracts. Richard Stuart drew my attention to this collection.
- 4 Polk's Directory 1903, p. 444.
- 5 Yukon World, 25 Sept. 1904, p. 1.
- 6 KN, 30 July 1898, p. 4.
- 7 Laura B. Berton, I Married the Klondike. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1954), p. 119.
- 8 The allegation that it did appears in Pierre Berton, Klondike. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 413.
- 9 See Hal J. Guest, "A History of the City of Dawson, Yukon Territory, 1896-1918". Microfiche Series No. 7. (Parks Canada, 1982), pp. 271-278.
- 10 Doug Sack, A Brief History of Dawson City and the Klondike. (Whitehorse: Yukon News Printing Co., n.d.), p. 27.
- 11 The data were derived from Polk's Directory for 1923-24 and the Sun Directories for B.C. and the Yukon Territory, 1935-48.
- 12 The number varied according to different oral sources.
- 13 Sack, Brief History, p. 30.
- 14 Census of Canada, 1951.
- 15 See Polk's Directory, 1903.
- 16 Dawson City Fire Department, Reports and Inspections, p. 86, 8 Nov. 1905.
- 17 Author interview, 18 May 1983.

- 18 Yukon Sun, 8 May 1900, p. 4.
- 19 KN, 17 Sept. 1898, p. 1.
- 20 Yukon Archives, Yukon Territorial Records, Commissioners Letterbooks, v. 77, p. 744, Ogilvie to Wade, undated.
- 21 See Peter Cominos, "Late Victorian Sexual Respectability and the Social System", International Review of Social History, v. 8, 1963, pp. 18-48, 216-250.
- 22 KN, 29 Oct. 1898, editorial.
- 23 Ibid., 12 May 1899, p. 1,
- 24 Ibid., 12 April 1899, p. 4.
- 25 Public Archives of Canada, RCMP Records, v. 1445, f. 181, pt. 6, McPhail Report.
- 26 University of Manitoba Dafoe Library, Clifford Sifton Papers, reel c493, p. 512920, Perry to Sifton, 7 Nov. 1900.
- 27 YA, YTR, CLB, v. 77, p. 738.
- 28 YA, Yukon Territorial Government Records, v. 9, f. 1443, Kate Heamon to Sifton, 27 June 1900.
- 29 Ibid., Wood to Ogilvie, 21 July 1900.
- 30 PAC, RCMP Records, v. 3032, Wood to Ogilvie, 5 Nov. 1900.
- 31 YS, 23 Feb. 1901, p. 2.
- 32 KN, 16 Oct. 1901, p. 4.
- 33 Ibid., 27 June 1902, p.6.
- 34 YA, YTR, CLB, v. 84, p. 569, Wood to Macdonald, 12 Aug. 1902.
- 35 KN, 15 April 1902, p. 1, 16 April 1902, p. 5, 17 April 1902, p. 5.
- 36 PAC, RCMP Records, vv. 3075 and 3076.
- 37 KN, 6, 11, 12, 16 May 1903, p. 4.
- 38 Ibid., 28 May 1903, p. 4.

- 39 James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), ch. 1.
- 40 The whole episode is discussed in Guest, "City of Dawson" ch. 8.
- 41 PAC, RCMP Records, v. 396, f. 567-10. See also British Social Biology Council, Women of the Streets. (London: Tavistock House, n.d.), p. 61.
- 42 PAC, RCMP Records, v. 461, f. 181-74, Moodie to Commissioner RNWMP, 5 Aug. 1914.
- 43 See for example Dawson Daily News, 12 March 1914, p. 4.
- 44 PC, PRO, Dawson land titles files, extracts.
- 45 Author interview, 23 June 1983.
- 46 Author interview, 20 June 1983.
- 47 Author interviews, various dates.
- 48 Author interview, Alan Duncan, 26 May 1983.
- 49 Author interview, 23 June 1983.
- 50 Author interviews, various dates.
- 51 Author interview, George Shaw, 20 June 1983.
- 52 Author interview, 21 June 1983.
- 53 RCMP Annual Report, 1937, p. 4.
- 54 DDN, 29 July 1937, p. 4.
- 55 This information will be fully documented in a forthcoming volume of Dr. Duncan's memoirs.
- 56 J.R. Lotz, Northern Realities. (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 116.
- 57 Author interview, George Shaw, 20 June 1983.
- 58 Ibid.
- 59 Author interview, Alan Duncan, 26 May 1983.
- 60 The non sequitur appeared in Whitehorse Star, 7 Sept. 1961, p. 3.

## 2 The Residents

For the most part, the owners and occupants of 233 Second Avenue have remained in obscurity. They were nondescript people who lived in an unprepossessing building. The edifice lacked architectural significance; its residents generally lacked political, economic and social significance. They were ordinary folk, faces in a crowd, and the printed record has few references to them. Of them all, only Ruby Scott left any lasting impression in Dawson and in the memories of those who had known her. The others simply moved on and disappeared.

The first traceable owner of the structure now known as Ruby's Place was Eva Ogara. The land titles files indicate that she acquired the lot on 11 August 1900. Very little is known about her, and the few references that mention her often misspell her surname as "O'Gara" or "Ogarrie".<sup>1</sup> Ferguson's 1901 directory listed her as "O'gara, Eve, dance hall". There are no clear indications whether she was the proprietor of a dance hall or merely a dance hall woman. Her name, however, does not appear on a list of dance hall girls prepared by the mounted police in 1899.<sup>2</sup> In Polk's directories for the years between 1903 and 1908, she was enumerated as "Ogara, Mrs. Eva, furnished rooms". Her husband, John H. Ogara, appeared in a Dawson directory only once, as a carpenter in 1903. He was a miner or mine labourer who seemed to be out of Dawson for lengthy periods. He was also the secretary of the Fraternal Order of Eagles in 1903.<sup>3</sup> The Ogaras remained in Dawson until 1908, the year, coincidentally that the Yukon Council decided to close the dancehalls. There is no

indication when John Ogara left but Eva set off by steamboat on 10 July.<sup>4</sup> Their destination was Fairbanks, where Ogara became first a bartender and then the manager of the Hotel Northern. Eva's occupation thereafter remains unknown.

After the departure of the Ogaras, the property at 233 Second Avenue fell into the hands of E.O. Finlaison, manager of the Bank of British North America.<sup>5</sup> Whether Finlaison acquired it by purchase from the previous owners or after foreclosure by his bank remains simple speculation. Finlaison, in any case, never took up residence in the house. In 1911, he took on a partner, Benjamin Stone, who operated the house as an hotel.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Stone had it listed as an hotel in the commercial section of Polk's Directories. Very little is known about Stone. He was a newcomer to Dawson, if not to the Klondike, as his name does not appear in a business directory before 1910. The absence of a directory for 1913 makes it difficult to ascertain how long Stone ran his hotel. By 1915, however, he had left it to become the operator of the "Government ferry", a fact which suggests that he was a Conservative of some local standing. He remained in Dawson until 30 August 1918.<sup>7</sup>

The land titles files indicate that Finlaison and Stone sold the property to E.J. Edwards in 1914. Elvin James Edwards was an Australian and a former constable in the RNWMP. He had arrived in Dawson in 1910 or 1911 and had been the cook at the police barracks. He remained in the town at the end of his stint and opened a second hand shop on Third Avenue. In the directories he advertised: "Furniture, Carpets and Household Goods, New and Second Hand Furniture Bought, Sold and Exchanged, Picture Framing and Mirrors Resilvered".<sup>8</sup> Edwards likely bought 233 Second Avenue as an

investment since there is no evidence that he lived in the house. He dabbled in a variety of other properties and at the time of his death in 1935 was the owner of Dawson's only funeral parlour.<sup>9</sup>

In 1917, Edwards sold the Second Avenue property to a Mrs. Dona Gordon. Gordon was a difficult person to trace. The confusion suggested by her first name, Dona, was compounded by the fact that she went by at least one other surname. In some years, she wished to be known as "Mrs. H. Dubois". She first appeared in a Dawson directory in 1915 as "Gordon, Mrs. Dona (Second Avenue Hotel)"; eight years later, she was listed as "Dubois, Mrs. Dona (Occidental Hotel)". She operated the Occidental in partnership with A.A. Gordon. It is tempting to assume that A.A. Gordon was her brother and that she had married Henry Dubois, a bartender and sometime proprietor of the Empire Hotel. But Dubois disappeared from the Dawson directories in 1915, the year when Dona Gordon first appeared. To make the confusion worse, the land titles refer to her as "Dora Gordon" from 1917 to 1930 when she was described as "Dora Gordon (Mrs. H. Dubois)". Whatever her name, she took possession of 233 Second Avenue in 1917.

