

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF MICHAEL GATES
CONDUCTED BY KAREN BREWSTER AND ANGELA SCHMIDT
IN WHITEHORSE, YUKON TERRITORY, CANADA

AUGUST 8, 2019

ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-111

KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIBED BY RUTH SENSENIG

[00:00:00]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, this is Karen Brewster. Today is August 8, 2019, and I'm here with Michael Gates at his home in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. And this is an interview for the Klondike National Historical Park Oral History Project. And we are also joined by Angela Schmidt, the film archivist at University of Alaska Fairbanks. So we're going to talk a little bit today about Yukon gold rush history and the Chilkoot Trail and your work as a curator for Parks Canada. So Michael, maybe you can get us started with, you know, where you're from originally, your growing up, things like that.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I grew up in Alberta, and in my later years of growing up, lived in rural Alberta. And I aspired to be an archeologist one day. So I went to the University of Calgary, starting in 1967, and took a degree in archeology. Worked my way through university. [00:01:15]And I was -- my connection to the Yukon is that after I got my degree, I worked for a year so I could go back for more study. And I had a job in a brewery, which paid really well and lots of overtime, and I was, you know, banking the money like crazy, but it was a pretty boring job, and --

KAREN BREWSTER: What was the job?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I worked on the -- the production line.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

MICHAEL GATES: So the -- the bottles would go by, and, you know, you'd -- they'd just come up with a -- getting off the track here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: But they came up with a new novelty bottle. It was called Heidelberg Beer, and they came in barrel bottles. And, of course, all their equipment could handle the, you know, the routine bottles, you know, the stubbies. At that time, it was stubbies. And they had, you know, things would come down with suction cups and pick 'em up and all that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, these things didn't fit, and so all that machinery didn't work. So they had to hire all these people to handle the bottles by hand. And it took over almost fifty percent of the beer market in Alberta for a while, so they were just going all out, day and night, to produce this new beer. So I was the beneficiary of that -- that period of employment. But I didn't want to end up working there like some of them had done for fifty years. [00:02:42]And a graduate student from the University of Calgary in archeology asked me if I wanted to be his assistant. He was going to the Yukon. So I

MICHAEL GATES
AUGUST 8, 2019
ORAL HISTORY 2017-01-111
Page 1 of 47

said, "Well, when do you want to leave?" He said, "Tomorrow." And I said, "How about the day after tomorrow?" And we drove -- drove to the Yukon in a 1949 Mercury one-ton truck. And that's -- that was my introduction to the Yukon. And I quickly fell in love with it and decided that I wanted to live there. And I was in love with the history, so I wanted to be there and not far away.

KAREN BREWSTER: And what year was that?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that was 1971.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

[00:03:24]MICHAEL GATES: And so, I came back the next year. I had a couple of projects to work on the next year, and I was hooked. And -- but I -- I finally came to -- well, I met a man named Alan Innes-Taylor. That's A-L-A-N I-N-N-E-S-dash-T-A-Y-L-O-R. And he -- he has very, very much part of the history himself. He was one of the first Canadians to fly. Got his pilot's license, was a -- flew a fighter in World War I, and he joined the Mounted Police. And he did patrols all over the Yukon. And then he became a purser on the sternwheelers. And then he got an opportunity to handle the dogs for the Byrd expeditions in Antarctica.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And then he became a -- during World War II, he became a lieutenant colonel in the US Air Force, I think, and he was a survival expert, and he did a lot of stuff related to northern survival. Wrote a manual on the subject. So and he had a tremendous love of the history. And he could see that it was being looted and destroyed and vandalized, and so he convinced me that, um, something ought to be done. And so, I decided that's the way I wanted to go into archeology. Forget Mesoamerica. I -- I just wanted to, you know, look at -- at the time, they didn't have cultural resource management, but that's -- that's what I wanted to do. [00:05:05]And so, I eventually went back to -- went to graduate school at the University of Alberta. And they didn't -- they didn't entertain the idea of what they used to call salvage archeology. That was too pedestrian, and it was dirtying your hands, and it wasn't academic work. And they -- they discouraged me from that. And I didn't see much of an opportunity at the time in archeology in the Yukon. So I had an opportunity to go to the National Museum and get training in conservation in their conservators-in-training program. So I spent three years in Ottawa doing that, and it was the most incredible learning opportunity imaginable. They brought people in from all over the world, the tops in their field. And I just soaked it all in. So I very quickly absorbed knowledge from a wide variety of fields, and that later helped me when I became the curator in Dawson. [00:06:06]So I worked in Ottawa for three years, three months, and three weeks. Got hired to work with Parks, and I spent six months in Ottawa, learning everything there was to learn about -- I worked with the curators, I worked through the cataloging system, I developed -- I took notes and ended up with a binder that thick, about --

KAREN BREWSTER: Three inches.

MICHAEL GATES: Almost three inches thick, that contained, you know, step by step, every part of the cataloging process. So when I was finished, I knew it took two hours and forty minutes to catalog an artifact from start to finish. That was useful later, when I started working with --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: -- the collection, 'cause, you know, we had -- it turned out, roughly a quarter of a million artifacts. And, you know, you apply that number to that number of artifacts, and I realize that you'd have ten people for a hundred years and not catalog it all. So that shaped how I dealt with the collection. [00:07:09]So uh, I applied for the job as the curator of collections, and I was hired in October of 1977, and I arrived in Dawson in March of 1978. And uh, started working on the -- the massive collection of buildings and the very ambitious program of development that they had in place. So -- and -- and that's what I did for twenty-three years. Worked in Dawson on the collection there. Uh, aside from the film discovery, which was kind of a sideline, the first year I spent just getting my -- a grip on what the collection was. Where everything was, how much material there was, and how -- what the content composition was. And formulated, basically, a model for how -- how we could store and house the collection. And my boss pondered how we would ever get support for any of this. But the next spring we had a flood, and eighty percent of Dawson was under water. And they gave us a blank check. And I already had the -- I knew what we needed. Didn't have to think about it. So we got -- we got the warehouses we needed, and got them upgraded and developed for storing the collection. And first -- first year, I had ten catalogers helping me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Whoa.

MICHAEL GATES: But we were working with the flood damaged-material. And that continued. That work lasted for ten years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

[00:08:57]MICHAEL GATES: But in the process, I got my collection organized. So I felt pretty good about that. And the -- when I started, they didn't have well-formed concept of what a curator was and why we do conservation. And I had to lock up one of the buildings where the bulk of our collection was stored because the guys in the workshop would go down there and raid it for tools.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: And they didn't understand why that wasn't -- you know, it's easier than going to the hardware store. Just go down and get the spokeshave you need. And I spent a lot of time with them. When I left, they were all wearing hard hats, which they didn't like it when I arrived, and they all respected the collection. And uh, but it was a gradual process that over the years, they started to understand.

[00:09:49]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, were you the first curator that they had -- Parks Canada had in Dawson?

MICHAEL GATES: I was the first professional museologist ever hired in the Yukon.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes, so what inspired them to hire somebody like you to work with the collection?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they had a grand master plan for developing the site, and it involved a team of curators and a team of conservators. And uh, they were going to develop -- There was one building that was a hotel that they were going to turn into staff housing. And uh -- Uh, very ambitious master plan. And the year that -- the first spring I was there, we went through that plan and started scheduling the buildings in the order in

which they'd be restored and what the curatorial involvement would be. And that went to Winnipeg, and they immediately slashed it. [00:10:40]And so, the grand plan for all the curators and all the conservators ended up with me. And I had an assistant curator who was a long-time Dawson resident and who -- named John Gould, who taught me a lot. He was -- he mentored me and introduced me to mining history. It was an invaluable opportunity. But we had two curators and no catalogers, no conservation, nothing. When John retired, I converted that position into a conservator, and um, so we -- we had a conservator from early on. And the first conservator I hired went on to be the provincial conservator in British Columbia. It was Valerie Thorp. And uh, the -- the catalogers that -- that I hired, uh, one of them continued to work with me until I retired. Well, 'til I left Dawson. And that was Paula Hassard. H-A-S-S-A-R-D. And she, uh, eventually got into developing exhibits and, you know, just um, you know, was a natural for the -- for the work. And when I left, they had a conservator and Paula, who was sort of the senior curator. And they had a design curator and a collections manager. And then in 2011, the Harper government decided that they weren't necessary, and they -- they wiped out the whole program and left them without any staff to care for the collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Great disappointment to me because when I left, that team was working so well together. And, you know, they integrated. It wasn't like, well, I'm conservator, and that's all I do. Everybody kinda worked together. You know, when there was a project, they all knew that they were part of the project. Not, just that's not my job, sort of thing. It was -- it was delightful to see that.

[00:12:50]KAREN BREWSTER: And so, what types of material were in the collection? Were -- is this all gold rush era? Or you said mining history.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, there were buildings and uh, their extent contents. There was the KTM building, which contained the material that used to be sold there. It was a lot of tin wares and other products. So there were shelves and shelves of old pots and tins and you name it. There were -- we had two dredges and all of the equipment that survived from those dredges. Dredge No. 4 was buried seventeen feet in the muck, and from the ground surface up, there wasn't much left. But when we had to move it, we had to extract it from the ground.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: It was frozen into. And as we washed away all the silt and worked our way down, everything was there. It was like they'd walked away from it. So the top half was bare, and the bottom half was --

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: Everything was intact. We had mining equipment. We had the contents of the Dawson Daily News. We had the contents from four blacksmiths' shops. We had the furnishings from the Commissioner's Residence. We had Robert Service Cabin. Um, I think when I left, there were about twenty-five different exhibit modules, all the way from the Commissioner's Residence, which I was the team leader for that -- that project. We restored the building and put in fire protection and basic services. And we restored the interior to the 1914-1915 period.

[00:14:39]KAREN BREWSTER: And that's a building that now the public can go in and tour through?

MICHAEL GATES: That's correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: As I recall, right?

MICHAEL GATES: The prime minister opened it in 1996. There was a big deal. And it was -- it was a fun project to, you know, at the end of my time in Dawson, because we -- we slowly worked from -- the first exhibit was in the window of the KTM. And I just took some of the things out of the collection. They were a little bit rusty, so we intervened in a professional conservation manner. Made them presentable for exhibit. The first exhibit was a Yoho bath heater. And uh, then we started doing other window displays. And we'd had a couple of, uh, uh -- I'm trying to think of the right word. Unpalatable dealings with the curators from Ottawa. It was sort of "I'm from Ottawa and I'm here to help you." Instead of, "I'm from Ottawa, what can we do to help?" You know, they -- it was like -- but they did it from afar. So instead of using items from the collection, they'd go shopping in Brimfield, Massachusetts. They had a massive flea market there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: They'd buy stuff there to furnish buildings in Dawson when we had the collection here. And so, I made it one of my tasks to start taking the collection, getting them out where people could see them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Because there weren't -- there was a lot of -- You know, people were saying, "Well, why are we spending all this time and money and nobody gets to see it?" And I didn't have a good answer for that one. Um, and I agreed with them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So we started a program of display cases and window displays, and, you know, opportunistically used the collection. We had graduate students in conservation working with our conservator. We had some graduate students in museum studies working on exhibits.

[00:16:48]ANGELA SCHMIDT: Were there any models that you were following to curate something on this scale, or were you making up a lot of this as you went along?

MICHAEL GATES: I made it up.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: I got a lot of ideas. I had -- someone suggested something that made sense, I grabbed a hold of it.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Are there other examples of something on this scale?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, ok. We had -- let's just say, I started with the number of a hundred thousand artifacts.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And I figured out how many hours it would take to catalog the collection. I said, that -- that isn't realistic. And we had one of our colleagues from Winnipeg in town. He talked about what he called inventory control. So what we did was, we'd have things like a great big wooden barrel full of horseshoe blanks. Well, in Ottawa, they would take them all, and they'd catalog each and every single one of them. And what I was did was, I cataloged one, and the rest were put into an inventory control group, referencing that catalog number. 'Cause they were all identical.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So one description. And if -- if you needed more for exhibit, then we would catalog them as required.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And -- and that way, we could work with huge groups of items, and catalog one and put the rest into an inventory control group. So that's -- that's just one example.

