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## ART ANDERSON: ASBESTOS MINE DISCOVERER WAS NO. 1

by Jane Gaffin

*(Information for the eulogy of Art Anderson that Jane Gaffin wrote for the Yukon News and The Whitehorse Star in October, 1996, was excerpted from her book **Cashing In.**)*

During the 10-year lifespan of the Clinton Creek Asbestos Mine, Arthur Elton Anderson was renowned as the No. 1 employee on the company's payroll.

The mine, which exhausted its reserves and closed in 1977, was at the relevant time Canada's most northerly open-pit operation. It was the Yukon's first asbestos producer.

Company officials always brought attention to Art Anderson, whom they lauded as a legend within his own time.

"I wasn't a prospector then, and I'm not now," said the Indian trapper, modestly, during a 1974 interview about his asbestos find some 30 miles northwest of Dawson City. "I didn't have to be (a prospector). There the asbestos was spread out all over the ground. I knew nothing about geology. I didn't have to know anything!"

He emphasized the immensity with hand gestures. "When tunneled, there was more than hoped for."

Art's father, Pete, a Dane, had boated down the Pelly River to the Klondike in July, 1898. Too late to stake good gold-bearing ground, he had turned to commercial fishing, which he knew from the old country.

He also farmed and prospected on the side around Fortymile, a few miles downstream from Dawson City.

Pete Anderson married an Indian woman, Mary (Charles) Phillips who died giving Art life on March 27, 1912. He was the youngest of six children.

By then, the village at the confluence of the Yukon and Fortymile rivers had dwindled from 300 to a dozen residents.

Rumours of gold strikes at Dawson City and Alaska's Circle City had silenced Fortymile's three saloons. The 21 members of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police vacated the two-storey barracks and followed the human tide.

Art's father raised him. The pair stayed behind in their log cabin, which had to be replaced when fire destroyed the original one.

Growing up in a roadless Yukon, the young Anderson covered land slowly on foot or with dogs. He had memorized virtually every square inch of the Clinton and Ogilvie terrain.

The only time he went outside the Yukon was when he unintentionally slipped across into Alaska by boat.

He learned fur trapping. He trained and drove single-hitched, eight-dog teams with good leaders. The longest dog-team trips he made were from Fortymile upriver to Dawson City so he could sell furs and buy supplies.

The 50-mile journey usually required two days over the frozen Yukon River. When springtime conditions were perfect, he recalled speeding over the ice in only six hours.

"The dogs wore out a lot of moccasins," he noted.

Art was 21 years old when he and his father left Fortymile in 1933. They farmed the fertile Clinton Valley soil. It provided a bounty of vegetables.

On Porcupine Hill, Pete Anderson found rusty gold pans, picks and decayed posts. The artifacts were remnants left behind by the 1898 miners.

His father also found a pile of fluffy fibres.

"Asbestos didn't mean much then," Art added. "It had no value, market or significance."

Some 20 years later, asbestos was a coveted product. Art returned to Porcupine Hill in 1957. But he couldn't find the asbestos.

For financial assistance he turned to the late Fred Caley (Honour Roll) and his son, Bob Caley. Fred, a long-time Dawsonite and grocer, grew too old to prospect and liked to grubstake others with money and goods in exchange for a percentage of whatever might be realized from a mineral find.

About 1955, Conwest Exploration, which owned the Cassiar Asbestos Corporation in northern British Columbia, had been attracted to Caley's asbestos find. (Note: On occasion, writers have erroneously credited Fred Caley with finding the great Cassiar asbestos deposit in northern British Columbia. The confusion comes from one of Caley's asbestos finds being located on a creek named Cassiar but it was in the Dawson City area of the Yukon and had no connection other than as a namesake to the long-time Cassiar asbestos producer in the Cassiar Range of northern B.C.)

The Caley deposit had proven too shallow to mine. So, Caley displayed an asbestos sample in his Dawson City general store. Prospectors associated the specimen with minerals in the field.

Art, joined by trapper friend, George Walters, relocated the white fibres that seemed to burst

out of the earth.

Alec Berry (Honour Roll), acting on behalf of Conwest Exploration and Doc William Smitheringale, started negotiating terms with the foursome for the property at Clinton Creek, a tributary of the Fortymile River. The deposit was located about eight miles from the Alaskan border.

Although financial compensation for his portion of the asbestos discovery was handsome, Art accepted his first full-time salaried job during the adit exploration stages.

"Money doesn't last long in this country," quipped Art, who built a Dawson City house for his wife Mary Eva and their three children, Margaret, Jimmy and Nancy.

Besides driving a team of strong dogs, Art also had a team of big black horses he used to drive up and down the Yukon River to carry out business in Dawson. It was on one of these trips that he had met Mary Eva Simon of Moosehide.

They were married in Dawson on October 18, 1947. Some of his early jobs that provided well for his family included work on the ferries at the crossings of the Stewart and Pelly rivers, woodcutting, fishing and trapping and later his very successful prospecting endeavors.

Clinton Creek Asbestos' exploration division helicoptered Art into the back country, looking for more asbestos. "We were prospecting, so I had to walk home," he said, grinning. "I got too old for that."

The decision to take the deposit into production was made in 1965. Two years later, the seven-floor mill, the Yukon's tallest building, was officially opened. During the mine's lifetime, an annual 100,000 tons of industrial-grade fibres were produced in the round-the-clock operation.

When Art's dark hair was frosted with more than 60 winters, he transferred to townsite maintenance in 1972.

The community of 500 people was situated on the soil where Art and his father once farmed. However, the mine site was severed from the rest of the world.

For three months each year, the Yukon River at Dawson stopped the Cassiar Transport and White Pass trucks in their tracks. They were hauling 38 tons of fibre as well as freight and fuel.

During in-between seasons, conditions were neither fit for government ferry nor an ice bridge. The company strung cables between two towers on opposite sides of the Yukon River. The skyline allowed for asbestos to be slung to the Dawson City side. Mail and freight were transferred to the Clinton Creek side.

It was a unique set-up, but inconvenient and very expensive. The skyline required additional loading and unloading time, plus the maintenance of two-truck fleets on either side of the river.

Six weeks were required to build an ice bridge. Then, in the spring, when warmer temperatures threatened to decay the structure, drivers crossed the bridge with truck doors ajar. They always had to be ready to leap if the ice collapsed.

The mine's limited lifespan deterred the Yukon government from building a permanent bridge. Ironically, now that the mine no longer exists, the government is once again talking about building that bridge across the Yukon River.

But Clinton Creek had remained completely independent of government. It even constructed the Yukon's first and only sewage-treatment plant of the day.

Art Anderson, the mine's discoverer and No. 1 employee, died at age 84 on October 4, 1996. Funeral services were held a week later from St. Paul's Anglican Church in Dawson City.

He was predeceased by his wife, Mary. He had three children, ten grandchildren, three great grandchildren, numerous nieces, nephews and cousins as well as the whole Yukon mining community to remember him.

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*Art Anderson was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors' Association's Hall of Fame in 2005. His name is engraved in the base of the bronze prospector statue that watches over Whitehorse from Main Street and Third Avenue.*

See related articles: *GSC: Early Government Surveyors Left a Permanent Mark on Yukon; Bob Kirk: The Prospector Who Cheerfully Blew His Million and Alec Berry: Conwest Exploration's Super Sleuth*. The village of Fortymile where Art Anderson was born and raised is described in *the article William Ogilvie: Dominion Surveyor Made Order Out of Chaos*.

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