



For gold-seekers, the all-Canadian water-route was shorter, but a lot more difficult.

There's Gold in Them Thar Hills!

By Lynette Enevoldsen

The quest for gold drives men to do drastic things, like stand in cold river far from home, eyeing a pan of swirling mud for flecks and glitter. Most find nothing but adventure, and they return with only wild tales to tell back home. For some gold-seekers in the 1890s, “back home” was Sutton.

Gold was discovered in the Sacramento Valley of California in the mid-19th century. The first strike in 1848 made headlines on several continents, and by 1849 thousands of immigrants—known as “forty-niners”—came to seek their fortune. The State of California was born in 1850, and the population grew from about 1,000 to 380,000 over the



Laraway Family Archives

Young Alva Laraway

first decade. Two of these original *forty-niners* who sought their fortune in California came from the Sutton area: Omie Lagrange, who sold his mill on Maple Street and departed, and Alva Laraway, who would later, in 1898, join another Suttonite gold-rusher—Reuben Westover—in Edmonton, and travel with him to the Klondike. (See, *Reuben Westover Heads for the Klondike*, p. 10)

A decade later, gold was also found in British Columbia. The Fraser Valley had some scattered deposits, and there was a gold rush in the Caribou Mountains between 1860 and 1866. In the Cassiar Mountains of northern British Columbia there was “a major strike” at Dease Lake in 1872.¹ Finally, in the Northwest Territories, the Yukon River and its tributaries were explored, among them the Klondike River.

1. www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/gold-rushes/

By the 1890s—the California gold rush long over—gold fever still raged in Alaska and the Yukon. On 15 July 1897, the ship *Excelsior* docked in San Francisco, bringing a crowd of prospectors from the Yukon. The *San Francisco Call* of that date declared: “Half a Million Dollars’ Worth of [gold] Dust Comes by the *Excelsior*.”² Two days later a second ship, the *Portland*, was due to dock in Seattle. Reporters rented a tug boat and besieged it on the water well before it docked. On board they interviewed the newly-rich prospectors—still in their filthy mining clothes—and witnessed the bags of gold dust and nuggets they’d carried from the Yukon and the Klondike. The tug rushed the reporters back to shore; their stories were printed before the *Portland* even reached port.

Three days later, the *Los Angeles Herald* reported that the Hon C.H. McIntosh, Governor of the Northwest Territories—passing through Seattle en route to Edmonton—was quoted as saying, “I consider the British Yukon goldfields the richest ever trod by man. The gold supply is practically inexhaustible. There are hundreds of rich rivers and creeks. Clondyke [sic] is only one of them.”³

The lure of gold reaches Brome County

From all over the world, men flocked to the Klondike hoping to make their fortune. Some were from the Eastern Townships, including Sutton. In March 1898, Sheldon Wells (b. 1854) and his brother Forrest (b. 1858) said goodbye to their families in West Brome and left for the Klondike. They took the new Canadian Pacific Railway route to Edmonton.

Likewise, when Suttonite Reuben Westover, who had the year before left Sutton for the American West, heard that some “fellows from back home” were leaving for Edmonton and the Klondike, he decided to

2. <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=SFC18970715.2.114>

3. <http://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH18970720.2.2>

join them. Westover would precede them, though the Wells brothers would take, in turn, the same route as Westover's expedition. The Wells brothers would be glad to escape with their lives.

When it was all over, Sheldon Wells remained on the west coast; he found work in Vancouver, and by 1903 his family came to join him. Forrest Wells, however, came back to West Brome. According to historian Jim Manson, "Forrest... suffer[ed] from poor health for the rest of his life. His premature death [in 1934] owes much to his experience in the Klondike."⁴ Forest Wells was the grandfather of Carol and Deanna Draper of Draper Road; his daughter Pearle Owens Wells had married Alva Thomas Draper.

As did Sheldon Wells, Reuben Westover stayed on the west coast after his Klondike expedition, settling eventually in Everett, Washington, where he died 10 August 1964. The four documents he left us are the basis of *Reuben Westover Heads for the Klondike* (p. 10).

