JAMES CHURCH McCook
AND AMERICAN CONSULAR DIPLOMACY
IN THE KLONDIKE, 1898-1901

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A
THESIS

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ABSTRACT

The Klondike gold rush saw tens of thousands of Americans pour into the Canadian Yukon. Although the unprecedented event was of marginal diplomatic significance to Washington, the United States government responded by establishing an official American presence in the Klondike boomtown of Dawson City. Congress provided for a United States consulate in Dawson in January of 1898, and the following summer, James Church McCook arrived to serve as the first consul.

McCook served for three and a half years as the only U.S. government official in what was essentially an American town on Canadian soil. A retired confectionery manufacturer from Philadelphia, McCook was representative of the amateur tradition of American consular diplomacy. His State Department correspondence revealed both the hardships of consular work and the notion of devoted service, while shedding light on Washington’s relationship with Canada at the time of the United States’ emergence as a world power.
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DEDICATION

My father, Byron Dale Jessup, began research on J.C. McCook while a graduate student at Wisconsin State University River Falls between 1969 and 1971.

This thesis is as much his as it is mine.
Introduction

Describing it as "one of the weirdest and most useless mass movements in history," historian Pierre Berton estimated that the Klondike gold rush brought between 30,000 and 40,000 hopeful prospectors to what emerged as the overnight boomtown of Dawson City. Situated at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers, the mining camp became the largest population center in Canada west of Winnipeg by June 1898.

It was a city populated overwhelmingly by Americans who arrived largely by way of Pacific ports and the Inside Passage of Alaska. After the stampede began in the summer of 1897, it was not long before Washington recognized a national interest in placing an official American presence in the bustling Canadian gold fields. Congress provided for the establishment of a United States consulate in Dawson in January 1898. At that post, the new consul would have a unique responsibility in that he would be the only U.S. government official in what was essentially an American city on Canadian soil.

Consul James Church McCook, an Irish-born Philadelphian who had recently retired from his confectionery manufacturing business, received the appointment to Dawson City from President William McKinley in March 1898. An amateur diplomat in the tradition of American consular diplomacy, McCook was typical of men appointed to the consular service in the 1890s. Although he had no background in international relations, neither did the vast majority of American consuls. U.S. consulates were the ultimate realm of political patronage. Presidents and Congressmen regarded consular assignments as plums with which they could reward their loyal supporters, but these small American outposts served important functions. Depending on the assignment, consular work could be quite demanding and not particularly rewarding. McCook's regular official reports to the State Department, referred to as consular despatches, provide insight into the experience of a dedicated American civil servant working for his
government far from home. This study is based largely upon those despatches, as well as the instructions McCook received from Washington.

Because of the size and unusual dominance of the American community in the Klondike, McCook’s job was particularly challenging. The short-lived but larger-than-life world that defined the gold rush provided an interesting backdrop for his work, but it also presented hardships. McCook’s consular experience was one of service and sacrifice in the face of a harsh environment, astronomically expensive living conditions, a community alternately plagued by destitution, disease, and conflagration, as well as his own failing health. To make matters worse, the consul found himself the hapless target of an American newspaper publisher bent on destroying his public image. Despite the difficulties, McCook dedicated himself to fulfilling his duties and to serving his country and countrymen in the Yukon. He took missteps and made mistakes, but his correspondence reveals a man committed to his duty. As he was occupying a position for which he had no formal training, his performance is best judged in light of the amateur nature of the consular service.

McCook entered the State Department at a time of unprecedented American diplomatic activity. The U.S. was emerging as a world power, a fact demonstrated decisively in the Spanish-American War, while Britain increasingly perceived its imperial interests in terms of an Anglo-American partnership. This left Canada in an awkward position at the turn of the twentieth century between the United States and Great Britain. London, not Ottawa, determined Canadian foreign policy, even as Canadian nationalism was on the rise. Canadian self-confidence was running high under the government of Sir Wilfrid Laurier, and the North West Mounted Police ruled Dawson City with a determination not only to maintain public order, as historian William Morrison pointed out, but also "to foil the menace of American manifest destiny." During the gold rush, the Dominion government was swift to assert
Canadian sovereignty in the face of American encroachment. But the Klondike was far from the forefront of American foreign policy-makers’ minds, despite the phenomenal nature of the gold rush stampede. The United States had no intentions of using the gold rush to further its imperialist ambitions. McCook dealt with the local and the mundane; issues of international significance did not often cross his desk. However, his experience with the newspaper in particular sheds light on the nationalist sentiments coursing through the Klondike community.

