

# RESEARCH BULLETIN

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The 1981 Field Season of Archaeological Research at the Klondike National Historic Sites, Dawson City, Yukon

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This past field season of archaeology has proven to be the most successful since the moratorium on archaeological research at the Klondike National Historic Sites (K.N.H.S.) in 1979. The suspension effectively put the Dawson City Archaeology Project one year out of synchronization with the Sites' development activities. As such, the pacing and scheduling of archaeological research at the K.N.H.S. has had to suffer somewhat in terms of its effectiveness in collecting and documenting valuable archaeological resources prior to development. With the loss of the lead time, archaeological investigations, have had to be scheduled for those sites which had undergone development during the period of archaeological stasis. At the same time, investigations must be scheduled for those sites currently undergoing development.

To meet the demands of this work load, the 1981 season of archaeological research has had to investigate, on an average, one historic site every two weeks. As such, the level of archaeological involvement at each site has had to be kept to a minimum; depending for the most part on small test excavations to sample and salvage as much data as possible within the short and hurried time frames available. Yet the 1981 program of archaeology has still been able to collect and document important thematic and service oriented information pertinent to the development and commemoration of historic Dawson City.



Over a twelve week field season, with a field crew of four persons supported by a laboratory staff of two, six sites were archaeologically investigated within Dawson City. These sites included: Lowe's Mortuary, the N.W.M.P. Fort Herchmer Hospital cum Jail, the Northern Commercial Company Warehouse, J.A. West's (Third Avenue) Machine Shop, St. Andrew's Presbyterian Manse and the N.W.M.P. Fort Herchmer Stable (Fig. 1). Pending detailed analysis of the recovered artifacts and many of the features, the following report briefly describes those sites investigated in terms of their history, the work undertaken and significant discoveries.

### Lowe's Mortuary (Fig. 2)

As late as the 1980 field season, it was believed that this building had only undergone two major historic occupations. The first of these, dating from ca. 1901 to 1910, was a ladies furnishings store, run by a Mrs. Mary Anderson. This was followed by the mortuary and embalming business; first run by Frank Lowe from 1910 to 1919; then by Elvin J. Edwards and Herbert Winaut, from 1920 to ca. 1935; and then by Alec Wark, during the 1940s. During these occupations it also appeared as though some part of the structure was utilized as a residence. However, prior to the 1981 field season, new historic evidence emerged which indicated that the pre-1901 uses of the building may have been as a blacksmith shop and, later as an outfitter's supply store (David Bowse, 1981: pers. comm.).

In 1980, (Ross, 1980: 4-5), test excavations at this site attempted to document the sub-surface features associated with the five evident structural components of the building. As well, it was hoped that evidence of each of the two previously known occupations would be uncovered. In pursuit of these objectives, a number of artifactual anomalies were observed. These artifacts including scrap metal pieces, clinkers and horseshoes, helped support the claim for an earlier blacksmith shop occupation.

Since the building was slated for major foundation work in this summer past, it was decided that archaeological investigations would be reconvened at the site to search for and salvage information and artifacts pertaining to this earliest historic occupation. In this regard, the excavations were highly successful in that the rough hewn timber floor of the blacksmith shop, the floor support beams, the anvil post and many blacksmith shop related artifacts were discovered. All finds related to the blacksmith shop activity were found in and immediately adjacent to the original, single room log cabin component of the building.

Excavations were also conducted in two of the back annexes, in the vicinity of an originally exterior door. These excavations support the 1980 hypothesis that artifact distribution across the site illustrates the sequence of construction and stabilization. In this respect, the blacksmithing activity can more or less be isolated from the dress shop activity, from the residential activity, and, to a lesser extent, from the mortuary activity. Likely to its longer term of occupancy, the mortuary activity is indeed the most pervasive of all the historic occupations at this site.

The N.W.M.P. Fort Herchmer Hospital cum Jail (Fig. 3)

This structure was built in 1898 as a component of the North West Mounted Police post of fort Herchmer in the south end of town. It was first used as the detachment hospital. The building underwent a number of exterior and interior alterations over the next decade, until the structure was turned into the post's jail in 1910.