Alva Laraway, Charles Ruitter and Henry Prentice were three of Reuben's co-adventurers from the Sutton area. Alva Laraway was born in 1822. Not only did he prospect in California's original 1849 strike, he became one of the renowned Vigilance Committee created to keep law and order in San Francisco during this period. Family members say he sought gold in Chile, too, perhaps in the Tierra del Fuego gold rush beginning in 1883.⁵ After the 1898 expedition, Laraway came back to Brome County; he was enumerated in the 1891 Census as living in East Farnham.

By virtue of Laraway's previous gold-rush experience he was made leader of Westover's group in 1898. Westover believed Laraway to be 72 that year; perhaps Laraway intentionally obfuscated his true age of 76.

4. Public Lecture, *The Wells Brothers and the Klondike Gold Rush*, Brome County Historical Society Conferences, Knowlton, QC, 12 January 2013.

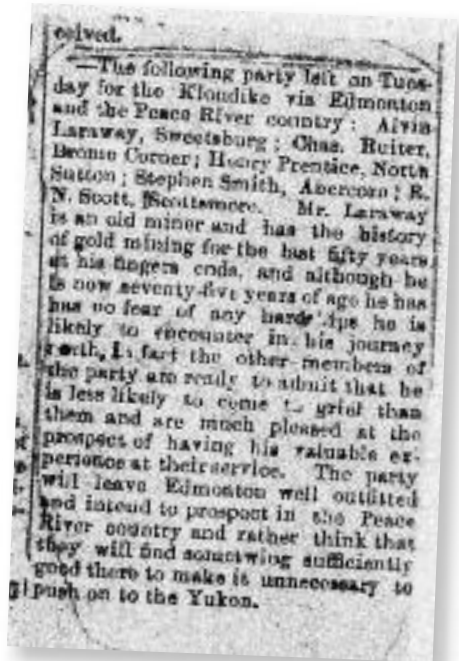
5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tierra_del_Fuego_gold_rush

After the Klondike expedition—his final gold rush—Laraway died in 1916, at age 95. Some of his descendants still live in or near Sutton, and in Vermont.

Beverley Laraway McCuin, his great-granddaughter, believes that Alva did not marry until he was about 40⁶, when he married Susanna Murray; they had a son, Alva (1871–1901), who in turn married Cora Wells (b. 1874). Cora's family were farmers, their ancestor Richard Wells (1767–1846) having received a land grant in the early 1800s. Perhaps the Laraways knew the Wells quite well by the 1890s.

The Census of 1891 shows Henry Prentice as a resident of North Sutton, and Charlie Ruitter as a resident of West Brome. A press clipping from 1898 identifies two additional members of the expedition, which the 1891 Census confirms as locals: Stephen Smith, living in Abercorn, and Richard. N. Scott, living on Scottsmore Rd. in Dunham.

Did the Wells brothers meet Reuben Westover's party on the way to the Klondike? No one knows; there were hundreds of other groups travelling this same route at this time. One would think that Reuben would have mentioned them in his memoirs had they met.



A local newspaper announces the departure of some of Reuben Westover's companions.

6. Author's telephone conversation with McCuin, August 2014.

Edmonton and Athabasca Landing

Newsman and author Pierre Berton estimates that about 100,000 men set out by various routes to Dawson City, the junction of the Klondike River with the Yukon River. But only 30–40,000 ever reached Dawson, and only about 4,000 ever found any gold at all.⁷

Many went overland directly from Edmonton, but the “[t]he all Canadian water route” to Dawson—Edmonton / Athabasca Landing / Mackenzie River—was inaugurated in 1897, when a Hudson’s Bay Co. boat-captain decided to quit and instead guide ten prospectors to Dawson City by the Mackenzie River route. It was another way of avoiding the traditional route from Skagway on the Pacific coast; from the Edmonton area, it was promoted to be about half the distance.⁸

While it transformed Athabasca Landing—about 100 miles north of Edmonton—from a small Hudson’s Bay Co. Post into a settlement of some renown, it was, in the end, the most difficult route to Dawson. Starting from Athabasca Landing, “... 775 prospectors attempted the 2000 mile trek northward... [but] at least 35 perished along the way (mainly from drowning or scurvy), perhaps 160 eventually reached Dawson (mainly in 1899), and all the rest were turned back or were rescued by relief expeditions.”⁸

