

“GATEWAY” TO THE ALASKA-YUKON BORDERLANDS¹:

The White Pass & Yukon Route Railway, the North-West Mounted Police, and the Klondike Gold Rush

SCOTT DUMONCEAUX*

ON 6 FEBRUARY 1899, TWO WEEKS before the White Pass and Yukon Route (WPYR) Railway reached the summit of White Pass and officially began carrying freight to the Klondike goldfields, the company entered its first contract with the North-West Mounted Police (NWMP) – a year-long agreement to transport police freight from Skagway to Bennett City.² The police welcomed the arrival of the WPYR. The Klondike gold rush had attracted some forty thousand gold-seekers to the Alaska-Yukon borderlands. The Yukon transportation system, which brought important commerce to Vancouver, Victoria, and other west coast cities, was a logistical nightmare because of difficult terrain and uncertainty about the location of the border with Alaska. The Mounted Police (also known as the Force), and everyone else, had to either ship supplies by steamer on the Yukon River, a long route not open in winter, or rely on a hodgepodge of independent packers, transportation companies, and their own labour to bring freight over the Chilkoot and White Passes before using all manner of boats, rafts, and steamers for the journey to Dawson City and the goldfields.

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¹ The WPYR slogan is “Gateway to the Yukon.” The name “White Pass & Yukon Route” is shorthand for the White Pass and Yukon Railway Company, Limited, and was used by railway officials to refer to both the railway line and the company that owned it. White Pass & Yukon Route is also the name of the heritage railway that purchased the line in 1988.

² L.H. Gray to F.L. Cartwright, memorandum, 4 February 1899; Gray to E.C. Hawkins, 9 February 1899, RG 18, vol. 160, file 56, Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC).

The completion of the WPYR, even if only to the summit, promised a more efficient, dependable, and cost-effective way to send people and supplies to their Klondike posts. By the end of 1899, the Mounted Police were among the WPYR's best customers and a valued partner in its quest to operate a railway across the Alaska-Yukon border.³

The WPYR's central problem was integrating itself into a rapidly changing Yukon transportation system. Railway officials faced an unforgiving northern environment and had to attract business from competitors, quickly move supplies across a vaguely defined border, and connect the railway to the rest of the Yukon transportation system. As they soon learned, a close relationship with the Mounted Police could assist them in addressing these problems. Working together, they created a functional Yukon transportation system that allowed the police to enforce the border and goods to flow smoothly to the interior.

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Transportation is central to many histories of the Klondike, but the WPYR has received less attention than most because it doesn't fit into traditional narratives of the gold rush, which characterize developments in Alaska and the Yukon as separate from each other and put them into respective narratives of American and Canadian historiography.⁴ Similarly, the history of North American railways has focused on national stories, with railways positioned as essential to the national narratives of both countries.⁵ A British-owned, American-operated railway that

³ The term "Alaska-Yukon border" refers to the border between Alaska, Yukon, and British Columbia because the Yukon-British Columbia border was not then well defined and the provisional border was under the control of the Canadian government.

⁴ Roy Minter, *The White Pass: Gateway to the Klondike* (Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 1987); Gordon Bennett, "Yukon Transportation: A History" (Canadian Historic Sites Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History No. 19, 1978); Kathryn Morse, *The Nature of Gold: An Environmental History of the Klondike Gold Rush* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003). For Alaska historiography, see Stephen W. Haycox, *Alaska: An American Colony* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Melody Webb, *The Last Frontier: A History of the Yukon Basin of Canada and Alaska* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985). For Canadian examples, see: Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of the Canadian North: 1870-1914* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971); William R. Morrison, *Showing the Flag: The Mounted Police and Canadian Sovereignty in the North, 1894-1925* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1985); Thomas Stone, *Miners' Justice: Migration, Law, and Order on the Alaska-Yukon Frontier, 1873-1902* (New York: Peter Lang, 1988); Ken S. Coates and William R. Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun: A History of the Yukon* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

⁵ Carlos A. Schwantes and James P. Ronda, *The West the Railroads Made* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2011). For a discussion of Canadian literature, see A.A. Den Otter, *The Philosophy of Railways: The Transcontinental Railway Idea in British North America* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

crossed the border between Alaska and the Yukon does not fit well into either narrative. Recently, scholars have addressed the interconnectedness of the North American railway system. Historians Richard White and Jeremy Mouat, who do not discuss the WPYR, argue that it makes more sense to examine such railways from transnational and regional perspectives rather than to force them into nation-building narratives.⁶ This study builds on this work, along with the argument of historian A.A. Den Otter that railways “fostered cross-border communication, trade and commerce, and the exchange of ideas.”⁷ The fact that the White Pass Railway crossed an international border in a remote and largely unknown region created a complex set of logistical problems that entangled the WPYR and the Mounted Police with other transportation companies and customs officials and fostered the creation of a functional Yukon transportation system that ultimately allowed both groups to achieve their goals in the region.

While the close links between railways and governments are well known, the WPYR was unable to secure funding or land grants from the Canadian or American governments, despite the lobbying of its promoters. By the late nineteenth century, North American governments were questioning their role in financing railway construction. As White explains, many North American railways were fundamentally flawed. Built ahead of demand and structured to enrich their shareholders, most would not have survived without government support.⁸

At the time gold was discovered on Rabbit Creek, a tributary of the Klondike River, in August 1896 – kicking off the rush to the Klondike – there was little public support for funding new railway projects. By July 1897, the scale of the Klondike rush also became clear to the Canadian government. Officials in Ottawa realized that a practical all-Canadian route to the Yukon did not exist and were concerned that the large number of Americans rushing to the Yukon would threaten Canadian sovereignty. While it explored the possibility of developing an all-Canadian railway following the Stikine River and Telegraph Creek, something more complex emerged in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands.⁹

⁶ White, *Railroaded*; Jeremy Mouat, “Nationalist Narratives and Regional Realities: The Political Economy of Railway Development in Southeastern British Columbia, 1895–1905,” in *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations West of the Rockies*, ed. John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002), 121–51.

⁷ Otter, *Philosophy of Railways*, 12.

⁸ White, *Railroaded*, xxiii–xxvii.

⁹ The Telegraph Creek route used Canada’s right of navigation on the Stikine River, granted by the 1871 Treaty of Washington, to cross the Alaska Panhandle. Other proposed all-Canadian routes included the Edmonton, Yukon, and Pacific Railway from Edmonton, and the

The WPYR was unable to secure a partnership with the Canadian government, but its interests aligned with those of the Mounted Police. As the main government agents in the Yukon, the police supported Ottawa's sovereignty concerns but developed a nuanced understanding of the local situation. Their main concern was getting reinforcements and supplies to construct and maintain posts and to control the rush of miners heading for the Klondike. The Mounted Police have generally been positioned in opposition to Americans in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands and elsewhere, but their conceptions were tied more to class than to nationality. The police linked the stereotypical loud, unruly, and lawless American to lower-class criminals; they did not do this with the middle- and upper-class members of the mining and business elite, including the WPYR leadership, with whom they were happy to work.¹⁰ Partnerships between local government agencies, including the Mounted Police, and railway companies were not unusual across the North American West, and the police easily adopted the practice in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands.¹¹ Indeed, the partnership fostered close relationships between American railway officials and Canadian Mounted Police officers.