First tested in 1978 (Burley and Ross, 1979a: 48-52), in 1980 it was decided to further explore the exterior areas along the south wall of the structure so as to ascertain and document the building's foundations (Ross, 1980: 3). Initially scheduled for stabilization in 1981, it was again decided to return to the site and concentrate investigations in interior areas of the building. Therefore the majority of excavation units were oriented such that they transected the width of the main log portion of the building, conforming to the major interior wall separating the north cell block from the south block. Other units were placed inside the east (rear) washroom at the south/east corner and the exterior south/west corner of the west (front) guardroom.

These excavations substantiated the 1980 observation that the overall structure was composed of three different foundation systems: 1) small square posts on board mud sills for the east addition, 2) ground surface support beams for the main portion, and 3) round log posts for the west addition. This latter system showed evidence of extensive maintenance and repair. Remains of the plumbing system for the washroom were discovered in the east addition. In the main portion of the building, evidence of three separate floor systems was noted.

For the most part, these excavations also verified the previous season's observation concerning the dearth of artifacts directly associated with either of the structure's two historic uses. The exception to this situation came from two units excavated at the lip of a cellar furnace room. This cellar was surrounded by a

rough stone, dry masonry wall, with "pointing" evident on its outer surface. In what would have been a "dead air" or crawl space between the original floor system and the original ground surface (represented by the top of the cellar wall), shards were retrieved from a number of large glass chemical/medicine bottles. With the cellar and furnace having been installed under the building in 1902 (Stuart, 1981: 22), these artifacts may be indicative of the hospital activity at the site.

The Northern Commercial Company Warehouse (Fig. 4)

One of four original Alaska Commercial Company warehouses, the frame and rough lumber siding structure was constructed in 1898. It constituted one of two such warehouses still extant. In 1901, the A.C. Co. effected a merger with a number of other commercial companies to become the Northern Commercial Company (Archibald, 1973: 96). While it changed names and ownership periodically, this building has always functioned as a warehouse. A single test unit was excavated at this site in 1977, below a door in the southeast corner of the building (Minni, 1978: 60-62). A wooden feature, reminiscent of a ramp or boardwalk, was revealed in this excavation along with construction materials and hardware artifacts.

In advance of planned foundation work along the west wall of this building, a number of test units were excavated adjacent to it in 1981. The purpose of this work was to investigate and document the existing foundation system prior to its repair. After removing the corrugated tin skirting from the wall, the top of the foundation system was revealed. This system consists of short square timber section posts, toed to the squared horizontal wall sill. Excavations showed that these square posts sat on top of second series of larger, log posts or piles. No length measurements for these second posts/piles were possible due to high permafrost levels. It was also observed that the original ground surface under and immediately surrounding the building had been covered with a densely packed matrix of oakum and sawdust at some point, likely at the time of construction. This matrix was probably laid to serve as insulation between the floor and the ground.

For the most part, artifacts recovered from this site consisted of relatively recent refuse. What construction related artifacts there were, may be associated with the building and maintenance of the structure.

J.A. West's (Third Avenue) Machine Shop (Fig. 5)

By all existing accounts, this building housed a number of varied activities over its history. The earliest uses (1901-1904) appeared to be as a residence, restaurant, rooming house and barber shop. From 1905 to 1929, the use of the building is unclear. It does appear that it continued to serve as a rooming house/residence until ca. 1906. During this period, the neighboring blacksmithing and saddlery businesses may have utilized the building, or at least its main floor, for storage. From 1929 to ca. 1938, J.A. West is believed to have utilized the building as a machine shop.

The adjacent lots, north and south of the machine shop, have been extensively excavated since 1977 (Minni, 1978: 48-60; Burley and Ross, 1979a: 26-36; Ross, 1980: 3-4). For the machine shop proper, only a short test trench had been excavated inside the south room of the rear (west) annex in 1977 (Minni; 1978: 54-55). This trench revealed no features and recovered no artifacts. In an attempt to bring the level of data for this structure up to par with the neighbouring sites, all 1981 excavations at the machine shop were concentrated inside the structure.

