



Carcross main street, after 1909 fire. Yukon Archives / MacBride Museum collection #3654.

## Carcross Historic Buildings

# Walking Tour

### A Brief Carcross History

The Tagish people call this area *Todezzane*, “blowing all the time” and the Tlingit call it *Naataase Heen*, “water running through the narrows”. In 1899, the community was officially named Caribou Crossing, referring to the spot where the local woodland caribou herd crossed the narrows. Bishop Bompas requested Caribou Crossing be renamed Carcross in 1904, and the government approved the change in 1906.

J. H. Brownlee surveyed the town site in 1899 for the White Pass & Yukon Route (WP&YR). Before the completion of the railway in 1900, Carcross consisted of a North-West Mounted Police post and associated reserve on the north side of the narrows and a First Nation community on the south. The town was established by WP&YR to maintain the rail line and connect freight and passengers to Atlin and points around the lake via the sternwheelers.

A major fire destroyed the downtown core in 1909, but the town survived. Over the years, buildings were relocated to Carcross from Bennett City, Conrad City, and other abandoned mining communities in the area. The stampede town of Bennett City, on Bennett Lake, was abandoned after 1900. Conrad City, a supply town and shipping depot for the Windy Arm Mining District in 1906, was abandoned in 1914 when the price of silver dropped.

The homeowners along Bennett Ave and the Bennett Lake beachfront were considered “squatters” until the regulations changed in 1983, allowing these properties to be titled.

## 1) White Pass & Yukon Route Complex



The White Pass & Yukon Route railroad depot was built in 1910. It is a designated Heritage Railway Station and operates as a Visitor Reception Centre. The depot and the adjoining yard have interesting exhibits about Southern Lakes history. The White Pass & Yukon Route railway ran from 1900 until 1982 and the warehouse behind the depot was used for freight storage in the later years. This building now houses the Koolseen Centre with information about local First Nation history and culture. The wharf was used for the sternwheelers and gas boats that ran on Windy Arm and Bennett Lake.

## 2) Caribou Hotel



The Caribou Hotel most likely started life as the Yukon Hotel in Bennett and was transported across Lake Bennett to Carcross on a scow by the owner, W. A. Anderson. In 1903 it was purchased by Dawson Charlie, one of the discoverers of gold in the Klondike.

The business prospered under several different owners until it burned to the ground in December 1909. The owner at that time, E. W. Gideon, built a new hotel on the spot in 1910 using material from a two-story building torn down in Conrad City. The Caribou is the oldest operating hotel in the Yukon.

## 32) Skookum Jim House



Skookum Jim had this house built in 1899, just after he discovered the gold near Dawson City that started the Klondike Gold Rush. The imported lumber and furniture was brought from Skagway to Lake Bennett by White Pass & Yukon Route and then rafted up the lake to Carcross. Four years after Skookum Jim died, the Anglican Church disposed of the property. Johnny Johns bought the house in 1920 in trust for the wolf clan who gradually paid him back. Johns never lived in the house, which is owned by the Wolf (Daklaweidi) People. Joe Schinkel largely reconstructed the Skookum Jim House after a fire that occurred around 1967.

*This brochure was produced with the help of the Carcross residents. We are anxious to hear from you if you have additional information or corrections regarding the information presented here. Please contact YTG Cultural Services Branch at 667-3458.*

### 30) Yukon Hotel



This building was part of the “Yukon Hotel” brought from Conrad by Johnny Johns and Ernie Butterfield. Johns and Butterfield sold it to Tommy “Togo” Takumatsu and his wife Jessie Jim (Ganaxteiti). During WWII, when the Canadian Army was relocating the Canadian Japanese people, Togo started living at 10 Mile in a cabin built into a cave and he died there during the winter. Jessie Jim remarried and lived in the house until she sold it to Tony Richard who raised a family here. At one time the house had an attached log shed.

### 31) James House



Andrew James was away fighting during WWI but he sent Mary James the money to buy this house. The house was moved in two pieces to the present site. William Atlin moved the house across the river for Andrew and Mary, via the old car bridge. Mary passed the house on to her family and it was eventually sold to Betty and Jerry Pope.

From 1918 to 1972 Polly the Parrot lived here and entertained the guests with her renditions of “I Love You Truly” and “Springtime in the Rockies”.

