

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Baker, Fred A., 1866-1946

**Journal and letters of Fred A. Baker from the Klondike gold fields and Nome, Alaska,
1896-1901**

MS 13-2-4

Introduction

Fred A. Baker came to Washington from Maine with his father, brother and sister, when he was 16 years old. The family homesteaded on land five miles north of Arlington, which they made into a dairy farm.

In the Spring of 1896, when Fred was 30 years old, and still unmarried, he and his brother-in-law, Jim McGee, upon hearing of the gold rush in Alaska, took off for the far north. Jim left behind his wife, Della, and two children. Fred's father, D.S. Baker ran the farm.

Fred was in poor health when he left, but by walking long distances with heavy packs on his back, he soon became strong and healthy. He and Jim worked together over five years and never was there a cross word between them. They would share their last crust of bread and their last nickel. They worked in the Klondike and Yukon Territories for over 3 years. They had claims on the Eureka, Last Chance and Bear Creeks, and would have to travel by foot or dog sled to Dawson for food. When they had enough gold for a winter's supply of food, they would buy it. It took a thousand pounds or more and sometimes was hard to get. Of course, the prices were high, too.

After the food was purchased, they would make several trips to a cache about half way to their cabin. Then they would make several more trips to get it home. They shot bear and moose, then dried and smoked the meat.

After three years of just making enough for a grub stake, they became discouraged, and decided to go to Nome. They bought an old boat, repaired it, rigged a sail to it, and started the 1700 miles down the Yukon River. They reached the mouth of the Yukon in a little over a month. There, at the Bering Sea, they set up camp, and began mining on the beach. News of

rich strikes of gold on the beach had reached them before they left the Yukon, and many people had traveled on the ice to get there. Fred and Jim found the most gold there on the beach, than anyplace else. But they also endured their greatest hardships because of the treacherous waves, bitter cold and blizzards. When their claims ran out of gold, they decided to come home. They went to Nome and took the Steamship Oregon, bound for Seattle in September 1901.

Life was extremely hard and riches eluded them, but the health he acquired through all the hardships was worth more than gold to Fred.

In 1904, Fred married Hattie Forbes. She died in 1905, giving birth to their son, George. In 1906, Fred married Elva Meeker, and they had one daughter Elizabeth. The family moved to California in the 1930's. Fred died in Pasadena, California at the age of 80.

This introduction was prepared by Elizabeth M. Baker of Yucaipa, California, daughter of Fred Baker, who loaned the Baker manuscripts to the library for copying in October .1978.

INVENTORY

Journal dated April 13, 1896 through September 3, 1901. (Incomplete journal lacking pages 67-86.11 Travel from Seattle to the Klondike through Dyea. Built a boat to go through the Lake LaBarge and rivers in the Yukon Territory where Baker and pardner Jim McGee began prospecting mentions people they met hunting and daily activity. Methods of mining and failure to find good prospect are documented as they try different locations in 1896. November 1897 reports several fires in Dawson, Y.T. They are working claim on Bear Creek and making about \$72.00 per day and have a good food supply. In 1898 have cabin in Dawson and make regular trips from the creeks to town. Reference to contested claim on Last Chance; but felt it went okay at court? Mining prospects are not producing and on January 31, 1898 decide to quit work and sell out. In June - August, 1898 (?) making some money and renew claim on Bonanza and Eureka Creeks. Pardners in claim with a Larson? who sells out to them. Not much success on claims and describes his low feelings in 1899? In May 1900 enter Alaska -- Eagle City, Circle City. Traveling awhile with fellows going to the Koyukuk. Arrive at Rampart City on June 6, 1900. On June 26 they found a life boat off the steamer Tacoma which they repair and sail. Reach St. Michael and work unloading steamers. Join three boats and have steamer Dawson City tow them to Golovnin Bay. Set up rocker and do some prospecting. At midnight on September 5, 1900 a storm sent the ocean over the sea wall, knocked down tent, smashed boat and other goods. Rain continues through September and difficult prospecting. October 25, Jim started for Nome to get an outfit (supplies) with their gold from summer's work \$367.50. Terrible storm. Mush ice - November 27 start building an eagle or dug-out. December 1, 1900 finished excavating for a shack as blizzards make tent living terrible. On December 13 they got their outfit so fairly well set for winter - gathering wood not very easy. Much bad weather clear through July. On August 30, 1901 camped at Hastings Creek, 10 miles from Nome. September 3 plan to sail tomorrow on the Steamer Oregon.