Gordon is another figure who remains in obscurity. There are indications that she had operated a small hotel and another Second Avenue boarding house before she acquired the house from Edwards. She also seemed to have been a local character. Only one oral source recalled her, and then in a rather singular manner. He remembered her as "Old Ma Gordon" and could not recollect her being called by any other name. He continued:

Well, you know when you'd see her walking down the street, if she was ahead of you, she had a figure on her and you'd think she was a real high class fancy gal, not too old, but by golly you'd get a front end view of her and she had a face on her that would crack a glass.<sup>10</sup>

He was just a young and impressionable lad at the time, but he thought she was "quite a character". She ran 233 Second Avenue as a boarding house originally, but he was convinced that "she might have done a little business on the side, too". This suggestion, however, was not corroborated by other sources, since they did not remember Gordon. Apart from these few allusions, then, Gordon remains anonymous.

Even less is known about a "Helen Adams" who, the land titles files reveal, owned the property in 1932. Other documents do not refer to her and none of the oral sources could identify her. One might surmise that she carried on the "business" established by Gordon, but that is unsupported speculation.

Much more is known about the woman who acquired the building in 1935. Mathilde Scott ran it as a house of prostitution for the next 27 years and she presided over a boarding house for seven more. "Ruby" is remembered with a great deal of affection by many long time residents of Dawson, and none of the oral sources showed any reluctance to speak of his or her association with her. In retrospect, she was regarded as a part of the community and friend to all, especially those in need. Everyone knew her and everyone knew how she made her living and still the community accepted her. A former city councillor declared: "a lot of people think of madams as real racketeers" but Ruby was "a good person" and that opinion was widely shared.

Biographical data on Ruby Scott are almost entirely derived from oral sources who knew her or knew of her. Scott herself seldom spoke of her past but from bits and pieces it is possible to assemble the rough outlines. She was born on 25 June 1885 in or near the city of Amiens in the Somme region of northern France.<sup>11</sup> As a child, she used to go to the docks in some port city where she sang for sailors and collected a little money. She went to school and had some secondary education as a few sources stated that she could write very well. One suggested that she could have written "something interesting about her life if she had wanted to" but she preferred otherwise. She left home at an early age and ran away to Paris where she eventually became a madam. There is some doubt as to whether she was ever a prostitute herself and most sources rather thought that she had not been one. Scott always denied that she had been a whore. Nonetheless, one source insisted that she had travelled to North America when she was 20 years old, an unusual undertaking for a single woman at the turn of the century. But she went back to France and in later years claimed to have known Charles de Gaulle when he was a young officer in the army. She was married eventually but only for convenience. She had no children and "she was never married properly" in the eyes of the church.

Scott's house of prostitution in Dawson was the last in a series of brothels. She had been a madam in Paris and had opened a house in Strasbourg in 1925. After the French government closed it down, she returned to North America and kept brothels in the United States. She opened a house in San Francisco and then spent two years running one in Honolulu. One source related that in San Francisco Scott had "got mixed up with some old lady" and went with her to Keno



City in the Yukon after the silver-lead mine went into production there. At Keno City, she had run a house with someone else but she wanted a place of her own and so went to Dawson.

The other woman at Keno City may have been her sister Cecile Williams. Williams had gone to San Francisco at an early age and spent her last years there. But she spent some years, or at least part of some years, at Keno City. A batch of Christmas cards to Ruby, postmarked Keno or Mayo, attest to that fact. Scott also travelled to Keno City frequently, at least annually and usually more often, and it may be that she continued to run a "branch operation" there after she moved to Dawson. In any case, Ruby Scott took up residence in Dawson in 1935, and 233 Second Avenue was her principal residence until she moved into the Sunset Lodge in November 1969.<sup>12</sup>

From 1935 to 1962 Ruby's Place was Dawson's best known house of prostitution. The estimates of the number of women employed ranged as high as six to eight, but most sources suggested that there were usually only two or three. In 1962, there was only one. None of the sources knew how or where Scott got her "girls", although one was sure that they all came from Québec. Another thought they had come "from all over the world". They were of all ages and the only source to admit that he had ever gone to Ruby's, and then only for a drink or two, recalled that "lots of them were under 20". In 1962, the last one was 37. Most stayed only for a year or two, but a few arrived in the spring and left in the fall. At least two married local men and a third lived until recently in Whitehorse. One source recalled that Ruby and her girls "dressed like ordinary women" and nothing

like the women in the sporting houses of television and the cinema. For the most part, they kept out of sight. They did not go to church and did not attend dances or social events. Like Ruby, they tried to be inconspicuous.

Only two of the "inmates" of Ruby's Place are identifiable. Cecile Hebit (alias Herber) was fined \$50 in the 1962 court case.<sup>13</sup> The other was the only one to have left a lasting impression in Dawson. She called herself "Liberty" and she was the one who surprised the policeman's wife by being "pretty" and "nice". "Liberty" seems to have been more outgoing and visible than the others, and the policeman's wife recollected that "Liberty" had been confined to the hospital for medical reasons. "Liberty" and Cecile may be the best remembered because they worked for Ruby Scott longer than the others.

The prices charged at "Ruby's Place" were apparently set to coincide with the wages offered in the goldfields. One source stated that the women charged "five dollars a time, twenty dollars a night". Five dollars was what a dredgeman earned each day for work of 12 hours or more. The same source added: "We spent the whole summer on the dredges and only came in in the fall. When we came in we had about \$1000, we were rich." The expense for "a time" was not a major consideration, nor were the prices Ruby charged for libations. An ounce of whiskey and water cost 50¢, and that was the staple drink. Sometimes she would have ginger ale, " but mostly just rye or scotch and water". A pleasant evening might cost a patron seven or eight dollars.

"Ruby's Place" became a popular resort because of the fairness of those prices and because of the trustworthiness

of Ruby herself. A former city councillor contended that Ruby never "rolled" anybody. She occasionally took money from drunks but only for their own good as she gave it back the next day. He asserted that men felt safe when they were at her place. His wife added that Ruby used to cash cheques for men who came in for a drink but she only gave them enough for a few glasses at an hotel. She kept the rest in an envelope which they collected when their sprees were finished.

Those practices were more than just maternalistic. They were good for business. Men feeling safe and comfortable opened their wallets more readily, and men who returned to collect their cash after having had one too many might have been willing to stay the night. Ruby was equally shrewd in other ways. When she decided to go for a night out, she would make a tour of the licensed premises, in each one buying a round for the house. As one source recalled: "She would say, 'I make money with the boys, I spend it with the boys'". This strategy not only engendered good will, it also reminded the patrons that other forms of recreation were available. Ruby was not unique in this respect. She seems to fit the mould of madams who are remembered as "den mothers" who acted like hostesses in clean and quiet houses.<sup>14</sup>

Because of her shrewdness and business acumen, several sources thought that Ruby was quite a wealthy woman. She spent her money in different ways. She had a large diamond ring and an expensive fur coat, a set of heavy sterling silverware and a house filled with beautiful but overstuffed furnishings. She entertained lavishly and went "outside" regularly at a time when air travel was especially costly. She spent several winters in California and on at least two

occasions went back to France to visit relatives. But she also used her money for other purposes.