Chapter 1 introduces James Church McCook, providing background on his personal life and the political process that resulted in his appointment as a United States consul. It describes the consular function and the historical development of the U.S. consular service with emphasis on the State Department under President William McKinley, and ends with a review of the literature in which McCook has earned mention. Chapter 2 discusses the place of Canadian-American relations among a myriad of diplomatic events unfolding at the dawn of the twentieth century. The gold rush took place in the context of a rapprochement between the United States and Great Britain that had a profound influence on Canada’s position between the two powers. Chapter 3 offers a detailed description of the consul’s activities during his first year in the Yukon, as the gold rush reached its climax. Emphasizing the consul’s attention to his duty and his concern for the welfare of his fellow citizens, it attempts to provide a realistic description of McCook’s work in Dawson apart from the newspaper portrayal that has largely determined his historic reputation. Chapter 4 examines the newspaper controversy that became the seminal event in his brief consular tenure. And Chapter 5 summarizes McCook’s final years of consular activity in the wake of his battle with the newspaper, concluding with a brief description of the consuls who served in Dawson City after him. The size of the Dawson community diminished considerably after the winter of 1898-99, and a gradual deterioration of the consul’s health seemed to mirror
the waning of the gold rush as the heyday of Klondike passed. McCook died in
Philadelphia in 1901 while he was on leave from his job in the Yukon. The three and a
half years at the end of his life that James McCook spent in the service of his country in
the Klondike may or may not have been a testament to the pitfalls of amateur diplomacy.
However, they were certainly a testament to a consul’s patriotic devotion.
2 Berton, 290.
3 Although recent scholarship has downplayed the American character of the event, the Klondike gold rush was an undeniably American phenomenon. See Charlene Porsild, *Gamblers and Dreamers: Women, Men, and Community in the Klondike* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998). While Porsild admitted that a “perception of American predominance existed within the community itself” (17), she contended that only 40 percent of the gold rush community was in fact American. However, she based this argument on census data reflecting the birthplace of Klondike residents. Her own citizenship data revealed that American citizens represented 63 to 68 percent of the community. The U.S. consul himself was a naturalized American citizen, and he had no obvious doubts as to his American identity.
Chapter 1: On Being a Consul

James C. McCook was in his early 50s at the time of his appointment. He was a Philadelphian and a manufacturing confectioner who had recently retired after twenty-five years in business. He was a relatively obscure figure. Philadelphia was a proud city at the turn of the twentieth century, and it produced many volumes of biographical portraits of its prominent citizens, but McCook does not earn a mention among them. Newspaper obituaries and articles announcing his appointment provide some information about his life prior to his service in Dawson City. Married and the father of five children, three daughters and two sons, he had been born in Ireland and moved to the United States at an early age. For ten years, he was the head of the J.C. McCook Co. and a member of the Manufacturers’ Club of Philadelphia, which listed his specialty in its membership rolls as “Confectionery for Export.” Apparently, then, he had some experience in international business, and he made something of a name for himself among East Coast practitioners of his trade. Upon his retirement, manufacturing confectioners from New York, Boston, and Baltimore gave him a farewell banquet at a New York hotel before he left for a tour of Europe. Over the years, he may have traveled extensively, as one article noted that he had once worked as a “commercial traveler,” and another mentioned his belonging to a group called the Travelers’ Club.1

More important to McCook was his membership in the Manufacturers’ Club in which he took particular pride. The association, founded in 1887, boasted an elaborately appointed six-floor building on Walnut Street, a $50 annual “tax,” and roughly one thousand members in 1895. A club directory published that year specified that membership was determined by a committee, “none being admitted upon whose business integrity or moral character a shadow can be cast.”2 The group had a political agenda, actively defending business interests through a permanent committee in Washington. Taking a firm stand in defense of protective tariffs3, the Manufacturers’
Club was a leading contributor to Republican party coffers, helping to maintain what historian James Kehl described as Pennsylvania’s pre-eminence as the “financial capital of the Republican party.” The club undoubtedly threw its support behind William McKinley’s presidential campaign in 1896, and its influence with the McKinley administration earned McCook his consular appointment. On January 18, 1898, Pennsylvania Representative Alfred C. Harmer escorted a delegation from the Manufacturers’ Club of Philadelphia to the White House, where members urged President McKinley to nominate McCook for the consular service. According to the Philadelphia Public Ledger, “the President informed the delegation he would give Mr. McCook any Consulship that was not already promised.” The post at Lisbon, Portugal, was the only available unfilled position at that time, and McCook, the paper reported, was willing to accept the assignment.

Two days after the White House visit, the Philadelphia Inquirer announced that McCook had been made consul to Lisbon. Beneath the headline “Philadelphia Honored,” it noted that McCook was a “staunch Republican” and “an earnest worker for his party.” But on February 12th, the same newspaper reported that Jacob H. Theirot of New York had been confirmed in that office by the Senate, while McCook, “thought to have been promised Lisbon,” would be given a Canadian consulate. Philadelphians were angered at having lost the position for one of their own, and an indignant editorial appeared in the Public Ledger explaining the convoluted political process in the Senate that determined consular appointments:

It takes long study to comprehend the mysteries of national politics under this Administration. Here is the Lisbon Consulate, for instance. It is a small post, paying only $1000 a year. Congressman Harmer tried to get it for a Philadelphian. His candidate was strongly backed by the business men of this city, and it was understood that he was to be appointed, but suddenly [New York] Senator [Thomas] Platt discovered that it was the only post available for a protege of his, who must be placed, and the protege got it, although for politico-strategic reasons, he had
to be credited to New Jersey instead of to New York, where he actually belongs. Neither Vice President [Garret] Hobart, [New Jersey] Senator [William] Sewell nor Attorney General [John] Griggs knew anything about the pseudo Jerseyman, nor was either of them consulted as to his appointment, yet it is reported that they will not oppose his confirmation, and this adds another complication to the mystery.8