Edmonton had, of course, advertised itself as an excellent gateway of the cross-country route to the Klondike, the city wishing to attract settlers to the frontier region; indeed, it may have tripled its population by the end of the gold rush because many prospectors never went further than Edmonton or Athabasca Landing. Even the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta admitted, “The overland route

7. Pierre Berton, *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush, 1896-1899*, 1958, 1972, p. 396.

8. http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/200/301/ic/can_digital_collections/athabasca/html/klondike/index.htm

from Edmonton was an unwise choice and it led to more tragedies than fortunes.”⁹

Reuben Westover reached this same conclusion after his several months of misery on the river-route from Edmonton. In his memoirs he observed the following:

The merchants of Edmonton and other boosters of the gold rush had put out maps and pamphlets telling us we could get to the Klondike country in six weeks, either by water route or by traveling overland. It has been estimated that four or five thousand men tried one way or the other. Most of them turned back from different points along the way, many of them lost their lives from accidents or sickness or plain starvation and only a handful ever got to Dawson or Alaska or ever found any gold to speak of. A man named Taylor¹⁰ had been hired by the Edmonton boosters to go through and map out a trail for the overland travellers but he never got very far and following the rivers turned out to be the best way. ●

Source Material

- Berton, Pierre. *Klondike: The Last Great Gold Rush*, 1896-1899. See n. 7
- Blower, James. 1971. *Gold Rush 1894-1907, A Pictorial History*. See n. 9
- Canadian Census, 1831-1901.
- *Collins World Atlas*, concise ed., 2002. Harper Collins.
- Draper Family Archives.
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- Manson, Jim. See n. 4
- Genealogical websites, various.
- www.collectionscanada.gc.ca
- www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/eco_reserve/portagebru_er.html
- www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca

9. Lieutenant Governor (1966-74) Grant MacEwan, from the Forward to *Gold Rush, 1894-1907, A Pictorial History*, James Blower, 1971.

10. Pierre Berton (see n. 8) also mentions Taylor at *Klondike*, p. 236. "... Taylor had been engaged by the Edmonton merchants for fifteen hundred dollars to blaze a route through to the Pelly River[; he] covered six hundred and fifty miles to Fort Nelson before he gave up."



Reuben Westover Heads for the Klondike

Reuben Westover Family Archives

Reuben Westover after he settled in Everett, WA.

A Memoir of the Gold Rush

By **Lynette Enevoldsen**

Many thanks to Neil Westover of Washington State—Reuben Westover’s grandson—for use of Reuben Westover’s memoirs and documents.

In 1897, news that prospectors were bringing bags of gold dust out of the Klondike sped around the world. The next year, Reuben Westover joined friends from Sutton, and they set out from Edmonton to get their share. But would they survive the rapids, the isolation, and the cold? Reuben’s memoir let’s us travel along.

Reuben Martin Westover had a sense of adventure, together with survival skills that would impress most of us today. He was born in July 1874, *on a farm at Sutton Junction, Quebec*. His father, Stephen Westover, farmed the 175 acres awarded in 1802 to Reuben’s great-grandfather, Moses Westover. Reuben’s mother, Eliza Martin, was a schoolteacher. In 1890 his father died, and at sixteen years of age Reuben took responsibility for the farm, and helped bring up his four sisters and the elder brother who had lost an arm.

Note to reader: All terms and quotations rendered in Italics are from the Westover documents; nothing else is rendered in Italics.

Reuben recalls that in 1896, *[s]ometime after my 21st birthday we sold the farm and I headed out west.* He found a job working on a ranch in South Dakota in 1897, the year when gold-laden prospectors had made headlines in San Francisco and Seattle. He writes that early in 1898, *I heard that a bunch of fellows from back home were getting ready to go to Edmonton to start out for the Klondike, and I arranged to meet them there.* The rendezvous in Edmonton occurred on 28 March 1898.

At Edmonton, the group camped for five nights on the vacant prairie beside the small, wooden Hudson's Bay Co. Store, where they bought their supplies. Reuben names three of his companions.