[00:18:16]KAREN BREWSTER: Or a box of nails? You don't catalog every nail.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, don't get me started on that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: I had some long discussions with the archeologists because they were excavating material, and they wanted to keep everything. And so, I got one -- I'm just trying to remember who it was. Uh, I got the conservator working on that, and, you know, looking at the conditions. And I said, you know, "What's the prospect, you know, for preserving these?" And the answer was, "Well, in twenty years, you can expect half the collection to be nothing but rust." So I went -- I went to the archeologists, and I said, "Hey, you know, you can't just let it sit there, or all you'll be curating is rust." And so, they launched a -- a multi-year program, and they brought teams of material culture specialists to Dawson. And they went through all these things, and they took prototypes, or --

KAREN BREWSTER: Samples.

MICHAEL GATES: Samples.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And gave them the full treatment, and the rest was retained in Dawson.

[00:19:24]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, so they -- if there's four styles of nails, they make sure that they've got one --

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or, you know, a few of each.

MICHAEL GATES: I mean, I left that up to them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But that's sort of the concept, that you get the representative differences, and you keep a few of them, and then, you don't need a thousand of the same nails, but you might need five of 'em.

MICHAEL GATES: I -- I think what I did was, I was able to inject reality and common sense that, you can't just say, "Well, we're going to keep it all." Because, you know, physically and practically, that was not possible. It was not feasible. And so, they directed their attention, and they took out two or three thousand, uh, specimens from the collection.

KAREN BREWSTER: And so, similar to Skagway --

MICHAEL GATES: Make a type collection.

[00:20:09]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So similar to Skagway, there was historic building restoration work going on in Dawson, and there was sort of salvage archeology below the buildings before they worked on them?

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm. That's correct. The -- and we also, when they were restoring buildings, we took samples of things like wallpapers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And, you know, lighting fixtures and things like that. We had a special group. There was a special accession number that we used each year to designate extent

samples that were collected. So when they worked on a building, we'd -- we'd get, you know, the doorknobs and the hinges and the wallpapers and things like that. 'Cause we knew that they couldn't use those in the -- when they restored it, but it would give us an idea of what we should be looking for, for, you know, the -- the modern things.

KAREN BREWSTER: The replicas.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: The replicas.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And then, I spent a lot of time, you know, looking through period catalogs. Funny thing was, one of the places we went to back in the '80's was a little outfit called Amazon.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I think I've heard of them.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Huh.

MICHAEL GATES: But yeah, there were specialty suppliers, and if you just knew where to look, you could get these things. We -- we found a place that had carbon filament lightbulbs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: So we put those into the Palace Grand Theatre, because we knew they didn't have the bright tungsten lights. And, you know, so, wherever possible, we tried to find something that was appropriate to the period.

[00:21:50]KAREN BREWSTER: So that means you worked with the historic building restoration crews to -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: Oh, yeah. I was a pain in the ass. Because, you know, I'd say, "Well, you can't do that." Or you know, I'd -- I'd say, "You know, you really have to have the right hardware here." You know, and I'd try my best to help them find what they needed.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. 'Cause yeah, in the US Park Service, they've -- they have a historic architect that helped in Skagway. But in Dawson, perhaps you didn't have that equivalent position?

MICHAEL GATES: Oh no, we had -- oh, we had teams. We had an architect on site for many years, an engineer on site. But um, my first encounter. I left Ottawa on my way to Dawson to start work. And at that time, our regional headquarters was in Winnipeg. And the fellow that hired me said, "Well, you should stop in Winnipeg on your way through." And as it turned out, they were having a team meeting for the Red Feather Saloon, which they were going to turn into a sort of a visitor interpretive center. And so, I sat in on the meetings. And at the end of the meeting, uh, I said, "Well, you know, you really didn't talk about the exhibits and what you're going to do inside." And one of them said, "Oh well, they'll worry about that when we give them the building." And -- and I thought, "Huh?" You should be thinking about that while you're developing the thing. Otherwise, you'll get a, you know, a building, you know, that suits their purposes but isn't suitable for exhibit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And so, I really -- you know, I really injected myself into these projects whenever I could because I knew we'd get a better result. The engineers saw A and B, and the straight line between them. And not many of them had the -- the -- the right

historical background. Some did. Guys like Ken Elder, he was terrific. I wish we'd've had more of him working in Dawson.

KAREN BREWSTER: And he was an architect, historic architect?

MICHAEL GATES: He was a restoration architect with the restoration services division in Ottawa. He did meticulous work. [00:24:08]So I -- I'd get -- get myself involved, and when -- I went to graduate school later on. I went to Cooperstown. And while I was away, they started a project while I was out of town. And when I got back, there are two things I remember. One, they decided to make over the -- some of the interior rooms in the Palace Grand Theatre, including one that we'd furnished. A typical room used by one of the ladies of the, you know, the theatre troupe. And they put this red and gold flocked wallpaper on the walls. And uh -- I was, uh, a little taken aback by this. And I, oh golly, wallpaper expert. I met him when I was in grad school. Dick, uh -- he's -- he was the American authority on historic wallpapers (Dick Nylander). So I -- I sent him a sample of wallpaper, and I said, "You know, is this appropriate?" And he sent it back and said, "Oh, this is 1950's." So I made them take it out and replace it. And they didn't like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: But, you know, that -- you know, that was a quick fix, but uh, it wasn't appropriate.

KAREN BREWSTER: But they listened to you?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, grudgingly. [00:25:31]Um, on another occasion -- the second time I went away to grad school, I spent two resident semesters in Cooperstown. The second one, they started doing the Bank of -- BNA. British North America Bank. British North America. And the restoration architect in that, um, had lots of information on the, um, what the interior of the bank looked like. But he saw one in a bank in Atlin that had -- looked really fancy, so that's what he put in there instead.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I thought, "Why did you do that when you had the evidence to tell you what was actually here?" And we actually had some of the counters and things. Why weren't we using that?

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So I realized that -- and by that time I'd realized that there was one restoration architect that took Robert Service Cabin and put an entirely different roof on it 'cause that one looked more like a roof for a log cabin instead of, you know, the one that was there. You know, they -- they exercised these liberties.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

[00:26:41]MICHAEL GATES: I'm sorry. I'm saying all these things and somebody's going to curse me for saying it, but these -- these are the facts that shaped my --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, right.

MICHAEL GATES: -- my approach. So I really felt it was important to strive for historical accuracy where you could. Well, while I was away in that second semester, the restoration architect started furnishing it.

KAREN BREWSTER: The bank?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. And these artifacts started showing up, and I was looking at them, thinking, arts and crafts style? What's this got to do with the bank? And so, I contacted the head of curatorial work in Winnipeg and said, "Do you know what they're doing?"

And she wasn't aware, so she put a stop to that. And I got the -- the head of -- oh, Susan Buggey. She was the head of historical -- B-U-G-G-E-Y. She was the head of historical research in the Winnipeg office at the time. And I said, "What we really need is for a historian to dig out all the information we have, a) on what the interior of the BNA bank looked like, and b) what were typical bank furnishings from the era." And they produced this lovely volume. And when we restored it, and Paula Hassard played a major role in that, we used things that were in our collection. And we worked with the counters that they put in there that replicated Atlin, but we'd -- we -- we used things that, you know, we learned from that historical study to inform our treatment of the building.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

[00:28:28]MICHAEL GATES: So that -- the curators in Ottawa at the time, they -- they were kind of like touchy-feely, and sometimes they took liberties. And um, I remember when I was in Ottawa, I said, "Well, where's the blueprint or plan for furnishings?" "Oh, I haven't got time for that." It was all, you know -- So when, for instance, when the "SS Klondike" was restored, curators came up and installed it and walked away. And in the fall I came down, and I recorded the installations, where everything was, and developed inventories of everything in each of the cabins. So that over the years, uh, when they had to -- let's say there was a leak and they had to take things out, we had a photographic record of what was in there and how they were arranged so that they could put them back. Otherwise, they'd start --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: There'd be what I call drift. It would drift away from the original intent.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: So that was something that I implemented, was always having a plan and a listing and, you know, sort of a philosophy or, you know, the thinking that went into developing the exhibit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And uh, um, and then once it was installed, we did a complete recording of it and an inventory, so that from then on, we could, for instance, check to make sure that everything was accounted for. [00:29:58]With the "SS Klondike," for example, they had an inventory. And some years later, I thought -- I went down to do the fall end-of-season inspection. And I thought, "Let's just see." We took the purser's office, and we had our inventory and said, "Ok, let's -- let's take the things out and check them off." And we took everything out and we had everything checked off on the list, and there was still stuff in the (in the purser's office) -- that had never been recorded.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the case?

MICHAEL GATES: Including one -- one item that was a loaner.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, from another institution?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: Yes. And so, we dealt with that. But --

KAREN BREWSTER: Little embarrassing.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, you know, it's not very professional.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And uh, until somebody said, "Let's -- let's take everything out and see what's left." They -- everything's on the checklist. It's all accounted for. So, you know, there were things that I learned over the years that informed the -- the way we did it. So every exhibit, we had, we always had an exhibit inventory. And we developed schedules for inspections and what you did.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:31:08]MICHAEL GATES: And for the exhibit cases, for example, uh, dust was a big problem. And so, we sealed the cases, enclosed them. And very simple. We put a fan and uh, we installed an air intake with an automobile air filter.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So it would draw the air through the automobile air filter before it circulated in the exhibit. And it cut the dust problem.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Eliminated the dust problem. And uh, my boss said, "Well, we want to have our exhibits open in the winter time." So I had to think about that. And I went back and I looked at the exhibits, and, well, one of the big problems in the winter time was, you get condensation on the windows. Frost.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: So um, we -- from then on, whenever we treated -- did a window exhibit, we put vents at the front so the air that we were circulating would come out and would come up across the windows and would keep the -- keep the windows free of frost. I mean, there's no point having the exhibit if -- and uh, it also, having that air movement eliminated frost build-up on artifacts.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

MICHAEL GATES: As well. [00:32:26]And um, and then we, um, we found a manufacturer who provided particular film you could apply to glass that would filter ultraviolet light.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And that eliminated the -- or reduced the problems with fading.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: We had one -- one exhibit an Ottawa curator came in and installed and I said, "Well, aren't you concerned about light?" "Oh well, there's a building across the street and the shade." And I said, "Have you looked at the building? Have you looked where it is?" "Ah." So I did a series of tests where I put test strips, you know, on inside.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And we monitored. And in the course of one -- the first season that exhibit was -- you know, it was in Madame Tremblay's. Uh, things were badly, badly bleached.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I mean, an outdoor -- it's basically like an outdoor exhibit if it's in a window.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: With all that sunlight.

MICHAEL GATES: So from there on, we always had the awning over the front. We put UV film in. And we worked with reproductions.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And um, so after that, we didn't have that prob -- I mean, after fifteen years, you're gonna have to deal with some issues, but not one year.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

MICHAEL GATES: So these are all things that seem to make sense to me if you're going to do a professional job. You know, you have to do it.

[00:33:58]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And you say you think this doesn't relate to Klondike Park, but it does. 'Cause they face those same issues with their collections.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: And their historic buildings and their exhibits.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, but I didn't go down there and say, here's what we're doing or anything like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, no, no. But you guys were probably got --

MICHAEL GATES: Similar issues.