Although McCook would not be booking passage to Portugal, the Washington Post and the Philadelphia Public Ledger reported on January 14th that a consulate had been proposed for Dawson City on account of the influx of Americans into the Klondike, and furthermore that $3,000 had been appropriated for its establishment. This created another opening in the consular ranks, and, in the competitive business of filling appointed positions, James McCook had powerful backing. There is no indication, however, that he had any close ties to the President. Although he had sent some sort of inquiry to the White House in October 1897, and an approving message to the President in February (immediately following Theirot’s appointment to the Lisbon consulate), he received in each case only brief, cordial responses from James Addison Porter, McKinley’s secretary. In the second instance, Porter wrote to McCook, “The President has requested me... to thank you for your cordial references to his action in the matter of which you write.”9 He may not have had a direct line to the President, but the newspapers reported that McCook’s nomination had support on Capitol Hill from Pennsylvania Senators Boies Penrose and Matthew Stanley Quay.10

Matt Quay was the only supporter McCook needed. A classical scholar, lawyer, and former state legislator elected to the Senate in 1887, Quay was the epitome of a party boss in a state dominated by the Republicans. In his biography of the powerful politician, James Kehl described him as being “responsible for endowing the national Republican party with Pennsylvania’s unbroken allegiance from 1870 to 1904.”11 Quay was so deft in his political maneuverings that, even as a United States senator sitting in Washington, he maintained a grip on the Republican machine in Pennsylvania.
down to the Philadelphia city government. Revealing some of his militant political philosophy, Quay once remarked in a speech, "I wish to see the great Republican party united, and see it stand together and strike in serried ranks against the common enemy." McKinley biographer Margaret Leech described Quay and his fellow party boss New York Senator Tom Platt as "a curious pair of dictators, disreputable and absolute." At the time of McCook's nomination, Quay's power in the Senate had been ironically lessened by McKinley's election and the subsequent arrival of the president's friend, Marcus Hanna of Ohio, to the upper house, but the weight of Quay's influence remained substantial. His tenacity and political survival were a testament to the Republican stranglehold on Pennsylvania. Boies Penrose, the other Senator representing the Keystone State, was a Harvard Law School graduate and fierce party loyalist who worked in Quay's shadow. "Quayism" was a term adopted by historians to describe the Senator's ability to centralize power by monopolizing the distribution of patronage. By delivering Pennsylvania's electoral votes to McKinley, Quay reserved for his constituents patronage privileges at the national level, and James McCook was one of the benefactors of his power.

The Senate received McCook's executive nomination for the new office of United States consul at Dawson City on March 22, 1898, and it confirmed his appointment on March 31st, paving the way for a Philadelphia candy-maker into the State Department and the humble business of consular diplomacy. Perhaps it was a tribute to McCook's good standing in the community when the Philadelphia North American, an outspoken and often virulent critic of Senator Quay, reported McCook's appointment with considerable praise:

James C. McCook is a well-known Philadelphian and exceptionally well-equipped for the position, having been engaged in mercantile life for over twenty-five years... He had the endorsement for the position of the leading manufacturers and businessmen of Philadelphia as well as that of Senators Quay
and Penrose and the entire Congressional delegation of the city.\textsuperscript{18}

If, by virtue of his experience, McCook was in fact "well-equipped for the position," he would have been an unusual candidate for the consular service. Few men entered the field of consular diplomacy with any diplomatic experience because U.S. consulates provided the ultimate storehouse for Congressional patronage positions. As a result, the linkage between American foreign policy and domestic politics was perhaps nowhere better illustrated in the 1890s than in the consular service. But once the wrangling on Capitol Hill was over, new consuls had to set out for the far corners of the earth to represent the United States. Most had probably only the vaguest notion of the many responsibilities associated with their appointments, although the consular profession had a long history.

Some historians argue that consular institutions have a longer history than diplomatic missions, tracing the origins of consular activity to ancient Greece and Greek representatives who held certain powers within their ethnic communities in Egypt.\textsuperscript{19} While envoys of diplomatic rank, generally ministers or ambassadors, serve in foreign capitals representing one government before another, consuls promote and protect their respective national interests on a regional or local level with a special eye toward encouraging business. Consuls have had a place in American history since the earliest days of the nation. In 1778, the Treaty of Amity and Commerce between France and the nascent United States made provisions for the appointment of consuls between the two countries. Two years later, in keeping with the treaty, Congress formally established the office of United States Consul, and sent its first such representative to France with an aim to expedite the shipment of badly needed supplies during the Revolutionary War.\textsuperscript{20}

Congress passed the first law regulating the consular Service in 1792, establishing official duties and a schedule of fees for services. Early Consuls received
no salaries and relied on fees for their livelihood, except for those appointed to the unpopular but necessary posts on the Barbary Coast where piracy threatened American shipping. (Interestingly, the $3000 salary established for those Barbary consuls in the 1790s was equal to that of the Dawson City post established more than a century later.) An 1810 law prohibited occupants of these first salaried posts from conducting private trade in addition to their consular duties. But it was not until 1856 that Congress granted consuls fixed compensation, and prohibited those earning salaries of $1500 or more from engaging in mercantile business. From the very beginning, the consular Service was built upon a combination of spoils and a fee system, a questionable arrangement that would persist until the 20th century. At the same time, consuls, not ambassadors, handled the primary business of the State Department for the first 130 years of its existence. Although the U.S. diplomatic corps found much of its work “centered upon social niceties,” as former consular officer Charles Kennedy explained, “the much larger consular service was promoting American trade, helping American shipping, protecting and often disciplining seamen, and assisting American citizens who fell into trouble in their consular districts.”