There were six of them besides myself, including ... Henry Prentiss, Frank Hoffman ... and Old Man Laraway who was 72 years old. He had been in the California gold rush in '49 and '50, and in several others before and after that, and we took him for what he knew. He was a lot of help in deciding what to take and how to pack it. He had us make waterproof canvas sacks for the food or anything that water would spoil. And we were better off than many of the other fellows' parties. We started off with about five tons of stuff including food, clothing, tools, guns, shells and so forth. Also 100 lb. of extra canvas[,] which we thought we could use for water piping when we started mining for gold.

Edmonton to Fort McMurray

Grand Rapids to Big Cascade,
March 28–May 30,

For the first leg of their journey, they hired two teams to transport their provisions the 100 miles to the Athabasca River¹. It took them four days. A small sawmill stood by the river. In 1969 Reuben Westover repeated

1. 1 mile = 1,6 km



The All Canadian water route from Edmonton.

this trip by car and said it took only two hours. The site of the sawmill was by then part of the city of Athabasca.

By April 6, the group had set to building a 34-foot² scow, as well as a skiff to be pulled behind it. They cut trees and hauled them to the saw mill, and by May 3 the boats were built, together with four, 17-foot oars. They were ready to leave.

The river offered some challenges. Once they went 75 miles down river in one day. But usually there were sandbars and rapids, and sheer strength was the only way to free and maneuver the boat. When they were stuck on a rock or a sandbar, *I jumped into the river and lifted up on the stern, enough to get her floating again.* Sometimes they helped another boat in trouble; there seems to have been a lot of coopération with other adventurers. Soon they passed Pelican Rapids, and found that abundant suckers (a bottom-feeding, freshwater fish) offered them sustenance, though they were boney. They took it in turns to be awake and on watch at night.

A bigger challenge faced them on May 10th. *The Athabasca [River] falls 240 feet in 12 miles at Grand Rapids,”* wrote Reuben. *There is an island about a half mile long in the middle of the channel, and the Hudson Bay[s] Company had built a tram on it. We unloaded our boat and took it across the island on the tram and carried our stuff past the worst of the rapids.* Reuben got his first taste of carrying a heavy load during this portage. *This was our first packing job and Henry Prentiss strapped a hundred-pound sack of flour on his back the first thing. I took 50 lb. and got along faster, but later I got used to it and could pack 150 lb.² at a time.*

Before they tackled the rapids below this point, they had to tackle a different kind of problem: cooties! But their solution worked: *[W]e got rid of them by boiling our clothes every night for three or four days.”*

2. 1 foot = 0,3 m; 1 lb = 0,45 kg

They spent a few days putting their supplies in order, and waiting for a guide who could steer them through the remaining six or seven rapids. In the end, they combined their efforts with five other boats waiting to go downstream. The guide picked four strong rowers—one being Reuben—and took through each boat in turn. Reuben went through the rapids six times, walking back upstream five times.

Ernest Brown Collection. Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta.



From Edmonton the prospectors travelled northward to Athabaska Landing, which was the starting point for the river travel to the gold fields. This photo shows Athabaska Landing, 1897.

It was May 26 when they reached Big Cascade. Here the boats had to be unloaded, let down on ropes, and then reloaded. Another crew's boat was damaged when a small tree it was attached to gave way; nobody drowned. A few days later, after navigating 11 more rapids and two cascades, Reuben's team arrived at Fort McMurray, 250 miles (400 km) from their put-in.



Ernest Brown Collection. Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta.

Fort Chipewyan, on Athabaska Lake, saw many a Klondiker's craft pass by on its journey into the Slave River. The Fort, owned and operated by the Hudson's Bay Company, was one of the largest and most important stopping points for fur traders and prospectors alike, as supplies could always be replenished from the Bay's storehouses.

Fort McMurray to Fort Simpson

Lake Athabasca–Fort Chipewyan–Slave River–Fort Smith–
Fort Resolution–Great Slave Lake
May 30–June 30.

The next month would provide new challenges and experiences: ice, dogs, water flowing upstream, searching for salt, and an unfortunate death. They started with a few good days, sailing down the Athabasca River in calm waters for about 200 miles and reaching Lake Athabasca by June 2nd. Entering the lake, however, they lost the main channel and *got into shallow water where there was solid ice to the bottom, and only about a foot of water on top. We had to take the little boat across first, wade back and forth, to pack our five tons of stuff over to it. When*



Just as the fur traders were forced to portage the countless numbers of rapids on the northern rivers, so did the miners. This photograph shows the last portage on the Slave River.

the scow was light enough to pull[,] we took it around into the main body of the lake and loaded everything from the little boat back in.