The relationship between the WPYR and the Mounted Police emerged in the context of a transformation of the Alaska-Yukon borderlands.¹² Before the gold rush, the non-Indigenous population of the region numbered only fifteen hundred miners and traders who, in the absence of government control, largely ignored the border. The Chilkat Tlingit guarded access to the routes leading from the head of the Lynn Canal – the White, Chilkoot, and Chilkat Passes – to the interior, preventing outsiders from gaining access to them until the 1880s, and then working

Vancouver, Westminster, and Yukon Railway from Vancouver. Neither route was considered by the government. See D.J. Hall, *Clifford Sifton: The Young Napoleon, 1861–1900* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1981); T.D. Regehr, *The Canadian Northern Railway* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976), 65–73, 328.

¹⁰ On NWMP conceptions of class, see R.C. Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement, 1873–1905* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), 127.

¹¹ Macleod, *The NWMP and Law Enforcement*; White, *Railroaded*; Michael L. Tate, *The American Army in Transition, 1865–1898* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007).

¹² On borderlands transformation, see Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Juan Mora-Torres, *The Making of the Mexican Border: The State, Capitalism, and Society in Nuevo Leon, 1848–1910* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001); Ken S. Coates, "Border Crossings: Patterns and Process along the Canada-United States Boundary West of the Rockies," in *Parallel Destinies*, ed. Findlay and Coates, 3–27; Samuel Truett, *Fugitive Landscapes: The Forgotten History of the US-Mexico Borderlands* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Sheila McManus, *The Line Which Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2005).

as packers until they were overwhelmed by the gold rush.¹³ The border line had been set by the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1825, but it had not been surveyed and, by the 1890s, there was considerable debate over its location.¹⁴ Once the gold rush began, the Canadian and American governments took steps to take control of the area and divide a formerly borderless region, complicating the transportation situation, as the WPYR and the Mounted Police discovered. Railway officials and the police had to cooperate with each other and other transportation companies and government agencies. Fortunately, they shared similar goals and beliefs in science and technology, Anglo-Saxon expansion, and the value of gold.¹⁵ The White Pass Railway and the Mounted Police were willing partners in the quest to establish a stable and profitable transportation system in the Alaska-Yukon borderlands. In the end, their partnership allowed both groups to succeed.

ORIGINS AND EARLY STRUGGLES

The Mounted Police had been in the Yukon since 1894 but only arrived at Skagway and Dyea in August 1897, shortly after news of the Klondike discovery reached the rest of the world. During 1897, the police focused on rushing reinforcements and supplies to Dawson and developing transportation routes to the interior. Because only a few small packing operations and local Indigenous packers were available for hire on the rough trails over the Chilkoot and White Passes, the police carried most of their supplies themselves. After initially ignoring the location of the Alaska-Yukon border, on 15 January 1898 the Canadian government ordered the police to establish a temporary border at the summits of the Chilkoot and White Passes. Inspectors R. Belcher and D'A.E. Strickland built NWMP posts at the summits and, on 26 and 27 February, respectively, hoisted the Union Jack and began collecting customs duties

¹³ Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen? Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters and Social Imagination* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Norman Penlington, *The Alaska Boundary Dispute: A Critical Reappraisal* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1972); Charles S. Campbell Jr., *Anglo-American Understanding, 1898–1903* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1957); Iestyn Adams, *Brothers across the Ocean: British Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Anglo-American "Special Relationship," 1900–1905* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2005); Edward P. Kohn, *This Kindred People: Canadian-American Relations and the Anglo-Saxon Idea, 1895–1903* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ Morse, *Nature of Gold*; Adam Arenson, "Anglo-Saxonism in the Yukon: The Klondike Nugget and American-British Relations in the "Two Wests,"" *Pacific Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (2007): 373–404; Preston Jones, "Maritime Certainty and International Cooperation in the Klondike and Alaska Gold Rushes, 1896–1903," *Northern Mariner* 31, no. 1 (2021): 61–78.

and enforcing the border.¹⁶ By early 1898, more packers and newly formed transportation companies arrived and built trails, bridges, camps, and, eventually, wagon roads and aerial tramways. The police made contracts with many of these companies and, by early 1899, relied on them to move most of their supplies. During the following months, negotiations with US and Canadian customs officials, the US Army, and other groups ensured that goods flowed smoothly across the new border. This work greatly benefited the WPYR when it opened for business.

The origins of the railway go back to Captain William Moore, a Canadian who explored the White Pass as part of the Geological Survey of Canada's Dawson Expedition in 1887. Moore convinced Charles Wilkinson, a representative of a British investment firm, of the route's potential in early 1896. Wilkinson spent the next two years advocating for the project. To address the uncertain location of the Alaska-Yukon border, he applied for three charters and set up three railway companies in 1897, one in each jurisdiction the line could pass: the United States, British Columbia, and Canada.¹⁷ Wilkinson lost control of the project in February 1898 to Close Brothers & Company, a London financial house with large land investments in the western United States and offices in Chicago. Close Brothers created the White Pass and Yukon Railway Company, Limited, a British corporation with British, American, and Canadian shareholders, to hold its Alaska/Yukon holdings. A separate entity, the Pacific Contract Company (PCC), was created to hold the railway's construction materials and equipment. Despite a complex corporate structure, management and ownership were one. American Samuel Graves, who led Close Brothers' American operations, was made president, and American E.C. Hawkins, who supervised the company's operations from Seattle, was made chief engineer and general manager, who supervised the company's operations from Seattle.¹⁸

Construction of the WPYR began in May 1898. The WPYR opened offices in Seattle, Vancouver, and Victoria – three cities, each of which sought business by claiming to be the “gateway to the goldfields.”¹⁹ Even

¹⁶ Fred White to A.B. Perry, 15 January 1898, RG 18, vol. 145, file 70, LAC; Government of Canada, *Report of the North-West Mounted Police 1898* (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1899), part 3, 82, 89.

¹⁷ Legal documentation for the initial financing of the railway used specific language to address the uncertain border. See WPYR, 94/58, 98/135, Yukon Archives (hereafter YA); Minter, *White Pass*, 25–50. The WPYR's early history and construction process is covered in detail by Minter, but the book is poorly documented, leaving aspects of the narrative open to question.

¹⁸ Minter, *White Pass*, 81, 149, 172–75; Tina Grant, ed., *International Directory of Company Histories*, vol. 39 (Detroit: St. James Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Norbert MacDonald, “Seattle, Vancouver, and the Klondike,” *Canadian Historical Review* 49, no. 3 (1968): 234–46.

.....THE.....

White Pass and Yukon

ROUTE.

The Pacific and Arctic Railway and Navigation Co.
British Columbia Yukon Railway Co.

From Skaguay, Alaska, to the Summit
of White Pass In a comfortable
Railway Train.

THE DANGERS, DIFFICULTIES AND DELAYS OF THE OLD METHODS
OF REACHING THE

Klondike and new Atlin Gold Fields

NOW OVERCOME.

SHIP YOUR FREIGHT BY RAIL.