KAREN BREWSTER: Parallel paths.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So to speak. And so, like for people who don't know, how is it that Parks Canada is connected to Dawson? Is -- is Dawson City a designated historical park?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, it all goes back to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. That -- that's the body, and it consists of, um, a representative from each province and territory, and a member from the National Archives and one from the National Museum. And anybody in Canada can put forward a nomination. We'd like this person or this place or this event declared nationally significant. And they review them, and they decide yes or no, and how they would be commemorated. And golly, I've got the minutes from the meeting. It was 1957, they came up, and then they came back a few years later. But uh, and did it again. But they decided that Dawson was a complex of historical significance. And they -- they selected a cross-section of buildings from within the community, original buildings that they thought collectively reflected the impact of the gold rush. And uh, in later years, I led some initiatives to develop what we call Commemorative Integrity Statements, which identified the resources, the values of those resources, and uh, it -- it helped guide our decision-making regarding, you know, how we intervened.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:36:01]MICHAEL GATES: Um, but it was the Historic Sites and Monuments Board that gave the direction.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: That Parks Canada should become involved. And the first two projects there were the, uh, they tore down the Palace Grand Theatre and rebuilt it, and they designated the "SS Keno" as nationally significant, and for a few years, the Klondike Visitors Association used it for entertainment, and people actually slept in the uh, the rooms.

KAREN BREWSTER: In the berths?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, in the little berths.

KAREN BREWSTER: Huh.

MICHAEL GATES: So I'm told. And -- but by the time I got there, it was strictly a visitor attraction.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:36:46]MICHAEL GATES: So uh, by the early 1960's, Parks Canada started acquiring properties scattered throughout Dawson. And there were about twenty-five buildings of one sort or another. And the Commemorative Integrity Statement identifies the -- I think there are now nineteen buildings that are designated as nationally significant. Robert Service Cabin, the Palace Grand Theatre, the KTM building, uh, Caley's Store, the Palace Grand Theatre, um, let me see. Bigg's Blacksmith Shop, the Red Feather Saloon. They're scattered throughout the community.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I'm impressed you could name them all off like that.

[00:37:31]Um, and then, but there's also the -- we're sort of getting off topic here, but the City of Dawson has a museum as well?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, there's a non-profit organization, the Dawson City Museum Society. And um, we -- we kind of worked with them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Yeah, I was wondering what that relationship was like.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, the building that -- when I first started, it looked like Parks Canada was going to help restore the building, and I was told to work closely with the museum society. I ended up getting married to the director. Who by the way, made some muffins.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh, excellent.

MICHAEL GATES: You must take --

KAREN BREWSTER: This is your wife, Kathy?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. You must take --

KAREN BREWSTER: Who's --

MICHAEL GATES: -- some muffins away with you.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. All right. Well, that's very kind of her. Um, so --

MICHAEL GATES: So over the years, those were the -- and then, there were another group of buildings that we acquired that supported the streetscapes. And uh, an example of that might be Oak Hall, or as it was called at the time, Winaut's Store. Uh, was an example. Or Lowe's Mortuary was another example. These were not nationally significant, but we saved the structures, and we've interpreted them, um, to the themes that are of national significance.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

[00:38:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And so, this -- the national significance of Dawson and the Klondike Gold Rush and the connections to Skagway and the Chilkoot Trail, do you want to summarize that a little bit?

MICHAEL GATES: Well -- well, I don't think that they had --

KAREN BREWSTER: Is there a connection?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, uh, uh, you'll see, I remember when -- when I was working in Whitehorse, we had two framed proclamations. I think they were dated 1998. Bill Clinton signed one, and, I think,2 Jean Chrétien signed the other, where they both sort of proclaimed that the Chilkoot Trail was an inter -- you know, an international thing. And I

know that Parks Canada has had very close working relationship with the US Park Service over the years. They have a trail center that they used to have.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: I don't know where that stands now, but when I was there, you know, the Parks Canada Trail Center was just across from the train station, you know, they --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right, right.

MICHAEL GATES: Where they have the theater for the US Park Service. And they -- they became a bit concerned about the, you know, the -- they were having problems with crowding some days on the trail, so they started this registration system to uh -- I think they limited it to fifty people a day?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And uh, that was happening in the '90's.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that's when it became a joint international park? Where they started sharing management?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they work closely together.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, you know, I -- you'd have to speak to the superintendents, Clay Alderson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, right.

MICHAEL GATES: Or --

KAREN BREWSTER: No, yeah. I've got all that. Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Um, I just know that they, you know, they communicated well, and exchanged --

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: -- stuff.

[00:40:55]KAREN BREWSTER: I was sort of wondering, like yeah, how Dawson fits into the story of the gold rush.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, you see, back in that period, we were also looking at having a -- an international thing that extended from Seattle --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: -- to the Chilkoot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Um, and uh, Whitehorse and the Yukon River because there's a section of the Yukon River that's a heritage river and then into Dawson and then the gold fields, the dredge. Dredge No. 4, and Bear Creek.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So all of these things kind of lent themselves to a unified theme, which was the Klondike Gold Rush. But I think it was pretty clear that, um, the people leading the charge in -- on the American side weren't interested in getting into an international park. So, for instance, when we looked at a World Heritage Site, that was one of the things we thought about, was having this thing with units from Seattle all the way to Dawson City. And that fell on difficult terrain. It wasn't fertile ground, so. And again, I wasn't involved in that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: But I know that eventually, they got the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in involved, and they -- they led the thing. And for a while, they were going to turn it into a First Nations theme.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And eventually, they -- they worked out a compromise where they acknowledged the First Nation component and the mining component, and uh, sort of melded them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did it become a World Heritage Site?

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, they're still working on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And someone like Paula Hassard would -- she was managing the project. After she re -- after she got the boot by the Harper government, uh, the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in hired her as the manager of the World Heritage initiative.

[00:43:03]KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. Ok. Well, and I know, like, you know, the Seattle part of the story of the gold rush from the American side, they do try and connect that with Skagway. You know, but you sort of have two park regions and units, and cooperation and administration can be challenging.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: So I was wondering if doing that from Dawson and the Parks Canada and then here in Whitehorse, cooperating across countries and agencies, was that even possible or the challenges of that?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I was aware of what was going on, but my -- my focus when I was in Dawson -- After the -- we completed the Commissioner's Residence restoration in '96, I morphed into a cultural integrity specialist. I dealt with policy and developing CI statements and leading, you know, the planning for CRM (Cultural Resource Management) considerations and different projects. And I didn't -- I didn't get involved in, you know, some of these other things.

[00:44:11]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And so, when did you come to Whitehorse?

MICHAEL GATES: 2000.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And since then, you have -- what was your position?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I was the cultural integrity specialist for the field unit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And I worked with historical material that was in Kluane, the Chilkoot Trail, and in Dawson City. So I led -- when they had the Commemorative Integrity Statements needed to be developed, I did that. And I give CRM training. And I worked on some projects. I helped, you know, when teams were planning projects, there were a couple on the Chilkoot Trail where I tried to be the voice for cultural resource management, to get that incorporated into the thinking and the planning. I discovered that if you wait until they're ready to start the project, it's too late to say, "But you forgot about that." And so, I tried to, you know, horn in as early in the process as possible to get them thinking about that.

[00:45:12]KAREN BREWSTER: So can you tell us what some of those projects were on the Chilkoot?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, the -- the one that, uh, I had the strongest attachment to was the cemetery restoration.

KAREN BREWSTER: The cemetery in Bennett?

MICHAEL GATES: Well -- well, they have a cemetery in Bennett, and they have one in Lindeman. And they also have them on the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, I didn't know that.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep. Yep. And uh, between Deep Lake and Lindeman, uh, there are some graves. They're not on the trail. You have to go around the lake and up a rock face and uh, you find a spot and it overlooks Lindeman Lake, and two infants were buried there, and uh, an adult.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So I gathered all the information that I had on the -- you know, from old photographs and whatnot, so I knew what they looked like. And I visited and looked at what was remaining, to see if that matched with what was in the photos. And took measurements and detailed what, you know, what was there. And uh, we tried to restore the -- the grave enclosures as accurately as we could. In some cases, they -- the -- back when corrections was doing this in the early '60's, they took some of the grave fences and they just threw them over the hill.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: And built these ones made out of log.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: So in some cases, all we did was we replicated the log enclosures.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: The -- burial remains like that are -- are not treated within the cultural resource management policy, they're treated as buried human remains, and that's -- there's a different policy for that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: But I -- bearing that in mind, I still tried to reflect the historicity. [00:47:19]There's also the Mathes grave, which overlooked the one-mile river that connects Lindeman Lake to Bennett.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: The story was, the fellow tried unsuccessfully two times to take his outfit through the rapids. And he lost it two times. So he went up on the hill and blew his brains out.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And they buried him there. Um, so -- and it involved contacting various families and interested parties. The -- the Masons, the Masonic Order, was interested in, specifically, in commemorating -- in the commemoration of Masons who were buried on the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And one of the members here forked out the money to buy stone markers, and we -- we flew them in in the spring, and I had them installed.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm. Um, but those -- so those old graves, you leave the human remains there?

MICHAEL GATES: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. You don't touch those?

MICHAEL GATES: No.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were any of them, um, First Nations people?

MICHAEL GATES: No. No. Uh, I've seen one photograph of an indigenous grave along the trail, but I have no idea where it is now.

[00:48:41]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, what other projects? I was thinking if there was trail work being done, did they have to do CRM clearance or putting in new bridges or things like that?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, I sort of had to deal with those, you know, as they came up, and --

KAREN BREWSTER: Or building a new trail shelter or something?

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm. Oh golly, now those -- I'd almost have to go back to the files to -- to get my memory on those.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: But I remember there was one -- one place where there was a grave right on the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh. Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: At Deep Lake. And so they built this -- the archeologists confirmed that they didn't go all the way down to the body, but when they, you know, surface skimmed, they could see the -- the outline. So they built a platform, you could walk over that instead of just trample it.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, that's why that platform's there.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, interesting.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, 'cause there's no sign or anything to indicate that there's something there. I'm sure they don't want people to know that.

[00:49:53]MICHAEL GATES: Um, Christine Hedgecock was -- she was the champion for protecting things on the trail. She knew the value of the things, and she knew where they were, and, you know, one of the things they did, they -- they picked various features, and they were monitoring them from year to year to see what kind of human impact and natural changes might be taking place. And I remember at Bennett, you know, people were wandering all over the place, trampling on things. And Christine, you know, she -- she got involved and put railings in certain places. And they took spruce needles and sprinkled them over the path so you couldn't see -- 'cause as soon as you see that there's a treadway there, everybody walks on it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: So they -- they covered those up, and they -- they took branches from trees, and they -- they covered trails so that people wouldn't see them. It was just a very subtle way of directing -- you know, keeping people on certain paths. There were things like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[00:50:55]MICHAEL GATES: But, you know, it's -- I know from personal experience, it's difficult to monitor people's -- the hikers' activities, and uh, I know that hikers are taking things off the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Still?

MICHAEL GATES: Uh. Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: I mean, certainly --

MICHAEL GATES: Let's say this, uh, I saw it in 1973 when I worked on the -- I did the archeological survey before the Skagway road went in. And that involved being at the summit of the White Pass. And I remember being in the -- we took the train back from the summit, and we stopped at Bennett for the big meal. Boy, were we hungry. And there were a couple of fellows there, and they were showing us the moonshine jug they -- they looted. And uh, some people had, you know, they'd select what they wanted, and then they'd go smash everything else, thinking, well, that makes my piece more valuable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And I heard stories about that. But I also saw people doing that.

[00:52:00]And then when I was working for Parks and I was going into, you know, various -- at various times, I would go to Lindeman or to the summit or to Bennett, and one time I remember hiking in via Bare Loon Lake, and I met some hikers on the way in. They had things dangling from their backpacks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: So, you know -- and they didn't see any -- you know, how could that hurt? I thought, well, uh, it's fifty hikers a day, that's what, fifteen hundred a month, that's forty-five hundred a year, over ten years, that's forty-five thousand artifacts that could get hauled away, or more.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Um.