The oral sources all agreed that Ruby Scott was generous to a fault. The Catholic priest in Dawson affirmed that "she made lots of money but she gave it all away." Several sources recalled that every Christmas she sent "a pile of presents" to her French relations, and during the war she sent parcels to all Dawsonites in the armed forces. A policeman's wife remembered Ruby's contributions to the hospital and a former city councillor declared that she helped anyone in need. His wife added that Ruby sent a present to every newly married couple in Dawson and to the parents of newborn children. She also recalled that Ruby "half adopted" Willie Woods, a local waif, and she bought him food and clothing in return for his washing her windows. She was very good to all her friends and she gave them most of what she had. The priest recalled that, when she sold her house to the government of Canada, she paid her debts and was left with about \$3500. She asked him to look after it, "but every other week she would ask for thirty or forty or fifty dollars and pretty soon it was all gone. She had given away everything and when she died she had nothing left, not enough money to pay for her funeral." She died poor but "she was a good old soul" and the sources all concurred that they felt better for having known her.

Ruby Scott's generosity was matched only by her skill in the culinary arts. As one source put it, "she was a marvelous cook" and the pillars of Dawson society looked forward to being invited to one of her special dinners. At these affairs, she provided imported French wines and "the best champagne" to accompany a goose or turkey dinner done according to the rules

of French cuisine. One source recalled her serving pâté sent in from Montréal and other delicacies such as Russian caviar. The priest recollected that that she knew how to cook French dishes like tripe and "everything was good". She was especially hospitable to the French Canadians in Dawson, as she used to have several at her house for Christmas dinner. One declared that "she cooked the best chicken in the world." She continued this practice after she had moved into the Sunset Lodge and every year she prepared a big Christmas dinner for the residents. Her banquets were legendary.

In addition to her generosity and culinary skill, Ruby had a weakness for children and dogs. She apparently had no children herself but she delighted in their presence. In Dawson, local children used to call at her door and she would invite them in for tea and cookies. One source recalled that her parents gave her strict orders not to visit "Ruby's Place", but she and her friends went anyway because Ruby was so friendly. She would take them into her kitchen and ask them about school and what they were doing and seemed genuinely interested in their welfare. Sometimes she gave them nickels and dimes to spend on candy and other things. Children quite liked her and she liked them.

In the 1960s, however, the principal object of Ruby's affections was her dog, a Pekinese named "Chi Chi". She fed him special food, "liver and stuff", brought in from Whitehorse and kept him for 10 or 15 years. After her retirement in 1962, she took to going to church with Chi Chi under her coat. The priest commented: "She surely had a lot of affection for that dog", even when he was old and sick and began to bite her. When he died, Ruby wanted to have the dog mounted but it was too expensive. The priest had Chi Chi buried in the bush

outside town, but Ruby became very angry and insisted that the animal be interred in the cemetery. She had him reburied just outside the graveyard and she put a little fence around the plot.

In 1969, at the age of 84, Ruby Scott sold her house to the crown and moved into the Sunset Lodge in Dawson. Before moving, she gave most of her jewellery and fine furniture to her long time friends and she sent her silverware to a niece in France. In her five years in the lodge, she left a lasting impression on the other residents and staff. A nurse's aid described her as a grande dame "of the old style". She "dressed for dinner" and served as unofficial hostess when important visitors arrived. In the last week of June 1974, she fell and broke her leg. The ambulance took her to the Dawson hospital where a doctor thought a pin would have to be inserted in the bone. She was transferred to the Whitehorse hospital for that medical procedure. On 26 June, she died under the anesthetic. The funeral service was held at St. Mary's Church on 30 June and "the good old soul" was buried in the Dawson cemetery.

Apart from Ruby Scott, the residents of 233 Second Avenue were not persons of lasting significance in Dawson. There seems to have been nothing out of the ordinary about Eva Ogara, or Benjamin Stone, or even Dona Gordon. Helen Adams remains just a name. Before 1935, the residents of "Ruby's Place" were simply people seen on Dawson's streets, the kind of ordinary folk who lived in ordinary towns. Ruby Scott, however, was far from ordinary. She may have been a madam like many others but she left fond memories with her contemporaries. Under her keeping, "Ruby's Place" acquired

economic and social significance, in part because of the force of her own personality. She is remembered not as "a purveyor of sin" but as a generous benefactor, a prodigious cook, a person kind to children and dogs, and as "a good old soul". Indeed, she must have been all those things. She was, in short, a most unusual pillar of the community.

## Notes

The notes have been kept to a minimum in order to respect the wishes of a few of the oral sources. Because some of the sources preferred to remain anonymous, I have not directly cited any of them. Where possible, I have identified the source of a quotation in the body of the text.

- 1 See, for example, Dawson City Fire Department Records, Reports and Inspections, 1905-1908, passim.
- 2 PAC, RCMP Records, v. 1445, f. 181, pt. 6.
- 3 Yukon Sun, 8 Dec. 1903, p. 4.
- 4 Yukon Archives, Clarence Craig Family Collection, Departures Ledgers.
- 5 PC, PRO, Dawson land titles files, extracts.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 YA, Craig Collection, Departures Ledgers.
- 8 Polk's Directory, 1917, p. 689.
- 9 See Richard G. Stuart, "Winaut's Store". Manuscript Report Series. No. 450. (Parks Canada, 1982), pp. 48, 51.
- 10 Author interview, 18 May 1983.
- 11 Her birth date is noted in Klondike Korner, 15 June 1972.
- 12 KK, 19 Nov. 1969, p. 2.
- 13 Whitehorse Star, 7 Sept. 1961, p. 3.
- 14 See James H. Gray, Red Lights on the Prairies. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1971), pp. 20-21.
- 15 KK, 27 June 1974.



### 3 The Structure

In architectural terms, Ruby's Place is of only marginal significance. The elaborate westernized facade with its pair of primitive oriel windows was meant to form a portion of Dawson's urban landscape but the rest of the exterior does not maintain the pretence. The facade projected elegance and craftsmanship; the remaining walls reflected function and quick construction. The symmetrical fenestration on the facade contributed to the style of the building, while the windows at the sides simply provided light for the interior apartments. The inconsistencies in the exterior then suggest that Ruby's Place might provide a study of contradictions.

Ruby's Place is also a building of anomalies. The upper floor, for example, is wider than the main floor. Extant Recorder Robert Van Rump commented that that feature was not uncommon in Dawson, as builders sometimes allowed for a covered outside passage to the rear when adjacent buildings touched each other. There is no evidence, however, of a structure being built in close proximity to the north side of Ruby's Place. Another feature of the exterior is unique. The rear windows on both floors are placed flush with the corners in a fashion seldom seen in Dawson or elsewhere. There are other anomalies in the interior. The staircase, for one, cuts across a window and on the upper floor linoleum was laid over a carpet. For the most part, these anomalies cannot be resolved with surviving evidence.

This structural history presented many difficult problems and a few insurmountable ones. The most serious problem arose from the absolute paucity of reliable documentary,

photographic, iconographic and cartographic evidence. The references in archival sources are few indeed and they are sometimes vague and misleading. The number of cabins at the rear of the house, for example, is hard to trace because of ambiguities in the reports of the fire inspectors. Photographs, sketches and maps offer little consolation. Often it appears that photographers deliberately excluded 233 Second Avenue as was the case with the photographs of the ruins of the Hotel Cecil in 1904. The only useful historic photographs show the building in the distance and the finer details of construction are not visible. The utility of oral sources was equally limited. Most could not remember even the outside colours and only two recalled features of the interior. One said simply that Ruby's Place "was like an ordinary private house, nothing special, a very private house." The other had been to dinner and recollected that the dining room had been comfortable but that everything had been overstuffed. The furniture had been too big "for such a small place, lots of pillows and things." The latter source remembered the rough layout of the lower floor but that was all.

The absence of reliable sources imposed severe constraints on this structural history but at the same time underlined the importance of the context. The significance of Ruby's Place in Dawson lay in its function rather than in its form; the townsfolk clearly recalled the occupants but the structure itself left little impression. Ruby Scott was a pillar of the community and a local institution but her house was just another building. Nonetheless, it is possible to assemble a rough and limited history of the building, based in part on the results of architectural investigation and extant recording.<sup>1</sup> One must keep in mind, however, that much of what follows is based on **un**substantial evidence, suspicion and speculation.