We are now prepared to carry Passengers and Freight by Rail from
SKAGUAY TO WHITE PASS, on the railway now being built to
Fort Selkirk, and guarantee delivery at the lakes. Goods shipped
through in bond.

THE MOST DIRECT ROUTE.

....FOR....

Passenger and Freight Rates

Apply to any of our Agents or

H. M. McARTNEY, Gen. Pass. and Freight Agent, Skaguay, Alaska	J. H. GREER, Commercial Agent, 16 Trounce Avenue Victoria, B.C.	L. H. GRAY, Gen. Traffic Mgr Dexter Horton Bldg. Seattle, Wash.
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Send two cents in stamps to any of our agents for our new map of
the Atlin Gold Fields.

Figure 1. The first WPYR advertisement to appear in the *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 November 1898, 3. The *British Colonist Online Edition*: 1858–1980. Reproduced with the permission of the *Victoria Times-Colonist*.

before the first part of the line was complete, the WPYR advertised widely in newspapers in all three cities.²⁰

WPYR officials were determined to begin operating as soon as possible, both to recoup construction costs and to gain a foothold in the Yukon trade. By mid-August 1898, enough track had been laid to open for limited business between Skagway and Rocky Point, seven miles (eleven kilometres) from Skagway. From there, independent packers moved freight over the summit and beyond. By early February 1899, with tracks approaching the summit, the railway bypassed the packers by building a sled trail on top of its grade. Eleven days before the WPYR reached the White Pass summit, General Traffic Manager L.H. Gray

²⁰ For examples, see *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, 11 October 1898, 9; *Victoria Daily Colonist*, 26 November 1898, 3.

sent Hawkins and Graves a lengthy statement of prospective and secured business from Seattle, Victoria, and Vancouver. While most shipments were under one hundred tons, the NWMP proposed to ship 750 tons of “Merchandise.”²¹ Securing such contracts was important because large government contracts offered stable revenue to be invested in construction. Endorsation by a government agency also helped attract other customers. The surviving police records show an increase in shipments over the course of 1899 – eight bills for transporting men and supplies by 31 March 1899, fifty-five bills by 31 May, and fifty-one in June – supporting the fledgling railway company during a time when it faced significant difficulties.²²

Before the line reached the summit on 19 February, the WPYR made a contract with the Red Line Transportation Company, a company created by Ontario-born contractor Michael J. Heney, to take freight from the summit, where it was stored in a large warehouse tent until the company could move it by sled to Log Cabin and Bennett, where a fleet of boats would take goods down the Yukon River in the spring.²³ An optimistic Gray wrote to his agents on 27 March 1899: “our line is now being successfully operated between Skaguay [*sic*] and the Summit of White Pass, and we can handle all rail between these two points, any amount of freight.”²⁴

Despite Gray’s optimism, tons of freight accumulated at the summit. He explained that “this Winter was a terror all over the United States, British Columbia, and Alaska.” Winter storms delayed construction: “the worst storm of the season set in a few days after we reached the Summit, and blocked our road between Glacier and Summit.” Because of the need to use sleds so often, the railway’s revenue “was cut in two, as the packers got their proportion for hauling it from Heney to Summit and beyond.”²⁵ Winter storms also slowed the movement of goods from the summit to Log Cabin and Bennett. Not until 15 May 1899 did Gray advise Hawkins and White Pass Railway agents that the Red Line Transportation Company would “clean up all freight now at the Summit and Log Cabin in two to three days.”²⁶ In the meantime, dissatisfied shippers “bullyragged, threatened and generally abused” Gray because

²¹ Gray to S.H. Graves and Hawkins, 8 February 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

²² RG 18, vol. 160, file 56 LAC.

²³ Minter, *White Pass*, 232, 274–75.

²⁴ Gray to Fred P. Meyers et al., 27 March 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

²⁵ Gray to Graves, 31 March 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

²⁶ Gray to Hawkins et al., 15 May 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

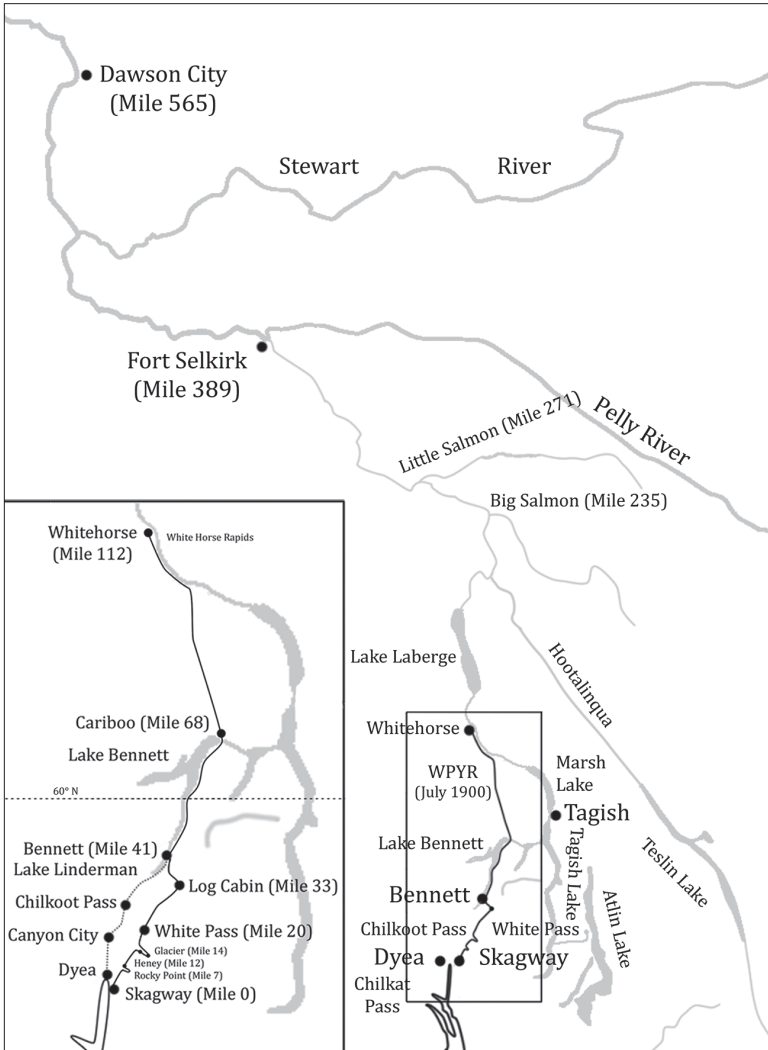


Figure 2. Map of the WPYR and river route to Dawson, created by the author.

the company was unable “to control the elements and deliver their freight from Skaguay [*sic*] to Bennett more promptly.”²⁷

Weather was not the only problem. Other transportation companies and independent packers posed serious competition for the WPYR, which in turn threatened the other transportation enterprises on the Lynn Canal route, including the Chilkoot Railroad and Transportation

