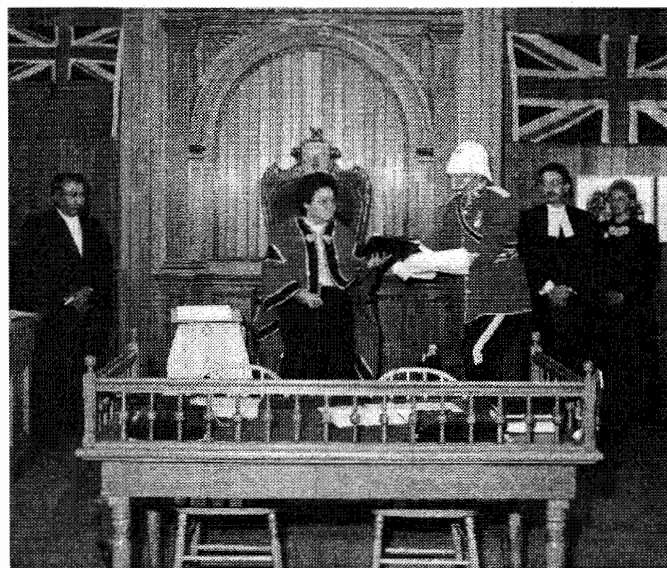

Yukon Celebrates its 100th Anniversary

by Patrick L. Michael

To mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Yukon Territory following the Gold Rush of 1898, the Legislative Assembly travelled to Dawson City and held a one-day special ceremonial sitting in the original legislative chamber used by Territorial Councils from 1901 to 1953. This chamber is located within the "Old Territorial Administration Building" which was designed and built by renowned architect T.W. Fuller in 1901 and now houses the Dawson City Museum.

The Yukon Territory celebrated its one hundredth anniversary on June 13, 1998. Centennial activities were focused on Dawson City, the centre of the Klondike Gold Rush and the capital of the Yukon from 1898 to 1953.

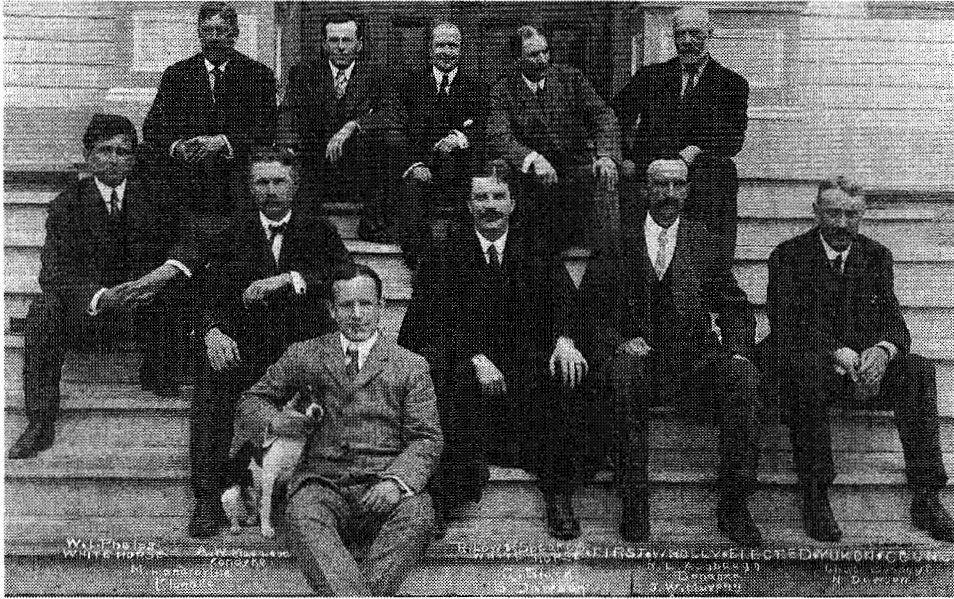
The Speaker, Robert Bruce, arrived at the Administration Building in a horse-drawn carriage. Members of the Assembly, most in period dress, took their places in the Chamber and the sitting opened with the Speaker's parade at 10:00 a.m. The Speaker gave the prayer in his native Gwitchin language and special guests were then introduced. These included former members for the Klondike riding, the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Mayor of Dawson City and consuls general for the United States, Great Britain and Germany. The Chief of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, the First Nation in the Dawson City area, received special greetings as his people had ratified a land claims and self-government agreement the preceding day. This was the seventh such agreement to be reached under the provisions of the Yukon First Nations umbrella final agreement.