Circumstantial evidence indicates that the building was put up early in 1903. In addition to the photograph cited in the first chapter (appendix, figure 1), the results of a structural investigation suggest that date. That investigation found no trace of asbestos paper in the exterior walls, as was required in the city building code established in 1903. City By-Law #40 made the use of asbestos paper mandatory in all new construction as a measure to prevent the spreading of fire.<sup>2</sup> The absence of that material in Ruby's Place suggests that the initial construction was under way before the by-law went into effect. The addition of pressed metal sheeting as a fire preventative on the exterior may have satisfied the building inspector. The weight of evidence supports the assumption that the building was erected in the early months of 1903. Coincidentally, in that year Second Avenue became a major thoroughfare after it was filled and graded.

The first work involved laying the foundation. That may have been a difficult task since the lot slopes down toward the centre. If the foundation were laid in the winter, it may have shifted after the spring thaw and if laid in the spring may have been altered by changes in the permafrost. According to Richard Stuart, in a typical Dawson foundation system " the floor rested upon 2x8 joists, and 7x8 axe-hewn mudsills."<sup>3</sup> It is impossible to say whether the foundation of Ruby's Place followed this pattern. The only available information records that the foundation underwent repairs in 1959, but their exact nature remains unknown.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of what it may have been, the original foundation system had decayed badly before the stabilization process and subsequent deterioration disrupted it beyond further analysis. In the summer of 1973, the house was raised by a series of screw jacks to preserve the structure from alterations resulting from age and the natural characteristics of the site. The house

presently rests on three girders which support a floor frame built in 1973 and the presumed historical floor. This floor is badly deteriorated because of fungus action and lack of ventilation.<sup>5</sup> For all intents and purposes, the original foundation has disappeared.

Ruby's Place is a two storey platform frame rectangular structure, 22' 4" (6.75 m) wide and 32' 4" (9.8 m) long, with a two slope gable and a westernized facade. The west elevation (figure 1) with its symmetrical fenestration and primitive oriel windows presented a boomtown facade and projected an elegance consistent with Dawson's Edwardian grandeur. The oriel windows are aesthetically dramatic and represent the work of a skilled craftsman. In addition to their stylistic role, they were designed to provide space and to capture light and diffuse it through the front apartments on the second floor. The windows particularly reflect the builder's intent to create a desirable residence. The elaborate use of wood and craftsmanship, however, is not maintained on the sides or on the rear of the building (figures 2 and 3). Instead, those elevations consist of planks covered with pressed metal sheeting and in some places a layer of asphalt brick paper, features entirely in keeping with turn of the century building techniques when metal sheeting was relatively inexpensive and readily available in Dawson. The sheet metal roof is also consistent with construction in that era.<sup>6</sup> Apart from natural deterioration and the replacement of some window frames, the exterior of the building appears to have been altered very little since its date of construction.

Originally, the building had two front and two rear exits. Those doors allowed the main floor to be divided into separate compartments, either two living quarters or one and room for some kind of commercial premises such as a laundry. There is enough evidence to suggest that at least part of the main

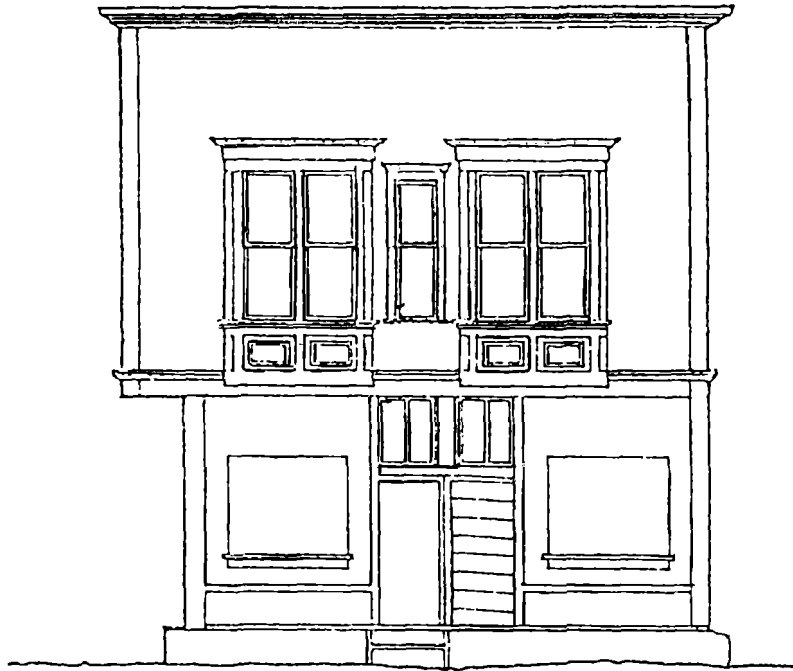


figure 1  
facade  
west elevation

(Restoration Services,  
Parks Canada, Prairie Regional Office)

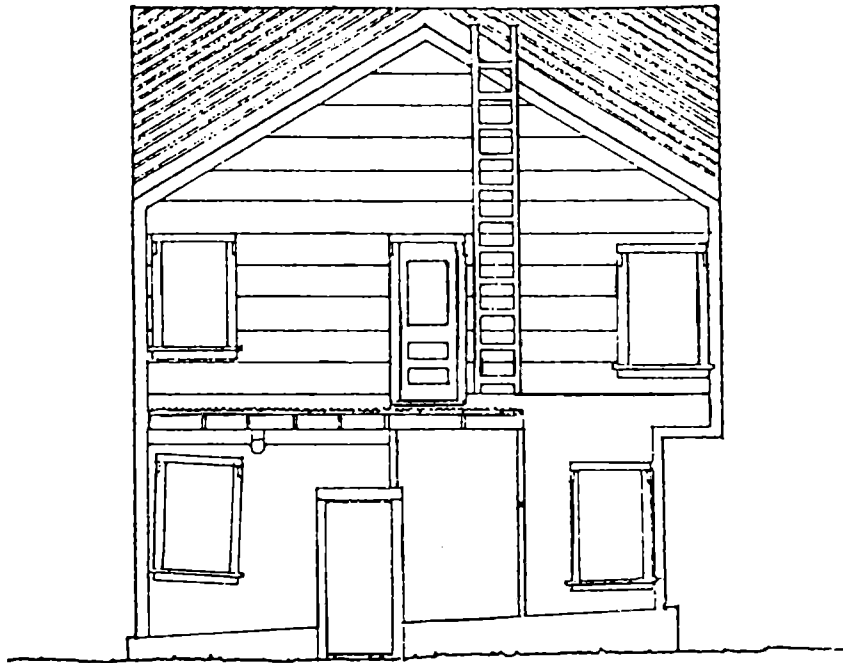


figure 2  
east elevation

(Restoration Services,  
Parks Canada, Prairie Regional Office)