²⁷ Gray to Graves, 2 June 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

Company's tramway over the Chilkoot Pass and businessman George Brackett's wagon road/trail on White Pass. Reliable rail service from Skagway threatened all the business of the packers on the Chilkoot and White Passes. Angered by the railway's purchase of the Brackett road and the introduction of a toll on a trail that they insisted they had built themselves, the packers launched a price war. Gray explained that packers cut their rates "to ruinous figures" and "transported about 300 tons mdse. from Skagway to points into the interior, at less rates than we could take it for."²⁸ He also reported that "packers are circulating all kinds of reports against us that we cannot move business any faster than they do."²⁹ Railway officials faced "lying and malicious statements of disgruntled competitors." The Chilkoot Tramway "make it a special point to keep themselves posted regarding our published tariff rates. They invariably cut under us from 1/4 to 1¢ per lb. and circulate the most libelous reports regarding the condition of our road."³⁰

The completion of the railway line to Bennett on 6 July 1899 marked the end of the WPYR's competition with the packers and the Chilkoot Tramway. The railway bought out the Chilkoot Company and shut it down. By 13 July, Gray wrote to Graves: "I feel that from this date the White Pass & Yukon Route is a 'winner,'" informing him that the railway had six hundred tons of freight awaiting transport at Skagway. "The people are tumbling over one another to give us business now," he noted.³¹

CUSTOMS AND THE BORDER

At the same time as the WPYR battled winter conditions and fierce competition on the passes, railway officials worked to develop a customs system to ensure that freight moved quickly across the border. Long delays waiting for customs officials to inspect freight or for customers to fill out the appropriate paperwork could hamper the movement of goods as much as bad weather. Customs delays could also force customers into the hands of competitors better equipped to handle the process. The amount of paperwork required to ship freight from Skagway to the interior shows the complicated customs process. Goods shipped from a Canadian port and "destined to points in" British Columbia or Yukon required three certified invoices, listing the goods as purchased; three

²⁸ Gray to Graves, 31 March 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

²⁹ Gray to John Hislop, 4 March 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

³⁰ Gray to Graves, 2 June 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

³¹ Gray to Graves, 13 July 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 13, YA.

bills of lading, listing the goods accepted by the shipper; the name of the steamer they arrived on; and two Canadian Customs Special Steamer Manifests.³²

The process of shipping goods “in bond” also made the customs issue particularly complicated. Since most goods shipped through Skagway were destined for Canadian territory, United States customs officials allowed customers to ship goods purchased in Canada from Skagway to the border without paying customs duties, and Canada allowed Americans to ship goods purchased in the United States and destined for Alaska without paying Canadian duties. The process required shippers to put their goods “in bond” while passing through either American or Canadian territory. Customs officials could require shippers to make a deposit or bond for the value of the customs duties until the goods reached the border, where a customs official would inspect them and, if they had not been used or left behind, cancel the bond.

The issue of bonded goods had contributed to the decision to send the Mounted Police to the summits in 1898. The US customs policy of requiring foreign miners to pay for a customs official to escort bonded goods to the Canadian frontier, at a cost of \$6.00 per day and \$3.00 per day in expenses, angered Canadians headed for the Klondike and the Canadian government wanted to avoid unrest.³³ Sending the Mounted Police to the summits of the Chilkoot and White Passes kept US customs officials out of Canadian territory and, by giving customs officials a place to cancel bonds, allowed travellers to avoid paying for an escort. By May 1898, a streamlined system was in place. Canadian miners entered their goods into bond at Skagway or Dyea and transported them to the summits, where a US customs official inspected the goods, cancelled the bond, and allowed miners to continue to the Klondike.

When the WPYR began carrying goods across the border in earnest in February 1899, this customs system allowed it to develop its own customs procedures. The railway opened a customs office in Skagway to reduce delays caused by missing or incorrect paperwork. As WPYR auditor A.L. Berdoe explained to Mounted Police comptroller Fred White in Ottawa, “we maintain our own Customs Office here in order to facilitate the movement of freight, and provide the services of a competent Customs Agent to the public at a reasonable charge.”³⁴ The service appears to have been popular with customers and hastened

³² Customs Department Circular Letter No. 5, 14 July 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 12, YA.

³³ Perry to White, 7 January 1898, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

³⁴ Quoted in White to J.L. McDougall, 28 December 1900, RG 18, vol. 195, file 707, LAC.

the movement of freight through customs. By 9 August 1899, Gray reported that the customs office “is now keeping three men busy from 8 a.m. until almost midnight every day on customs papers.”³⁵ Between January and April 1899, the customs office in Skagway cost the railway \$905.00 in salaries and expenses and brought in \$854.50 in revenue, a loss of \$50.50.³⁶ Berdoe told White in December 1900 that the office “is run at an expense of many thousand dollars in the course of a year,” but so important was it for business that the company was willing to run it at a loss.³⁷

Railway officials turned bonded goods over to US customs officials, who stored them in a secure bonded warehouse at Skagway station, supervised their loading into boxcars, and locked and sealed the cars. At the summit or the destination, a customs official inspected the goods and the bills of lading to ensure that nothing was missing before releasing them to the shipper. This process required coordination and negotiation between the railway and customs officials. During a particularly busy time, for example, Railway Division superintendent F.H. Whiting asked C.L. Andrews, deputy collector of customs at Skagway, to have a customs official supervise the loading of trains at night.³⁸ Andrews and Whiting also had to negotiate the inspection of passengers’ personal baggage at Skagway before it could be released. US customs officials often had to work “until 9, 10, and even 11 o’clock” in the evening “in order to accommodate passengers.”³⁹ By 28 September, Whiting and Andrews agreed to inspect passenger baggage at the White Pass summit to avoid a delay at Skagway for inbound trains. “We would much rather have the train held ten or fifteen minutes at White Pass, than to have the delay here,” Whiting wrote.⁴⁰ To facilitate this, by September 1900, the US customs located its office at the White Pass summit in the WPYR yard.⁴¹ The railway also proposed to supply two rooms for the NWMP at the summit for use as an office and quarters, although as of January 1900, the rooms had not been provided.⁴² Plans for a passenger depot at Whitehorse in

³⁵ Gray to Hawkins, 9 August 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 12, YA.

³⁶ Gray to Hawkins, 15 May 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 12, YA.

³⁷ White to McDougall, 28 December 1900.

³⁸ F.H. Whiting to C.L. Andrews, 18 August 1899, WPYR, COR 872, file 1, YA.

³⁹ Whiting to Hawkins, 7 September 1899, WPYR, COR 872, file 1, YA.

⁴⁰ Whiting to Andrews, 28 September 1899, WPYR, COR 872, file 1, YA.

⁴¹ Hawkins to J.P. Rogers, 3 September 1900, WPYR, COR 862, file 314, YA.

⁴² Perry to White, 23 September 1899; Z.T. Wood to C.C. Dawson, 8 January 1900, RG 18, vol. 185, file 249, LAC.



Figure 3. WPYR station at summit of White Pass, 9 April 1899. University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, Hegg676.