Granting assent to the *Yukon Day Act*. From (l-r): Hon. Robert Bruce, Speaker; Mrs. Judy Gingell, Commissioner; Inspector Brian Huddle (Aide-de-Camp); Patrick Michael, Clerk and Missy Follwell, Deputy Clerk.

The House then proceeded with the business of the day which was Bill Number 100 entitled *Yukon Day Act*. The numbering of the bill was purposeful; the fact that it

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The original members of the first wholly elected Council of Yukon. The photo was taken in 1909.

was being considered on the one hundredth day of the First Session of the Twenty-Ninth Legislature was a coincidence. The text of the legislation is as follows:

Recognizing that Yukoners value the history and heritage of this land and its peoples,

That the lives, traditions and cultures of the peoples of Yukon First Nations and of all others who have come to this land deserve honour and respect, and

That the creation of Yukon as a territory within Canada on June 13, 1898, was an historic event meriting recognition on its one hundredth anniversary,

The Commissioner of the Yukon Territory, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly, enacts as follows:

- In 1998 and every year thereafter June 13 shall be recognized as "Yukon Day".
- Yukon Day shall be a day on which the citizens of Yukon are encouraged to reflect on the history and heritage of their land and its peoples and to celebrate the lives, traditions and cultures of all Yukoners past and present.
- This Act comes into force on June 13, 1998.

All-party support for the legislation was demonstrated by having the motions for each of the three readings moved by the Government Leader, Piers McDonald, and seconded by both the Leader of the Official Opposition, John Ostashek, and the Leader of the Third Party, Pat Duncan.

All members spoke during debate on the bill. The history of the Yukon was surveyed in many speeches with personal perspectives offered on the lives, traditions and cultures of both the original peoples and those who took

up residence in more recent times. It was agreed that the discovery of gold on Rabbit Creek by George Carmack, Skookum Jim Mason and Tagish Charlie on August 17, 1896 was a seminal event. The Klondike Gold Rush which followed in 1898 brought some 40,000 newcomers to an area which had a population of about 4,000. The attention of the Canadian Government and the Parliament of Canada was brought to bear on the region and, to aid in the efforts to ensure peace, order and good government, the Yukon was created as a separate political entity through the passage of *The Yukon Territory Act* (assented to on June 13, 1898). During the ensuing years, Yukon affairs have been typified by attention to issues of governance and the pursuit of minerals.

In this light, Members drew attention to the evolution of democratic institutions in the Yukon with particular emphasis on the Legislative Assembly. Assemblies are numbered from the election of the first wholly elective Territorial Council in 1909. Although a representative legislature has been in place for almost 90 years, it is only since 1979 and the initiatives taken by Jake Epp, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, that the Yukon has had responsible government. In that year, Mr. Epp instructed the Commissioner of the Yukon, who from 1898 to 1979 had had an active leadership role in the executive, to restrict activities to that of a head of state in the same manner as is done by lieutenant governors in the provinces. The Government Leader or Premier (as that position is entitled to be called) is now the head of government and the Commissioner receives and accepts the advice of that premier advisor and his or her cabinet on exactly the same basis as is done in any province. The Commissioner's prerogative powers are re-