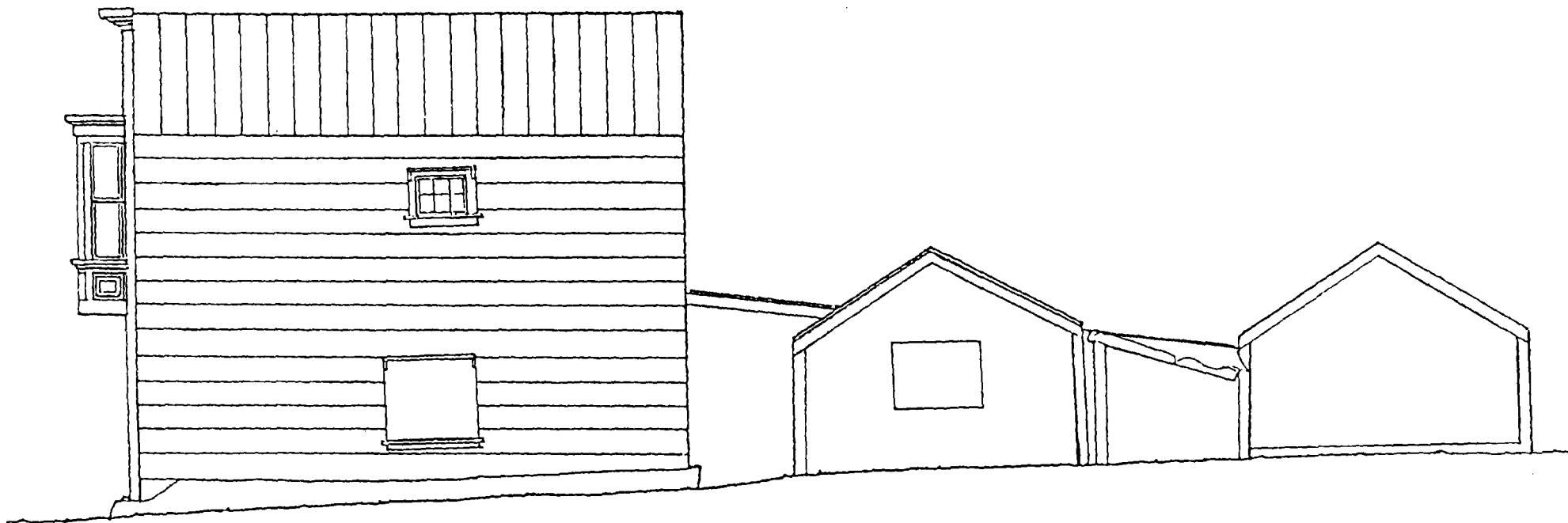


figure 3  
south elevation

(Restoration Services, Parks Canada, Prairie Regional Office)

floor was always used as a residence. Eva Ogara lived on the main floor in the early period and Ruby Scott had her private quarters on the southern half in the years after 1935.<sup>7</sup> The original floorplan likely followed the outline illustrated in figure 4. As the building's function changed, however, the southern door on the facade and the northern door at the rear were filled in and other doors relocated on interior walls to allow access to and from all parts of the interior main floor. It is impossible to date these changes, although they likely took place at the same time as the construction of the interior staircase. The original plan had a staircase at the rear as the only means of access to the upper floor. The earliest reference to this structure appears in the report of the fire inspector on 8 November 1905. He described the edifice as a "Two storey frame covered with sheet metal owned and occupied by Eva O'Gara as the 'Sinclair Lodging House'... the 2nd floor is the lodging house with exit by stairs at rear."<sup>8</sup> Later inspection reports did not convey similar detail.

The current floor plan of the first floor reflects several changes from the original. The current layout is illustrated in figure 5. The relocation of several doors is especially noticeable. The interior door at the western end of the centre wall is not in its original location as extant recording found that the wall plate extended through the doorway. The door was moved from its initial place further east as the original threshold was found when the floor was stripped. That door may have been relocated to accommodate new furniture or to allow greater privacy for the living quarters in the southern half of the house. The door between the small room in the southeastern corner (1-03[e]), now the kitchen, and the larger southwestern room (1-02[e]) is also not original. Those rooms were separated by an archway which was filled in and a door



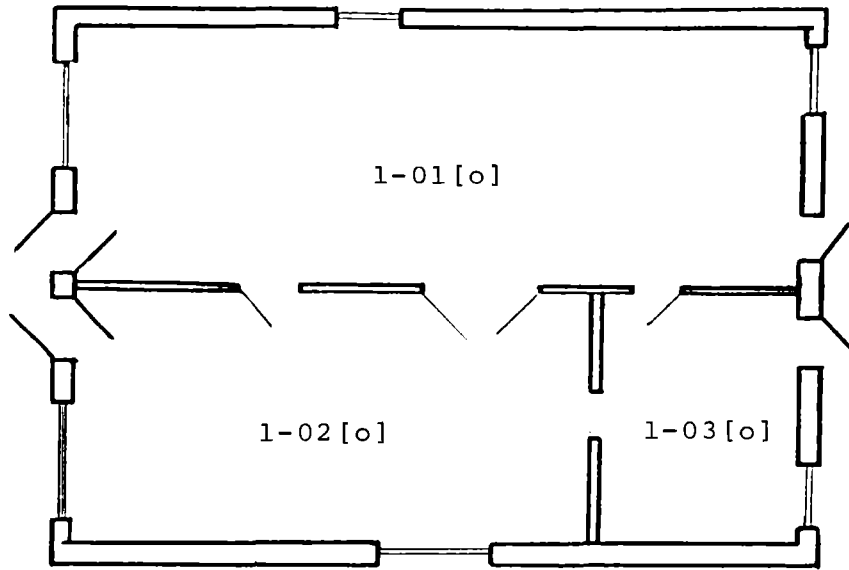


figure 4

original floor plan, main floor

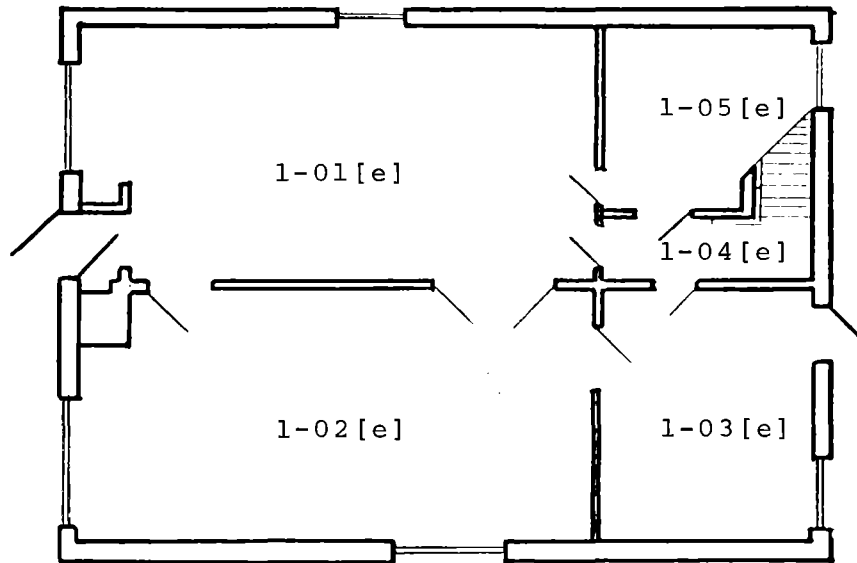


figure 5

current floor plan, main floor

added, again likely to allow for privacy in the living quarters adjacent.<sup>9</sup>

The northern half of the main floor has also been altered. The door at the rear was filled in, perhaps at the same time as the construction of the staircase. Extant recording found that the partition between the northwestern (1-01[e]) and northeastern (1-05[e]) rooms was added sometime after 1927. The existing baseboard runs behind the partition and a layer of carpet, a layer of newspaper dated 19 June 1927 and two layers of linoleum were found beneath it. Also the door in the southeastern partition is not original as a wall plate was found under the current floorboards. The kitchen may have been in the northeastern room (1-05[e]) at one time but moved to the southeastern room (1-03[e]) when plumbing was installed on the upper floor.<sup>10</sup>

The main floor floorboards are not original. The historic floor below was estimated to be 85% deteriorated in September 1982.<sup>11</sup> The current floor rests on 12 joists laid on the original floor; the space between is filled with sawdust insulation. It is possible to establish the probable period of this alteration because of artifacts found in the sawdust. They included a bottle cap from a brewery which operated from 1928 to 1954 and a 1950s vintage cigarette package. The work apparently postdated 1952 as a newspaper of 27 August of that year was uncovered behind a baseboard at the window seat. It may be that these alterations were part of the foundation repairs carried out in 1959 but there is no evidence to support this possibility. Variations in the spacing of nails suggest that the work employed two people. The presence of four floorboards cut straight at both ends near the centre wall in the southwestern room (1-02[e]) indicate that the floor was patched on account of fire, flood or natural deterioration. The records

of the fire department contain no reference to a fire in the interior of the house. There is another hole of unknown origin in the floorboards near the door from the southeastern room (1-03[e]), the kitchen, to the stairway.<sup>12</sup>

