The Klondike Nugget Index

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Preface

The University of Washington Libraries owns a small gem which is the publisher's copy of the entire run of the Klondike Nugget, a Dawson City newspaper published from 1898 to 1903. It was established and run by Eugene Allen who left Dawson in 1899 for Nome, where he started the Teller News. His brother, George M. Allen, a University of Washington graduate, took over the Klondike Nugget. The newspaper contains cartoons, illustrations, maps and photographs. Contrary to other gold rush newspapers, the Klondike Nugget does not concentrate only on mining issues. A personal style of journalism covers every aspect of life in Dawson: politics, social life, crime, religion and more. Politics, of course, was Eugene Allen's forte and the Klondike Nugget gives rich detail in that area. The Klondike Nugget also carried on an exuberant rivalry with the other Dawson City newspapers, the Yukon Sun and the Dawson Daily News.

The entire run of the Klondike Nugget is indexed. However, from its inception to March 11, 1900 the Klondike Nugget was exclusively a semi-weekly newspaper. Beginning in March 12, 1900 to January 1, 1902 the Klondike Nugget published simultaneous daily and semi-weekly editions. For this item period, only the semi-weekly edition is indexed.*

Library of Congress subject headings are used for the 31,000 citation index. Emphasis is placed on three areas: personal and corporate names, subjects, and geographic areas. Information can be approached through any one, or a combination, of these three access points. In addition, a separate index of all advertisements, included at the end of the regular index, provides a source for business history. Portrait illustrations, political cartoons and maps are usually indexed under the appropriate subject or personal name of the subject being depicted.

Not all names are included. Names from passenger lists of incoming ships are not included because such a formidable task would have extensively lengthened the indexing project. However, the passenger lists were scanned and notable persons are indexed. The principal figures in each article are indexed as well as all names in obituaries. Many people who participated in the gold rush, while unknown at the time, became influential later: T.D. Pattullo, Alex Pantages, Ed Mizener, etc. The selective indexing of most of these names resulted from research and a knowledge of the history of the area prior to the indexing project. Frequently due to the journalism practice of the time, only last names, or last names with initials, were given. These names were filed in the index as separate persons unless strong evidence existed that they were the same person.

* From January 2, 1902 to July 14, 1903 the Nugget published only a daily edition which was indexed.
The Klondike Nugget documents the last grand gold rush, but it also provides a rich source of information for the political development of Dawson, tensions between Americans and Canadians, and the social life and customs of the day. Consequently, the subject headings indexed cover a wider spectrum than just the gold mining aspects. Almost all articles and all editorials are indexed, but on-going serials like "Police Court" and "Notes" were selectively indexed.

An attempt was made to provide as much geographic access to the newspaper as possible. Often creek names are included, as well as names of towns that sprang up overnight and might no longer be existent, but which had great importance at the time. Since many of the miners had continual contact, via the Yukon River, with Alaskan miners, much Alaska news was in the Klondike Nugget and is indexed. Later, during the Alaskan gold rush, a large percentage of the Dawson American population left and went to Nome, thus many Alaskan locations are also in the index. Place names are spelled according to modern spellings but "See" references are made from the old spelling to the new, e.g., Clondyke See Klondike.

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**THE KLONDIKE NUGGET: AN AMERICAN NEWSPAPER ON THE CANADIAN FRONTIER**

By: Lea Kajati Ehrlich

Frontier newspapers are often used as source material, but as an institution in themselves they have been little studied. Also in the history of mining frontier journalism the influence of editors and newspapers remains controversial. How valuable is a frontier newspaper as a source of history? Robert Dykstra says that newspapers contributed to the growth of an urban impulse by fostering social conflict within the frontier community. By contrast, William Savage maintains that, since early frontier newspapers were often spokesmen for special interest groups, they were by no means an effective measure of community development and should be used selectively. What is the role of the newspaper in a frontier area? Was it a catalyst of social change, as Oliver Knight expounds, or a more passive reflection of its time, as William Lyon maintains? What role does the editor have in shaping the policy of the newspaper?