Mrs. Gideon and her husband ran the hotel together in the early 1920s. Mr. Gideon died in 1925. Mrs. Gideon continued running the hotel until her death, in the hotel, on October 27, 1933. Her ghost is said to roam the third floor.

### 3) Matthew Watson General Store

See interpretive sign in front of store.

### 4) Bobby Watson House



Mr. J. Pooley, who worked at the Venus Mine, built this house in 1903/04. It was sold to Matthew Watson in 1914 when he took up residence here with his family. He rented the building to a number of individuals and institutions.

In the 1920s, it was used as a North-West Mounted Police barracks, and was fitted with a jail cell. In 1939, after the Choutla School burned, the Principal, Rev. H.C.M. Grant and his family lived here. They stayed until 1941. Bobby and May Robson ran a tea room and barber shop out of this house from about 1948 to 1950. The R.C.M.P. had a barracks here again in the 1950s.

About 1955 it became the year-round residence of Bob and Nellie Watson, Matthew's son and daughter-in-law.

## 5) Simmons House



This house was moved from Conrad City to its present location by Leo Simmons, a local mink and fox rancher. Leo Simmons owned this house with his wife, Grace, who in later years was affectionately known as “Ma Simmons”. They raised three children here: Aubrey became the Yukon’s Member of Parliament in the 1950s; George started Northern Airways in Carcross in the 1930s and operated it until its decline in the 1950s and; Gladys, who worked for George. Gladys lived in the house until her death in 1950.

George took over the house and he and Emily Hill lived most of their married life here. The building of the Atlin road, in the 1950s, altered George’s business interests from aviation to trucking. George died in 1985 and Emily continued to live here during the summers until poor health required her to leave the territory.

## 6) Tommy Brooks Cabin



Tommy Brooks, a prospector and poet of some fame, lived in this tiny house between the late 1920s and the early 1960s. Poor health finally forced him to leave his beloved home for a senior’s residence in

Whitehorse.

Albert Peterson and his wife, Jennifer Stephens, bought the wee house in 1989. The Peterson/Stephens family completely renovated the house and made it their home until 1997. Albert turned his hand to painting and sketching and produced many fine pieces of art in the small living space of this special cabin.

## 28) Clara Schinkel House



Louis Sherella built this house in the 1920s of locally milled lumber. Sherella was originally from Yugoslavia and worked around Carcross as a carpenter and trapper. When Douglas Watson owned the building he was going to use the house as a summer cabin, but instead he sold it to Joe Schinkel who undertook extensive renovations. Clara Schinkel lived in the house in the 1980s. A spark from the stove caused a fire and considerable damage in the 1990s.

## 29) Beattie House



Johnny Johns bought this house in Conrad from a man named Hope, and moved the house to this site in 1924. Art Johns was born in the house and Johnny Johns mink farm was just behind. This is the site of the first North-West Mounted Police barracks in Carcross, a two-story building built in 1896-97 to house 30-40 men. After the Klondike Gold Rush, that building was converted into an Anglican Church school.

## 26) Johnny Johns House



Part of this house originally came from downtown Whitehorse and was moved to Porter Creek to serve as a motel unit. Johnny Johns brought it to Carcross, about 1978, and built a porch on the north side. His cache, behind the house, came from Conrad. His smokehouse was originally built on the other side of the narrows and Johns hauled it over to its present position near the river.

## 27) Adam Dickson House



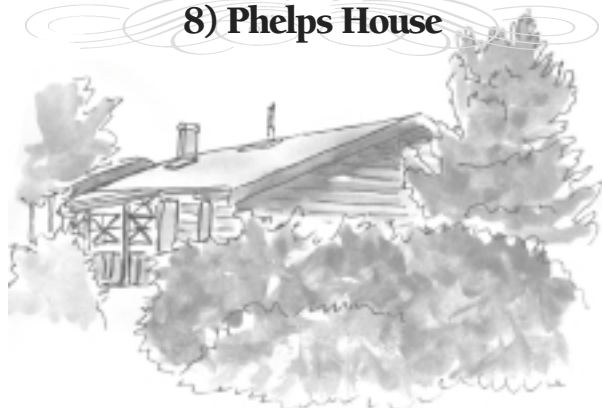
Adam Dickson built this house about 1914 before he went to the war. Dickson was a lineman on the telegraph line that followed the lakeshore from Tagish to Carcross. Adam's half brother, Alf, lived in the house and added a front addition for the family before he too left for the war. The Breton's purchased the house from Alf Dickson.