May 1900 included two rooms for the Mounted Police and rooms for customs inspectors.⁴³

While the WPYR quickly developed a system to move freight smoothly across the border, thanks in part to the efforts of the Mounted Police and US customs officials, the process had not been without conflict. At the end of the 1898 season, the Canadian customs officers at the summits, and the small detachments of Mounted Police who assisted them, moved to the police posts at Linderman and Log Cabin to collect customs duties. US customs officials followed them. Both assumed that the chaos of the height of the gold rush had passed and that customs duties could be collected away from the provisional border during the harsh winter months. As the WPYR approached the White Pass summit in early 1899, however, the situation between the end of the track and Log Cabin was anything but calm.

During the winter of 1899, as the WPYR battled winter conditions and fierce competition, hundreds of tons of goods were transported between

⁴³ Hawkins to Rogers, 12 May 1900, WPYR, COR 868, file 4-525, YA.

the summit and the customs posts at Log Cabin. Without a Canadian customs post at the summit, US customs officials could not ensure that goods shipped in bond would not be consumed in American territory. The constant delays moving freight from the summit also meant that bonded goods could sit for weeks without being checked by a customs officer. At Log Cabin, Superintendent Z.T. Wood, commander of Tagish district, complained that the Mounted Police were so busy assisting with customs work that it was impossible to keep up “unless all Police duty is abandoned.” Wood explained that “a camp of 350 Railway labourers are now at the Log Cabin, patrols have to be kept going between Log Cabin and the Summit, Railway camps have to be visited and on several occasions our men have been called out to hunt for supposed missing and frozen men.”⁴⁴

US customs officials responded to this uncertainty by reinstating the convoy system, again requiring Canadian bonded goods to be escorted from Skagway to the Canadian customs office at Log Cabin, at a cost of \$6.00 per day plus expenses. Officials in Ottawa saw the move as a possible attempt to push back the Alaska-Yukon border from the summits of the Chilkoot and White Passes. Clifford Sifton, the minister of the interior, ordered Comptroller White to send the Mounted Police back to the summits of the Chilkoot and White Passes.⁴⁵ The police responded quickly. Wood informed White: “we have established Detachments at the Summits,” and “orders have been given them to prevent American Convoys from proceeding any further.”⁴⁶ Inspector F.L. Cartwright, commanding officer at White Pass, reported that the police had turned back an American convoy, “in charge of a consignment of liquor,” on 22 March – and the whole affair exploded in controversy.⁴⁷

An angry US deputy collector Andrews complained to his superior that the Mounted Police and Canadian customs officials “have arrested US Officers, have insulted them and taken their goods.”⁴⁸ He requested permission to take retaliatory action against Canadian goods, including an end to bonding privileges at Skagway. Not waiting for a reply, Andrews ordered a stop to all bonded freight leaving Skagway.

This news alarmed General Manager Hawkins. A ban on bonded goods would dramatically reduce the amount of freight the railway could

⁴⁴ Wood to White, 4 January 1899, RG 18, vol. 161, file 93, LAC.

⁴⁵ Clifford Sifton to White, 24 February 1899, RG 18, vol. 161, file 93, LAC.

⁴⁶ Wood to White, 21 March 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁴⁷ Cartwright to Wood, 26 March 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁴⁸ Andrews to J.W. Ivey, 22 March 1899, RG 36, Microfilm Publication T1189, reel 33, vol. 16, National Archives and Records Administration (hereafter NARA).

move to the interior. Hawkins met Andrews and convinced him “to let the railway move this bonded freight,” with the exception of liquor, which Andrews refused to permit. Cartwright also met Andrews and reiterated that “convoys would not be allowed to pass the summit.”⁴⁹ Wood informed Ottawa that “Inspector Cartwright reports great indignation in Skaguay [*sic*] and that the press are trying to stir the people up to organizing and driving us off the Summits.”⁵⁰

By 8 April, fifty tons of liquor was held up at Skagway. Hawkins informed Cartwright that the delay was causing “great injury to shippers and [the] railway.” He asked the police to allow American “convoys to go to Log Cabin.”⁵¹ Replying to a similar letter from Traffic Manger Gray, Cartwright wrote: “Andrews has no right to send a convoy passed [*sic*] the summit, which he knows perfectly well.”⁵² By late April, US Army captain R.J. Yeatman, commanding officer of the District of Lynn Canal at Dyea, reported that a still angry Andrews was planning to force his way past the White Pass summit. Yeatman warned Andrews: “force is a matter of last resort and only to be used after failure of other means.”⁵³

Once Comptroller White in Ottawa received word of the situation, he immediately ordered that: “United States Convoys should be allowed to accompany goods bonded to Log Cabin so long as Canadian Customs Officers are stationed there.”⁵⁴ He explained to Wood, “you appear to have misunderstood the instructions to re-establish detachments at the summits. It was not intended that any change should be made in the Customs arrangements until so ordered by the Customs Dept.”⁵⁵

Once the police allowed American convoys to continue to Log Cabin, the situation stabilized. The Mounted Police remained at the summits of the Chilkoot and White Passes, but the Canadian customs office remained at Log Cabin and US customs officials continued to escort liquor shipments across the border. By helping resolve the conflict between the police and US customs officials, the WPYR kept the transportation system working and goods flowing across the border.

⁴⁹ Cartwright to Wood, 26 March 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁵⁰ Wood to Perry, 28 March 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁵¹ E.C. Hawkins to Cartwright, 8 April 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁵² Gray to Cartwright, 8 April 1899; Cartwright to Gray, n.d., RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁵³ R.J. Yeatman to Andrews, 24 April 1899, RG 393, part 3, E309, NARA.

⁵⁴ White to Perry, 6 April 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

⁵⁵ White to Wood, 28 April 1899, RG 18, vol. 164, file 176, LAC.

TRAFFIC AGREEMENTS

By July 1899 the WPYR had control of the Lynn Canal route, having beaten winter conditions and competition and established a reliable customs system. Now it had to integrate the railway into the rest of the Yukon transportation system. The fundamental problem was that it controlled only one portion of the system, the Skagway to Lake Bennett route. Customers had to ship their goods from a west coast port to Skagway on an ocean-going vessel, transfer their freight to the WPYR, and transfer goods at Bennett to another company's steamer for the journey down the Yukon River.⁵⁶ The White Pass Railway could only guarantee timely shipment of freight between Skagway and Bennett, and could not quote through rates without making contracts with steamer companies.

The solution was traffic agreements with other transportation companies to issue joint bills of lading that would allow the companies to make contracts for the whole route. In early 1899, the railway began making agreements with ocean steamer companies who brought goods from the west coast to Skagway. The WPYR entered its first traffic agreement, effective 1 January 1899, with the Union Steamship Company of Vancouver. Similar agreements with the Alaska Steamship Company of Seattle and the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company of Victoria soon followed.⁵⁷

In the spring of 1899, with construction of the railway to Lake Bennett continuing and the opening of navigation on the upper Yukon approaching, the WPYR began negotiating traffic agreements with the Canadian Development Company (CDC), a Victoria-based transportation company with English shareholders, and other steamer companies operating on Lake Bennett and the upper Yukon River. Under agreements with the CDC's competitors, the Bennett Lake & Klondike Navigation Company and the John Irving Navigation Company, which became effective when the railway reached Bennett, the partner companies agreed to protect their local passenger and freight rates during the 1899 season, \$60.00 per ton for the WPYR portion of the route.⁵⁸ Gray observed that "the lowest freight rates from Puget Sound and British Columbia Ports to Dawson that are being quoted via Skagway on the

⁵⁶ Early in the gold rush, miners had to build boats at Bennett for the journey to Dawson, but by the spring of 1899 a number of companies offered steamer service on the final portion of the route.

