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BRUCE PATNODE: DESIGNER OF PROSPECTOR STATUE by Jane Gaffin

Jane Gaffin is a Whitehorse-based freelance writer who specializes in mining.

Bruce Patnode was about six years old when he came to Whitehorse in 1953. His father, the late Larry Patnode (Hall of Fame), had come ahead from Alberta to take an army job. Then his mother, Alice Patnode, a school teacher and artist, followed with the two children, Bruce and Sharon.

"We were starving on the Alberta homestead," said Mrs. Patnode in a 1992 interview. "We came to make our stake, get rich quick and leave. But we never left."

Bruce grew up in Whitehorse, where he went to school and graduated from F.H. Collins Secondary in 1965. It was natural that from a very young age he became fascinated with rocks and began studying geology on his own and taking prospecting courses.

In that sense, he was following in the footsteps of his father who possessed an enthusiasm for finding mineral prospects and promoting properties. Father and son often went out on field forays together.

While a student, the teenager spent summers doing field jobs that turned out to be an eclectic collection of experiences associated with some of the Yukon's most important mining projects of 1960-70 vintage.

He was a radio operator in a remote three-person camp for Southwest Potash Corporation (Amax) when the tungsten deposit was discovered in 1962. The MacTung property, accessible from the north Canol Road, is located at MacMillan Pass on the Yukon-Northwest Territories border.

He was on crews doing legal surveys of mining claims throughout the Yukon, such as in the Keno Hill district and the Whitehorse copperbelt. As an employee of White, Hosford and Impey of Whitehorse, he was one of the first surveyors into the early Faro mining camp in 1965, and later surveyed for the New York-based Parsons Construction which built the mill for Anvil Mining Corporation in 1968.

As a White Pass truck driver, he later was hauling lead-zinc silver concentrates from that Faro mill to railhead at Whitehorse as well as hauling asbestos from the Clinton Creek Mine near Dawson and silver concentrates from United Keno Hill Mines at Elsa. In 1974, he was on the Cassiar run hauling asbestos fibres from the mine in northern British Columbia to Whitehorse.

At one point, he did a stint driving for Ray Russell Transport. The Whitehorse-based truck company had the contract to haul Hudson Bay Mining's nickel concentrates from the Wellgreen Nickel Mines near Burwash to a port facility in Haines, Alaska, between May, 1972 to July, 1973.

Over the years, Patnode's mining-related jobs expanded into crewing on diamond-drill rigs, operating heavy equipment and supervising geochemical and geophysical field programs in Canada and abroad.

Meanwhile, he was still studying geology as an avocation and eventually set up his own mineral exploration company. He had returned to a British Columbia college to finish a business administration degree with majors in finance and marketing. In the mid-1980s, he was employed with the Yukon government's economic development department.

By 1986, the energetic Patnode had taken on the role of president of the Yukon Prospectors' Association (YPA) and assumed management duties of the association's Satellite Remote Sensing facility, initially housed in a building on Industrial Road. The purpose of the-then cutting-edge satellite imagery technology was to discern geological features on earth to assist mineral explorers in their quest for finding mineral deposits.

Simultaneously, Patnode served seven years as a director of the Yukon Chamber of Mines. As the senior industry spokesman, he liaised with government, first nations, private industry and environmental groups to help foster mining activities in a socially, environmentally and economically responsible context.

Amid all these other activities, he seriously began pursuing art with great zeal around 1989. All those neglected ideas came pouring forth. Up till then, it was the artist's old lament about never having time.

"I also do wood carving and stone sculptures," said Patnode, although his genre was mainly landscapes when interviewed in 1992. " But I enjoy experimenting with anything new."

His work is very visible. For instance, he participated in producing the RCMP commemorative mural displayed beside the Whitehorse detachment building.

Some of his landscape dioramas, or backgrounds, that highlight wildlife displays can be viewed in the Kluane Museum at Burwash Landing, Carcross Museum of Natural History and at the Teslin museum.

He and Chuck Buchanan, founder of the Yukon Museum of Natural History and Frontierland Theme Park near the historic burg of Carcross, produced the Skaguay to Dawson diorama inside the Yukon Transportation Museum.

On the museum's exterior wall is a colorful historic mural mounted in the summer of 1992. Patnode was a contributor to the Yukon Art Society's big anniversary project to mark the Alaska Highway's 50th birthday.

Mother and son competed against each other in the 1992 Northwestel phone directory cover contest that had to portray some aspect of Alaska Highway construction. Both Patnode entries hung in the phone company's 50th anniversary traveling art show on tour in 14

Yukon communities and various locales in northern British Columbia.

Bruce's *More Mud* entry depicted the elements men endured when punching through 1,600 miles of permafrost and muskeg to build a highway from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Fairbanks (Delta), Alaska.

"I tried to capture the feeling of what it might have been like during 1942," expressed Patnode, whose only formal training was high school art classes. The rest of his training came from an inherited talent and learning what experience teaches.

Of all his artisan projects, the larger-than-life bronze Goldseeker statue was the most ambitious. As designer and project co-ordinator, Patnode modestly described the project as "a good idea", which is why all the pieces came together in a short time, he said.

The initial idea for a Prospectors' Hall of Fame was conceived in 1988; the money for an heroic-size statue took a little longer, he confirmed.

The Yukon Prospectors' Association struck a committee to launch the Prospectors' Hall of Fame with a big kick-off dinner and dance at the Westmark Whitehorse Hotel and attended by 250 people wearing turn-of-the-century regalia.