The composition of the floor system from the interior to the crawl space consists in descending order of layers of linoleum, masonite sheeting,  $\frac{3}{4}$ "x5" planks which have rotted, 2"x4" joists, four inches of sawdust insulation, 0.003 asphalt paper, linoleum paper,  $\frac{3}{4}$ "x5" planks which have rotted, new 2"x5" joists, girders and screw jacks.<sup>13</sup>

The upper floor has also been modified. There is reason to suspect that at first it conformed to a centre hall plan, as in figure 6, with a window at the front of the hall and with inner and outer doors leading to the exterior staircase at the rear. According to this layout, the second storey consisted of six apartments, all with windows and all with doors opening to the centre hall. The desirable rooms would be those on the west side with the oriel windows, while the rear apartments were smaller and less illuminated and the central ones still smaller and darker. This plan was altered by four major changes. The north wall in the southwestern room (2-02[o]), presuming there was a wall, was removed to enlarge the room by adding the western end of the hall and to get more light through the centre window of the facade. The removal of the wall between the northwestern (2-01[o]) and north central (2-06[o]) rooms enlarged the northwestern apartment and allowed in light from the window on the north wall. The construction of the interior staircase turned the northeastern room (2-05[o]) into a stairwell. The installation of toilet facilities made the south central room (2-03[o]) into a water closet (2-03[e]). These changes transformed the upper floor from six rooms into three, one of which was rumoured to be Ruby's "recovery room" (2-04[e]). The origin of

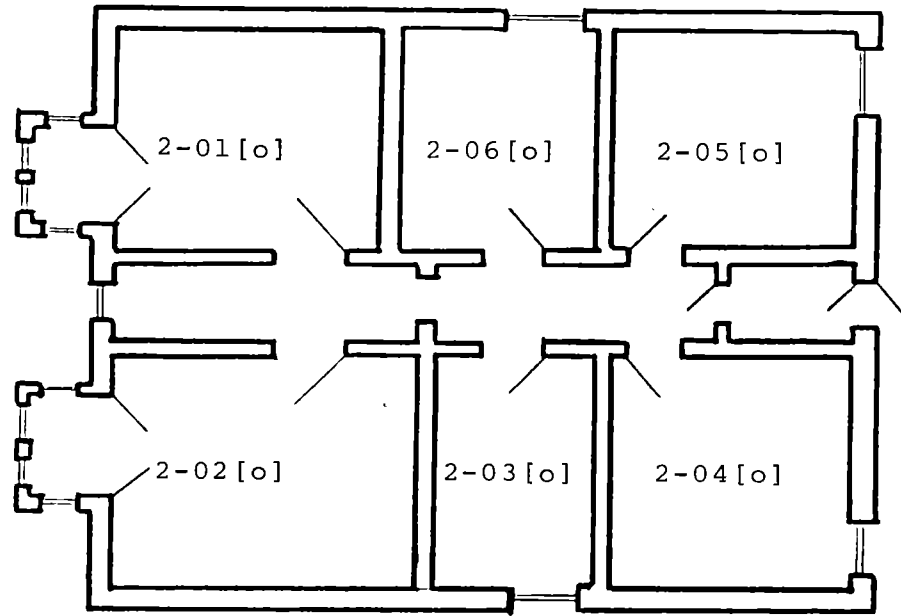


figure 6

original floor plan, upper floor

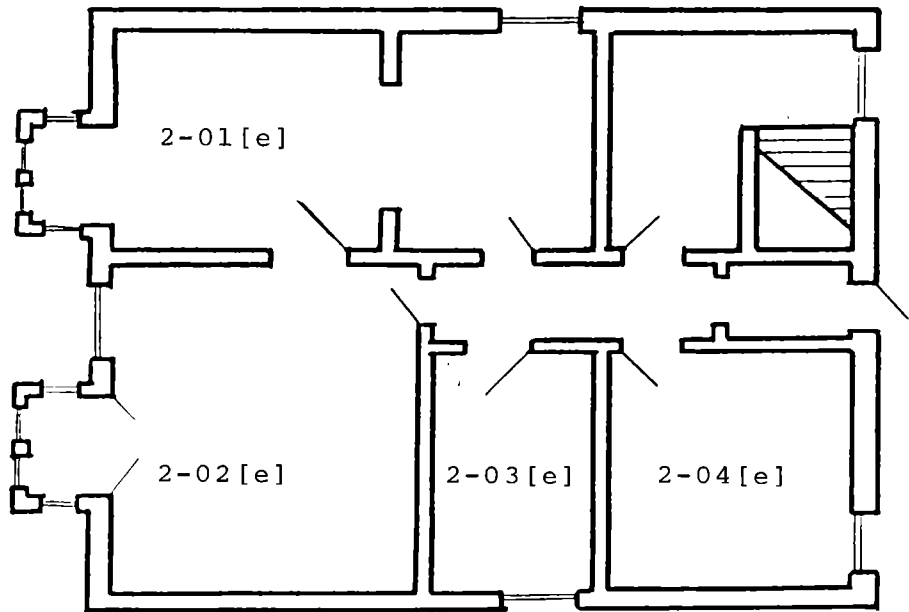


figure 7

current floor plan, upper floor

the "recovery room" theory is unknown but the presence of a sink in the southeastern room contributes to it. According to the rumour, Ruby Scott learned of the benefits of recovery rooms after a visit to a Vancouver hospital and she supposedly decided to devote a room in her house for the recovery of her clients.<sup>14</sup> The implications for the relationship between form and function are intriguing but the rumour remains under a shadow of doubt.

The interior walls of both stories are made of 1"x10" planks covered with canvas or muslin, a 2mm layer of felt paper, three to six layers of wallpaper and recently added particle boards. The outer walls reflect the prevailing view at the time of construction that a double wall enclosing dead air space provided adequate insulation. The sawdust between the floors, by the same token, suggests that the current floor is a relatively recent addition. The main floor ceiling is a drop ceiling 2'3" below the original. It is an independent framing, nailed to the walls and ceiling joists, which cuts across the windows above the front doors. The ceiling on the upper floor consists of  $\frac{1}{2}$ " particle board nailed onto an original layer of wallpaper and 2"x6" ceiling joists. Installed to provide insulation itself, it shows serious deterioration because of the lack of enclosure and insulation in the attic and because of leaks in the roof at the front gable and around chimney openings.<sup>15</sup>

Information on mechanical services is especially scanty. While there are a few references to the heating system, it is very difficult to say when the building was wired for electricity and when the plumbing was installed. The first reference to heat appeared in the report of the fire inspector in 1905. The report only noted that the "Sinclair Lodging House" had two "heaters" and one Yukon stove.<sup>16</sup> They were probably located on the main floor and heat radiated from

stove pipes which extended through the second floor. In 1910, the fire inspector recorded that there were four pipes in the house which needed to be cleaned.<sup>17</sup> Much heat must have been lost through the chimney as in the same year a fish net put on the roof to dry was ignited by the stove pipe.<sup>18</sup> The stove and heaters must have been kept very hot, since the fire department regularly extinguished chimney fires at 233 Second Avenue.<sup>19</sup> It is very difficult to estimate when new heating apparatus were installed. In 1950, the fire chief inspected the premises and reported that there was an oil burner in the kitchen as well as a tank stove in the front room and that the stoves and pipes were in good condition.<sup>20</sup> The as-found photographs of 1970 show an oil burner in the kitchen with a pipe extending through the second floor and a space heater in the northwestern room on the upper floor. In the absence of other devices, and given Ruby's legendary generosity, it is possible that the building was also heated by small electric space heaters which she gave to her friends before she moved. But there is no evidence to support this suspicion.