⁵⁷ Gray to Hawkins, 8 June 1899; Gray to Hawkins, 9 June 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 14, YA.

⁵⁸ Memorandum of Agreement, 16 June 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 15, YA; Memorandum of Agreement, 28 July 1899, COR 869, File 16, YA.

CANADIAN DEVELOPMENT COMPANY, LIMITED.
 H. MAITLAND KERSEY, MANAGING DIRECTOR.
 GENERAL OFFICES: 32 FORT STREET, VICTORIA, B. C.

AGENCIES:

A. H. B. MACGOWAN, 226 Cambie Street, Vancouver, B. C.
 FRED. H. WORLOCK, 214 Broadway, Skaguay, Alaska.
 FRED. P. MEYER, 105 Yesler Way, Seattle, Wash.

G. F. O. No. A. 17.
SPECIAL JOINT THROUGH FREIGHT TARIFF
 APPLYING ON ALL ORDINARY ARTICLES OF COMMERCE AND LIVE STOCK,
 —BETWEEN—
BRITISH COLUMBIA AND PUGET SOUND PORTS and DAWSON CITY AND UPPER YUKON POINTS
 —VIA—
**ALASKA STEAMSHIP COMPANY,
 WHITE PASS & YUKON ROUTE,
 PACIFIC & ARCTIC RAILWAY AND NAVIGATION CO., BRITISH COLUMBIA YUKON RAILWAY CO.,
 MILES CANYON & LEWES RIVER TRAMWAY COMPANY,
 CANADIAN DEVELOPMENT COMPANY, LIMITED,**
 effective on opening of through Railway service between Skaguay and Lake Bennett,
 with guaranteed delivery of shipments during season of navigation of 1899.
 In dollars per ton, weight or measurement ship's option, on the classes established
 herein.

First Class	- - - - -	\$160.00
Second Class	- - - - -	155.00
Third Class	- - - - -	136.00

Figure 4. CDC advertisement for the traffic agreement rate. Document: Passenger and freight rates – North-West Mounted Police – Summer 1899, Yukon, Canadian Development Co., 1899 © Government of Canada. Reproduced with the permission of Library and Archives Canada (2022). Source: Library and Archives Canada, Royal Canadian Mounted Police fonds, vol. 173, file 500-99.

opening Navigation is \$162.00 per Ton.” With the WPYR portion set at \$60.00 per ton, \$102.00 was left to be split by the ocean shipper and the upper river steamers. “This does not include wharfage at Skaguay [*sic*],” Gray noted.⁵⁹

Traffic agreements helped to solve two problems for the railway. First, they attracted business to the WPYR. Whether goods were shipped by the CDC, the Bennett Lake & Klondike Navigation Company, or any other partner, the WPYR was guaranteed \$60.00 per ton. Second, they helped the railway to extend its reach beyond Bennett and advertise that it could ship goods from the west coast to any point in the interior.

⁵⁹ Gray to John Irving, 28 March 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 16, YA.

The traffic agreement system also fostered the railway's relationship with the Mounted Police. During the 1899 season, in order to ship their supplies from Vancouver to their Yukon posts, the police had to coordinate separate arrangements with an ocean-going steamer to Skagway, a combination of the Chilkoot Tramway, packers, and the White Pass Railway over the Chilkoot and White Passes, and a steamer on Lake Bennett and the Yukon River. Being able to deliver supplies to a single shipper in Vancouver and simply pick them up at their destination saved substantial effort.

While the traffic agreement system was in development, the Mounted Police had tendered a contract to ship approximately two hundred tons from Vancouver to Tagish via Skagway. By the deadline of 5 April 1899, Comptroller White had received tenders from five companies, including the WPYR.⁶⁰ The competition came down to two companies, the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company, offering \$127.50 per ton, and the CDC, offering \$127.00 per ton. As the bids were being considered, both companies made traffic agreements with the WPYR, allowing the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company to reduce its bid to \$87.00 per ton and the CDC to \$61.00 per ton. White rightly concluded: "the most definite and satisfactory offer from our point of view is undoubtedly that of the Canadian Development Company."⁶¹ Although the WPYR's own offer of \$70.00 per ton was rejected, the traffic agreements ensured that it would carry police supplies from Skagway to Bennett no matter who won the contract.

As the principal driver of the traffic agreement system, the White Pass Railway had to put considerable effort into maintaining relations with other transportation companies and shippers. For example, Superintendent A.B. Perry, NWMP forwarding agent at Vancouver, learned that Traffic Manager Gray had "no objection to receiving under our contract with the Canadian Development Co. small quantities of goods," in addition to the bulk shipments.⁶² Nevertheless, railway officials sometimes had to intervene in conflicts between the Mounted Police and the CDC. Towards the end of the navigation season on the Yukon River, the Mounted Police attempted to ship eighty tons of supplies to Dawson and Tagish, but the CDC agent in Vancouver refused to issue a through bill of lading to Dawson.⁶³ The incident turned out to be a misunderstanding. In late August, the railway had announced that it

⁶⁰ White, Call for Tenders, 16 February 1899, RG 18, vol. 167, file 226, LAC.

⁶¹ White, Memorandum, 16 May 1899, RG 18, vol. 167, file 226, LAC.

⁶² Perry to White, 5 June 1899, RG 18, vol. 196, file 708, LAC.

⁶³ Perry to White, 8 September 1899, RG 18, vol. 196, file 708, LAC.

would stop issuing joint bills of lading for goods going beyond Lake Bennett on 1 September because it couldn't guarantee delivery before the close of navigation.⁶⁴ In response, the CDC instructed its agents to stop issuing bills of lading for goods destined for Dawson. According to CDC secretary R.T. Elliott, these instructions did not explain that police supplies were exempt. Elliott assured Perry: "we will protect our contract to the fullest extent" and would ensure that police supplies reached their destination by the end of the season.⁶⁵

Despite such minor problems, the traffic agreement system was a huge success. Gray advised Hawkins on 5 August 1899 that the WPYR had "turned over to Canadian Development Company at Bennett since our through traffic arrangements were effected" 1,315 tons of freight, 22.5 tons of lumber, and several hundred tons of "shipments originating at Skagway."⁶⁶ Gray predicted that "present indications point that we will give them 1000 tons during August unless you instruct otherwise."⁶⁷ Anyone shipping freight to the Yukon could now have goods delivered to Skagway, Bennett, or any point on the Yukon River serviced by steamer with little effort, but the police were especially pleased to have a reliable and uncomplicated through route. At the end of the season, Perry reported: "the railway company have [*sic*] treated me exceedingly well and have done everything they could to meet our wishes."⁶⁸ After the close of navigation and the end of the contract with the CDC, the police increasingly sent shipments to the interior with the White Pass Railway itself during the winter of 1899–1900. In the coming year, the relationship between the police and the WPYR would only grow closer as the railway consolidated its gains from the traffic agreement system.