[00:52:40]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and certainly, nowadays, with the trail being so controlled for hikers on the US side, you know, there's a lot of education attempts to tell people not to take things.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that helps. That helps. But there are people that'll still do it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: You can't stop them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, and people say before the Klondike Gold Rush Park was established, you know, lots of people in Skagway and hikers took all kinds of stuff.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm. Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that probably happened on the Canadian side as well?

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So I was aware of that, but I never tried to quantify that. But my encounters suggested that it was a frequent occurrence.

KAREN BREWSTER: So if you -- that --

MICHAEL GATES: And they would take things from the trail, and they'd get to Lindeman, and they'd put them on the sod roof of the cabin.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, so now the provenience, the provenance is -- is lost.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, you don't know where it came from originally. [00:53:31]Yeah, and I was -- that's one reason, like, when you came across people who had things, did you encourage them to not take them with them?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they'd already taken them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, so it didn't matter?

MICHAEL GATES: They're not going to turn around and hike all the way back up the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: No, but even -- so if they left them where you met them, it would've been a moot point?

MICHAEL GATES: Out of context.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah. Hm.

[00:53:53]MICHAEL GATES: I also, when I was working on the cemetery project, I witnessed some people at Bennett, or half a dozen of them, I think. And there were ground features from the shore, out where the stones had been piled up for quays and docks and things like that. And they were going and they were ripping these out and throwing them in the water to make a big splash.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, my goodness.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. So, you know, over time, you lose the integrity because of these thoughtless human actions.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: But, you know, unless I got in there, "You can't do that." And, you know, loaded the shotgun to chase 'em away.

[00:54:35]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, what about the church at Bennett? Were you involved in any way with any of that preservation of it?

MICHAEL GATES: No, no.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or is there restoration plans for it?

MICHAEL GATES: No. No, I wasn't.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: We did -- I did arrange for some of the pieces that were taken from the church to be stored in Dawson.

KAREN BREWSTER: So pieces were taken for --

MICHAEL GATES: Elements.

KAREN BREWSTER: But they were taken by hikers, or they were taken --

MICHAEL GATES: No, no. By our staff.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- for protection purposes?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they'd bring 'em in, and they'd make replicas.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok.

[00:55:13]MICHAEL GATES: So, you know, and some of the grave markers were in such poor condition that we fabricated replicas, and I arranged for the originals to be stored in Dawson.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. Why in Dawson and not in Whitehorse?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, because in Dawson, they had a team that could catalog them and store them and conserve them and care for them. In Whitehorse, they had a warehouse, and everybody could go and work, you know, sort through things, and they got moved around.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, it was -- in my opinion, the team in Dawson could do a better job of curating.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: No disrespect to my -- my colleagues in Whitehorse, but the volume of curatorial work --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: You could never justify a full-time position to take care of that stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: So did you ever collaborate curation collection stuff, like, with Deb Sanders and the -- you know, each side did its own thing? Ok. Interesting. [00:56:12]Um, the other structure on the Canadian side I'm wondering about is the trapping cabin, the Helm family cabin?

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, the best person to talk to there is probably Christine.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: She's very -- they adopted her into their family. She's known them for years and years, and --

KAREN BREWSTER: So Parks Canada has had nothing to do with preserving that or protecting that?

MICHAEL GATES: No. No, that's her house.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: As far as I know. Um, she lived there before it was a park, and she's living there now. And they just acknowledge that that's her cabin.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And there was a sign on it that said --

MICHAEL GATES: Leave. Do not --

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, it said, "You know, if you're interested, you can look inside, but make sure the door's closed. But don't disturb anything"

MICHAEL GATES: Oh. You're not talking about Edna Helms' cabin?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I mean, we didn't go in. We didn't look --

MICHAEL GATES: Ok. Well, it's been -- it's been more than ten years since I've been up there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So maybe that's something new.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it was --

MICHAEL GATES: It used to be --

KAREN BREWSTER: It was not a -- it was not a Parks Canada sign. It was from her and the family.

MICHAEL GATES: Ok. That's new.

KAREN BREWSTER: That said, this is a private residence.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. That's new. There were signs that said "Private: Please Keep Away."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So it does say that it's private. So that's -- I just didn't know if Parks Canada had anything to do with it.

[00:57:30]MICHAEL GATES: I hate to say it, but there are some tourists who just think that they can go anywhere they want and do anything they want.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: When I -- when I was in Dawson, I remember observing after hours someone going -- gaining access to the "SS Keno." And they were shinnying up the mast.

KAREN BREWSTER: Whoa.

MICHAEL GATES: And I walked over, and I said, "I'm sorry, uh, the boat is closed, and, you know, you shouldn't be up there." This guy's hanging onto the pole like this, looking down at me, he says, "Oh, really?" Like, "I didn't know."

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Give me a break.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And uh, the museum had some trains.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And one day I caught some guys with big wrenches taking parts off the train.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, my goodness.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. I sent them packing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: My wife was the director of the museum, so I felt I had authority.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, in that case, would there be police involved? The RCMP weren't called?

MICHAEL GATES: No, I just made sure we got everything back from them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And they just thought that, "Oh, it's fine. You know, I don't see why I can't." I said, "Well actually -- " Well, they're not taking care of it." Well, you know, as if taking bits and pieces away to twenty-five different places is going to be good for them. And they were eventually treated -- the small Porter engine was restored and put on exhibit at Expo '86.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: So when it came back, it was fully restored.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So it did happen. But not -- no thanks to these guys with the wrenches trying to steal parts.

[00:59:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, you're talking about the development of the Chilkoot Trail, and um, you mentioned in the '60's, some of the corrections labor. Maybe it was the '70's? When did that happen?

MICHAEL GATES: There was a fellow named Vic Ogison who was -- I'm not sure what he was. He was -- he was one of the senior guys. He might have been the head of

corrections. In fact, I think he probably was. And he -- he was really proud of the program and what they were doing to, you know, improve the trail for hiking purposes.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was before it was a park?

MICHAEL GATES: Yes. Now I don't know precisely when it became -- it's not a site, it's a park. It's a national historic park.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And I'm not sure --

KAREN BREWSTER: I know the US side was officially designated, I think, in '76-'77, somewhere around there.

MICHAEL GATES: I'd have to take a look at the Commemorative Integrity Statement.

KAREN BREWSTER: But I don't know --

MICHAEL GATES: It'll say in there.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know about the Canadian side.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Well, if you want to put your device on hold for a minute, I'll go and

--

(Break)

MICHAEL GATES: Date now, but --

[01:00:15]KAREN BREWSTER: So what is this report? It's the --

MICHAEL GATES: Well, these were the CRM documents that guided our management decisions for -- for historic sites.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Commemorative Integrity Statement.

MICHAEL GATES: These are -- these are the things that are nationally significant -- significance and why. And commemorative integrity is being retained if certain things -- you know, if we can say certain things are occurring.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And so, um, "Declared of national historic significance in 1987."

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: (Reading from a document) "Chilkoot Trail National Historic Site is part of the complex of Canadian National Historic Sites related to the gold rush. Uh, these sites, with some recommendations dating back to 1926 -- " There was a plaque recognizing the gold rush in 1926. Um, "considering the social, economic, and political components shaping the Yukon region over the last century. So in 1987, the board recommended that the context of the Klondike Gold Rush as a social phenomenon, the Chilkoot Trail is of national historic significance, and its development, jointly with the American Park Service, as part of an international park, should be encouraged."

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: So the Historic Sites and Monuments Board gave us our direction.

KAREN BREWSTER: In 1987?

MICHAEL GATES: In 1987. And as part of that, they said we should encourage working with the US side.

[01:01:47]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right. But the -- some of the early trail development, like on the US side, you know, they used corrections people, too, I think. Or were they confu -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: I don't know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or is it confused -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: I know nothing about that.
KAREN BREWSTER: Or are they confused with the Canadian side? The Canadian side --
MICHAEL GATES: Should -- is this going again?
KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah, it's going again.
MICHAEL GATES: Oh, ok.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. That, um, when the Canadian side used these corrections --
MICHAEL GATES: That was in the '60's.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So even in the '60's, there was interest in having the whole Chilkoot Trail be accessible?
MICHAEL GATES: I met Vic Ogison in 1972 -- '73. And he -- he spoke with some pride of, you know, this program. And I think he was looking at it, not just from the historical point of view, but from the rehabilitation point of view. Better have them (the inmates) doing something like this than sitting in cells.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. I wonder where the idea came from that the trail needed work, and that it was a good crew to use?
MICHAEL GATES: I don't know.
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, interesting.
MICHAEL GATES: Bruce Harvey was the superintendent at the time. And he would've been involved in that, but he's long since passed away.
KAREN BREWSTER: The superintendent on this side, on the Canadian side? Right? Ok.
MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. He was the superintendent for all the Yukon sites.
KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.
MICHAEL GATES: Initially.
[01:03:10]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um, Angie, you had a question.
ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah, having just come off the Chilkoot Trail, you know, we hiked from Skagway to Bennett, um, are there still people who hike all the way from Skagway to -- to Dawson City?
MICHAEL GATES: You mean from Dyea?
KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.
ANGELA SCHMIDT: Sorry, yeah. From Dyea, yeah.
MICHAEL GATES: Um, you'll get -- you'll get individuals who take on the challenge of doing -- re-enacting the whole trip.
ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.
MICHAEL GATES: And they -- they've done reality TV.
KAREN BREWSTER: Right.
MICHAEL GATES: Where they've done it. So yes.
KAREN BREWSTER: Do they start in Seattle and take a --
MICHAEL GATES: I don't know. Christine --
ANGELA SCHMIDT: Is there any thought about developing that as an official --
MICHAEL GATES: Could tell you. She'd be able to tell you more about that sort of activity than I can.
KAREN BREWSTER: Right.
ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm. Is there any thought about developing that whole corridor? Um, so that someone could travel all the way from Seattle?
KAREN BREWSTER: For tourism?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they can do that now.

KAREN BREWSTER: But it's -- independently, kinda.

MICHAEL GATES: You can get on a ferry in --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Sure.

MICHAEL GATES: -- Seattle, or take one of the cruise ships, and it'll take you all the way to Skagway.

KAREN BREWSTER: And then, when they re-enact it, do they build a boat at Lindeman?

MICHAEL GATES: Some of them do.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Wow.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep. National Geographic sponsored Keith Tryck back in the '70's, and they did that. They built a raft and floated down the Yukon River. Took 'em two years because they were filming it, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: But, yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: They succeeded? He succeeded?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:04:39]KAREN BREWSTER: Another thing I know you have worked on, you know, larger Yukon history and the Dalton -- Jack Dalton and the Dalton Trail story.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's out of Haines, is that where that trail went from? Can you talk about that a little bit?

MICHAEL GATES: Um, well, the first thing I'll say is, I found it quite interesting that during the centennials, which were acknowledged both on the American side and the Canadian side, that there was little mention made of the Dalton Trail. I'd become aware of the Dalton Trail back in 1972, partly because of Alan Innes-Taylor.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: He, uh, he ranted about a fellow who was kind of a local mining developer. You know, at the huckster's scale, in my mind. I visualize this guy as a hustler rather than a genuine mining investor. And I remember he talked about -- you're going to lose your recorder there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Thanks, ok.

MICHAEL GATES: I remember him ranting about this fellow taking a bulldozer and pushing the old buildings back. Which I saw. I mentioned what I saw, and he said, "Oh, I know all about that." And that was what got me thinking about conservation. And uh, but I learned quite a bit about the Dalton Trail that summer, and over the course of the winter, I prepared about a thirty-page submission to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board to convince them that they should declare it of national significance. They turned it down. But I did my best. And I, you know, documented the damage that was occurring and tried to place it in a historical context. [01:06:37]So, um, but during the centennials, um, you looked at various documents and displays and posters, and they'd forgotten all about the Dalton Trail. Yet it was extremely important. You know, at one point, it was thought it would be the main route to get to the coast. And that two or three different companies took an interest in developing a railroad over that route. And in 1897, a government

surveyor actually surveyed the, you know, not detailed instrument survey, but he -- he walked the route and uh, to determine, you know, the feasibility of developing a railroad. And uh, he went all the way from Pyramid Harbor to Fort Selkirk. And um, but, of course, the Chilkoot Trail was the preferred route for most. And one of the prime reasons, as you know, is because it was only, what, twenty-six miles?