A limited-edition Hall of Fame souvenir booklet was published. It was replete with fascinating early-day newspaper mining accounts and reports plus the original listing of about 173 inductees into the Hall of Fame and the 25 people and organizations to the Honour Roll.

Additionally, Patnode made provisions for artist Bill Wallis of Atlin, British Columbia, to create a large wood-burned plaque on which Hall of Famers' names are inscribed on individual brass plates. The artwork is displayed in the foyer of the Yukon government administration building.

The exercise was a way to pay tribute to Yukon prospectors who struggled against seemingly impossible odds, suffered undue hardships and incurred incredible risks in their search for minerals in the territory.

At one point, sculptor Chuck Buchanan's suggestion to create a larger-than-life statue seemingly was destined to die on the drafting table. But the "good idea", as Patnode called it, continued to tug at his imagination. Only he knows how he managed to pull the money together and find such a prominent place for the landmark in record time.

First, with a miniature clay prospector-dog model, known as a maquette, Patnode promoted the "good idea" while circulating among the delegates attending the Geoscience Forum at the Westmark Hotel in November, 1991.

What he accomplished was a monumental feat. Only 10 months lapsed from the time Buchanan cast the miniature prototype until the nine-foot-tall prospector, accompanied by his malamute companion, suddenly appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, for the dedication ceremony.

The statue was unveiled in downtown Whitehorse as part of the Canadian Mines Ministers' Conference on September 21, 1992.

But the signal to definitely go ahead had not sounded until June, 1992. Once the money was committed for the project, Buchanan started the clay work on the larger-than-life figures. He then took the art casting to the foundry in Kalispell, Montana, for bronzing.

Patnode went down the last day to assist with last-minute details. There was no time to admire their creation or make any changes. The crunch was on. The statue had to be out the door and expressed by truck to Whitehorse.

If the statue, shipped from the foundry on Consolidated Freightways, had missed the connection with the Canadian Freightways truck, the statue would not have been in Whitehorse on time for the dedication ceremony.

It arrived on time. The statue was trucked to Midnight Sun Drilling's shop, where it was assembled and prepared for the concrete base. Sidrock Company's owner was downtown digging up flagstones and doing the concrete work so the base could be anchored in place.

Continental Crane was hired to unload the artwork from Jerry Vermette's lowboy onto the deck. By the time the crowd swarmed out for lunch from the mines ministers' meeting, the heavy equipment had vanished. A shrouded statue was bolted down in the tidy flagstone area at Main Street and Third Avenue.

"Elmer Mackay, the (federal) Public Works minister, liked the idea," Patnode noted. "He was instrumental in making the project a success as well as providing an excellent location for this landmark."

But the most important thing about the fruition of the project was to have the unwavering support from the prospectors' association's board, he added.

Federal Northern Affairs minister Jake Epp and territorial mines minister Maurice Byblow also spoke a few glowing words to the crowd.

It was so well received that the community immediately assumed ownership of the statue which has proven to be the most popular backdrop and photographed item in downtown Whitehorse. Kids crawl up to sit at the toe of the size 24 boot to survey their kingdom while holding secret meetings and eating lunch.

The prospector stands proud and confident, clad in high-top boots, a feather stuck in his broad-brimmed hat, a gold poke attached to his belt. In his left hand, he carries a long-handled shovel. A sheathed rifle is slung from his shoulder. A cup, an axe, and the all-important gold pan are strapped to his back pack.

The faithful, broad-faced, pointy-eared dog totes his master's packs, bedroll, jacket and bucket.

"It was nip and tuck to get the statue out on time," Patnode confirmed about the high-pressure, nerve-wracking deadlines. "Everybody worked as fast as they could. It came together. But it wouldn't have come together without Chuck Buchanan and his knowledge and contacts for bronzing."

Chuck is very organized, praised Patnode. "This was his first big piece. He did it on a forgiving basis. It would be doubtful if any other sculptor could have done the project for that price."

The \$80,000 funding to cast and erect the creation was cost-shared by government and private enterprise. Public Works Canada contributed \$25,000 while Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Government of Yukon provided \$10,000 each.

The \$35,000 contributions were equally split among seven private companies: Curragh Inc.; Golden Hill Ventures, Ltd.; Loki Gold Corporation; Midnight Sun Drilling Company, Ltd.; Pelly Construction, Ltd.; White Pass and Yukon Route; and Yukon Electrical Company Ltd.

Contributors' names are engraved in the base of the statue as well as names of 183 men and women inducted into the Hall of Fame for their work from 1860 to 1992. Space is reserved to recognize other inductees in future years.

An Honour Roll pays tribute to 30 individuals, companies and organizations who have helped prospectors along the way by showing faith in their visions.

The original inductees were chosen by a selection committee, comprised of Dennis Prince, John Scott, Ron Granger and Dorothy Howatt. They were invaluable for their knowledge and research of Yukon old-timers, as was non-member Laurent Cyr for his historic contributions.

Selection is an on-going process. To be inducted requires that a Yukon prospector must have made an important contribution to mining in the territory.

Nomination forms are available from the prospectors' association so the public can submit names for consideration. The selection committee review submissions annually.

As soon as Patnode made his permanent, several-ton statement in 1992 that epitomizes those who follow their dreams, he stepped aside after seven years as president of the prospectors' association for a much-needed rest.

He was soon lured away to British Columbia's Vancouver Island, where he is busy painting and continues to promote the Yukon at the slightest chance.

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* Whitehorse-based prospector Allen Carlos sponsored preparation of this article for posting on the prospectors' association's Website in 2005.

* See related articles: *Chuck Buchanan Sculpted the Prospector Statue* and *The Yukon's Favourite Prospector*.

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