CONSOLIDATION AND DOMINANCE

The traffic agreements and the decline of gold rush activity in late 1899 also allowed the WPYR and the police to address residual administrative problems and consolidate their relationships with other companies. For the WPYR, this process began after the Pacific Contract Company, the railway's construction arm, completed the first section of the railway between Skagway and Bennett, under the supervision of contractor

⁶⁴ Gray to R.T. Elliott, 25 August 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 6, YA.

⁶⁵ Elliott to Perry, 11 September 1899, RG 18, vol. 196, file 708, LAC.

⁶⁶ Gray to Hawkins, 5 August 1899; Gray to Hawkins, 4 August 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 6, YA.

⁶⁷ Gray to Hawkins, 9 August 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 6, YA.

⁶⁸ Perry to White, 21 September 1899, RG 18, vol. 196, file 708, LAC.

Michael J. Heney. For the second section between Bennett and Caribou, WPYR officials independently contracted Heney to do the work, making the PCC redundant. The affairs of the PCC and the railway company became increasingly intertwined, and many functions were duplicated. General Agent F.A. Twichell noted: “we have two storekeepers, one for each Company; two sets of forwarding agents, one for each Company; two Departments handling customs papers, etc. etc.” He asked, “is it not possible to have the White Pass do all this work?”⁶⁹ Hawkins agreed and instructed Twichell “to turn over to the Railway Company all of the business of the ‘Pacific Contract Company’ at the earliest opportunity.”⁷⁰

Closing the affairs of the PCC was not simple. At Skagway, the PCC storekeeper was instructed to sell any duplicate supplies locally or ship them to Seattle and transfer anything useful to the WPYR.⁷¹ First, he had to set a value for each item. For new and unused goods, he only had to determine the cost price. Other stock could be more complicated. Thirty horses sold to Heney for \$1,425.00, for example, came under scrutiny. Hawkins considered “that the bunch of horses should be worth anyway [*sic*], from \$2750.00 to \$3250.00.”⁷² Twichell had to write a five-page memorandum justifying the sale.⁷³ Not until December 1900 could Berdoe calculate the company’s final assets and liabilities and proceed with closing its affairs.⁷⁴ The Pacific Contract Company was not officially shut down until August 1901, when it paid the WPYR \$114,098.12 to close out its accounts.⁷⁵

The agreement between the WPYR and Heney to build the second and third sections also caused problems. As part of the hastily arranged contract, the WPYR made regular payments, based on estimated costs, to meet Heney’s payroll and construction expenses. The railway also transferred a significant amount of PCC stock to Heney in lieu of cash without agreeing on its value. By 31 August 1900, the transactions with Heney had been reviewed and a settlement apparently reached.⁷⁶ Berdoe reported that the WPYR owed Heney approximately \$135,000. The railway agreed to pay interest “at a rate of 6% per annum”⁷⁷ and made

⁶⁹ F.A. Twichell to Hawkins, 9 December 1899, WPYR, COR 867, file 513(a), YA.

⁷⁰ Hawkins to Twichell, 26 December 1899, WPYR, COR 867, file 513(a), YA.

⁷¹ Berdoe to Chas Rockwell, 5 February 1900, WPYR, COR 867, file 513(a), YA.

⁷² Berdoe to I.W. Young, 21 February 1900, WPYR, COR 867, file 513(b), YA.

⁷³ Twichell to Hawkins, 19 March 1900, WPYR, COR 867, file 513(b), YA.

⁷⁴ Berdoe to Graves, 18 December 1900, WPYR, COR 870, file 2, YA.

⁷⁵ Berdoe to George Wilkinson, 16 August 1901, WPYR, COR 870, file 14, YA.

⁷⁶ Monthly invoices for August to December 1899 filled five folders in the WPYR records, see WPYR, COR 862, file 366, YA; Hawkins to Berdoe, 31 August 1900, WPYR, COR 862, file 283, YA.

⁷⁷ Berdoe to Hawkins, 17 May 1901, WPYR, COR 862, file 283, YA.

its final payment to Heney on 1 September 1901.⁷⁸ Settling the WPYR's accounts with the Pacific Contract Company and Heney put the railway in a better position to streamline operations as the line between Skagway and Whitehorse neared completion.

The decline of the gold rush also allowed the Mounted Police to catch up on paperwork. In March 1899, Comptroller White complained to Superintendent S.B. Steele, police commander at Dawson: "since the organization of the Force, 25 years ago, I have not been placed in so awkward a position as I am at present in connection with expenditure."⁷⁹ Steele, busy with the demands of the gold rush, had not submitted to Ottawa vouchers and other paperwork justifying his expenses for much of the 1898 season. Over the next two months, Steele forwarded documents for July to November 1898 to White for ultimate review by Auditor General John L. McDougall. After reviewing the expenditures at Dawson for September to December 1898, McDougall sent White a long list of questions about inconsistencies and mistakes in Steele's numbers and justifications of large expenses.⁸⁰ In September 1899, Superintendent Perry, who replaced Steele as commanding officer at Dawson, sent an inspector to Ottawa to "explain discrepancies &c., respecting accounts and paylists" from Dawson.⁸¹ Not until December 1900 and after much correspondence between Ottawa and Dawson were Steele's expenses for the 1898–99 fiscal year finally sorted out.⁸²

Poor bookkeeping may also explain why the police were slow to pay their accounts to transportation companies after the advent of the traffic agreement system – although the problem seems common, as the companies did not complain. In April 1902, White, still dealing with accounts from an 1899 contract with the CDC, sent the police in Whitehorse "copies of Bills of Lading for freight carried from Vancouver to Bennett and Tagish in 1899, the accounts for which are still unpaid, and which I am sure you have heard me swearing about on several occasions."⁸³ Early accounts between the Mounted Police and the WPYR faced similar problems. Berdoe, White, and McDougall were in near constant contact, exchanging countless letters and account sheets, collecting vouchers and shipment information, auditing accounts, and approving payments to

⁷⁸ Berdoe to H.H. Philips, 2 September 1901, WPYR, COR 870, file 6, YA.

⁷⁹ White to Steele, 2 March 1899, RG 18, vol. 177, file 32, LAC.

⁸⁰ McDougall to White, 24 April 1899, RG 18, vol. 177, file 32, LAC.

⁸¹ White to Perry, 31 September 1899, RG 18, vol. 177, file 32, LAC.

⁸² White to Wood, 13 December 1900, RG 18, vol. 177, file 32, LAC.

⁸³ White to E.F. Drake, 3 April 1902, RG 18, vol. 196, file 708, LAC.

the railway company.⁸⁴ The auditing process caught numerous mistakes, over and under charges that had to be checked, and accounts that needed more information before payment could be made. In September 1900, they were dealing with accounts from June 1899. Final payment was not made until 5 February 1901, when White sent a cheque for \$1,717.38 to the railway.⁸⁵ Later, the police introduced a more standardized accounting system with a single, large file for each year to audit WPYR bills of lading and arrange payments. But keeping track of accounts and shipments still took time for both parties.⁸⁶

The problem became simpler in 1900, when the Force decided to rely on the WPYR exclusively for its transportation needs. The police in 1899 had sent supplies via the White Pass route with the Canadian Development Company and the Yukon River route with the Alaska Commercial Company. Superintendent Perry suggested in January 1900 that “it would be to our advantage if all our shipments came in via the White Pass.”⁸⁷ Following brief negotiations, Comptroller White instructed Perry to accept the WPYR offer to ship police supplies at a rate of \$80.00 per ton between Skagway and Whitehorse and \$120.00 between Skagway and Dawson.⁸⁸ With one of the WPYR’s largest customers under contract, railway officials were free to consolidate their relationship with the railway’s partners in the traffic agreement system.