KAREN BREWSTER: Thirty-three miles.

MICHAEL GATES: Thirty-three miles.

KAREN BREWSTER: Now, it's thirty-three miles.

MICHAEL GATES: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: It may have been twenty-six at the time.

MICHAEL GATES: I don't know. Anyway. Thirty-three miles to Bennett, whereas the -- the trip from Pyramid Harbor to the Yukon River was a couple hundred miles. So it wasn't feasible to -- to trek your supplies over like you could over the Chilkoot Trail. So that was one thing that was not in its favor. [01:08:16]Um, but the mounted police set up posts along the trail and monitored the trail, and it became the preferred route for taking cattle into the Klondike. And thousands and thousands of head of cattle were taken in that way over a period of ten years, including Jack Dalton. But others, Pat Burns, who became one of the biggest meat packers in Canada, certainly in western Canada, made a bundle taking cattle in. And George Tuxford, a farmer from Saskatchewan, took from Saskatoon, took a small herd in and documented it in a 250-page memoir.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, so you know, you've got lots of detail on its use as a route for the cattle drives. And that -- that was probably the single thing that stood out in terms of the gold rush as the function of the Dalton Trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: So for people who don't know --

MICHAEL GATES: Have you read the -- have you read my book?

KAREN BREWSTER: I have not, but I'm aware of it.

MICHAEL GATES: You should.

KAREN BREWSTER: I should. I've heard you give a -- at the Alaska Historical Society conference in Haines, I believe you gave a presentation.

MICHAEL GATES: I might have done. I think -- I think I would -- that was the year I was the keynote speaker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes.

MICHAEL GATES: And I also gave a talk about the Dalton Trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So that's why I know you know something about the Dalton Trail.

MICHAEL GATES: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: But so, for people who don't know, where did the Dalton Trail go, and who started it and all that?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, who started it was, it was an aboriginal trade route.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And, in fact, this fall, in October, they're having a big celebration because it's been 150 years since George Davidson talked to Kohklux about the trail. And Kohklux created the famous map.

KAREN BREWSTER: Kohklux Map, yes. I'm aware. Linda Johnson's --

MICHAEL GATES: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yes. Um, so it, like the Chilkoot, was a traditional trade route?

MICHAEL GATES: Yes, it was. There were -- there were network of trade routes all along the coast. The coastal people were trading to the interior. And that was -- that was one of them. And so, I start my book by talking about the indigenous use of the trail and how trade was first established.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: It's embedded in oral history.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right. [01:10:53]And then, so during the gold rush, some people did use it? Or this -- when it was the --

MICHAEL GATES: Well, what happened was --

KAREN BREWSTER: When it was the main route for the cattle, what time period are we talking about?

MICHAEL GATES: Hold it. There's -- there's something that happened in between the gold rush and the traditional use.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, Europeans were starting to penetrate the Interior. And Aural Krause was trying to, you know, he went in over the Chilkoot to document things there. You know, he was a naturalist, collecting data and taking samples and whatnot. And he wanted to do the same with the Chilkat. And they -- he got them to take them to the point where in the distance, he could see Kusawa Lake. But his guide claimed he wasn't feeling well and they couldn't go any farther. But I think he was essentially feeling stronger and stronger, um, resistance to taking him in over this route because they -- they protected the routes. They were covetous of the routes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:11:59]MICHAEL GATES: And as you know, in 1852, Kohklux participated in a raid at Fort Selkirk, where they drove out the Hudson's Bay Company.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

MICHAEL GATES: So uh, in 1890, um, "Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine" (actually Newspaper) funded an expedition. And um, Glave, Wells, Schanz, and Dalton, there were a couple of others, embarked on a trip, and they went in from Klukwan up the Chilkat River over the summit and down onto Kusawa Lake. And they got halfway down the lake, and the party split in two. And the uh -- Wells and Schanz carried on. Glave and Dalton turned left, and they went over Frederick Lake to Dezadeash Lake and then to Klukshu and down to Nesketahin. And then they -- they hiked and made their way down the Tatshenshini, which was then called the Alsek, but it's now called the Tatshenshini. Um, to a village, which we tried to locate in 1972. It's, I don't know, thirty or forty miles down the Tatshenshini River. It was a seasonal camp called Noogaayik. Um, and from there, Glave and Dalton secured a guide and a dugout, and they made their way down the Alsek River to -- to its mouth.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And he -- he wrote about that. And so, that was the first intrusion by white people. And then, the following year, the two of them came back, and this time they took pack horses. And this time, they went up over the route that is now part of the Haines Road.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And they got to Nesketahin, and they -- they talked to the -- the people who were there at the time. Glave actually got some of them to make maps to show them the relationships of the lakes and rivers and the various features. And those are preserved at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

MICHAEL GATES: You may have seen them, I don't know.

KAREN BREWSTER: No.

MICHAEL GATES: But they -- they made their way into an area around Kloo Lake and then over to Kluane. And then they returned via the Slims River and the Kaskawulsh. And they came to where the Kaskawulsh meets the Dezadeash River and now becomes the Alsek. And then, they cut across country to Nesketahin and made their way out. And that was -- that was the first serious intrusion into the Interior (of the southwest Yukon) by Europeans.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:14:47]MICHAEL GATES: And that's where Dalton got the idea to make a trail. So he didn't find the trail, he just used the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: That was there.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And exploited it for his own purposes and became very proprietorial, to the extent that he even charged First Nations people.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: To use their own trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: They could walk over it, but if they started taking anything in with them, then he'd -- he'd charge them for it.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause he was using it as a trading trail of his own?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, he'd take pack trains of supplies in before the gold rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: And they'd get to the Yukon River, and then they'd -- they'd float down to Forty-Mile to -- to deliver their goods.

[01:15:27]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But it's interesting that it did not get the attention during the gold rush. It seems like it might've been --

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I blame part of that on Pierre Berton. Pierre Berton has written the definitive work on the Klondike Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And it's a classic, and it's a masterpiece, and uh, he's done more to influence our perception of the Klon -- the Klondike Gold Rush than any other single person. But he only devotes, I think I counted six paragraphs, that related to Dalton and the Dalton Trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I don't think he even includes a map of that in his book. So it was easy to overlook. And all these commemorations and exhibits that took place during the centennial years in the '90's, they -- many of them neglected to include that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Well, that's why I brought it up because it seems like it was a trail used during the gold rush era.

MICHAEL GATES: It was. It was one of the most important routes. That's why I wrote a book about it.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But it wasn't -- but, as you say, the stampedeers maybe didn't use it 'cause of the distance, but it was used to bring supplies and cattle.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, it was used to bring cattle in.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. So that then were feeding the stampedeers along the way?

MICHAEL GATES: That's right. Yeah. [01:16:41]I figured -- I did some number-crunching, and conservatively, a third of all the gold that was recovered in 1898 was spent on meat.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, it blew my mind. 'Cause they were paying \$2.50 -- up to \$2.50 a pound.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: For meat that cost \$0.05 a pound Outside.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Wow.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: It just depended on, you know, the time of year and the surety of supply and demand.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And at that price, you start, you know, calculating the number of head that went in. They -- they dressed out at about six to eight hundred pounds each. And, you know, and then you figure out, you know, conservatively \$1.50 a pound, how much is that? And I was surprised just how much.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow, yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So it was -- it was a very lucrative business.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, definitely. [01:17:33]Well, and I always find it funny, you know, it's the Klondike Gold Rush, which is in Canada, but it's all like, promoted as this big American thing over the Chilkoot Trail. So what's the Canadian take on the story?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I think Pierre Berton has defined it for Americans and Canadians. Uh, 'cause he wrote -- his book came out as "Klondike Fever" in the States.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Um, Canadians laugh at the American perception that it's in Alaska.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, it's a standing joke. Dawson City, Alaska, Yukon. You know, Kathy as the director of the museum used to get letters addressed to her in strange -- the strangest ways. Uh, because people, you know, didn't know. And there is a tendency from the American point of view to take an American spin on things. And I know, you know, during the gold rush period, there was a big argument going on about where the boundary was going to be.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And the American desire was for it to extend to the Interior as far as Tagish. The Canadian and the British pushed back and said, no, we need a tidewater port. And I think the thing that did more than anything else to define the boundary is that Clifford Sifton instructed the mounted police (Northwest Mounted Police (NWMP)) to set up posts at the summits.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And they did that on the White Pass, and they did that on the Chilkoot Pass. But when the -- the -- the detachment that was sent to the Chilkat Pass, they got as far as where the boundary is now, and they encountered, like, twenty feet of snow and they couldn't go any farther, so they -- they put their post there. And you'll notice now, the boundary comes down and it very neatly goes down around the Mounted Police post. So that was the Canadian action that ultimately defined where the boundary was defined in that area. And it wasn't until 1903 that they signed off on it. And it was another three years before they -- they did the survey work. So they kept the Mounted Police post active there until the official boundary work was finished, and then they pulled it out.

[01:20:07] BREWSTER: Well, and I heard they used to have a cannon or something up there, too, during the gold rush.

MICHAEL GATES: Oh, they might have on the Chilkoot.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: They certainly had a Maxim gun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Which I don't know exactly what that is, but.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, it's a form of a machine gun.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. Oh, those old --

MICHAEL GATES: I've never seen one, but that's what it was, essentially.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. It was to protect the border, I guess?

MICHAEL GATES: How's that for an informed description.

KAREN BREWSTER: The visual of spinning and turning a crank.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yeah, aiming it and turning the crank --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: -- that feeds the bullets into the chamber.

[01:20:46] KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, there was something else I was just going to say.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, you were asking about the Dalton Trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, yeah, and the perceptions of the gold rush that, yeah, in Alaska it's called the Alaska Gold Rush. You're like, but it wasn't in Alaska.

MICHAEL GATES: No, it wasn't. And uh, just a reflection on it, uh, there was a young fellow who was born in Dawson City. He became a motion picture star. His name was Victor Jory. I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

KAREN BREWSTER: I have not.

MICHAEL GATES: But he was Helen Keller's father in "The Miracle Worker." (an Oscar-winning film)

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh, ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Um, he -- he was a popular film star in the '30's, '40's, and '50's. You look at his -- you know, they all had a legend. They all have a, like, their background story. And in theirs, they shaped it so he was from Alaska.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh, really.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. 'Cause that -- that appeals to the American mass market.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And -- and so, there's that built-in bias against acknowledging anything that isn't American, I guess.

[01:21:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um, I know I was going to ask you about that you've also been writing articles for the Whitehorse newspaper.

MICHAEL GATES: Yukon News.

KAREN BREWSTER: Correct?

MICHAEL GATES: That's correct.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um.

MICHAEL GATES: Closing in on six hundred articles.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow. And so, what do you write about?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, after we're finished, I can show you 'cause I've saved a cop -- I've clipped copies of everything I've written. But people, places, and events. I do book reviews, describe things like the YHMA Heritage Awards and the Transportation Hall of Fame Awards, and, you know, I never know where the stories are going to be inspired or where they'll come from. And that's better than, you know, having a rigid structure of, I'll only write about this.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Sometimes someone will get in touch, and they -- they're seeking their family story. And I'll talk to them, and an interesting story emerges. We got a call last year, this family was interested in looking into their ancestor, George Patton Mackenzie. I did a quick scan, and I realized that there was a motherlode of information. And I was too busy, so I asked Kathy if she was interested. And she contacted these people, and in the end - and I can show you - she produced four -- four-volume -- four binders.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: That much material on George Patton Mackenzie. And so, I, you know, extracted some from that, and I wrote a column about that. So I never know where the stories are going to come from. I just -- this week's column is a book review about "The Caribou Hotel."