A study of the Klondike Nugget, a Dawson City, Yukon Territory newspaper, published during the height of the Klondike Gold Rush, seems to reflect partially both paradigms. During the first year of its existence, June 1898 to the summer/fall of 1899, the Nugget reflected mostly mining interests. A perusal of the pages of the Nugget give no indication that, simultaneous with the gold rush, a million dollar fur industry was active in the Yukon; no hint that an indigenous, recently displaced, Indian community existed at Moosehide, a short distance from Dawson City; and very little information about subjects that are now primarily called 'social history.' Instead, during its first year, the Nugget editors concentrated on local mining issues and focused upon establishing what they considered to be an amenable political climate in which mining could flourish and expand. This meant adopting an adversary position on many phases of Canadian government policy: the 10% royalty tax on mining output; appointed, rather than elected officials; and in general complaints about having no voice in government. These typical American frontier concerns caused a natural conflict to develop between Canadian officials and the American-owned and operated Klondike Nugget. However, American ownership could not have been the determining factor in Canadian government opposition because the other Dawson newspaper, the Yukon Midnight Sun, was also operated and owned by an American and was even subsidized with a government printing contract. Consequently, in the case of the Nugget, the personality of the editor had a definite and strong influence on the course the newspaper would take.

The owner and editor of the Nugget until the fall of 1899, Eugene Castle Allen, was a Seattle compositor and job printer. He was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1868, but in early childhood moved to Lawrence, Kansas with his family.2 He graduated from the University of Kansas at a time when few people were college-educated. Allen went on to learn the printing trade in the Midwest.

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and when his family moved to Seattle in 1888 Eugene followed them out West. They settled in the north end of town in close proximity to Green Lake. Until 1897 he edited a community newspaper, the Green Lake News, and worked at job printing for the Metropolitan Printing and Binding Company, owned by his brother, future Washington state senator, Pliny Allen. In 1895 Eugene became a salesman for the firm but he was itching for something more lucrative and exciting.

When the steamer Portland, loaded with gold from the Yukon, arrived at Seattle on July 16, 1897, Allen and his friend Zach Hickman were at the docks to meet the ship. Their imaginations were fired by the stories they heard and read about the Klondike in the following days. Down at the docks Allen and Hickman mingled with the returning miners and heard that Dawson lacked a newspaper. Bitten by the gold bug and being young men who wanted to do something adventurous, they decided to go to Dawson and set up its first newspaper. Allen, still a bachelor at the age of 30, stated in his diary, "All I can see is what a corking adventure its going to be, and I'm eager to be at it."5

Hickman made a preliminary fact-finding trip into the Klondike that summer of 1897. By January 1898 he returned to Seattle after a difficult and treacherous trip out over the ice with a dog team. The two men now conclusively decided to proceed with their plans and for this purpose they borrowed $2,000 from Allen's brother, Pliny, $650 of which they spent for a printing press, intending to haul it over the passes. Eugene persuaded his brother George Merritt Allen, a 22 year old Everett, Washington school teacher and a recent graduate of the University of Washington, to abandon his teaching position and join them. George Allen had received journalism experience in 1894-96 as one of the early editors of the University of Washington student newspaper, The Pacific Wave.6 The men booked passage for Skagway on the steamer City of Seattle and sailed on February 9th, 1898. The boat was dangerously overloaded, carrying 1/3 more passengers than it should have had.

On February 14th the party arrived in Skagway. The distance from Skagway to the summit was less than 25 miles, yet the course was so steep in places and the trail was so badly damaged by the heavy travel that sometimes an entire week was consumed in advancing their camp three or four miles.

After the first week of the terrible strain, Allen wrote in his diary, "It sure seems a lifetime since we left home, and that former existence is something out of another life, while we have the feeling that we have always been mushing along the snowbound trail into the teeth of this awful Arctic wind, with the thermometer 25 to 35 degrees below zero."7

It took the group one month of arduous work, averaging less than a mile a day, to haul their supplies and printing press over White Pass, which possessed a more gradual slope than the shorter but steeper Chilkoot Pass. Shortly after reaching the summit of the pass on March 20th, 1898 Allen and Hickman heard from returning miners that another newspaperman, George B. Swinehart, of Juneau,
Alaska was also headed for Dawson City to set up a newspaper. Allen was
determined to be the one to establish the first newspaper in Dawson and after
confering with Hickman, decided to race on alone, hopefully overtaking
Swinehart, and prepare to set up the press. He met a Seattle friend with whom
he travelled part of the way, photographer Asahel Curtis. At Lake LeBarge they
separated and Allen continued on to Dawson, while Curtis turned back to Skagway.
Allen reached Dawson City on May 17th, 1898, three months after leaving Seattle,
and began searching for a site for his newspaper plant.