## 7) Post Office



The North-West Mounted Police erected the first building on this site in 1898. By 1902, the post office and telegraph office shared space with the police. This Post Office building was erected around 1905. The first post master at Carcross was W. J. Scott.

## 8) Phelps House



This log structure was built in 1905-06 for the American entrepreneur Col. John Howard Conrad, who won and lost many fortunes over his long life. He invested heavily in the Windy Arm mining district and managed to ship about 50,000 tons of ore from Conrad City before its demise. By 1912 the price of silver was low and Conrad was out of money. Instead of paying back what he owed to Whitehorse lawyer Willard Phelps, Conrad deeded over his Carcross property. This building housed Conrad's office and living quarters, and accommodation for workers at the Conrad mines.

## 9) McMurphy House



Mr. Herman Vance built this house in 1909 after he gave up his position as Manager of Venus Mine to become the superintendent of the new Big Thing Mine. He sold the house to Mr. Brown, collector of customs in Carcross, around 1919.

Mr. Brown's wife, the former Annie McMurphy, had a nearly-grown family of four and Brown added a "second floor" bedroom over the living room area. Mrs. Brown spent a lot of time in this room, sewing and keeping an eye on the comings and goings of town!

The house became the home of Jack and Adele McMurphy and family in the early 1930s. In 1939 the house was briefly rented to the RCMP before the McMurphy family returned to it in 1944. Shortly before his death in 1970, Jack tore out the kitchen and replaced it with a log addition. Adele stayed here until the early 1970s when she moved to Whitehorse.

In 1976, the McMurphy's youngest daughter, Tina Devine, moved in with her growing family. The Devine children became the third generation of McMurphys to be raised in the house.

## 10) The Whitehorse Star Cabin



This cabin was built as a residence around 1910. It was owned by Willard Phelps and rented through the 1930s and 1940s.

Bob Erlam, owner and editor of the Whitehorse Star newspaper, owned the cabin for over 15 years.

## 24) Dora Wedge House



Nick O'Brien and Ernie Butterfield built this house. A few people lived in it before Matthew Watson purchased it and rented it out. Dora Wedge, daughter of Tagish John and Maria, rented it from Watson for ten years before purchasing it about 1975.

## 25) Bishop Bompas House



Bishop William Carpenter Bompas first came to the north in 1869 as a missionary at Fort Yukon. He and his wife relocated to Carcross in 1901 with the intent of opening a mission school. They rented this Canadian Development Co. bunkhouse and purchased it shortly thereafter. At that time the building was much larger and T shaped, extending back into the bank. School and church services were held here until separate facilities were built for the mission school and church in 1903/04. The Grant family lived here in the 1940s and the Baptist Church used it in 1980 for services given by Mr. Dickie.

## 22) NWMP Barracks



This frame building was originally the North-West Mounted Police barracks and jail for Carcross. It was built ca. 1900 and Sergeant Evans was posted here. The first Carcross detachment was built in 1898 with the help of Constable Thomas A. Dickson who left the force in 1900 to marry a Tagish First Nation woman. By 1910, only 50 officers were left in the Yukon but the Carcross detachment remained open although only one man staffed it.

## 23) Blatta House



Ernie Butterfield arrived on the train in Carcross one day in the 1920s, liked the town and stayed for forty years. Soon after he arrived, he purchased a log building and then a frame building in Conrad and brought them over the ice to Carcross with a team of horses. The frame building was attached to the log building to make a house and this he sold to Ed Blatta. Blatta was a mink rancher and policeman for 15 years in Carcross. Ed Blatta's in-laws lived in the house for a while and moved back to Vancouver when fur prices dropped in the 1940s.

## 11) Jones Cabin



This cabin was built in 1938 with logs that came from a ca. 1902 home in Conrad City. Alf Dickson constructed the cabin as a guesthouse and rental unit beside his larger log home next door. Around 1940, Mr. Herman Peterson, a pilot with Northern Airways in Carcross, documented some of Carcross' history in a makeshift darkroom he created in the back room. Don Jones purchased the cabin in 1952.