Letters from Fred A. Baker to his Father and Mother in Arlington, Washington. 14 letters.

16 Sept. 1896, Forty Mile City.4p (Forty Mile is mostly dogs and saloons. General comment on mining mail-address mail in care of Joe Hadue at Forty Mile)

27 May 1897, Bear Gulch (near Dawson) 8p. (Received second letters from home. Left Forty Mile Oct. 1, 1896 with 1,000 pounds of grub - not much food for 2 men, but all they could get. No luck on prospecting, but worked a claim for Stanley and Warden for \$15.00 per day and got enough to buy food supply. Staked 3 claims on 2 creeks - describes stampedees. Food prices - Flour \$60.00 a sack, bacon, \$1.00 a pound, etc. Have made good friends.

12 June 1897, Dawson - 2p. (Got parents letter saloons booming - one saloon made \$40,000.00 in 10 days. Lots of people and mosquitoes)

21 August 1897, Dawson, 8p. (Working claims on Lost Chance. ground that does not pay \$15.00 a day is no good. mentions Lee Rogers, Charley Johnson, Sam Barnes,

Al Giford, the Wilsons, Jim & Fred have built a cabin.

9 November, 1897, Dawson, 4p. (Have got a little gold in three holes. Have four claims in various districts. Mentions John Pearson being in tent and a lot of Arlington men.)

26 June 1898 Dawson. 8p (Tells about getting their grub supply, cabin burned in forest fire, saved food and bedding by piling it in creek and covering with wet blanket. Canadian mining law is a problem.

15 Nov. 1898 Eureka Creek (near Dawson) 8p. (general comments, moose hunting, nations McEwen boys, Billy _____, Chub Dennis, Jim Flority, Sam Barnes.

1 Dec. 1898 Dawson. 2p. (giving this letter to Tom McMahan to take to Arlington. Received 2 letters written in August)

11 June 1899 Dawson. 4p. (Mentions George Esterbrooks, Mrs. Cline, Sam Barnes, Henry Larson, Billy McGee, John Pearson. Mining laws are a problem and want to go mine in Alaska.)

7 Oct. 1899 Last Chance (Near Dawson) 2p. (Did not make much on claim but in good health; also lots of work as many men going to Cape Nome. Have wood ready to work ground over winter. Billy McGee has left and Roscoe around area.)

9 Nov. 1899. Last Chance Creek (Near Dawson) 2p. (Barely ranking wages on claim-about 3¢ per pan, but always expecting something better. If they don't find anything this winter, they are going to Cape Nom.

25 Dec. 1899 Last Chance Creek (near Dawson) 2p. (Merry Christmas - in fairly good health and as marry as circumstances will permit. Cold weather makes work difficult. Rocking dirt for money to get grub. Rock about 2 - 3 hours and make one to three dollars. Explains how they lower hot rocks to heat water and then do rocking, hoist out tailings? and water and get fires ready for next day. The lay (prospect) from last summer is being worked by another party driving a tunnel and ten feet from where they left off had a good strike from 25¢ to \$30.00.)

6 March 1900 Last Chance (Near Dawson) 4p. (coldest winter yet. About 800 people left Dawson for Nome over ice this winter. Some have dog teams, sleighs, and some have bikes.

Jim is picking much and they are sinking a new shaft about 50 feet deep. Jim was laid up three weeks with a cut on his knee. Lee Rogers is on Eureka Creek.)

16 June 1901 Bluff City (Near Nome, Alaska) 4p. (Received 2 letters dated Dec. 12 and Feb. 24. nearly 15 feet of snow in front of their tent. Making some money in this prospect.

Memorandum no. 2597 of gold bullion deposit, October 7, 1901 at Seattle, Washington by Fred Baker for \$528.25.

Grocery List (incomplete)