In Canada, consuls played a special role given the fact that, as part of the British Empire, the Dominion hosted no foreign emissaries of diplomatic rank. American diplomatic representation did not arrive in Ottawa until 1927, when the U.S. opened a legation, which it did not elevate to an embassy until 1943. However, in 1900, the United States had three consulates general (at Halifax, Montreal, and Ottawa), 34 consulates, and ten commercial agencies in Canada. While political realities may have prevented the formal exchange of ministers in the waning years of the nineteenth century, the economic interaction between the two countries warranted the large American consular presence in Canada. At the same time, until 1943, Canadians relied on British consuls to represent their interest in the United States, although Ottawa did appoint agents to
promote immigration to Canada in American cities. In 1903, for example, there were 22 such immigration agents.\textsuperscript{24} Ironically, for U.S. consuls in Canada, according to Political Scientist Roger Frank Swanson, the major burden of work lay in "servicing the massive, if historically uneven, movements of people from Canada to the United States."\textsuperscript{25} Of course, in the case of the Klondike gold rush, the massive movement was in the other direction, making the Dawson City post unique even among Canadian consulates.

Despite their importance, the traditional status of consuls was lower than that of officers of diplomatic rank, a condition that persists to the present day. Historian Thomas Etzold referred to consuls as "the Cinderellas of diplomacy," while another scholar, John Ritchie, titled his dissertation "The Consular Function: The Stepchild of United States Foreign Policy Administration."\textsuperscript{26} The process by which consular appointments were made in the 19th century did not always produce the most reliable representatives of the U.S. government. Etzold acknowledged that many American consuls were rightfully "known as dissolute scalawags and rapscallions." This reputation carried over into the historical literature on the subject. In regard to references to the pre-1906 Consular Service, Kennedy wrote, "Historians had little that was good to say about consuls, often representing them as incompetent, corrupt, unregenerate alcoholics, or, at best, political hacks." But Kennedy found that "most consular service men performed well, often under dangerous and difficult conditions."\textsuperscript{27} Henry E. Mattox, another foreign service officer-turned-historian likewise concluded, "many of the persons chosen through the political process were in fact among the best that America had to offer."\textsuperscript{28} In fact, appointed consuls must have represented both extremes in terms of ability and effectiveness, and McCook probably fell somewhere in between.
He received his appointment at the peak of American consular activity. In 1890, there were a total of 760 American consular posts abroad, including consulates-general, consulates, commercial agencies, and consular agencies. By 1900, there were fewer posts in total (713) on account of a reduction in the number of lesser agencies, but that year the number of consulates-general and consulates reached its highest level, with 43 of the former and 248 of the latter. The degree of consular activity reflected the exponentially increasing importance of foreign trade to the American economy. While not officially foremost among the duties of an American consul, representing U.S. business interests abroad was the major impetus behind the establishment of so many overseas posts. Historian Milton Plesur argued that under Secretary of State William Evarts, who served during the Rutherford B. Hayes administration, consuls became the “commercial vanguards of the Republic.” Other duties, however, tended to consume the major part of a consular officer’s time and attention.

State Department historians William Barnes and John Morgan summarized the six duties of U.S. consuls as follows:

(1) protection of citizens, (2) assistance and protection to the merchant marine and American seamen, (3) issuance of bills of health, (4) certification of invoices, (5) administration of justice in countries such as China and Turkey, which called for the proper discharge of duties involving the civil and criminal rights of citizens, and (6) promotion of American export trade.

In the case of Dawson City, McCook did not have the privilege (or burden) of administering justice, but he carried out the other duties with regularity. Protecting citizens usually took the form of ensuring that Americans were fairly treated under the law. American seamen, especially in the case of Dawson, were often stranded by unscrupulous captains in foreign ports, and consuls were charged with seeing to their safe return home. U.S. regulations required consuls to issue bills of health to American vessels before clearing them to return to the United States. Consuls also certified
invoices on goods exported to the U.S. to ensure that they correctly reflected the items in transit so that proper import duties could be levied against the goods upon their arrival. McCook faced the question of whether or not to issue consular invoices to men exporting gold from the Yukon. In July 1900, the department ordered him to do so, but the practice was difficult to implement. Most miners carrying gold out of the Yukon did not stop to obtain an invoice. When they did, they probably grossly underestimated the value of their poke so as to minimize the effect of the 10 percent royalty collected by the Canadian government on everything taken from claims in the territory (20 percent for gold recovered in excess of $500 per week). Promoting American export trade presumably took different forms in different places, but in Dawson City, where American businesses predominated, the consul served more as a symbolic representative of the American government than as a salesman for U.S. products.

Although he entered the consular service at the apex of its size and scope, McCook also experienced the waning days of old-style American service abroad. Calling the 1890s the “last decade before the reforms of the Progressive Era began to have a significant impact on how the diplomatic and consular establishments were staffed,” Henry Mattox explained that the period “approached the end of the almost complete amateurism at all levels in the conduct of American foreign policy that had prevailed throughout the life of the Republic.” The United States held on to its peculiar amateur staffing practices after other industrialized nations had adopted professional diplomatic and consular systems. “It is amazing to realize how casual was the American government’s selection of its envoys,” historian Lawrence Gelfand observed, suggesting that the U.S. approach to foreign relations was little different than its approach to business in “Hoboken, Toledo, Savannah, or St. Louis.”

