

"A Letter from the Klondike"

Carroll County Times article for 3 May 1998

By Jay A. Graybeal

The discovery of gold on Klondike Creek in the Yukon on August 12, 1896 sparked the "Klondike Stampede" of 1897-8, the second great "gold rush" in the nineteenth century. News of the strike reached the U.S. in June 1897 and within months thousands of Americans left their homes to seek their fortunes in the Klondike. At least one Carroll Countian, T. Charles Thomas, made the journey; an advice letter he wrote to the editors the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper was published in the April 9, 1898 issue of the paper:

"The Klondike

Correspondence of the Democratic Advocate.

SEATTLE, WASH., March 30, 1898

EDITORS ADVOCATE:-Since my arrival in this city I have learned the ways of the wise in regard to the Klondike and Copper River counties. You meet all kinds of people here, and from all parts of the United States, and I might say of the world. There is the man that knows it all just as soon as he gets off the train in Seattle, the man that knows nothing and is too dumb to learn, and the man that knows nothing, but is willing to take advice and to learn what he should know.

The fellow that thinks that he knows it all, is the one who, when he left the East, was a right nice kind of fellow, but upon coming in contact with some Klondiker on the train between here and St. Paul, and listening to his adventures, he cannot be told anything here. The first thing that greets you upon your arrival here is rain, coming down pretty rapidly, for, the first six weeks that I was in this city, we only had two days that it did not rain a drop. The town itself is a right pretty place, but is the hilliest city I think in the world; you have to hold to the seat in front of you going up hill on the street cars to keep from falling out backwards. The streets are kept as clean as is possible, with so much rain to make them muddy.

At the last election, on the 8th of this month, Judge Hurnes, the Republican nominee, was elected mayor. He was elected upon a "wide open" policy, and so declared himself from the stump, and now there are about twenty-five gambling houses. The saloons are open 365 days in the year, and nearly all the stores are open on Sunday; in fact, from the appearance of the town you could not tell that there was such a thing as Sunday, unless you when around to some obscure place, and happened to run upon a church, and then probably you might make a mistake, for there is one very near where I live that has fallen into the hands of a dancing master and is used by him for his school.

I don't say these things to keep any one away from here, but only to show you the difference between this city and our Eastern towns and cities.

All that any one thinks of out here is some scheme or plan to do the other fellow, and naturally that keeps everybody on the hump. I don't like to say it, but there have been eight murders and thirteen suicides here since the first of February. They don't stop at any thing in this beautiful city. One man was robbed here the other day of \$368 in the largest bank in the city, and no one dared to stop the robbers, and as is usual the police were not to be found. These robberies and murders are caused by so many

people coming here with such a small amount of money to go to the Klondike, and after finding out their trouble, get desperate and will do anything.

To go to the Klondike from Baltimore, a man should have at least \$1000, and it would be better to have \$1200. With the latter amount he can go there, and have enough to get back on if he does not strike any thing, after having been there for a year. His fare from Baltimore out here, including his meals on the way, will cost him now in the neighborhood of \$65.00. Upon arriving here he will have to take at least a week to ten days to look around and buy his outfit, and that will cost him \$25 more. Then his fare from here to Dyea or Skagway is \$50. His outfit costs him \$350 to \$400, and to get it through British territory cost him \$50 more. If he goes by the rivers he will have to buy a boat at Lake Linderman, which will cost him \$200. From then on he has no more expense, unless there is an accident or he is taken sick. A man's outfit consists of 1100 pounds of provisions, about 300 pounds of hardware, tents and cooking utensils, a small sized arsenal-shot gun, rifle and pistol-and about 100 pounds of personal clothing, sleeping bag and furs. With these he cannot get over Chilcoot Pass under six weeks, unless he has it taken over by someone of the tramways and cable companies now are in existence there and they have a rate of 15 cents a pound.

A Klondiker's clothing consists of the following: One pair of heavy woolen socks over these a pair of heavy German socks and a pair of boots reaching above the knee, and covering the feet of the boots in another heavy moccasin, very heavy and closely woven underwear, a suit of mackinaw, and outside of all, what is called a slicker, a coat on the inside rubber as pliable as leather, and outside a coat of fur. This coat can be turned either way, it depending upon the weather. On his head a sweater cap with only his eyes showing, and then a fur cap covering that cap. In summer it is quite different, as it is warmer there then in Carroll county on the hottest summer day, and the only thing that is necessary to be worn is a heavy mosquito netting to keep those gentlemen from taking too much liberty with you.

All Marylanders are welcome at Maryland Headquarters, 111 Columbia Street, where Mr. Waters and myself will try and rope you in, and take your stuff over the Pass for you. Five ships arrived here yesterday from Dyea and Copper Run, and upon one was \$75,000 in gold; this is only what is happening now every day. Speaking of Copper Run, I would not advise any one to go there, as there have never yet been a dollar's worth of gold brought out of that river. There is no doubt but that there is gold there, but you cannot get to it on account of the glaciers.

Very truly yours,
T. CHARLES THOMAS"

By 1898 there were 18,000 people in the Klondike area. It is not known if any local men took Mr. Thomas's advice however, it seems likely that both parties would have profited from a mutual arrangement.

Photo caption: [no photo]