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JANE SUMMERS ORRELL: SEAMSTRESS TURNED PROSPECTOR by Jane Gaffin

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

(Information for this piece has relied on *Lode Mining in Yukon: An Investigation of Quartz Deposits in the Klondike Division* by mining engineer T.A. MacLean, Canada Department of Mines (Honour Roll), Government Printing Bureau, Ottawa, 1914; and Yukon Genealogy Gold Rush Database.)

Mrs. Jane Summers Orrell (Hall of Fame) was with a small party who came over the Chilkoot Trail from the Alaska coastal town of Dyea and entered the Yukon Territory on June 27, 1900. At the Tagish Lake check point North West Mounted Police inspected the amount of gear and condition of the two crafts then registered the scow and canoe respectively as #349 and #350 for that year. The Dawson-bound travelers were cleared to paddle down the Yukon River.

The Klondike madness had crested two years earlier in 1898. Then a great number of the original 35,000 stampedeers were mobilized to join the Nome and other Alaska gold rushes. 1900 was a good time to be in the Klondike goldfields. Latecomers benefited from the exodus that opened favourable mining ground on which no representation work had been done to keep the claims in good standing with the federal government mining recorder.

The capital city of Dawson, the hub of Yukon commerce and mining activity, was enjoying a surge in class as a stable female population blossomed. There were women writers, newspaper correspondents, teachers, nurses, secretaries, fortune seekers, entertainers, shopkeepers and owners of lodges, hotels and eateries, as well as housewives of distinction by virtue of their husbands' political status, religious role or extent of mining fortunes. All these lovely ladies looked lovelier when turned out lavishly in elaborate Victorian attire and floral-ribbon-and-feather bedecked hats.

To satisfy the ladies' fashion needs, Dawson supported eight clothing stores in the early 1900s. Business was brisk at the popular millinery and dress shop of Summers & Orrell. Jane and her sister, Catherine Summers, who had come from Ontario, lived together with Minnie Walker, an Ontario seamstress employed at the Summers & Orrell shop.

In their spare time, Jane and Catherine sidelined in the avocation of gold prospecting. Between 1901 and 1912, they held both placer and lode ground. They were best known as chief owners of the group of lode claims called Green Gulch and Boxcar, where Jane was credited with discovering gold between 1904 and 1909.

A lode, or quartz, deposit indicates minerals formed in solid rock which needs blasting and drilling to mine, as opposed to placer gold deposited in a stream and mined by washing the sand and gravel with a gold pan or sluice box. The claims have to be recorded as either a placer or a quartz claim.

The Green Gulch property was situated on the head of Green Gulch, a tributary of Sulphur Creek, and adjoined a group of claims known as the Lloyd on the west. The Green Gulch group was comprised of about 30 claims and four fraction claims. Ten of the claims near the ridge road had been surveyed to establish legal boundaries so the owners could apply for a 21-year lease in order to invest in and carry out long-term exploration and mining work.

Like many women investors, Jane and Catherine elected to contract a man to do the actual mining and assessment work because they were too busy stitching and fitting garments to be in the field performing the hard labour themselves.

Mr. Sam Thurbur (Hall of Fame) was in charge of the Summers and Orrell property and resided on the claims. "Systematic prospecting is required to locate and outline the veins, as the present workings are scattered and insufficient to correlate them, or to afford information on which to base an estimate of the probable quantity of quartz," observed mining engineer T.A. MacLean, on tour of the Klondike in 1912. Of six presumably random samples taken from this property, all but one assayed with values; four were fair, and one reached as high as \$12.30, he wrote.

Another group of claims had been generally tagged "Box Car" because the property was situated on the divide between Bonanza and Soda creeks. Soda is a tributary of Gold Bottom Creek, where Bob Henderson originally found Klondike gold, and Gold Bottom adjoined the Klondike Railway's Box Car station.

The Box Car group was comprised of 14 claims. Six claims were grouped under joint ownership of Mrs. Jane Orrell and her sister Miss Summers; and the other eight claims were jointly owned by a Mr. Murphy, a Mrs. O'Brien and other Dawson residents. Mr. Sam Thurbur (a.k.a. Thurber), who was living on and managing the Green Gulch property, was responsible for the annual assessment work of the entire Box Car group of claims where quartz was found to occur in the form of veins, lenses, bunches and stringers.

Mrs. Jane Summers Orrell, widow of Thomas H. Orrell before 1904, was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors' Association's Hall of Fame in 1988. Her name is inscribed on a brass plate attached to the Hall of Fame artpiece displayed in the foyer of the Yukon government administration building. Her name also is engraved in the base of the bronze prospector statue that watches over downtown Whitehorse from Main Street and Third Avenue.

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