* * * * *

The railway began 1900 intent to continue the traffic agreement system. Traffic Manager S.M. Irwin renewed the arrangement with the Canadian Development Company for another year.⁸⁹ During the 1900 season, however, relations between the two companies deteriorated. By 1 February 1901, Hawkins complained: “C.D. Co. Ltd. mail contracts and all other matters in very bad condition; a great deal of work will have to be done on steamers and to make arrangements for future.”⁹⁰ Graves expressed dissatisfaction with the company’s manager, R.T. Elliott, including his failure to “comply with my request that ... \$100,000 be paid

⁸⁴ McDougall to White, 15 September 1900; White to WP&Y, 26 September 1900, RG 18, vol. 195, file 707, LAC.

⁸⁵ White to WPYR, 5 February 1901, RG 18, vol. 195, file 707, LAC.

⁸⁶ RG 18, vol. 195, File 707, LAC; vol. 228, file 134, LAC; vol. 248, file 120, LAC; vol. 264, file 59, LAC; vol. 284, file 9 LAC.

⁸⁷ Perry to White, 10 January 1900, RG 18, vol. 179, file 104, LAC.

⁸⁸ White to Perry, 15 June 1900; S.M. Irwin to Perry, 9 May 1900, RG 18, vol. 179, file 104, LAC.

⁸⁹ Irwin to Hawkins, 9 May 1900, WPYR, COR 862, file 338, YA.

⁹⁰ Hawkins to Graves, 1 February 1901, WPYR, COR 864, file 1000, YA.

us.” He reminded Hawkins: “it still remains a mystery what became of the enormous amount of money which the C. D. Co. received last season.”⁹¹

Railway officials also grew dissatisfied with other steamer partners on the upper Yukon River. Graves later recalled that the WPYR was forced to turn freight and passengers “over to an irresponsible mob of river steamers that competed for the business in much the same fashion as cab-drivers outside an ill-managed railway station.”⁹² The WPYR was willing to put up with such minor chaos in 1899, but in 1900, with the line complete to Whitehorse, Graves and Hawkins began to look to the railway’s post gold rush future.

The completion of the railway to Whitehorse simplified the WPYR’s transportation network, cutting out the steamer route between Lake Bennett and Whitehorse and the need to transfer freight to the Miles Canyon & Lewes River tramway to cross the White Horse rapids. Despite its dissatisfaction with the CDC, the WPYR continued to work closely with the company, who moved its steamers to the other side of the rapids to operate between Whitehorse and Dawson.⁹³

By 19 March 1901, the WPYR had purchased the steamers and property of the Canadian Development Company and renamed the operation the British Yukon Navigation Company (BYNC).⁹⁴ The WPYR had realized by the end of 1900 “that in self-defense we must organize our own river service.”⁹⁵ During the winter, the company built a shipyard at Whitehorse and a repair yard at Dawson. It also bought three steamers from the Canadian Pacific Navigation Company and used their machinery and fittings for new boats.⁹⁶

The British Yukon Navigation Company was a huge success for the WPYR. It gave the railway a competitive advantage as corporations consolidated individual claims into concessions that could be mined with large-scale industrial techniques.⁹⁷ As early as July 1899, WPYR employee and adviser Samuel E. Adair predicted that “binders, engines, pumps, thawing machines, pipe for hydraulic mining supplies for drift mining, together with feed for horses will constitute a large part of future

⁹¹ Graves to Hawkins, 15 April 1901, WPYR, COR 864, file 1000, YA.

⁹² S.H. Graves, *On the “White Pass” Pay-Roll* (Chicago: The Lakeside Press, 1908), 141.

⁹³ Some obstacles remained, including late season ice on Lake Laberge and the dangerous Five Figure and Hellsgate Rapids. See Bennett, “Yukon Transportation,” 63; W.W. Routland[?] to White, 7 June 1900, RG 18, vol. 179, file 104, LAC.

⁹⁴ Hawkins, memorandum, 19 March 1901, WPYR, COR 865, file 1424, YA.

⁹⁵ Graves, *On the “White Pass” Pay-Roll*, 142.

⁹⁶ Bennett, “Yukon Transportation,” 64; Minter, *White Pass*, 350.

⁹⁷ Bennett, “Yukon Transportation,” 64; Coates and Morrison, *Land of the Midnight Sun*, 118–19.

freight.”⁹⁸ During the 1901 season, the railway used its steamer service to undercut its competitors on the upper river route and force most of them out of business. The BYNC purchased the boats of many former competitors. By 1903, only three independent steamers remained on the upper river. That number was reduced to one by 1907.⁹⁹

* * * * *

The development of the relationship between the WPYR and the Mounted Police mirrored the transformation of the Alaska-Yukon border lands. At the beginning of the Klondike gold rush, the region was remote and borderless, with few connections to the outside world. Within three years, the region had been remade. The efforts of railway officials, the Mounted Police, and others to establish a border at the summit of White Pass and to ensure that goods flowed to the interior created a functional Alaska-Yukon border. Police and customs officials enforced customs regulations and the location of the border at WPYR stations, while goods, including Mounted Police supplies, flowed across the border on WPYR trains and to the interior on steamers operated by companies with traffic agreements or the BYNC. A reliable transportation system solidified links to the North American industrial economy and allowed the police to cement government control on the Canadian side of the border. The development of a functional border was complete before international negotiators met to discuss the Alaska boundary question in October 1899, and the local border was confirmed by the 1903 Alaska boundary tribunal. The Alaska-Yukon borderlands had been remade from a borderless to a bordered region, but it continued to be a borderland, thanks in no small part to the WPYR and the Mounted Police.

The fact that historians have not discussed the WPYR as a cross-border railway is a testament to the success of the relationship between the White Pass Railway and the North-West Mounted Police and the functional Alaska-Yukon border they created. The partnership shows the value of looking at the development of the border as a process rather than an established fact, highlighting cooperation and negotiation between local groups and regional and borderlands perspectives of the Klondike gold rush. The close relationship between railway and police officials is also significant. As Mounted Police superintendent Wood wrote to WPYR general manager Hawkins on 28 February 1899: “Please accept my thanks for your kindness ... At the earliest opportunity I ... hope to

⁹⁸ Samuel E. Adair to Hawkins, 16 July 1899, WPYR, COR 869, file 1, YA.

⁹⁹ Bennett, “Yukon Transportation,” 64; Minter, *White Pass*, 350–51.

meet you and your staff and thank them personally for the many acts of kindness and general good feeling you all have shown to Members of the Mounted Police.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Wood to Hawkins, 28 February 1899, WPYR, COR 871, file 55, YA.