Afraid that Swinehart would reach Dawson before his companions with the
press, Allen decided to produce the first issues of the Klondike Nugget in
typewritten form, not an uncommon feature for a frontier newspaper. According
to Allen, the first typewritten sheet, typed on New York Times correspondent
Leroy Pelletier's typewriter, appeared on May 27th, 1898 pinned to a bulletin
board which Allen constructed in front of Pelletier's brokerage office.8 Allen
noted in his diary that "I've worked like a fool all day gathering news, writing
it, and posting it on the bulletin board. All day long the crowds have been
milling about the board devouring the news like starved men. ... It is one
o'clock in the morning (now)...(and) the crowds are still clustered about the
bulletin board eagerly scanning the latest item of news and hoping for more."9
But he added anxiously: "I wish the plant would hurry up and get here."10

After the first week in Dawson, Allen was extremely worried about the safety of
his younger brother George and Zach Hickman, fearing that they might not have
survived the many treacherous rapids that had to be crossed.

Finally, on the evening of June 10th, after many exciting adventures of
their own, George Allen and Zach Hickman, tired but relieved, arrived in Dawson
with the printing plant: "Every part had been packed in excelsior and wrapped
in heavy canvas," Allen wrote in his diary, "and (miraculously) came through
without a spot of rust or a break. Even the paper stock was unsoiled by
water."11 They hastily set up the print shop and after many sleepless nights
were able to get the first printed edition of the Klondike Nugget issued on July
16th, 1898. to their chagrin, the Sun had appeared three days earlier, on July
13th, 1898.

Many frontier newspapers like the Nugget disappeared along with the booming
communities in which they were founded. In the case of the Nugget however, the
Pacific Northwest Collection at the University of Washington Library has bound
publisher's copies covering its entire run of five years. George Allen, possibly falling on hard times during the Depression tried to sell the Nugget to the library in 1932 but the University was only able to offer him $75, so he withdrew the offer.12 After George's death in September 1935, four months prior to that of his brother Eugene's, the newspaper, stored in George's basement, received some minor water damage and Mrs. George Allen donated it to the University. The recently completed Klondike Nugget Index will soon become
available on microfiche.
The format of the Nugget is esthetically pleasing in spite of its slightly irregular appearance at times. It was mostly issued as a four page, 11 by 17 inches, newspaper. The size of the paper actually varied considerably depending on the size of paper available. In April - May of 1899, when all incoming ships were ice bound at Lake Bennett, and Allen couldn't get his usual paper stock supplies, the Nugget was printed on butcher's wrapping paper. The Nugget included cartoons, illustrations, and by 1902, photographs. This professional appearance probably stemmed from the rather high quality of the staff at the Nugget. Many of the names are familiar to Alaska and Pacific Northwest historians - 'Stroller' White, a columnist; Arthur Buel, cartoonist; Arnold F. George and George Storey, news reporters. Most of the staff had prior journalism experience, a situation that was not always true for frontier newspapers.

Coupled with the competent staff, Eugene Allen used innovative news-gathering techniques and newspaper distribution methods. The telegraph had not yet been installed in the Yukon but Allen did not wait for the news to come to him. He dispatched reporters downriver to meet incoming steamers and gather news from the ship's captains. In the winter when the ships were ice-bound he sent reporters to Skagway by dog sled to gather information; in this way he had the jump on his competitor, the Sun. Most miners did not live in Dawson, so Allen devised a delivery system for the Nugget. The newspaper was distributed by salaried carriers throughout the outlying creeks and tributaries.