A number of  $1m^2$  units were excavated in the main log (front) portion of the building. Artifacts were sparse and located in the top most layer. This was likely due to the early construction of the building and the relatively sound nature of the floor prior to its removal in 1979. Many artifacts, primarily sheet metal pieces, wire, nails, bolts, screws and other metal objects, were likely associated with the machine shop activity. The log post or pile foundation system was recorded, except for the length measurements which were unobtainable due to high frost levels.

The north room of the frame rear addition was extensively excavated. Excavations here revealed two floor systems in an advanced state of decomposition. The sub-floor foundation system was observed to consist of joists on top of ground surface beams. No posts for the annex were found. Artifacts from this room were again few; but did consist of more kitchen/residential material (e.g. ceramics, glass, bones, eggshell, etc.). Taken in relation to the other finds from the other rooms of the building, this room may have housed the kitchen for the restaurant/rooming house activities known to have occurred at the site.

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Manse (Fig. 6)

Built in 1901 as the single example of "Second Empire" architecture in Dawson City, the manse was heralded as one of the most beautiful and costly residences in the

city. Used more or less constantly as the minister's home until the closure of the church in 1932, the manse continued to be used seasonally by voluntary organizations until the late 1940s (Richard Stuart, 1981: pers. comm.). As it was scheduled for rehabilitation and full exterior restoration, archaeology was undertaken at the site to locate landscape features and to document sub-surface structural information. Due to the instability of the structure, all excavations were relegated to exterior areas of the site.

It was observed that the foundation system for the manse was of post and mud sill construction. The crawlspace between the original ground surface and the floor of the manse was enclosed by two layers of siding, consisting of vertical interior boards covered by horizontal exterior boards. Those units clustered around an exterior door in the east rear wall of the manse revealed a number of interesting features. These features included a buried step leading up to the door, a coal chute entering the cellar under the building, and the possible decomposed remains of a boardwalk connecting the manse door to a rear door of the adjacent St. Andre's Presbyterian Church. The remains of saw-dust insulation boxes around the perimeter of the manse were also uncovered underneath a more contemporary rose garden.

All artifacts recovered from this site were of a distinct residential/personal nature. An interesting distribution pattern was observed whereby artifact density increased as excavations progressed from the front of the structure to the yard area immediately adjacent to the rear door. Also, many artifacts from around the step and chute features (including an 1894 Copeland ceramic plate) were found intact.

#### The N.W.M.P. Fort Herchmer Stable (Fig. 7)

The 32 stall stable was built and outfitted in 1903 to replace the original, smaller log stable in Fort Herchmer. This new frame structure also housed a cow stable at one end and an artificer's room to the north (Bush, 1972: 49-54). Stabilization of the extant structure has been slated for the 1982/83 fiscal year. It was therefore felt that it would be opportune to archaeologically collect and document the site in advance of any disturbance related to this construction program.

Three cursory test units were opened up at the west exterior limits of the stable in 1978 (Burley and Ross, 1979a: 50-51). Two of these units revealed a wooden ramp/boardwalk feature. This find suggested that valuable activity and/or structural information associated with the stable still existed in the immedi-

ately surrounding yard areas. This suggestion, coupled with logistical problems of excavating interior areas perpetually submerged under standing water, influenced the decision to locate all excavation units in adjacent yard areas.

A number of discrepancies between the original blueprints for the stable (Bush, 1972: 53) and the extant structure were noted during the process of orienting the excavation grid to the extant recorders' site plan. In this regard, it was noted that approximately one quarter of the originally planned structure, including the entire cow stables, was missing. The extant recorders had also documented extensive repairs to the east wall of the extant building. It was conjectured therefore that the non-extant portion of the stable could likely have extended out into the immediate east yard area. Consequently, all archaeological activity at the site was concentrated in excavating an east/west trench in line with the extant north wall of the stable and extending out from the building into the yard area.