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: It's a new book that just came out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Where is the Caribou Hotel, here in Whitehorse?

MICHAEL GATES: No, it's the one in Carcross.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, oh, oh. Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, right next to Matthew Watson's store.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, yeah. Well, we saw that building. We were wondering.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: I said, it looks like an old hotel.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's being restored, or it looks like it.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, that -- at one point, it belonged to Dawson Charlie, one of the discoverers of the Klondike.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: So there's a lot of history there.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's great. And so, it's a weekly column?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, now it's a biweekly, but it -- I've been doing it for thirteen years now.

KAREN BREWSTER: So biweekly means every two weeks?

MICHAEL GATES: Every two weeks.

[01:24:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. Um, yeah. I was thinking, it's interesting that the local newspaper has a history column.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, it's popular. All the other columns got cut. I'm one of the last men standing.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: So that -- I hope that's a reflection that there are readers who -- I know I get lots of people who talk to me about something I've written in the newspaper, so. But it's one way of um -- I don't know, I just love exploring the old records. And, you know, there are so many interesting people here.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:25:02]MICHAEL GATES: Morley Bones. He -- he was a fellow who lived out at Silver City, on Kluane Lake, and he established a fox farm there for furs.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Mm. Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: But he was also an outfitter. And uh, there's a book, "Yukon Trophies Won and Lost," where they describe him guiding them from, I think, Valdez through the mountains to White -- in the end, they ended up in Whitehorse.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And uh, the -- they got to the White River, and they had, you know, all these trophies, you know, horns and antlers.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And hides and whatnot. So they found an old scow, and they fixed it up, and they loaded all the trophies in, and they started going down the White River. And it caught on something, and it turned over and everything went to the bottom of the river.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: That winter, when it was forty below, Morley Bones and one of the Jacquot brothers came back out to the site, and they built a caisson of ice down to the river bottom, to see if they could recover any of the trophies. Spent a month.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did they?

MICHAEL GATES: They found the spot. There are pictures. There's actually a picture of the caisson, and you can see a picture of the boat in the corner, but um, no. They weren't able to recover anything. But he -- he was a man of his word, and he said he'd do his best to recover them.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And they spent a month at forty below trying to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: Can't ask for more.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, I think I've heard about the story of them going down the river and it flipping and losing everything.

MICHAEL GATES: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: But I don't think I've ever heard the other end of it, that they went back.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, just wait a moment, though. The pictures.

(break)

[01:26:44]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: You'll be interested to know that all the time I worked for Parks Canada, I never did the -- the entire trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: You never hiked the entire trail?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Interesting.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, actually, I -- in 2001, I took a holiday, and a friend came up from Vancouver, and we hiked it then. And I'll add that the -- the rangers on the American side were very hospitable to us.

KAREN BREWSTER: Did you tell them that you worked for Parks Canada?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, you did.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. But I wasn't there on off -- you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: In an official capacity, but.

[01:27:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, how many times did you hike up and down the Canadian side?

MICHAEL GATES: Oh, I don't know. Half a dozen times.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm. Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Were there ever any times that new artifacts were found, new things came up and were found, that you had to go assess?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, the cemeteries.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Finding that, uh, you know, where those infants were buried. That was -- that was kind of a touching moment.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

[01:27:45]MICHAEL GATES: I tend to think -- remember things like the bear encounters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh, my gosh.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, those are good stories.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I came in one time and oh, trying to remember who -- who it was I came in with, but we were -- we boated in from Bennett. And we were about to land at Lindeman, and a big bear came out on the beach and was wandering back and forth. So we did circles out in the lake for about half an hour until we hadn't seen it for a while before we landed. And then, there were four of us, and one was Jerry van Rhine (sp?), who was the engineer doing a bridge survey of the trail. And we had dinner that evening, and he was washing dishes inside the bunk near the kitchen.

KAREN BREWSTER: The wardens' -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: The wardens' cabin kitchen. And I was outside chopping wood. And all of a sudden, he shouted, "There's a bear!" So I came running around the corner of the cabin, and there was the bear.

KAREN BREWSTER: Whoa.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep, there was a bear. And uh, but he -- he just wandered off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Black or brown?

MICHAEL GATES: It was a black bear. The only -- we call 'em grizzlies. (the brown bears)

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: The only time I've ever seen a bear, it's usually been going in the other direction.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's the best way.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: That's good.

MICHAEL GATES: That's the best way.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yep. [01:29:13]So when did -- are you retired now, I'm assuming?

MICHAEL GATES: I retired in 2008.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. And uh, what have you been doing? Writing books and articles, since then?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yep. Um, the first thing I did after I retired was, um, I got Ron Chambers to take me down the Dezadeash River. I was looking for part of the trail.

KAREN BREWSTER: Uh-huh.

MICHAEL GATES: The Dalton Trail. The footpath.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Because I had hiked other portions, and there's a well-defined trail, so I knew there had to be something there somewhere. And that was one of the high points of my life, doing that trip, because he -- he is, uh, indigenous ancestry, but he was also a warden with Kluane Park for many years. And he combined those two things in a remarkable way, and he was always looking for anything.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, any flakes or artifacts or anything that indicated prehistoric use.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: He worked with Scotty MacNeish (Richard Stockton MacNeish), who did archeological work here in the late '50's and early '60's.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: When he was just a lad.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. Um --

MICHAEL GATES: Um.

[01:30:34]KAREN BREWSTER: So did you find any evidence of that old pathway?

MICHAEL GATES: Um, no, but we found Pennock's Post, which was built in 1898 and was well documented.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I came back the next summer with another friend, and we -- we went to the same place, and I thought, well, we couldn't find it, but if we start at this spot on the bank of the river, and we go straight toward the mountains, we're gonna find that trail

somewhere. And we went all the way through the bush and the swamp and we got to the -
- the mountain, and we never found the trail. And we -- we hiked back, and we came out
a little bit farther along the lake shore, and there was the trail. And we followed it back
right into the camp that we were camped in. And when I walked on the other side of the
camp, I followed the trail out of the camp and down. We just didn't look in the right
place the first time.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that must've been pretty exciting.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yeah. It was satisfying, very satisfying.

KAREN BREWSTER: So that was the last missing piece for the whole Dalton trail?

MICHAEL GATES: No. No, there were lots of missing pieces, but it was just one of the links in
the chain.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

[01:31:46]ANGELA SCHMIDT: I have sort of a philosophical question. Actually, I have two,
and I'll just join them together because maybe they're related somewhat. Um, at the
beginning, you were talking about the men who just went down to the shop to grab the
tools to use because that's what they were used to doing.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: So my question is, when does history end and when does preservation
begin? If that makes sense.

MICHAEL GATES: Well --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: And then secondly, um, what do you hope that people a hundred years
from now are able to see of the Chilkoot Trail and, you know, Dawson City, and what do
you hope that they learn from it?

KAREN BREWSTER: That's two very separate questions.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: But they might tie together.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: They sort of tie together. I mean --

MICHAEL GATES: You want to repeat -- no.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right, so history versus preservation.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I -- when I was in Dawson, Kathy and I started making annual
pilgrimages to the gold fields to document what we found. And that was so immense that
I ended up focusing on one tributary, Gold Run Creek. And I spent twenty years visiting
the site, talking to the miners, and documenting the historical remains. And -- and as their
work progressed, things eventually got destroyed and lost. I documented their -- their
work, as well. And I was once lamenting to a miner that, um, "You know, it's a shame to
see all this history, you know, being lost." And he says, "Well, we're making history." So
where -- where does the history end and non-history begin?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: As far as he was concerned, history is what we're doing right now, and all
that other stuff, it's gone. But we're making history. And -- and it all depends on your
perspective and how you define it. [01:33:30]And I know that different cultural resource
management regimes apply different criteria to establishing what is historical and what is
not. Historic Sites and Monuments Board won't even consider a nomination until a
certain amount of time has passed, for example. And I know that territorial parks, they --

they do the same thing. If it's not so many years old, it's not worth considering. And with the Federal Heritage Building Review Office, it was forty years, I think.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Which meant that the Palace Grand Theatre only became of historic -- real historical interest in 2000.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: When it was forty years old.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Before that, it was a contemporary structure.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: So to answer your question, it all depends on who you are, doesn't it?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm. Yeah. Yeah. Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and that leads me --

[01:34:33]MICHAEL GATES: The other question, what was the other question?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: What do you hope that people a hundred years from now are able to see of the Chilkoot Trail and Dawson City? What do you hope they take away from it? What do you hope they learn?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I'm not optimistic that they're going to see much because of natural processes and the gradual human attrition.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And that was -- that was something that occurred -- dawned in my mind back in 1972.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I was a poor, starving student, and, you know, I was way down at the bottom of the pecking order, and so I thought, it really meant a lot to me. And so, I reframed the question as, what can I do?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I said, "Well, I can't preserve these things, 'cause that takes money and resources and that. But what I can do is, I can see these places, and I can record them to the best of my ability when I'm able to, so that we have a record of what was there." And I've done that ever since whenever I can. [01:35:40]Um, now it's sort of sad to go back to some of these places and see how far they've declined. I did -- I did two trips on the Forty-Mile River, and in the second one, I was with the Bureau of Land Management. And we got to this one site, and I had lots of photographs of what was there the previous visit, which was seven years earlier. And a forest fire had gone through, and all that was left was some bedsprings and a stove.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

MICHAEL GATES: Everything else had burned to the ground.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So um, I know these processes take place, and there's not much we can do, but we can work really hard. And -- and I reali -- that's why I really enjoyed working for Parks Canada. We had targeted a number of buildings, and we said, "We'll do our utmost to preserve the integrity of these buildings." Because -- and I knew that they couldn't do it all. And I liked the model that they had chosen and the representative selection they had made, and so forth. And uh, worked very happily in that paradigm while I was

curator. So I was actually employed to do what in my heart I wanted to do. So not many people get to say that, but I get to say that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Excellent.

[01:37:04]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, that was one of my questions of what you enjoyed about your jobs, the Dawson one or the Whitehorse?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that was the big one.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: That, you know, knowing that I now had a job where I could make a difference.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm. And any regrets?

MICHAEL GATES: Um, not really.

KAREN BREWSTER: Or things you wished you could have accomplished that you were not able to?

MICHAEL GATES: I accomplished as much as I could. You know, I feel good about that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, I wasn't a nine-to-fiver. And uh, what I did in my off hours, you know, reinforced what I was doing when I was in the office.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, um, and -- and uh, no, I have no regrets.

[01:37:51]KAREN BREWSTER: What about particular challenges you've -- you faced?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, one was the -- and I didn't realize this at first, but my campaign to make people aware of the concept of preservation.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, when I first arrived in Dawson, they didn't have that. You know, the -- the theatre troupe that performed in the Palace Grand Theatre, every spring they'd come and find, you know, what they could from the collection to use as props on stage. And I took great pains to explain that they couldn't do that anymore. And I explained why. I always explained why. You know, these are national treasures. You know, you want to have a cocktail party, you don't go to the Louvre and borrow the Mona Lisa to provide background. Well, these things are treasures, and I said, that's the way we have to treat them. And so, over time, the culture changed, and they became more sensitive and responsive. To the point where the engineers from Winnipeg would still come in and try to steamroll their projects through without CRM. But the employees, we had this network, and they wouldn't let them get away with it.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Nice.

MICHAEL GATES: I loved that.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: That's great.