The next day they reached Fort Chipewyan on the west side of the lake, and saw the *Indians* who came to trade there. The *Indians* had dogs, *fierce looking dogs [that] were so hungry that they swam out to our boat during the night and stole slabs of bacon and other stuff, and scattered our cooking dishes all over the place.* The *Indian squaws* sat by and picked lice out of each other's hair. There were thousands of geese on the lake, though unfortunately not nearly enough to shoot and contribute fresh fowl to their diet.

From Ft Chipewyan they followed the Slave River down toward Fort Smith and the Great Slave Lake. *We started down the Slave River on June 6th. About 26 miles below the lake ... where the Peace River flows into the Slave Lake we found ourselves rowing against the current and could not understand at first. It seems that for about three weeks*

every spring this stretch of river flows upstream until it brings up the level of the lake. This is something I have never seen, and probably few people know about. Looking at the map one can see that the Peace River drains a huge area, and must contribute a huge amount of melt water to the Athabasca in spring and early summer.

Below Fort Smith, the Salt River joins the Athabasca from the east. Reuben Westover and Frank Hoffmann took the skiff and explored up the Salt River. *We came to a place where a salt spring flowed out of the hill and everything was white from the salt left at high water ... We were surprised to see the salt water full of big fish. We travelled two days and a night without sleeping[,] except for the time it took us to shovel up four or five hundred pounds of salt[,] and got back about 7 o'clock in the evening of June 16th.*

The group reached Great Slave Lake, about 600 miles north of Edmonton as the crow flies. They sailed west across its southern shore, fighting heavy winds, large waves, and troubling shallows. Finally they were descending on the great Mackenzie River, which flows west out of the lake before turning north to the Arctic Ocean. Here they raised a sail in calmer waters. Their plan was to reach the Liard River, and follow its valley upstream into the wilderness of the Rockies toward the Yukon.

On June 30th we reached Fort Simpson on the Mackenzie, at the mouth of the Liard River. The Hudson's Bay Co. had a store there. But a terrible thing happened. *[E]veryone tied up their boat and climbed up the banks to the store. The cook belonging to one crew stayed behind to finish something, and when he was ready to come ashore he jumped into the water with his rubber boots on. He slipped and fell in some way, and his boots which were full of air came to the top and pulled him down and he drowned. We never used our rubber boots, even when wading in icy water up to our knees. They were kept mainly for mining work but it was a long time before we did any of that.*



The Hudson's Bay Company's Fort Resolution was built on the shores of Great Slave Lake and served, like Fort Chipewyan, as a supply depot and resting point for the miners and trappers.

Up the Terrible Liard River

Fort Simpson to Brulé Portage,
early July–October 1898.

On July 2nd Reuben's group started up *the terrible Liard*. For the first time since leaving Edmonton, they would be travelling upstream. In the first six days they struggled upstream only 40 miles, including eight miles of rapids. In the first document of Reuben's memoir he describes in detail how they managed to traverse Devil's Gorge, one of several canyons that the Liard River rushes through: *[W]e had to pull our boat through Devil's Gorge, after having unloaded it and packed our goods for four miles across a 2000 foot mountain.*

In the region called Hell's Gate we passed through six canyons within six miles and at times we had to crawl along the face of the cliffs

with harnesses across our shoulders and ropes attached to the boats fore and aft to keep them straight and pull them through the swift water.

Reuben almost drowned slogging up the Liard River. *On one such occasion when I was the last man on the rope, the men ahead suddenly took up the slack and the rope jumped high above my head. I was left to flounder the hundred feet or more to shore. It was getting dark and in the midst of the rushing water, I became dizzy ... But after a few moments of sheer panic, I managed to reach shore and soon overtook the others who were greatly relieved to see me still alive. Needless to say, their relief was nothing to my own!*

It took them nearly two weeks to reach the Nahanni River, just 120 miles southwest of Fort Simpson. (See map p. 13) A month later they reached the confluence of the Nelson River. *At the Nelson River[,] August 9th[,] we met a party which had come overland from Edmonton. They had started out with horses but they had all died or broken their legs trying to travel over the muskeg and log jams and through the dense timber in some places and then the men had decided to build a boat and try our method of travel.*

Had Reuben's group had GPS they would have known they were about 600 miles from both Edmonton and Dawson City, the midpoint of the journey as the crow flies. They had left Edmonton on March 28th. It was now mid-August.