The spoils system had withstood several reform efforts aimed at bringing American practice into line with professional foreign services elsewhere. The urban
political machines, such as that in place in Philadelphia, inspired strong support for
government reform by the 1890s, especially in regard to any form of established
patronage. The State Department itself presented Congress with internal reform
suggestions in 1884, but lawmakers took no action on the recommendations. Two years
later, the House Committee on Foreign Affairs produced a consular reform bill that
would have abolished compensation by fees and established a strictly salaried service,
but it went unapproved. It was not until Grover Cleveland’s second administration
(1893-1897) that real reform threatened to end the legacy of American amateur
diplomacy. Cleveland went so far as to address consular appointments in his 1893
annual message, saying that it was “imperative that men of character, intelligence, and
ability be appointed.” Two years later, Alabama Senator John T. Morgan of the Foreign
Relations Committee supported a bill to reform the consular service, but the Senate
again failed to act. Legislators were reluctant to tamper with such a rich source of
positions with which they could reward their political supporters, but Cleveland was
determined. After the failure of the Senate bill, he attempted to implement the first major
consular reforms with an executive order on September 20, 1895.

The measure limited consular appointments for posts within the $1000 to $2500
salary range to current State Department employees, former employees, or those who
passed an examination. On the surface, the move was quite sweeping, but Cleveland’s
reformist inclinations did not leave him immune to making political decisions when it
came to the consular service. He had proven little different from his predecessors in
replacing most of the incumbent consular officers at the beginning of his second term.
Even Consul General Warren P. Sutton, a Hayes administration appointee who had
earned high praise for 15 years of dedicated service under five presidents at posts in
Mexico, fell victim to a Cleveland replacement in 1893. In the end, the reforms did
little to change the established system, and the election of William McKinley only
affirmed the place of politics in the selection of consuls. The new president understood well the power of patronage in building political capital. After McKinley entered the White House, he promptly recalled “almost the entire consular force” and appointed friends of the administration in their place.\textsuperscript{39} The examinations established by Cleveland remained, but of the 112 appointees examined during the McKinley administration, only one person was rejected.\textsuperscript{40} The service could hardly be called professional when McCook entered upon his consular duties in the Klondike.

In contrast, the highest tiers of the State Department were filled with Americans from the upper echelons of society, although the department’s top officers experienced considerable administrative juggling during the McKinley years. The president initially appointed veteran Ohio Senator John Sherman as Secretary of State. (Sherman, interestingly, was among those who had once advocated the acquisition of Canada by the United States.\textsuperscript{41}) Historians have speculated that McKinley engineered this move to open a place in the Senate for his close political ally, Ohio industrialist Marcus Hanna. By exerting his influence on the governor of Ohio, the President assured Hanna’s appointment to Sherman’s seat. Whatever McKinley’s motives in appointing him, the 73 year-old Sherman soon proved troublesome politically, as observers began to question his intellectual capacities. The President secured Sherman’s retirement after 13 months at the head of the State Department and replaced him with his old friend Judge William R. Day.\textsuperscript{42} Filling the job from late April until mid-September 1898, Day served for the duration of the Spanish-American War before leaving the department to head the Peace Commission that negotiated the conflict’s settlement. Although Day was quite effective, he had no experience in foreign relations, and looked forward to a federal judgeship after the negotiations were complete.\textsuperscript{43}

His replacement was quite a different story. The sitting ambassador to London at the time of his appointment, John Hay, had been assistant private secretary to
President Abraham Lincoln at the age of 22. A successful and wealthy author whose works included a multi-volume biography of Lincoln, Hay was an eager and erudite statesman. His ardent determination to forge a tight Anglo-American relationship was a significant factor in the rapprochement with Great Britain discussed in detail in the following chapter. Serving under both McKinley and Roosevelt, John Hay held his cabinet position from September 1898 until his death in 1905. Regarding consular appointments, he revealed his contempt for both patronage and the Senate when in a letter he remarked, “There can be few things in life funnier than sixteen Senators wrangling over a $2000 Consulate.”

So, in the brief three and a half years that McCook spent in his $3000 consulate, he served under three secretaries of state, as well as an interim secretary who headed the department for 13 days between Day’s resignation and Hay’s entry into duty. That interim chief was Second Assistant Secretary of State Alvey Augustus Adee, who served in his post for an astonishing 38 years, from 1886 until 1924. Adee was, if anything, a renaissance man who filled his spare time studying Shakespeare and discovering new species of microscopic diatoms. Hard of hearing as a result of a bout with Scarlet Fever, he nonetheless had a hand in nearly every activity at the department. On occasion, even McCook received instructions directly from Adee. President McKinley sought to keep a firm grip on foreign policy, and often remained tight-lipped on the subject as a result. During the aged John Sherman’s tenure as secretary of state, the famous complaint floating about Washington was “the President says nothing, the Assistant Secretary hears nothing, and the Secretary of State knows nothing.”

McCook received the vast majority of his instructions from the Third Assistant Secretary of State, Thomas Wilbur Cridler, whose service in that office roughly mirrored McCook’s service as consul. A somewhat obscure figure, Cridler was a native of West Virginia who had begun at the department as a clerk and worked his way up.
But when sending his despatches, McCook formally addressed them to the Assistant Secretary of State. For five months in 1898, John Bassett Moore, a Columbia University professor, held this position. Thereafter, it was occupied by David Jayne Hill, an author of books on rhetoric, logic, and psychology who had been elected the youngest college president in America in 1879 when, at 28, he took the helm of the University of Lewisburg (Bucknell University after 1886). His biographer, Aubrey Parkman, wrote that Hill might have accepted a consular position himself had he not been warned that the work was unlikely to be satisfying.