MICHAEL GATES: So that was -- that was really great. [01:39:07]You know, and they were working on the Palace Grand Theatre, and they had done some trenching to, you know, wires or pipes or something. And the guys all were filling us in on what was there. And we went down and looked, and we were able to get them to put the project, that work, on hold, so we could examine and record. And our conservator did some -- had archeological experience, did some excavating and so forth before they proceeded. So it was nice to have that. And to see them engaged in discussions. [01:39:37]I gave a talk

two years ago on CRM to the staff, and they came in, and there was one fellow, Tom. He is so bored about things like going to attend talks, you know, especially on, you know, health and safety or whatever it is. And -- but I was talking about how you intervene and the values and what you're trying to preserve, and how you learn from what you see. And how you -- you plan your work so that you protect these things. And you could see him light up, and he started talking. And I thought, I've connected. If I can get old Tom to get talking about this, I know that I'm, you know, I'm beating on the right drum here. So that -- that felt kinda good. And the fact that they asked me back to talk about it.

[01:40:30]And part of it was, the -- the supervisor had -- we had done this project on Robert Service Cabin before I left Dawson. And what they had to do was work on the roof. You heard me talk about the roof.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, in 1991 and '92, we restored -- we moved Dredge No. 4. It was a massive undertaking.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And in order to do that, they built a huge berm.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And then, they lined the inner side of it with rubber, so they could fill it with water to float the dredge to move it onto a new location.

KAREN BREWSTER: Mm.

MICHAEL GATES: Afterwards, they rolled up all the rubber, and they put it away for future use. And what they wanted to do, was they wanted to put a sod roof on top of the -- which was not historical, by the way.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: A sod roof on --

KAREN BREWSTER: The cabin.

MICHAEL GATES: -- the Service Cabin. Uh, they were concerned about water penetration, and they wanted to, you know, put this rubber membrane underneath the sod to protect the --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: -- interior of the cabin from leakage. So he came to me, and he said, "You know, let's -- can we do a CRM on this?" And I said, "Sure." So I went digging through all the records, and I realized that that wasn't in fact the roof that was on there originally, that some architect had got to fulfill their fantasy for a cabin, and they changed it entirely. So I said to him, "You know, you've got rotten components there, but they're not historical. And you know, you can replace those planks, no problem." And I said, "But if you ever get to the point where you have to do a major intervention on the roof, this is what it looked like, not what's there now."

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And that is -- that's your benchmark. That's what you should strive for.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: And I think he bought into that. He -- he got -- he got it. I showed him the pictures, and we talked a lot. And it was talking, and not just spouting principles, but, you know, explaining why and showing the pictures and going up and examining it and -- and, you know, getting your hands on.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: I think that made the difference. Especially with any pe -- any people who are in the -- the trades. They understand that more than you sitting in your office, you know, spouting platitudes.

[01:42:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, and that, of course, leads to the question of, in historic restoration, to what time period are you restoring something?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that --

KAREN BREWSTER: And how you make that decision?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that's a toughie, but I'll give you an example. We had the Commissioner's Residence. And it went through three different forms. It was built -- at first, it was just a box. And then in 1903, the commissioner at the time had it modified, and they turned it in -- it looked like a Louisiana bordello with all this gingerbread work and balconies and these little cupolas on top that everybody called ballot boxes because he was known for his corrupt electoral practices. (this is referring to the occupant at the time, Commissioner Frederick Congdon)

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: And then they had a fire, and when they replaced it, it's -- they left it in the -- they restored it to the configuration it has now. So a lot of people thought we should go back to the gingerbread 'cause they liked that. That looked really neat. And I looked at it, and I said, "Well, the current configuration is -- conforms with the historic event." And this was 1908, so we're within the -- the period of commemoration. So we don't have to rip all that off to recreate something that doesn't exist there anymore. And I said, "We have excellent documentation for what the building looked like, inside and out." And we have -- seventy percent of the original furnishings survived, and we were able to use them when we did the refurnishing inside. And so, in that particular case, you know, we balanced the two choices, and we went with the -- the later period. So we preserved the configuration that came after the fire in 1905. And we were able to use the original artifacts that survived from the period. And it was also a time when George and Martha Black occupied the building, and they were quite prominent in Yukon history, as well. So that was -- that was one. Some of them are, you know, they're a little bit more challenging. I mean, the idea of re -- just replacing the roof of the Robert Service Cabin on a whim without any historical evidence, that -- I always had a hard time with that.

[01:45:19]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and in some cases, you don't have this great historical documentation. Like the Commissioner's Residence, you had all those photos and all that. What do you do if you don't have that? How do you know --

MICHAEL GATES: Well, we always treated it as, CRM, as a knowledge-based decision-making process. So you say, what do we know about the resource? And you gather as much information as you have before you sit down to discuss it. That's where you start.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Does that make sense?

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, but I'm thinking, like, if you have no resources, if you can't find any resources, how do you know where to start?

MICHAEL GATES: When -- when I did the -- the restoration for the Commissioner's Residence, I remember we -- we got agreement with the curatorial conservation people in Winnipeg to treat some of the material. So we shipped it to Winnipeg, and the day it arrived, I got a phone call saying, "You know, this stuff is, you know, it's eclectic.

There's this, and there's that. You know, I'm -- we question whether this is valid or not." So I took the photographs of those pieces of furniture in the building, in the period of commemoration, and I -- I mailed them a package. Or I faxed them. But anyway, after that they shut up. What -- what they do is, failing any information, they default to a theme room approach.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: We know it's of this age, so uh, I'll pick things that I'm familiar with from that time period.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Right, yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So what you end up with is the -- a creation of the curator, rather than a historical rendering.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah.

[01:47:05]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That you know that was the style of furniture in that time period or something?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, I know because we have pictures of that furniture in that room. We had the inventories.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: I knew where they purchased it. I found catalogs.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. But if you don't have all that, as you say, well, we know it was from this time period, so we'll put other pieces here.

MICHAEL GATES: They do the best -- they do the best they can.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: But I think all too often, curators default to a theme room approach.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's --

MICHAEL GATES: Not always, but I've seen a lot of that.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's easier, probably.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, when you have no evidence to rely upon, what do you do?

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. That was my question. What do you do?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, this --

MICHAEL GATES: You use the -- you use the best knowledge and the best evidence and the best skills that you've acquired as a curator.

[01:47:55]KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. And we were talking before we started recording about, you know, history and quote/unquote "getting it right." And -- and what is accurate history. And that sort of ties in with this.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, ok. You think something like the discovery of the Klondike. That's pretty straightforward.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: But you see, around 1903, there was a movement afoot to have Robert Henderson declared the official discoverer of the Klondike. And the reason for that was, he was a Canadian. And they lobbied the Canadian government, and the government acceded to their petitioning, and they declared him the official discoverer of the Klondike and gave him a pension for life.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: Ok. But he was -- he was cut out of the action because he was a racist, and he refused to deal with Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie when -- or Tagish Charlie, as he was known then, when they visited his camp on Hunker Creek before they made the discovery, and they weren't going to go all the way back over the hill to tell him after -- after that. So then there's the discussion about, well, Carmack filed the discovery claim, but William Ogilvie interviewed them all, and they sat down together, and they -- they came to the consensus it was Skookum Jim who found the gold. Ok. So they've had three different plaques at the discovery claim. And over time, the -- the emphasis has shifted, depending upon the current thinking. Now -- now the National Prospecting Chamber of Mines, they have a hall of fame. And they've just inducted George Carmack's wife, Kate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Because she's not only indigenous, but she's a woman, and that lends itself to contemporary perspective. Unfortunately, she wasn't with them when the discovery occurred. But it's a popular perspective now, and you -- you get your fingers whacked with the ruler if you say, oh, but she wasn't there.

[01:50:20]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, and similarly, it transitioned from it was Henderson or Carmacks to the recognition that --

MICHAEL GATES: Skookum Jim.

KAREN BREWSTER: It was the First Nations' Skookum Jim --

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Yep.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- and Tagish Charlie.

MICHAEL GATES: That's right.

KAREN BREWSTER: That, um.

MICHAEL GATES: That's right. So there's -- there you've got three or four different renderings of -- everybody wants to have a piece of the action of discovery. And the same thing happened in California, you know.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: The poor guy that made the discovery in the mill race in Sutter's Mill.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: They hounded him for the rest of his life, thinking he had the magic touch. Um, so -- but I must say that Skookum Jim and Dawson Charlie fared much better than, oh, what's his name, from the California Gold Rush?

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, John Sutter is Sutter's Mill.

MICHAEL GATES: No, no. It wasn't Sutter.

KAREN BREWSTER: I know, I can't remember who the other person is.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Anyway, they fared much better. [01:51:16]And Skookum Jim left a legacy that grew over time, and they were able to use -- tap into that to create the Skookum Jim Friendship Center, oh, about twenty years ago, twenty-five years ago.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's here in Whitehorse?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So you know, that was -- and the Caribou Hotel is one of the legacies left to remind us of Dawson Charlie.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, in Carcross.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep.

[01:51:40]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, yeah, so is -- can one say you ever get history right?

MICHAEL GATES: Um, well, there are certain things, like the date that George Carmack signed the affidavit for the discovery claim.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, we have documentation of that. And, you know, that -- that's probably an immutable fact. But there are so many different versions swirling around the discovery that that becomes open to debate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And it all depends on who you're saying. George Carmack was interviewed some years later about the discovery, and he said, "Well, you know, the gold was there, and I was just the lucky one who came and found it. Anybody could've found it."

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Whoever happened to be there and tried the waters would've found it. And so, he was -- he was saying, you know -- he wasn't trying to make a big deal out of him being the discoverer, I guess, is what I'm saying.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah, right.

MICHAEL GATES: So and I guess it -- it depends on everything you do. [01:52:53]I've thought about that a lot. I mean, during the 1930's, Germany tried to remake their entire heritage and fabricate this new history where Germans, the Aryan race --

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: -- were responsible for civilization everywhere. Um, you know, politicians like to turn events into significant things for their campaigns. You know, people hold history up all the time for one purpose or another. You know people want their relatives to have an important place in history, and you see that a lot in the Klondike Gold Rush.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: You know, I don't know how many people have claimed that they met Jack London.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Even when it was physically impossible.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And I've been criticized for pointing that out, but. And then there are the ones who remember camping with Robert Service on the Chilkoot during the gold rush. Course, he --

KAREN BREWSTER: He was not there.

MICHAEL GATES: 1906.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: He never did that. But, you know, people want to do it. [01:54:01]And then, another example, the shooting of McGinniss. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but Jack Dalton killed a man in Haines in 1892. And the -- I tracked that story back to a book that was published in 1947, and it was the reminiscences of a fellow fifty years after the facts, more than fifty years later. And he created this thing that I think he'd seen too many westerns in between.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And it was a gunfight, guns blazing, matter of honor, and all that stuff.

Well, um, Bruce Parham --

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: -- gave me a copy, sent me a copy of the trial transcript. And when you compare that with this -- it was Monte Hawthorn was the fellow's name who related the story, it was a total fabrication. But I found that Monte Hawthorn fabrication repeated over and over and over again in books after -- because they all went to that one and used the story.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, that's a common thing. That's what's with, um, "Klondike Fever." The same thing is done. Everybody uses that as the end-all, be-all source, and it gets repeated.

MICHAEL GATES: Well --

KAREN BREWSTER: And I'm sure I've been guilty of it, 'cause if you don't know the subject, you don't know that it's wrong.

MICHAEL GATES: You default to what -- what's available. I understand that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. And you default to what you think is the best source.

[01:55:33]MICHAEL GATES: Well, and another example is Klondike Kate.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, there's a book written by Ellis Lucia about Klondike Kate, and I -- I had some difficulty with it. You know, they claimed she was the queen of the ball, and, you know, the queen of theater, and all that stuff.