This trench did indeed prove successful in locating the remains of the non-extant portion of the stable. The remains of the north wall were exposed and successfully followed to the original north/east corner of the building. As well, the location of the original side (north) doorway leading into the stables was pinpointed; the entrance ramp for this door was uncovered; evidence for the interior partition separating the cow stables from the horse stables was found; and, evidence of one of the stalls for the cow stables was revealed. By scrutinizing the soil stratigraphy in the trench, it also appeared that the sequence for demolishing this portion of the stables could be ascertained. In this respect, this portion appeared to have been dismantled in two stages. First the cow stables were torn down; and, then, a section of the horse stables was removed, resulting in the present dimensions for the structure.

### Conclusions

In trying to contend with the loss of its lead time and the established stabilization program, the K.N.H.S. Archaeology Project has been confronted with a very heavy work load. This work load has been steadily increasing each year since 1980, with an anticipated load of ten potential sites to be archaeologically investigated in the upcoming 1982 field season. In endeavoring to effectively implement archaeological research, the 1981 project has had to content itself with limited testing and salvage excavations at six sites within Dawson City. This program has, nevertheless, provided valuable support services for those sections and

departments actively involved in the development of the K.N.H.S. While the work load for and level of involvement of archaeology at the K.N.H.S. is not envisioned as improving over the next four years; continued support of this research will ensure archaeology's contribution to the synthesis of material and information relevant to the complete and accurate commemoration, protection, interpretation, development and presentation of the heritage resources of the Klondike National Historic Sites.

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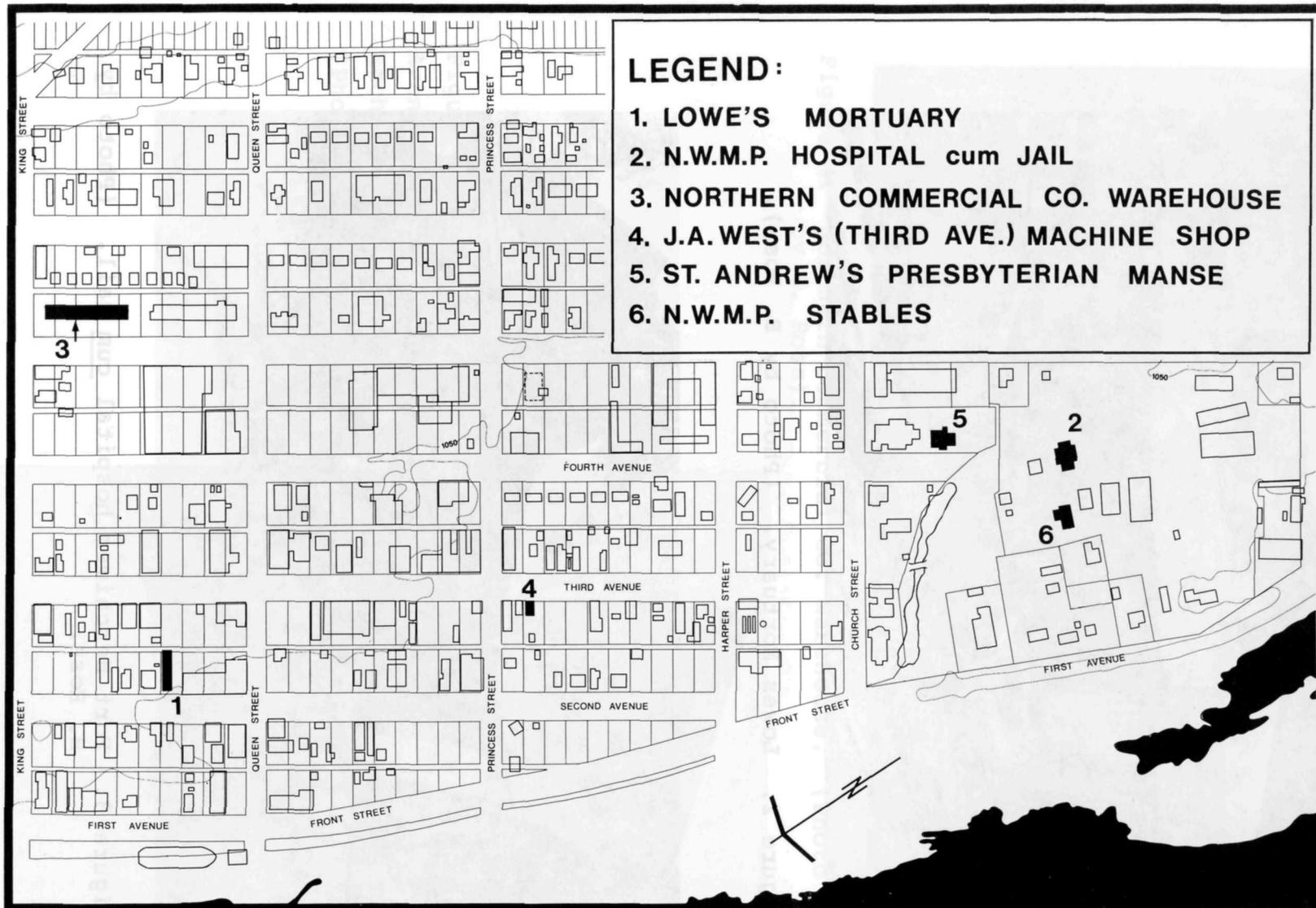