After McKinley's assassination, the consular appointment process underwent a dramatic change as Theodore Roosevelt proved much more determined than Grover Cleveland in his efforts to reform the system, and much more successful in doing so. McCook, therefore, served at the very end of the amateur era in consular diplomacy. By the end of 1906, Roosevelt had overseen the establishment of a consular salary scale, a two-year permanent inspection cycle of every overseas post, a total prohibition on consular officers' engagement in private business, the abolition of the personal fee system with the new requirement that any fees collected be paid into the Treasury, and the creation of a board of examiners administering exams covering specific subjects, including foreign languages. The Roosevelt measures permanently transformed the consular service, which underwent further radical reform under the Calvin Coolidge administration with the passage of the Rogers Act on May 24, 1924. It amalgamated the separate consular and diplomatic services into the modern United States Foreign Service, and established merit as the sole basis for appointment and promotion. However, McCook's service as a U.S. consul preceded these changes, and it is important that his performance be considered in light of the amateur system in place at the time of his appointment.
The subject of the U.S. consulate in Dawson City, and of J.C. McCook in particular, has received only cursory attention in secondary works devoted to the Klondike gold rush. In many cases, the scant information presented is incorrect. Pierre Berton, in *Klondike*, his landmark history of the gold rush first published in 1958, made mention of the consul only in passing reference to the allegations leveled at him by the *Klondike Nugget*. Referring to McCook as a “plump and fun-loving official,” Berton came to the false conclusion that after the dismissal of his lawsuit against the paper, “the consul shortly afterward [was] relieved of his post.” More recently, another Canadian scholar, Charlene Porsild, touched upon McCook in her 1998 work on the Klondike, *Gamblers and Dreamers*. Porsild contended that “McCook was particularly well integrated in the social and political world of Dawson society,” making the assertion that his official correspondence indicated that he regularly held meetings in saloons and dance halls. Although the consul’s greatest embarrassment resulted from a visit to a Dawson saloon, his despatches do not suggest that he frequented such establishments on business or otherwise. If he did, he did not so inform the State Department. Porsild also mistakenly identified Vice Consul Hein TeRoller as McCook’s successor.

A. Bankson released a book about the newspaper simply titled *The Klondike Nugget*, which contained much of the content published by the paper in its first year, as well as background material written in a spirit quite sympathetic to Eugene Allen. Bankson, similar to Pierre Berton, assumed that in the wake of the public criticism, “McCook departed quietly from Dawson City,” and that the U.S. government appointed a successor.

This misconception was perpetuated in Richard O’Connor’s 1954 book, *High Jinks on the Klondike*, which may have been the source of Berton’s incorrect information. O’Connor wrote that after the failure of his lawsuits, “McCook saw the wisdom of resigning and slipping aboard a steamer for the States.” His particularly colorful language included a description of the consul as a “heroic drunk,” who “…tried, perhaps too strenuously, to take the stuffiness out of international relations.”

O’Connor also referred to McCook as a self-appointed “natural-born colonel.” This description was in keeping with another that had been made by a legitimate Colonel, Sir Samuel Benfield Steele of the North West Mounted Police, in his 1915 memoirs. While Steele was in command of the Mounties in Dawson City, he and McCook had considerable professional interaction. Although he did not refer to McCook by name in his memoirs, it is likely that the following passage referred to the American consul and how he acquired his unofficial title:

> Amongst the citizens of Dawson was a certain “Colonel.” His countrymen had given him the rank unsolicited, and as the boy said, “He came when called Colonel.” On one occasion, at a banquet given in honour of [Yukon Commissioner] Mr. Ogilvie, the health of the colonel was drunk. In his reply he said, “I wish to explain how it is that I hold the rank of ‘Colonel,’ which you always give me in this town, and why I have that title instead of that of ‘Judge,’ which was the only alternative! It is thus: I was in New York many years ago, and met at one of the clubs three colonels; one was from the regular army, another had served with the Confederate forces during the Civil War, the third was a Kentuckian. In the course of the conversation, the second, who was a Virginian, said to the latter, ‘What regiment did you
command in the war, sir?' ‘Nevah commanded any regiment in the wah, suh, natural bawn colonel, suh!’ and that is what I am—a natural born colonel!  

A brief mention of the consul appeared in *The Tragedy of the Klondike*, a book published in 1906 by Luella Day, a physician who had lived in gold rush-era Dawson and firmly believed that Canadian authorities systematically persecuted her and Klondike prospectors generally. Her title page promised: “This Book of Travels Gives the True Facts of What Took Place in the Gold-fields Under British Rule.” She credited McCook with stopping certain court proceedings against her in April 1901, writing, “While Colonel McCook was a dissipated man, he was a man of great courage and stood up for the rights of the government which he represented.” Her dealings with a “dissipated” McCook took place within seven months of his death.