There is even less information about the other services. The house apparently was not electrified until well after 1910. The only available fire inspection reports dealing with wiring and rewiring contain an entry in 1909 which stated that the "St. Clair House" was lighted by oil lamps.<sup>21</sup> The antiquated style of some of the visible wiring suggests that the work was done by a qualified electrician in the 1920s or perhaps earlier. The light fixtures in the northwestern room appear to date from that period. The ceiling fixtures are simple porcelain receptacles which may have had ornamental shades.

Information about plumbing is negligible. There are no records which mention when the house received running water nor are there documents concerning the installation of indoor plumbing. There is an outbuilding at the rear of the house

but it is apparently not in a proper location. Several oral sources related that indoor plumbing was not common in Dawson until the 1940s and later. The style and condition of the fixtures indicate that they were added in that period.

There are two other structures annexed to the rear of Ruby's Place. The changes in their use over time are reflected by their description as "cabins", "shacks" and now "sheds". Information about them is scant indeed. It is even difficult to ascertain precisely the number of structures which rested on the lot. The 1905 report of the fire inspector referred to "two frame cabins, occupied".<sup>22</sup> Five years later, the wiring inspector listed "3 one storey log cabins at rear of Sinclair Lodging House - all vacant."<sup>23</sup> In that same year, however, the fire inspector listed seven cabins behind the rooming house owned by "Capt. Stone", while another entry referred to four cabins at the back of Stone's hotel.<sup>24</sup> The entries all seem to refer to the lot in Block J adjacent to the IOOF Hall, but it is possible that some of them refer to other lots on Second Avenue. These ambiguities compound the difficulties caused by the absence of other evidence. The city assessment roll of 1948 listed two "shacks" at the rear of the house owned by Ruby Scott and they were valued at \$100.<sup>25</sup> They are likely the current structures.

The available evidence suggests that the cabins were originally residences and that at least one was occupied until 1910. The 1903 city directory revealed that two laundresses resided in cabins at the rear of 233 Second Avenue as did a seamstress and a cook.<sup>26</sup> The fire inspector reported in 1905 that two cabins were occupied but in 1909 the wiring inspector found two of three to be empty. They were all vacant when inspected in 1910.<sup>27</sup> There is no evidence that they were occupied thereafter, apart from the unexpected finding that the wallpaper in one is the same as the wallpaper in a room

on the second floor of the house. The 1948 assessment roll described the cabins as "shacks", perhaps suggesting that they were used for storage or not used at all.

The two shacks were inaccessible during the research period and intensive investigation has not been undertaken. Preliminary findings, however, suggest that the surviving cabins were well built at first. Each has two layers of roof boards and two layers of tin and the floor of one consists partly of tongue and groove wooden boards.<sup>28</sup> Those facts raise two possibilities. The cabins may have been made of materials left over when the house was finished or they may be remnants of buildings which antedated construction of the house. There is, however, no evidence to support either possibility. The cabins, then, remain very much a mystery.

Through the use of documentary, photographic, iconographic, cartographic and extant recording evidence, it is possible to assemble only the barest outline of a structural history of Ruby's Place. There are huge gaps which cannot be bridged. The absence of reliable sources, especially oral ones, reflects an attitude to the building. The house at 233 Second Avenue was not a landmark in Dawson. The boomtown facade expressed an elegance but, like many other Dawson buildings, the rest of the walls did not maintain that pretence. The structure dates back to 1903, the apex of Dawson's civic development and it reflects the aspirations of its first owner. Ruby's Place may lack architectural significance but it was designed to be a desirable lodging house and a profitable enterprise. The changes which the interior underwent in later years represented attempts to make it even more attractive in light of its different use. The importance of the structure in Dawson lay in its function rather than in its form. Ruby's Place was just one small part of Dawson's urban landscape.



## Notes

- 1 The architectural investigation was undertaken by Guy Masson and the extant recording by a team led by Robert Van Rumpt, all of Parks Canada Restoration Services.
- 2 Yukon Archives, By-Laws of the City of Dawson, pp. 106-8.
- 3 Richard G. Stuart, "Winaut's Store, Dawson, Y.T.: a Structural and Use History 1902-1972". Manuscript Report Series. No. 450. (Parks Canada, 1982), p. 17.
- 4 information supplied by Richard Stuart.
- 5 Guy Masson, "Ruby's House, Dawson City, Yukon: Architectural & Structural Investigation with Recommendations for Stabilization". ([Winnipeg]: Parks Canada, 1983).
- 6 information supplied by Richard Stuart
- 7 See Dawson City Fire Department Records, Reports and Inspections, Block J, 8 Nov. 1905 for the reference to Eva Ogara. The as-found photographs of 1970 show that Ruby Scott had private quarters on the main floor.
- 8 Dawson City Fire Department Records, Reports and Inspections Inspections, Block J, 8 Nov. 1905.
- 9 Robert Van Rumpt, Extant Recorders Field Notes, 1983.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Masson, "Ruby's House".
- 12 Extant Recorders Field Notes.
- 13 Masson, "Ruby's House".
- 14 The idea was raised in an interview conducted by Richard Stuart in 1980.
- 15 information supplied by Guy Masson.
- 16 Dawson Fire Dept. Records, Reports and inspections, Block J, 8 Nov. 1905.

- 17 Ibid., 13 Sept. 1910.
- 18 Ibid., Daily Reports, 26 April 1906.
- 19 See, for example, Ibid., 9 April 1906.
- 20 Ibid., 26 April 1950.
- 21 Ibid., Fire Inspection Reports, Rewiring and Rewiring,  
24 April 1909.
- 22 Ibid., Reports and Inspections, Block J, 8 Nov. 1905.
- 23 Ibid., Fire Inspection Reports, Rewiring and Rewiring,  
27 Sept. 1910.
- 24 Ibid., Reports and Inspections, Block J, various dates.
- 25 YA, Dawson City Records, I-B, Assessment of Land and  
Improvements, 1948.
- 26 See above, p. 9.
- 27 Dawson Fire Dept., Reports and Inspections, Block J,  
8 Nov. 1905; Wiring and Rewiring, 5 Nov. 1909, 27 Sept. 1910.
- 28 Extant Recorders Field Notes.

## Conclusion

For almost seven decades, Ruby's Place accurately reflected the character of Dawson and especially represented the character of Second Avenue. When Dawson's population was most fluid, in the 20 years after 1898, the building served as a respectable lodging house, as did many of its neighbours. As Dawson underwent its demographic transformation in later years, the function of the house also changed. With the consent of the community, Ruby Scott turned it into Dawson's premier house of prostitution. She ran it as a brothel until the local demand for its services fell to the point where the business was no longer profitable. She then returned it to its original use as a lodging house. Ruby's Place occupied a position of unusual significance since the changes in its function clearly reflected the process of social change and continuity in Dawson.

Of all the residents of 233 Second Avenue, only Ruby Scott had lasting significance. The others were just faces in a crowd, the sort of ordinary folk who lived in ordinary towns. Ruby Scott was different, not only because many of her contemporaries had fond memories of her. While the force of her personality contributed to the economic and social significance of her house, she was much more than the keeper of a brothel. Ruby Scott became a pillar of the community much beloved by Dawson's more "respectable" men, women and children. Her generosity was legendary, as was her reputation as a cook, hostess and as "a good old soul". Ten years after her death

the oral sources all agreed that they felt better for having known her.

In architectural terms, Ruby's Place was not a landmark in Dawson. The structure dates back to 1903 and its elegant boomtown facade reflected the aspirations of its first owner. The style of the building and the techniques of its construction were fully in keeping with Dawson's attempt at Edwardian grandeur. It is also a building of anomalies, many of which remain unresolved. It was designed originally to be a desirable lodging house but its interior plan allowed for its later use as a house of prostitution. Yet it must be emphasized that the importance of the structure lay in its function rather than in its form. Ruby's Place was just one small part of Dawson's urban landscape but it represented a large part of Dawson's social history.



## Appendix

Ruby's Place is one of the least photographed structures in Dawson. A careful search through major collections found no detailed photograph of the house before 1970. The selection which follows represents the few photographs which are available.