## 12) Miss Matthews Cabin



This home was built by a Mr. Kennedy, from Conrad City, in 1905. Mr. Kennedy left the Carcross area when the Conrad operations slowed to a halt, around 1907.

Matthew Watson acquired the cabin in 1910 and used it as a rental property for many years. At one point it became the local Teacherage, housing the single school teachers.

In the mid 1960s an Anglican Missionary, Miss Ruth Matthews, rented the cabin. It quickly became locally known as the "Miss Matthew's Cabin", likely as a result of her great involvement in the community for the few short years she lived here.

Bobby Watson sold the little cabin to Helen Williams and Margaret Wilson, two nurses from Whitehorse, around 1980. They completely renovated it in 1988 just prior to Helen's death.

### 13) Peterson Store



This little house was constructed around 1947 as a store

operated by Joyce Richards and Doris Peterson. After Joyce married Gordon Yardley, Gordon built three little rental cabins behind the house and one of these still exists near the Caribou Hotel. Gordon Yardley came to the Yukon in 1937. He worked on the *S. S. Tutshi* and for Pan American Airways before he became a contractor. The Yardleys raised cattle and bought a ranch near Carcross. At the same time they had a sawmill and made the ties for the Carcross to Whitehorse rail line. The kids went to school at Carcross and Joyce ran the Post Office for five years.

### 14) Mining Recorder's Office



This building is the Conrad City Mining Recorder's office and residence, which was

dismantled and moved, log by log, over the winter ice in 1909. It belonged to the Conrad City North-West Mounted Police, but was empty when the Carcross Mining Recorder needed some space. The mining recorder used the building until the office closed in 1917.

Paul Tingley, a local woodcutter and wood merchant, lived in this house for many years following the closure of the Mining Recorder's Office. Mr. Tingley left his home in Carcross around 1957.

Johnnie Johns purchased it from the Oleson family of Atlin in the 1960s. He renovated the house, adding an inside bathroom for the first time. Anita Johns, Johnnie's wife, lived here up until her death in 1986.

Mr. Johns was a famous outfitter and guide and his house was a testament to this, even on the outside. A very large moose head was mounted overlooking Bennett Ave. and for many years it greeted locals and visitors as they wandered down the wooden sidewalk running the length of the avenue.

### 19) Old School



The first primary school in Carcross was probably built in 1910 and may have only lasted a year. The second school building was rented from Matthew Watson in 1928-9 and Adele Sansom was the teacher that year. This building was constructed in 1939-40 by the Bishop of the Yukon for use as a territorial school and was used until 1953. It later became a Parish Hall for the Anglican Church.

### 20) The Carcross Barracks

Enter the Barracks to find out its history.

### 21) St. Saviour's Anglican Church



Bishop Bompas and his congregation constructed St. Saviour's in 1904 on the south side of the Narrows. Skookum Jim's daughter, Daisy, was the first person baptized here. The church was brought across the river by scow to its present site about 1914. For access please inquire at the Visitor Reception Centre.



## 17) Matthew Watson House



Matthew Watson lived, and farmed here, from 1920 to 1957, and at one time also had a fox and mink ranch. For many years this property was considered “out of town” and visitors packed a lunch when they visited. This house is composed of several houses and, while the dining and living rooms match, the kitchen was part of a different building. A least one interior cupboard was originally from the White Pass sternwheelers. One of the outbuildings was also relocated and has “P. Martin Conrad” painted on the exterior. Patrick Martin owned general merchandise stores in Conrad and Whitehorse.

## 18) St. John the Baptist Catholic Church



St. John the Baptist Church was brought from Conrad City to this site in the early 1940s. William and Winnie Atlin were the first couple to be married here. A pastoral worker conducts regular Sunday Communion services.

## 15) Old School



Herman Peterson built this house using material from a building at Engineer Mines on Tagish Lake. Peterson was a pilot for Northern Airways in the early 1940s and he was transferred to Atlin before the house was completed. The building was used as a schoolhouse from 1953 until the new school was constructed in the 1970s.