A 1973 Master’s thesis, “Frontier Consuls,” by Clyde William Tucker has been the only academic work to have made a substantial attempt to address McCook’s consular role in the Yukon. Even so, Tucker considered U.S. consular functions in Vancouver and Victoria in addition to the Dawson City post, and the British Columbia offices received the major part of his attention. He made a favorable assessment of McCook’s efforts to protect Americans in trouble with the law, but based his generally negative overall opinion of McCook on the newspaper controversy. Tucker must have lent considerable credence to the paper’s accusations, as he described McCook as a “representative who lacked the judgment to represent with dignity the interests of the United States.” This conclusion is probably unfair in light of the non-professional nature of the consular service in the 1890s. A close examination of McCook’s despatches reveals a man devoted to his duty and his country, in spite of the fact that he was not a polished diplomat.
25 Swanson, “Canadia Constellation II,” 331.
27 Kennedy, viii.
31 Barnes and Morgan, 151.
32 Thomas Cridler, Third Assistant Secretary of State, to James C. McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 176, July 20, 1900, in U.S. Department of State, Consular Instructions, 1800-1906, Record Group 59, Volumes 161-182, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
33 Klondike Mining Laws, Rules and Regulations of the United States and Canada Applicable to Alaska and Northwest Territory (Seattle: W.J. Hills and B.M. Ausherman, 1897), 141.
36 Barnes and Morgan, 148-149.
37 Ritchie, 137.
39 Barnes and Morgan, 151.
40 Ritchie, 138.
41 Margaret Leech, In the Days of McKinley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 151.
43 Leech, 328.
51 Aubrey Parkman, David Jayne Hill and the Problem of World Peace (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1975), 64.
52 Barnes and Morgan, 164-165; Ritchie, 139-141.
53 Stuart, 99.


56 Porsild, 174.


Chapter 2: The Diplomatic Setting

President William McKinley had completed just over two years of his first term in office when the State Department issued James C. McCook’s consular appointment to Dawson City on April 9, 1898.1 Two days later, McKinley asked Congress for a declaration of war against Spain, “in the name of humanity, in the name of civilization, in behalf of endangered American interests which give us the right and the duty to speak and to act.”2 It is somewhat ironic that McCook received his orders to head for the Klondike just as the impending Spanish-American War eclipsed the gold rush in the headlines, but the frantic race to the Yukon took place in a period of tremendous change. Events around the world were shifting the balance of power, and the United States was emerging on the international scene as it had at no time in its history. It was in this setting that Consul McCook made his small contribution to American diplomacy on the Canadian frontier.

To the United States, the Klondike gold rush was a relatively insignificant diplomatic event. Perhaps if it had occurred a few years earlier the case would have been different, but in the late 1890s, American statesmen were engaged in diplomatic maneuvering in Venezuela, Hawaii, Cuba, the Philippines, Samoa, China, South Africa, and Central America. McCook’s three and a half years in the consular service in Dawson City were some of the most eventful years in American diplomatic history, but his post was nowhere near the forefront of U.S. foreign policy. At any other time, the fact that over 30,000 people, most of them American, poured into the Canadian Yukon in a single year would have probably excited more interest at the State Department. Of course, Dawson was far removed from Washington, and its remoteness contributed to the lack of attention. As it was, President McKinley’s December 1898 annual address, which ran to 46 pages when printed, included only the slightest mention of Canada, and no mention of the gold rush at all.3 The view from Canada was understandably quite
different, and Ottawa made a swift and concerted effort to assert Canadian sovereignty in the Klondike. Between 1896 and 1898, the Canadian government increased the North West Mounted Police force in the Yukon from 20 to nearly 200, and sent an additional 200 soldiers to supplement the police in the fall of 1898. That military detachment, the Yukon Field Force, represented fully one-quarter of the Canadian militia. The move reflected the traditional uneasiness with which the Dominion viewed its powerful neighbor. Canada’s international presence was small, and its interests were increasingly marginalized by British policy-makers trying to cultivate stronger ties to the United States, as the U.S. concentrated on securing a place among the great powers of Europe.

Relations with Canada had been colored by talk of annexation since the American Revolution. The Dominion of Canada, which Parliament created in the British North America Act on July 1, 1867, existed as a distinct Confederation within the British Empire. Although autonomous in the conduct of its domestic affairs, the government in Ottawa did not play an international role; Canadian foreign policy was the responsibility of London. With the emergence of the U.S. as a world power in the 1890s, and as the relationship between the United States and Great Britain grew in importance, Canada was left in the awkward position of sharing a continent with one power and being utterly beholden to the other. But in the decades before the Anglo-American rapprochement, American annexation of Canada was a topic of serious consideration on both sides of the border.

Much of the discussion circulated at the highest levels of American government. William H. Seward, the Secretary of State under Presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson, is described in the words of historian Richard H. Miller as having "coalesced the fragmented approaches of his predecessors into an expansionist master plan." Indeed, Seward negotiated the purchase of Alaska from Russia as a step in the direction of much greater North American expansion. In the debate over the
appropriation of the $7.2 million the United States had agreed to pay for Alaska, California Representative William Higby revealed the ultimate aim of many expansionist proponents of the purchase in his speech on the floor of the House:

Alaska will soon have a hardy, active people; trade and commerce will grow up to great importance. Its growth and thrift on the north, the same as that on the south in Washington and Idaho Territories, will make British Columbia sicken and die as a British province and cause it to spring into newness of life as a territory of the United States.6