Above the Nelson River confluence, the Liard makes a turn toward the northwest and the Yukon. *[I]t was so hard and so dangerous that for a hundred mile stretch ... you could not hire an Indian to go on the river ... [T]he Hudson's Bay Company avoided this part of the river ... and ran only one boat as far as the Devil's Gate ... [W]e had gone through the terrible ordeal at Devil's Portage, and taken our boats through the Devil's Gorge which people still say, no-one has ever done.*



Along their way, Laraway and his companions faced many risky challenges.

They reached Brulé Portage in October. Ice was forming on the rivers, and they needed to build a shelter to winter-over. *We burned our boats and built a shack ... [T]here were about forty men there for some weeks.* Thousands of men like Reuben and his companions had no other means of escaping the terrible winter cold of the northern Rockies.



Public Archives of Canada

During the gold rush era the Hudson's Bay Company still maintained a supply store within the confines of Fort Edmonton, in conjunction with their general store on Edmonton's Main Street. This photograph shows Fort Edmonton as it appeared in 1896.

Winter 1898-99

Brulé Portage and the Coal River

Reuben spent the winter with his friend, Tom Anderson. *[W]hen winter came down and it became too cold to travel, my party had built themselves a snug shack at Brulé Portage on the Liard River and settled down to wait out the weather. Four of us, hoping to spend the time more profitably, had decided to go trapping for whatever food or fur we might find.*

Travelling on ice and pulling our supplies on home-made sleds, we proceeded about 75 miles up the Coal River where we built a small log shelter, just large enough for bunks on opposite sides and a huge fire in the middle. Two of the men soon returned downstream to the original camp, but Tom Anderson and I agreed to stay for at least a few weeks.

We finally decided to use the shack for a week-end meeting place and to go our separate ways during the week and see who had the best luck.

Once, when Reuben was far from the shack, there was a cold spell, and he had only a canvas tarp spread over some poles to warm himself. He made a fire underneath and turned frequently, but sparks landed on his knee and burned through his heavy clothing. The next morning he forced himself to keep going until he reached the shack. When he stopped to rest, he started to feel numb. He learned later that the temperature had gone as low as -76°F . (-60° Celsius).

Tom and I were surely glad to see each other that time, and thankful for the cozy shack we had built so carefully. We had first laid logs to a height of about three feet to form an 8-foot square and had put on half the roof. Then we dug down about three feet into the ground inside the logs, throwing the dirt up onto the half roof as we worked. After finishing the rest of the roof of poles chinked with moss, we distributed the dirt over the whole, leaving only a square hole in the centre for a chimney.

Inside, we left a mound of dirt in the middle of our little room on which to build our fire of 3ft. logs and put up a railing around it of longer poles ... We could sit on our bunks and put our feet on this railing and keep warm, but before going to sleep we threw the fire outside, getting rid of the smoke and sparks which might fly, and put sacks over the chimney hole to keep out the cold air. How young and strong we were to be able to endure this loneliness and hardship and to enjoy at least part of it!

Reuben's tools and food supply were minimal: *Besides the ball of twine and a good sharp knife, I carried along an ax, a frying pan, a can for making tea, a tin plate and eating utensils, my gun and some shells. I took no blankets or bed-rolls but only an eight-foot square of*

canvas to sleep on and to wrap my other equipment in. Before long our rations were so low that we had only flour and tea to take with us and I used to bake what we called bannocks, sometimes only one for each meal.

I would pour water from melted snow into the top of my sack of flour, stir it around into a ball, then flatten it out to bake in the frying pan leaned up before the fire. I got into the habit of baking three of these cakes in the evening as soon as I got a good fire going. I would eat one for my supper[, and] saving one for breakfast and the other for my mid-day snack, often carrying it inside my clothing to keep it from freezing.