## 16) Arne Ormen Cabin



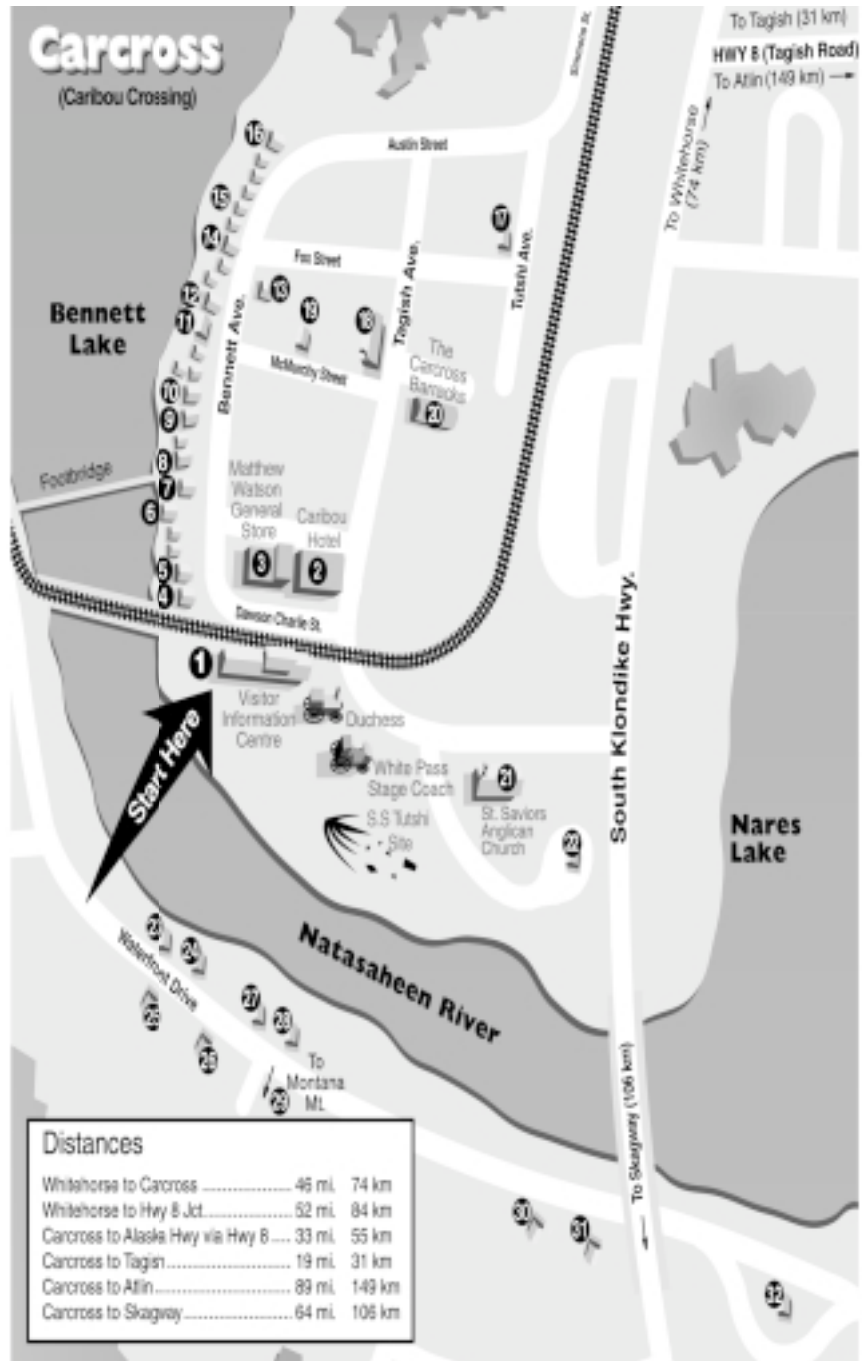
Arnulf (Arne) Ormen was a woodcutter who lived at 12 Mile on the Tagish Road from the 1940s to the 1960s. He was of Scandinavian descent and would ski into Carcross in the winter or bicycle in the summer to get his supplies and to spend a little time in the beer parlour.

As Arne grew older he thought perhaps he should live in Carcross. So he built a little cabin where he claimed he could do what he always wanted - light his fire without getting out of bed! As he was a big tall man, it would appear he could only stand up straight in his outhouse! Unfortunately Arne didn't live very long after his cabin was built.

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*We welcome you to experience our history. Please respect the privacy of the property owners.*