KAREN BREWSTER: She was in -- she was in Dawson, right?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah, she was. There's no question about that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: That's well documented. But her stature is -- was elevated substantially in this book. And everybody has glommed onto that, and -- and they've made her the "Queen of the Klondike." Well, uh, I found a number of places where I can document exaggerations in this book, so I know that he's prone to overstating it. And -- and I went back to find evidence that she was the preeminent -- well, the preeminent person during the gold rush was Cad Wilson. And um, who probably deserves that "Queen of the Klondike" more than Kate Rockwell. When Kate Rockwell was in Dawson, any time you find her name, you know, in -- in the theatre reviews or the advertisements for the stage performance that's coming up, her name would be in the middle of a cast of a dozen. So they didn't put her up in big letters.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And she -- she was noted in the newspapers for putting on things like Sunday afternoon when the theatres were compelled to shut down, she put on a series of tableaux. You know what tableaux are?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Poses?

MICHAEL GATES: Living tab -- human tableaux?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah. Um-hm. The curtains part, and everybody's frozen, you know, to represent The Last Supper --

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right, right.

MICHAEL GATES: Or The Rape of the Sabine Women or, you know, something like that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Then the curtains close, and you hear rumble, rumble, rumble, and they're dragging the furniture around, and then they open it up and it's another piece of classic art. And uh, everybody goes "Ooh." And "Aah." And they close the curtains. That's -- that's -- that was her forte.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

[01:57:50]MICHAEL GATES: And then, I looked in the census records, and they had a listing of -- I found her name. And she was listed with about a dozen others from the theatre. And the actresses started at four hundred dollars a month, and then three hundred dollars a month. And Kate was at the bottom at two hundred dollars a month.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: She was not the featured act.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Right. Right.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: So in the end, I realized -- and nobody called her Klondike Kate. That came when she showed up at the Pantages trial in 1929.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And the press started calling her that, and she grabbed that and ran with it.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, right.

MICHAEL GATES: So.

KAREN BREWSTER: That shows you the influence of the press, which, you know, they -- they continue to do that, you know.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, every -- all the old-timers loved it. They all remembered her.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And so, she was Klondike Kate. She embodied that glorious period from the past that they all participated in.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. She took on -- she took on that fame. Why not?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

[01:58:52]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, another thing I want to quickly ask about, you mentioned surveying the road. Archeological survey. That's the south Klondike Highway?

MICHAEL GATES: Yes.

KAREN BREWSTER: Between Whitehorse and Skagway?

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah. Um, the BC provincial archeologist plucked me out of a project I was working on in BC to lead a crew of two to go over the -- the route that the road was to follow.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, to ensure that the archeological resources weren't -- or determine what would -- how -- what the impact would be. And I remember when I got there, uh, at the end of the road was the BC border, and they had a bulldozer sitting there, idling. And they hadn't moved into BC yet, and the project engineer for the road said, "Can you at least give us the green light on the first five miles?" And so, that was the first thing we had to do.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you --

MICHAEL GATES: We backpacked. We hiked in. That was the only way we could get to these places.

KAREN BREWSTER: And was the route already flagged?

MICHAEL GATES: No. We had -- the route was marked on topo maps.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So you had something to follow?

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: And did you find things?

MICHAEL GATES: A little bit. But nothing of grave consequence. But we weren't able to cover the entire thing, um, that summer, so the next year, the fellow who assisted me came back in with another archeologist, and they completed the portions that we weren't able to get to.

[02:00:31]KAREN BREWSTER: And then who did -- did the -- was the US part done and the Yukon part done? Because you just did the BC side.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, the road was all the way up to the BC border, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh.

MICHAEL GATES: There was no argument about that. Um, and we just -- we got as far as the BC border (actually meant the international border at the summit of White Pass). We -- we camped on a little -- little flat spot right next to the boundary marker.

KAREN BREWSTER: Hm.

MICHAEL GATES: Overlooking the tracks. We set up our little base camp there, and then we -- we started working back along the route that the road was to follow. They dropped us off at Log Cabin, and we hiked all the way from Log Cabin. We backpacked from there up the railroad to the summit, and then we started working our way back down from -- over the route that was -- the road was to follow.

[02:01:19]KAREN BREWSTER: And did the road follow the old White Pass/Bennett Road trail?

MICHAEL GATES: Uh, no. Because it's one peak over.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh, ok. Oh yeah, the railroad follows that.

MICHAEL GATES: The railroad followed -- yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: So you don't know how they picked the route for the road?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, they would've worked with aerial photographs and -- I don't know what was already on the American side. If the American side got it partway up, they'd say, well, we'll just link up with what they've got.

KAREN BREWSTER: I don't know.

MICHAEL GATES: I don't know, either.

KAREN BREWSTER: I would've assumed --

MICHAEL GATES: That wasn't part of my job.

KAREN BREWSTER: I would've assumed they start from this end because it ends on the American side, but I don't know.

MICHAEL GATES: I don't know.

[02:01:59]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, but that also lead me to think, did you do any archeological survey work on the Chilkoot Trail? Because I know Karl Gurcke --

MICHAEL GATES: No, they had archeologists to do that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok. So that was -- at that point, you were working in Dawson, probably. Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: Yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: 'Cause I know Karl Gurcke and folks did that on the US side and numbered and mapped everything. Do you know if it was done on the Canadian side?

MICHAEL GATES: Oh, they -- they worked it to death.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: Yep. In fact, in later years when I was in Whitehorse, the superintendent for the Chilkoot grumbled every time the word archeology came up because, in his opinion, they'd done far too much.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Yeah, I bet.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. Ok. [02:02:44]Um, and then, I just want to wrap up with what we are not going to talk about today, maybe, which is the film project. The Dawson City film project, which is a whole 'nother story, and you've been interviewed about it a lot. But I just want it recorded that you were involved in -- in finding those films and --

MICHAEL GATES: I was, and it was quite circumstantial. It wasn't part of my mandate or my job.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: But I was young and had lots of energy, and I just -- I felt that we can't let one more thing get lost. I've heard so many old-timers talk about things being thrown out and thrown away and given away, I just -- I don't know, there was something that -- I -- I -- I needed to find somebody who might care about these. And --

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Did you ever think about the similarities between the discovery of gold and the discovery of the films?

MICHAEL GATES: No.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: No?

MICHAEL GATES: No. Not at all. I wasn't looking for it.

KAREN BREWSTER: And that was in 1970 --

MICHAEL GATES: Eight.

KAREN BREWSTER: Eight, right.

MICHAEL GATES: And, you know, it wasn't part of our mandate, and I ended up doing a lot of my involvement in that after hours.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: So my boss wouldn't grumble as much. And I never had -- at the time, I never conceived that it would be one of the things that keeps coming back to haunt me.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: At this end of my career.

[02:04:07]KAREN BREWSTER: Right. Well, that's why I say, it's a whole long story, but those were old films that had been shown in Dawson, in what, 19 -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: Well, between 1905 and 1925.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: And what -- what sparked it for me was finding an advertisement for one of the film -- reels of film that I had just looked at.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And it was shown in the theatre in 1917.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: "The Strange Case of Mary Page" was the title.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that's right. And it was old nitrate film that was very flammable and had to be --

MICHAEL GATES: That's right.

KAREN BREWSTER: -- conserved, and that was a huge project.

[02:04:39]MICHAEL GATES: My last -- my last sort of involvement in the project was trying to figure out how to get it to Ottawa. And so, we -- we had these crates built, and I had them lined with metal. I later learned that it probably would've been a useless gesture. Once those things catch fire, there's no putting them out.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And at one point, I took about four feet of nitrate film, and I held it over a galvanized garbage barrel.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And I lit the bottom and dropped it in. And the flame shot eight feet in the air, and it melted the galvanizing off the outside.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: It has -- ounce for ounce, or gram for gram, it has thirteen times the BTU's of wood. So when it burns, it's incredibly intense.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And I've been told, but I never tried it, it burns under water. You can attest to that.

ANGELA SCHMIDT: I've seen videos of that.

MICHAEL GATES: Ok. So you know. So it was a very dangerous material. [02:05:40]We had this ton of film loaded into these crates. And then, how do we get them out of town? Well, there happened to be a moving company in town, and they were moving somebody's domestic haul, and they had room on their truck. So we were able to get these crates onto the truck.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: And they got it to Whitehorse. And then, I went to Whitehorse, and I said, "You know, can we arrange to get these to Ottawa?" And he said, "Oh, we've been listening to the radio. We know what that is, and we are -- we're not going to touch it."

KAREN BREWSTER: Major HAZMAT.

MICHAEL GATES: So I went down to Greyhound, and I said, "You know, any chance you could transport these?" "We know what that stuff is. We're not going to touch it." And I -- I went and talked to the trucking outfits, and they knew. They wouldn't touch it. And Canadian Pacific Airlines would have nothing to do with it. So I went back, and I was mulling this over a coffee break, and one of my colleagues was retired from the military. And he says, "Well, the armed forces does that stuff all the time." So we relayed this to Sam Kula, and he got his boss to talk to someone in Department of National Defense, and they sent a Hercules up, and they picked the film up.

KAREN BREWSTER: Oh. I thought you were gonna have to drive it yourself to Ottawa.

MICHAEL GATES: I would've. I would've.

[02:06:56]KAREN BREWSTER: Um, well, I really appreciate your time this morning.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um, any other thing about the work you've done in Yukon history or Klondike Chilkoot stuff that we haven't talked about that -- ?

MICHAEL GATES: Oh. I've got another six hours.

KAREN BREWSTER: You know, that was on your -- right.

MICHAEL GATES: I'm --

KAREN BREWSTER: That was on your mind when I initiated this thing? We want to make sure --

MICHAEL GATES: Well, mostly it was my fear of not having a lot to say about, you know, the Chilkoot. And there are other people who are far more knowledgeable.

KAREN BREWSTER: Um-hm.

MICHAEL GATES: And, you know, I thought it was going to be a very short interview.

KAREN BREWSTER: Well, I mean, your experiences on the Chilkoot doing the CRM, I mean, that is a unique thing. So you did have some special moments out there.

MICHAEL GATES: A little bit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: A little bit.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah. [02:07:40]You have a favorite spot on the trail?

MICHAEL GATES: I have a favorite moment.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: It was early one morning at Bennett, and I'd just gotten up. I got out of my tent, and I was sitting at one of the picnic tables. And I heard a wolf howl across the lake, and it just -- it echoed across the lake. And it was just dead calm. The -- the sun was just coming up, and it was just raking the mountaintops. And there was a bit of a chill in the air, and then, this howl pierced the silence.

KAREN BREWSTER: Wow.

MICHAEL GATES: I remember that.

KAREN BREWSTER: That's beautiful.

MICHAEL GATES: But that's one of many.

KAREN BREWSTER: Right.

MICHAEL GATES: Many.

[02:08:27]KAREN BREWSTER: Well, that makes me think about a question about, you know, the Chilkoot Trail and the continued preservation of it. Now is it more a wilderness nature experience to be preserved, versus --

MICHAEL GATES: I'll leave that up to somebody else to decide.

KAREN BREWSTER: Versus a history thing to be preserved?

MICHAEL GATES: It'll always be a history thing as far as I'm concerned. And we must not lose sight of that.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok.

MICHAEL GATES: I know, they have the warden service in there -- turn your machine off.

KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, we're -- ok.

(break)

[02:09:01]KAREN BREWSTER: Ok, we're just gonna, um, sign off here, and thank you very much for your stories and perspective.

MICHAEL GATES: Um-hm.

KAREN BREWSTER: It's been great. Angie, anything else from you?

ANGELA SCHMIDT: Thanks, this has been wonderful.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right.

MICHAEL GATES: Ok.

KAREN BREWSTER: We'll save the rest for another interview, right?

MICHAEL GATES: Sometime.

KAREN BREWSTER: Sometime. All right. I'm looking forward to your book about the film project.

MICHAEL GATES: Well, that'll be a couple years.

KAREN BREWSTER: Yeah.

MICHAEL GATES: But I'm working -- I've got one that has got to be to the publisher by October, so.

KAREN BREWSTER: All right.

MICHAEL GATES: That comes first, but yeah.

KAREN BREWSTER: Great, thanks.