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JAN DICKSON: FIRST WOMAN HONOURED AS PROSPECTOR OF THE YEAR

by Jane Gaffin

(Information for this piece is based on an article that originally appeared in the *Yukon News* on November 29, 1996.)

A 300-guest banquet, staged at the Gold Rush Inn, was part of the annual Geoscience Forum in November and served as the setting where the Yukon Prospectors' Association (YPA) honored the 1996 Prospector of the Year.

Janet Dickson, renowned as a hard worker with impressive credentials, was the first--and to date the only--woman to receive the prestigious award.

The shiny prospector's rock hammer, attached to an engraved plaque, was presented by YPA president Mike Power. In his preamble, he explained that one place Mrs. Dickson had prospected extensively was Dublin Gulch in the Mayo area before it was a popular place to be.

"The ground turned into a gold property that is now First Dynasty, or whatever name the company is using this year," quipped Power. His reference to the recent name-change to New Millennium Mining drew hoots from a giddy audience.

"Jan also has prospected the Mount Nansen area, near Carmacks," Power added to the list of accolades. "Her claims were rolled into and became part of BYG's Mount Nansen property. And she's putting a junior company on the stock market next year. Jan will probably be getting two or three more royalty cheques in the mail soon."

In her words of acceptance, Mrs. Dickson said she planned to keep on prospecting. "I just hope that the regulations don't get so tough that the individual prospector won't be able to work in the Yukon."

Janet Dickson was born, reared and educated a "city girl" at a time when most young women were entering into traditional roles of teaching, nursing and secretarial careers. After attending business college, she went to work for a Calgary brokerage firm that was influential in launching her prospecting career.

At her place of employment, people talked about stocks and anomalies and she became fascinated with the mining business. Later, while working in Vancouver, the 29-year-old Janet met and married an older man, Gordon Dickson (Hall of Fame). The Yukon mining legend was prospecting and cutting mining deals until 1993 when he died at age 80 of heart failure after a lengthy battle with Hodgkins disease.

The pair's common denominator was a love for the outdoor life. Janet's liking for picnics and hiking later translated into an excuse for running away from housework and cooking at home. It was far more fun to cook and do laundry on a scrub board when living in a canvas tent in the wilds.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the Dicksons prospected around Dawson City and north of Mayo. They would be transported to a place by airplanes and helicopters. Pilots were instructed to pick up the prospectors at a specified location two or three months hence.

One of her early memorable outings was a hundred miles north of Mayo. She was introduced to snowshoes and marveling over the ingenious northern footwear. She was sloggng across a frozen lake, fetching trees to drag back to Gordon who cut, peeled and fashioned the limbs into bed, cupboard, table and other useful camp furnishings. After a few hours of breaking through soft, foot-deep snow with every step, she wasn't half so enamoured with the webbed footgear discovery. It was really hard work.

Their meals consisted mainly of corn beef, rice, cabbage and onions, varied with Kraft dinners and canned meatballs and gravy. When close to a stream, Janet would catch and bake a tasty treat of fresh grayling for dinner.

Sometime later they had a stove in camp. Sundays were reserved for baking bread as well as scrubbing clothes by hand. Life was made easier with the four-wheelers, Bombardiers and a bulldozer. A travel trailer replaced the canvas tent.

Janet liked the lifestyle of climbing hills and stopping to build a fire to boil a pot of tea. She liked the beautiful rainbow after a storm and hankered to investigate where the colorful bands ended. She liked having a moose hanging around camp one summer and caribou wandering into camp unexpectedly. She even relished having a few bears camped as close as the other side of the creek.

She had quickly learned to identify one mineral from another and found that prospecting was a busy business. The day started taking care of personal needs, cutting wood, building a fire, cooking and eating breakfast, washing dishes and packing for the trail. The morning and afternoon were dedicated to cracking rocks, interrupted with a lunch break.

Late in the day, back in camp, there were rocks to study, wood to gather, fire building, meal preparation, cleaning up, burning cans before finally hitting the rack so the prospectors could be up early and repeat the routine.

In the beginning, the Dicksons didn't make any money. But rewards improved with time. They optioned mineral claims to Welcome North Mines and Chevron Minerals. Some mining properties exchanged for stocks proved a lucrative arrangement.

When her husband died in March, 1993, the couple was holding hundreds of claims at Mount Nansen near Carmacks and Dublin Gulch near Mayo. On her own, she made option and royalty agreements with mining companies such as Aurchem Resources Ltd. for property later rolled into BYG Natural Resources, and cut a deal with the junior exploration company, New Millennium Mining.

Mrs. Dickson said she planned to keep prospecting and negotiating mining deals as long as the government's permitting regime didn't become too onerous for the small guy to navigate. For sure, she would refuse to work within a system if it ever required her to obtain a permit

to go stake a claim.

"When you find something, it's a secret. If you have to tell everybody where you're going, there might be a hundred people there before you," Mrs. Dickson told *Whitehorse Star* reporter Ann Prichard in a 1996 interview. "No, if it's too tough, I'll retire. I don't need to go through it."

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See related piece: [Gordon Dickson](#), 1989 Prospector of the Year.

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