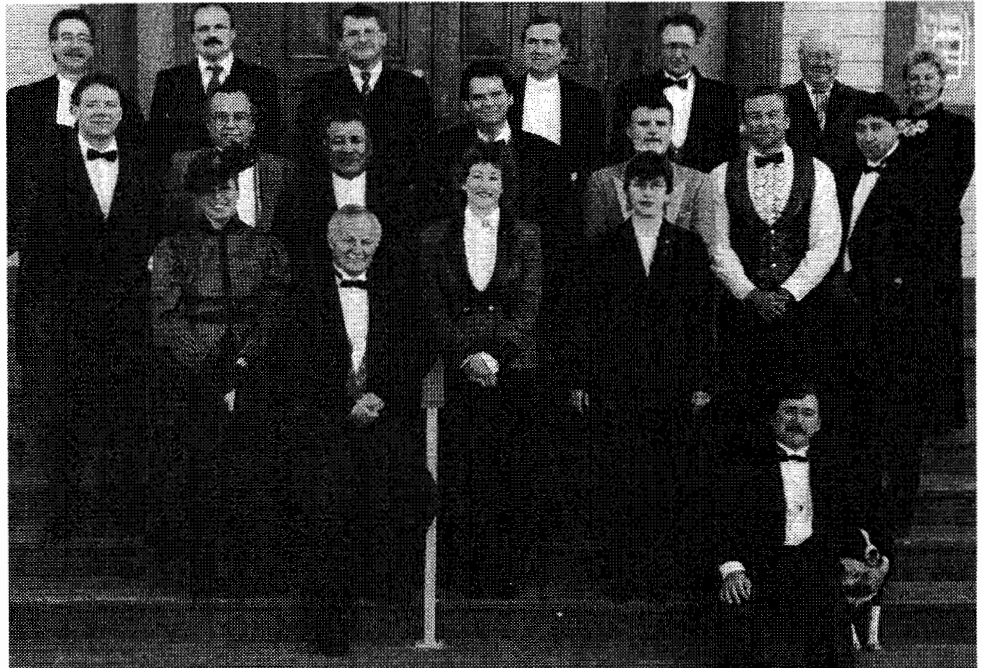
Re-enactment of photo taken in 1909 on the steps of the Old Territorial Administration Building.

Back row: Patrick Michael, Todd Hardy, Piers McDonald, Peter Jenkins, John Ostashek, Jack Cable, Missy Follwell.

Middle row: Doug Livingston, Dave Keenan, Robert Bruce, Gary McRobb, Dennis Fentie, Trevor Harding, Eric Fairclough.

Front row: Sue Edelman, Doug Phillips, Pat Duncan, Lois Moorcroft.

Seated: Dave Sloan and D.D. the dog.



stricted to and exercised in the same fashion as those held by lieutenant governors.

The Yukon had a significant amount of experience with party politics in the early years as they were a regular feature of public life from 1898 to the First World War. Following 1921 and continuing until 1978 only independent members sat in the Assembly. The general election in 1978 marked the return of active participation by political parties in elections. There have been four governments since that time: (1) Yukon Territorial Progressive Conservative Party; 1978-1985 (2) New Democratic Party; 1985-1992 (3) Yukon Party; 1992-1996 (4) New Democratic Party; 1996-present.

Once Bill Number 100 had received third reading and was passed, the Speaker asked that Commissioner Judy Gingell be invited to attend the Chamber to grant assent to the bill. Mrs. Gingell is the first aboriginal person to be Commissioner of the Yukon and, in recognition of her own heritage, came to the Chamber wearing a traditional button blanket made by her mother and other family members. After granting assent to the *Yukon Day Act* she made the following remarks:

The Assembly is to be commended for setting a day aside on which all Yukoners are encouraged to pay tribute to the many different cultures that now call this land "home". We are fortunate to have such diversity in our peoples, from those of the First Nations to those who have come to this land in more recent times.

It is to be desired that we all make the greatest effort to know and understand each other's history, culture and hopes for the future. We must continue to value and celebrate our respective cultural differences, based upon

mutual respect and understanding. For example, the modern Yukon treaties are the constitutional foundation for our mutual respect in this Territory. The more we can come to understanding and sharing, the more success we will have in building and nurturing a society that is healthy in every respect, be it on the economic, social or political level.

Following the adjournment of the sitting Members gathered on the steps of the Administration Building for a group photograph. This was a re-creation of a photograph taken of the First Wholly Elective Council in 1909 in exactly the same spot. A dog was in that earlier photograph and it was felt that authenticity demanded that a dog also be present in 1998. The canine, kindly loaned for the photograph by a local Dawsonite, bore marked similarity to the original dog. Most appropriately, it answered to the name "D.D." which is short for Diamond Driller.

Having concluded the special ceremonial sitting and the events associated with it, many members and their guests stayed on in Dawson City to attend the Commissioner's Tea and the Commissioner's Ball. These annual events, at which the standard regalia is formal period and traditional dress, are highlights in the Yukon's social calendar. To those fortunate enough to be in attendance at this spot on the confluence of the historic Klondike and Yukon Rivers, it was a great treat, under the midnight sun, to be able to offer a toast to their home territory on the conclusion of its one hundredth birthday.