They carried no traps but occasionally feasted on a rabbit or fool-hen which they caught or shot. Their Christmas dinner was special. I shall never forget our Christmas dinner which consisted of a porcupine which Tom had shot and roasted. After our diet of tea and bannocks it tasted fine.

They struggled through three entire months this way. The rest of their party were sure they had perished, and in February had begun up the Liard River without them; Reuben and Tom surprised them when they caught up.

Reuben saw a big change in Old Man Laraway: [H]e had become quite weak and lame from scurvy by the time we got back and for some forty or fifty miles we took turns hauling him up the river. We left him at Liard Post when we reached the mouth of the Dease River, where he joined a number of other invalids, some who were, like him, suffering from scurvy, some with frostbitten feet[,] and others nearly dead from lack of food. Here they were able to receive some medical care and, most important, a greater variety of food ... [M]ost of them lived to come back home by way of the Hudson's Bay's relief boats.

Spring to Autumn, 1899

Looking for gold in the Cassiar Mountains, and getting out.

Reuben and his companions travelled on ice until reaching Laketon, in April, where they could buy supplies. On April 18th, Reuben bought a British Columbia Miner's certificate, valid for one year. He spent a couple of months prospecting the Dease River—where gold had been found during the Cassiar Gold Rush—and in Poor Man's Gulch, ... *[where] I found some gold, but not enough to make it worthwhile to stay there.* After that he lived in *wild Cassiar country* where caribou provided fresh meat, which was most welcome. His companions were Bat O'Brien, old man Doyle, and Archie McCormack, Doyle's nephew.

Finally, after exploring the Nisutlin River in July and August, they'd had enough. Facing another winter in the wilderness was too much, so they decided to give up the whole adventure and go home. Their plan was to head for the coast at Wrangell, which was U.S. Territory, what is now the State of Alaska. They built a boat in three days and drifted down-river to Teslin Lake. On August 19th they made for Telegraph Creek on the Stikine River carrying 90-lb. loads. Reuben counted over 65 dead horses as they walked down the Teslin Trail, one of the routes that would-be prospectors commonly used. In 10 days they covered 160 miles.

About three days from Telegraph Creek they ran out of food. Reuben and Bat offered to go ahead and return with supplies, but Doyle wanted them to stay together, to hunt instead. Luckily they found a cache of food and, somehow knowing it had been there for at least a year, and knowing it was permitted in BC—if you were desperate—to take abandoned food, they took the quantity of flour they needed.

They reached Telegraph Creek on Sept 1st and were given rations enough to survive until Glenora, further down river. From there, the last boat of the season would take them out to the coast. (Warned by the

RCMP that miners were starving and injured, the Canadian government had guaranteed payment of food and transportation to merchants who supplied them.) The boat was a regular steamer that carried in supplies to the Hudson's Bay Co., and it took on 100 men who had given up searching for gold. Meals on board were free, and Reuben and the others helped to load the boat. They were taken to Wrangell, on the coast, but

their meal tickets were good to Vancouver or Seattle, so Reuben stayed on.

Reuben reached Port Townsend, WA, on September 14, 1899. He fell in love with the climate of the western United States and eventually settled across Puget Sound, in Everett, WA, the place his children and grandchildren would call home. His descendants still live there, and have been kind enough to share with us Reuben's memoir of his adventures. ●



Reuben Westover Family Archives

Reuben Westover at the end of his life.

Source Material

Reuben Westover's Memoirs, four documents.

The first of these—*My goodness Grandpa! Weren't you ever just scared to death?*—contains Westover's memories of the winter of 1898–99, the most frightening part of his Klondike journey.

A second document was typewritten and then orally recorded by Westover in January 1955; that recording now resides on a compact disk. (Three additional paragraphs were, at some time, added to the document, though these are not read by Reuben on the recording.) This second document gives details of his journey to the Klondike.

A third document is a small piece of paper on which he noted the names of some of his companions. A fourth recounts his early life on the farm. (There is some variation in the spelling of proper names throughout.)

Photos and captions on p. 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, are from James Blower, *Gold Rush 1894-1897, A Pictorial History*, 1971.