Figure 1. Sites at which archaeological investigations were conducted in 1981. (Drawing by K. Graham-Stevenson).

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Figure 2. Lowes Mortuary. (Photo by B. Ross).



Figure 3. Fort Herchimer hospital cum jail. (Photo by B. Ross).

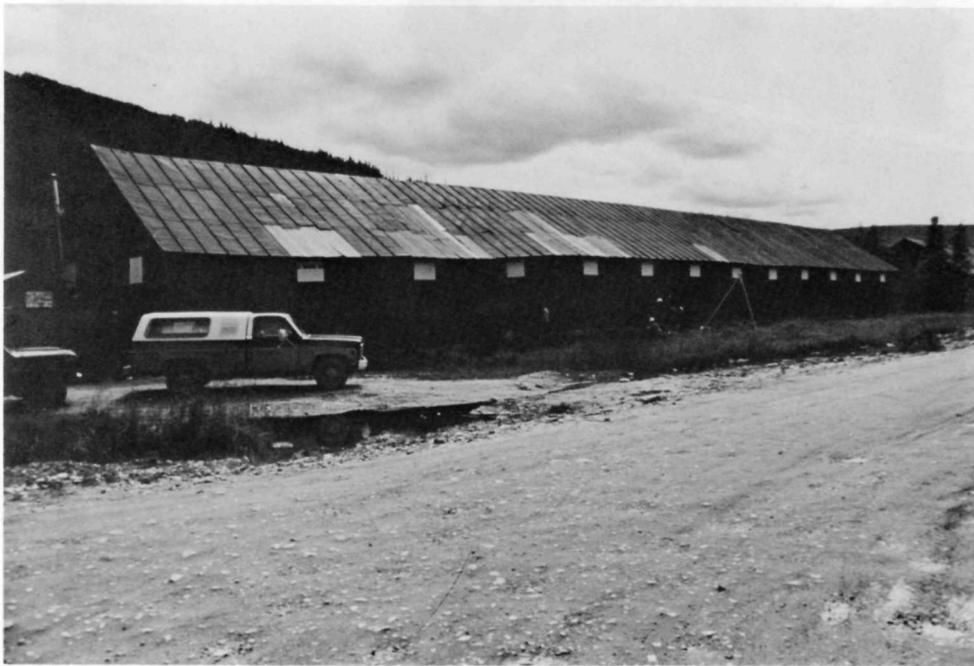


Figure 4. Northern Commercial Co. Warehouse. (Photo by B. Ross).



Figure 5. Third Avenue (West's) Machine Shop. (Photo by B. Ross).



Figure 6. St. Andrew's Presbyterian manse. (Photo by B. Ross).



Figure 7. N.W.M.P. Fort Herchmer stable. (Photo by Sheila Minni).

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