Due to the general shortage of paper, Allen printed limited copies in Dawson and had "the Metropolitan Printing and Binding Co. of Seattle... reproduce each issue by photographic process and print Nuggets by the tens of thousands."13 All non-local subscriptions were mailed from the Seattle office. By this practice he again had the jump on his competitor. In Dawson, the circulation figures of the Nugget increased from 350 copies in June 1898 to 1992 copies in January 1899. According to Allen the Nugget was read by approximately 33% of the inhabitants of Dawson since the 1992 copies were "sent only to actual subscribers. ...It must be remembered that in a country such as this there are at least six readers for every paper which means that ... over 13,000 people are numbered among our readers in this city and the creeks."14

From its inception, the Nugget did not present a lot of 'boiler-plate' wire service national news. Instead it concentrated on covering, or creating, controversial local issues and was at loggerheads with the Sun which boasted of being the mouthpiece of the Liberal Party in the Yukon. The Sun defended the mining laws, championed Sir Clifford Sifton, and backed the territorial commissioners and gold commissioners. In contrast, the Nugget proclaimed its intent to fight for "the interests of the common people. ...Ours will be a real newspaper and not an organ for interests that look like they are going to need a lot of attention. ...We have the miners with us, and we are going to protect their interests, which are not being protected by the government..."15 By not supporting either of Canada's two political parties the Nugget became a principal leader in the movement against Canadian policies and officials. They championed American principles - grassroots political activity; free enterprise
rather than government control - and applied the new muckraking techniques. Allen advised his staff to "dig up everything that you can that looks rotten. We're all going to sink or swim together." He boasted grandiosely, "the Nugget ... enters upon a fearless and aggressive policy against all enemies of the people."16

The Nugget had conducted a long and intensive attack against the Canadian Gold Commissioner, Thomas Fawcett, whom the government finally, although reluctantly, investigated for corruption, but then decided to replace without indictment. At his farewell reception, Fawcett was commended by the American Consul in Dawson City, James McCook. The Nugget angrily charged that McCook, in his official capacity as U.S. Consul, should not have lauded Fawcett while he was under investigation for corruption. McCook replied with a poorly written letter to the editor. Allen published the letter complete with its "grammatical and etymological eccentricities."18

The issue also contained a cartoon of a sad McCook learning grammar in school - the cartoon depicted a not very bright pupil. The publication of the cartoon and of his letter verbatim with misspellings provoked McCook, who sued the Nugget for $5,000 in damages and filed another suit for $20,000 against Eugene Allen and Arnold George, city editor of the Nugget. McCook charged Allen and George with "falsely and maliciously ... conveying the idea to the readers of the newspaper that the plaintiff is an illiterate man and with the idea of bringing the plaintiff into contempt and ridicule."19

McCook was also known for his imbibing and the situation was further inflamed by the Nugget's simultaneous publication of a story and a cartoon regarding an episode of McCook's drunkenness. In the early morning hours of April 6th, 1899, McCook staggered into the Phoenix bar and dance hall and demanded loudly, "Who isn't an American citizen?" A young man answered that he was not, and McCook roared, "Then I'll make you one in two minutes." A brawl ensued and ended only after the bartender separated the two.20

The Consul then turned his attention to lighter things and started dispensing his valuables to the dance hall girls who by this time had entered the bar to find out what was causing the commotion. One of the party then pinned a small American flag to the rear of the Consul's pants and McCook bent over the bar and yelled: "kick me." After repeated kicks to the flag and McCook's rear, the Consul excused himself and staggered home.

The Nugget quickly printed an indignant editorial entitled "The Eagles Drooped Wings" next to a poem, appropriately and pointedly, entitled "Honor the Flag."21 In the editorial the Nugget beseeched McCook to resign "before you have further trailed that glorious flag in the mire, to the sorrow of your compatriots and the derision of their foreign cousins. ...We conjure you to drop the position in which you make every proud American in the land hang his head in shame. ...Consul McCook, Americans have ... a strong national vanity. You, sir, are injuring them in their most sensitive point when you render yourself the object of ridicule which you had become long before this paper
voiced the popular sentiment and called you down. ...It is most dispiriting to note how the public feeling of ridicule and contempt for the consul has spread to his office with some danger of at least involving the flag, which so many revere to the bottom of their hearts."