Figure 1  
Dawson, c.1903, portion of panorama  
photographer unknown, Public Archives of Canada C-22350

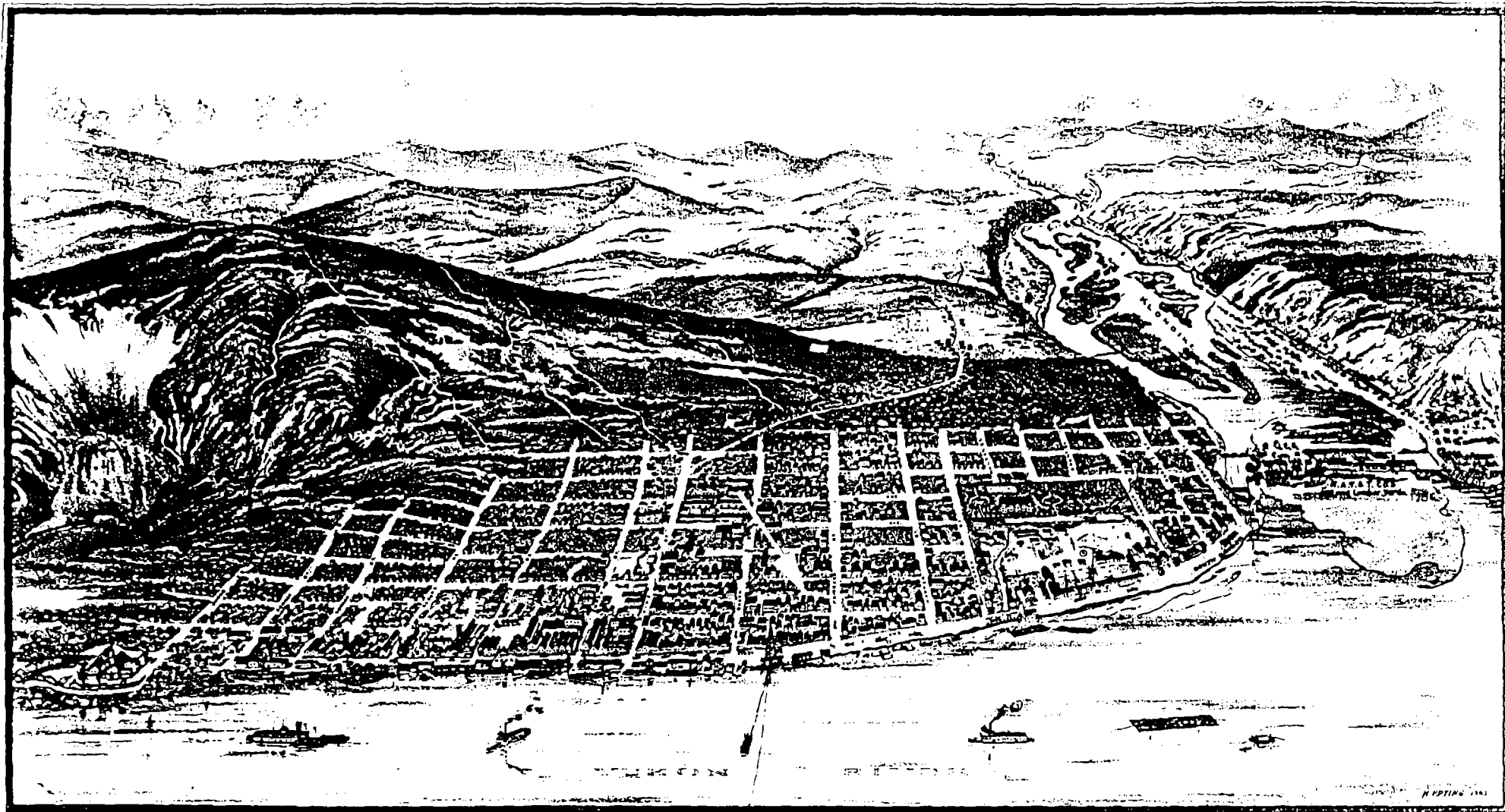
This photograph is sometimes dated 1902 but circumstantial evidence suggests that 1903 is a more appropriate date. The arrow identifies Eva Ogara's house as the oriel windows on the upper floor are unmistakable. The house appears in later panoramic views but there is too little detail to illustrate changes to the structure. This photograph is the first in which the house may be seen clearly.





Figure 2  
Birdseye View of Dawson, 1903  
artist unknown, Dawson City Museum

This illustrated map may have been based rather loosely on the panoramic view in figure 1. While some of the detail is not consistent with that panorama or with other photographs of the period, many of the buildings are visible in their proper locations. The arrow identifies the house at 233 Second Avenue.



Birdseye View of Dawson, Yukon Ter., 1903.

(courtesy Dawson City Museum)

- 1. Klondike Market Gardens
- 2. Administration Building and Grounds, \$150,000
- 3. Territorial Court Building, \$35,000
- 4. N. W. M. P. Office and Grounds
- 5. Government House, \$50,000
- 6. Electric Light and Power Plant
- 7. Municipal Fire Works
- 8. Fire Dept. Station
- 9. Casino Hall
- 10. Public Church

- 11. United Samaritan Hospital
- 12. St. Andrew's Parish Church and Parsonage
- 13. Methodist Church and Parsonage
- 14. Public Cold Storage Plant
- 15. Public School and Grounds, \$10,000
- 16. Amateur Athletic Club, \$10,000
- 17. Arctic Bombardment Hall, \$10,000
- 18. Yukon Bankers Co., Capital \$100,000
- 19. T. G. Wilson (Bank), \$15,000
- 20. Mackay Bros., Washroom

- 21. Lumber Co. Park of Commerce
- 22. Bank of B. N. A.
- 23. Merchant Transportation Co. Dock
- 24. White Pass and Yukon Route
- 25. Northern Commercial Co.'s Wharf
- 26. Northern Commercial Co.'s Back
- 27. N. A. T. & T. Co. Wharf
- 28. N. A. T. & T. Co. Main
- 29. Northern Commercial Co.'s Warehouse

- 30. Post Office, Telegraph and Customs
- 31. Anderson Theatre
- 32. Palmer Bros., Washroom
- 33. Ann McNamee Co.
- 34. The Ladies Co.
- 35. Lumber Mill Dancer
- 36. Lumber Quarries Mill
- 37. H. A. T. & T. Coal Packer
- 38. Catholic Church, Hospital and N.S. Co.

Figure 3  
Second Avenue, South from Queen Street  
Midnight, 1 July 1904  
Adams and Co., Vancouver Public Library 33164

The oriel windows and sheet metal roof identify Eva Ogara's house near the centre of this photograph. A sign with the words "St. Clair, Furnished Rooms" extends out over the sidewalk. The canopy of the building to the immediate south of 233 Second Avenue bears the words "Grocery", the only evidence of a neighbouring commercial premises. There is a pile of lumber in the street in front of the building. This photograph also depicts the context of that block of Second Avenue, with the hotels Cecil and Stockholm on the east and "The Vancouver" on the west. The Cecil, Stockholm and buildings to the south were destroyed by fire just over two months after this photograph was taken.



SECOND AVE. SOUTH FROM QUEEN ST.

MIDNIGHT JULY 1 1904.

ADAMS & CO. - BUREAU - N. Y.

Figure 4

Ruby's Place, Dawson, 1970

K. Bennett, Parks Canada, Prairie Regional Office



Figure 5  
Ruby Scott, Strasbourg, 1925  
photographer unknown, courtesy M. Bobillier, Dawson





Ruby Scott, 1925  
Strasbourg



Figure 6  
Ruby Scott and Chi Chi, 1963  
anonymous photographer

This photograph is the only known view of the interior of Ruby's Place before its purchase by the crown. It is also the only available portrait of Ruby Scott at home. She was 78 years old at the time it was taken and in her second year of "retirement". The background illustrates the arrangement of furniture and the décor of the western end of her personal quarters on the main floor of the house (room 1-02[e]). The upper right corner shows the drop ceiling cutting across the window above one of the original front doors. The hutch and buffet at the right of the photograph remained in the house after she left.





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