



# Yukon Hostels

## Dawson City and Whitehorse

### St. Paul's, Dawson

The Klondike Gold Rush of 1897–98 ushered in a new era in the Selkirk District of the Northwest Territories, with thousands of settlers arriving each month, new communities established, rapidly improving communications, and other growing pains as the territory opened up. These events contributed to Ottawa's decision to give Selkirk its own government and name in 1898—Yukon Territory. Dawson was made the territory's capital. The Anglican Diocese of Selkirk, formed in 1891, was similarly renamed in 1907. In these changing times, the Church faced new challenges.

Missionary work in the district during the Victorian era had focused on efforts to serve the native population, then dominant. The London-based Church Missionary Society (CMS) was the primary sponsor of these Anglican missionaries, who travelled widely throughout the Yukon and neighbouring Mackenzie District. Their evangelizing work dates from 1861 and was most successful in the central and northern regions. Roman Catholic missionaries found their success in the Yukon's south and in the principal cities of Dawson and Whitehorse where they also competed with their Anglican contemporaries. At Dawson, St. Paul's Anglican Church was established in 1897 by Rev. R.J. Bowen, who conducted services in a log cabin for the gold miners. A substantial new church building was put up in 1902 and remains in use today.

With the large influx of non-natives, mostly American miners and entrepreneurs, the dynamics of Yukon society changed. There was a desperate need for new clergy to administer to the needs of white residents and provide schooling for their children. Most had settled in the Dawson City area close to the gold producing area of the Klondike. In the more remote areas, the existing network of mission day schools could only admit a few white or Métis students, whose homes were near these posts. Those living close to Dawson City attended the new public school opened in 1900. At the height of the Gold Rush in 1898, the city's population was about 40,000 but most newcomers soon left when the stampede was over. When Dawson was incorporated as a city in 1902, the number had dropped to 5,000.

Many children of settlers living away from major centres or mission stations continued to be deprived of formal schooling. Their plight was not being addressed by the government, which prompted Diocesan Bishop Isaac Stringer to make independent plans for a hostel in Dawson, where students could attend the local combined elementary and secondary school. On his tour of the Diocese in 1920, Stringer met a father who pleaded to have his children brought back to Dawson so they may get an education in the municipal schools. Not entirely prepared for this encounter, the Bishop nevertheless brought the children back with him and arranged accommodation in a remodelled former private home. Hence, St. Paul's Hostel was opened that November.

More children followed, the hostel was expanded, filled again (about 20 students) and in 1923 it was relocated to the former Samaritan Hospital, which was remodelled to take in 30 children. Most boarders were children of mixed parents, the father usually white. These part-native children were "non-status" and not eligible to attend Indian residential schools, such as the large Choooutla School at Carcross. Ottawa provided a small capital grant for St. Paul's but operational funding was difficult to secure. Parents, if able, paid a set per capita fee of \$25 per month, local merchants assisted (especially the local Bank of Commerce) and money flowed from other Church sources—St. Paul's parishioners, Diocese of the Yukon, Women's Auxiliary, church benefactors in England, and the Missionary Society of the Church of England in Canada (MSCC). However, expenses were heavy and funds rarely sufficient during the early years.

Enrolment peaked at about 40 during WWII, but declined after the war as the Alaska Highway boosted other communities, particularly Whitehorse, which became the territorial capital in 1952 and new See for the Diocese. Many families moved to the southern part of the Yukon for employment and preferred to send their children to public schools in Whitehorse. In the absence of an Anglican hostel, many were boarded at the Roman Catholic or Baptist hostels. About 1951, St. Paul's enrolment had dropped to nine—all orphans or those from destitute families. The deteriorating hostel had become unviable, forcing the Diocese to close it in the spring of 1952. The few remaining children at Dawson were sent to Carcross to board temporarily with staff of the Chooutla School and to attend the government day school in Carcross. Some of these children were later transferred to All Saints Anglican Residential School at Aklavik and the new St. Agnes Anglican Hostel in Whitehorse, which opened in the fall of 1952.

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*St. Agnes Hostel (Yukon Hall),  
Whitehorse*

The circumstances surrounding the founding of St. Agnes Hostel were similar to that of its older sister and predecessor at Dawson. Protestant families in remote areas of the southern Yukon petitioned the Church to find a residence in Whitehorse to enable their children to attend school in Whitehorse. The newly elected Bishop of the Yukon, Tom Greenwood, championed this cause and acquired two army surplus huts in 1952. They were moved to church-owned land in town (306 Lambert Street) and outfitted as a student residence, which was formally opened in October 1952. The hostel was named after the local Anglican parish, St. Agnes. Management was the responsibility of the St. Agnes Hostel Board, an arms length agency of the Diocese. The Yukon Government provided a grant for some of the capital expenses.

The hostel had capacity for about 25 children but during its 14 years of existence, it was rarely full. Priority was given to white or mixed blood children, whose parents were expected to pay a prescribed enrolment fee. Over the years, many status Indian students were accommodated, with funding provided by the Indian Affairs Department. Many of these students had completed early primary schooling at the Chooutla School and were transferred to Whitehorse to complete their elementary and secondary education in city schools. Other boarders at St. Agnes included orphaned and destitute children, native and non-native, who were wards of the government.

Funding was a chronic problem due to high operational costs, many needed repairs, and unpredictable enrolment projections in some years. As well, there were many bureaucratic issues that stifled the business plans of the hostel's Anglican administrators. All levels of government were partners to some extent in the policy and planning process. At one point in 1960 Bishop Greenwood was prepared to close the hostel as being an unviable institution. However, its closure was ultimately dictated by the poor condition of the buildings and their condemnation by the Fire Marshall in 1966. St. Agnes Hostel closed its doors to students August 31, 1966. It was then brought up to acceptable standards to be used as a temporary home for Anglican Church workers staying in Whitehorse.

# Milestones

1897	St. Paul's Anglican Church established in Dawson.	1962–1966	Hostel used primarily for older students attending grades 9–12.
1900	Combined public elementary and high schools open in Dawson.	1966 Mar.	Hostel becomes a 'girls only' residence.
1920 Nov.	St. Paul's Hostel opened by Bishop Isaac Stringer.	1966 Aug. 31	St. Agnes Hostel closes, following condemnation by Fire Marshall. Facility subsequently remodelled to serve as temporary housing for Anglican workers staying in Whitehorse.
1921–1922	Hostel expanded to accommodate about 20 children.		
1923	Hostel relocates to former Samaritan Hospital, which is remodelled to accommodate 30 children.		
1946	Enrolment peaks at 40 but declines in subsequent years as new Alaska Highway brings migration of Yukon residents to southern regions, especially Whitehorse which offers better schooling facilities—a preferred environment for children of remote settlers' families.		
1952 June	St. Paul's Hostel closes. Remaining 6 students are temporarily boarded by staff at Chooutla School in Carcross until they can be placed in the Anglican Indian Residential School at Aklavik and the new St. Agnes Hostel, expected to open in the fall.		
1952 Oct.	St. Agnes Hostel at Whitehorse formally opens on Thanksgiving Sunday with 12 students in residence.		
1953	Following the opening of new Chooutla School at Carcross, some students in senior primary and high school grades are sent to St. Agnes to attend Whitehorse public schools.		
1959	Half the boarders at St. Agnes are treaty children (status Indian).		



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