The accompanying cartoon by Arthur Buel, shows Uncle Sam weeping while an inebriated Consul McCook dances on a flag draped coffin entitled "Here lies U.S. dignity." Reporting this last incident caused James McCook to file an additional suit, one alleging criminal libel against the Nugget and Eugene Allen. Henceforth, the Nugget had to maintain silence on the issue since the case was soon to appear in court. On June 3rd, in bold print the headlines stated, The Nugget devoted an entire page to the court proceedings and in summing up stated, "the trial also proved a testimonial of the highest nature to the thoroughness, accuracy and reliability of the Nugget's news service; for the evidence showed that every one of the hundreds of statements contained in the principal article constituting the alleged libel was absolutely true — so much so that the presiding judge was impelled, in his summing up of the evidence, to tell the jurors that they might consider all the allegations as proven beyond question."

Consul McCook's account to his State Department superiors differed considerably from the Nugget's. McCook maintained that he entered the Phoenix bar and dance hall in pursuit of business matters and was drugged by the Nugget staff. Then, during a scuffle, he was robbed of his watch and chain. McCook added that the Nugget "is a blackmailing sheet and is only run for that purpose."

"And I cannot see why the authorities here have failed to suppress the paper, as it blackguards everyone in office and has abused the (Canadian) officials here as much as it has me."

Then he added, like a remorseful child, "One thing is certain, I will never again enter a saloon in Dawson or the Yukon Territory no matter on what business."

The Nugget, reflecting Allen's views in news stories as well as editorials, vociferously fought for changes in the Canadian mining laws and regulations, questioned the competence of Canadian government officials, and charged the Canadian government with discrimination against American miners. Consequently, Allen soon became quite popular with miners who were, after all, mostly American. How many of Allen's viewpoints were motivated by financial self-interest and how many by progressive clean government philosophy is difficult to determine. He did stand to benefit financially if some of his promotings had materialized. But "newspapers throughout the U.S. (soon) began to picture him as some colossal giant of the Northland." While this praise may be interpreted as the natural excess of a laudatory biographer, the Toronto Globe did label Allen and the Nugget "fomenters of trouble" and stated that Allen represented "a certain class of American who were naturally agitators."

Such charges by the Canadians were often directed at foreigners who actively promoted opposing views.
In spite of the American/Canadian dichotomy, the leaders of the Canadian Conservation Party sometimes agreed with the Nugget's criticisms and charges but usually for partisan political reasons. The Liberal Party was in power in 1898 and any Yukon Administration 'mismanagement' quickly became a political hot potato by which the Conservatives hoped to discredit Sir Clifford Sifton's western policy and the ruling Liberals.

The on-going detailed and lively coverage in the Nugget provides the historian with rich, although biased, source material. By contrast, many frontier newspapers offer very little local news and what they do contain is superficially covered.

In the summer of 1899 Eugene Allen decided to pursue other business interests and deeded the newspaper over to his brother George. For the remainder of the Nugget's life span, George Allen influenced the newspaper with his own more professionally objective style while pursuing Eugene's philosophical goals. Both men later went on to other endeavors but in publishing, and later preserving, the Klondike Nugget, they performed a service to those historians interested in re-creating the issues and events that fired Dawson City for a brief time during its zenith.
FOOTNOTES


7. Bankson, The Klondike Nugget, p. 34.


9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.


15 The Klondike Nugget, November 5, 1898, p. 1, col. 1; Bankson, The Klondike Nugget, p. 94.
16 Bankson, The Klondike Nugget, p. 96.
17 The Klondike Nugget, June 28, 1898, p. 2, col. 1, editorial.
18 The Klondike Nugget, April 1, 1899, p. 2, col. 1, editorial.
19 The Klondike Nugget, April 12, 1899, p. 1, col. 3.
20 Ibid.
21 The Klondike Nugget, April 12, 1899, p. 2, col. 1, editorial.
22 Ibid.
23 The Klondike Nugget, April 12, 1899, p. 1, col. 2-3.
25 U.S. State Department, Dispatches from U.S. Consuls in Dawson City, Canada, 1898 - 1906, National Archives, #T-560, Letter #78, April 13, 1899.
26 Ibid., Letter #79, April 13, 1899.
27 Ibid., Letter #78, April 13, 1899.
28 Bankson, op. cit., p. 198.