The Senate ratified the treaty of sale on April 9, 1867, transferring Alaska to the United States just five weeks prior to Canadian Confederation. Some of the impetus behind Confederation had, in fact, developed out of fears of an American annexation threat in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Over time, the discourse surrounding annexation shifted in focus from the notion of a military or political takeover of Canada to the idea of a voluntary merger or commercial union. Still, the American attitude toward Canada was ambiguous. Alice Felt Tyler, biographer of Benjamin Harrison’s Secretary of State, James G. Blaine, described Blaine’s attitude regarding Canada as “a queer combination of a rather suspicious dislike and a conviction that Canada must sometime in the probably far distant future become a part of the United States.”7 As late as 1891, Blaine wrote to the president, “The fact is we do not want any intercourse with Canada, except through the medium of a tariff, and she will find that she has a hard row to hoe and will ultimately, I believe, seek admission to the Union.”8 That same year, former Oxford history professor Goldwin Smith published his book, Canada and the Canadian Question, in which he argued that his adopted Canada was an artificial creation that naturally should belong to the United States. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald and his Conservative Party won Canada’s 1891 election after turning annexation fears into a political issue.9 Meanwhile in the U.S., the Continental Union League, calling for the integration of the
two countries, could boast a membership that included Andrew Carnegie, Theodore Roosevelt, and John Hay. More significant perhaps was a line in the 1896 Republican Party platform on which William McKinley campaigned: “We hopefully look forward to the eventual withdrawal of the European powers from this hemisphere, to the ultimate union of all the English-speaking parts of the continent by the free consent of its inhabitants.”

By the late 1890s, however, as U.S. expansionism approached its zenith, a number of factors actually turned American imperialist attention away from Canada. The 1890 publication of Alfred T. Mahan’s *The Influence of Sea Power upon History* prompted worldwide recognition of the importance of naval superiority to the balance of power. Germany soon began its race to build a navy to match the incomparable British fleet, and Britain countered by building more ships of her own. In keeping with this theme, U.S. attention turned to the seas, and to the Pacific and Caribbean in particular. The desire to establish a strong U.S. naval presence around the world provided justification for the cession of Spanish island colonies after the Spanish-American War, and, in fact, provided some justification for American involvement in the conflict in the first place. The two efforts to annex Hawaii, the 1898 attempt to purchase the Danish Virgin Islands and the 1899 annexation of American Samoa were a part of the same agenda. American imperialist ambitions were no longer limited to the continent, and Canada ceased to occupy a prominent place in the grand American vision. Furthermore, much of the popular support behind expansionism in 1898 lay in the idea of a “White Man’s Burden” to civilize and Christianize the less fortunate peoples of the world. Canadians needed no such help. But the most important factor influencing the change in the American attitude toward Canada was the improvement in relations with Great Britain. Once the American government was on friendly terms with London, a more cordial approach to Her Majesty’s subjects in North America was natural.
The campaign of 1896 gave little indication that the McKinley administration would be dominated by foreign policy. Domestic issues had propelled the Republican Ohio governor and former Congressman into the White House. The depression of 1893 had stirred populist agricultural protest, industrial unrest, and the currency debate over free silver, while the blame for the poor economy fell largely on the shoulders of second-term President Grover Cleveland. After suffering the greatest loss of congressional seats in American history in the off-year elections of 1894, Democrats abandoned support of the policies of their conservative president and nominated William Jennings Bryan on a free silver, pro-income tax platform. Taking advantage of the dissention within the Democratic Party, Republicans nominated Governor McKinley, who endorsed the gold standard and supported high protectionist tariffs. Although some Republican supporters of free silver deserted the party before the election, McKinley was swept into office with a Republican majority in both Houses of Congress.

The avoidance of foreign affairs in American politics was nothing new. In fact, historians have characterized the post-Reconstruction period between 1877 and 1889 as a nadir in American diplomacy. Not since the 1867 purchase of Alaska had the United States expanded beyond its contiguous borders; only ten years later the Army withdrew from Alaska entirely, leaving the district under the nominal authority of the Treasury Department and residents largely to fend for themselves. Americans did not populate Alaska in significant numbers until the discovery of gold. The years of general disinterest in their own far-flung possession was perhaps indicative of the even greater disinterest Americans demonstrated toward the business of other nations. In 1889, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts wrote: “Our relations with foreign nations today fill but a slight place in American politics, and excite generally a languid interest. We have separated ourselves so completely from the affairs of other people.”
While foreign policy may not have captured the electorate’s attention, the seeds of American expansion were already sown by 1896, and the election of McKinley had important consequences. Although outgoing President Cleveland was firmly anti-expansionist, the Republican administration of Benjamin Harrison (that punctuated Cleveland’s non-consecutive terms from 1889-1893) had made expansionist overtures in the Pacific. In 1893, after a revolution overthrew Queen Liliuokalani in Hawaii, Harrison submitted a treaty of Hawaiian annexation to the Senate in the waning hours of his presidency. Hawaiian business interests who sought immediate American annexation had staged the coup, but Cleveland returned to the White House before the Senate voted on the treaty and he withdrew it from consideration. Sending a special mission to Hawaii to investigate the circumstances of the revolution, Cleveland determined that it had been orchestrated from the United States and did not reflect the will of the Hawaiian people.16

In 1896, the Republicans promised to annex Hawaii, purchase the Danish holdings in the West Indies, construct an isthmian canal, and support the colonial insurgents in Spanish Cuba. Although McKinley biographer H. Wayne Morgan contended that “McKinley’s early views on foreign affairs were hard to gauge, so silently did he wend his way through diplomacy,”17 he apparently supported Hawaiian annexation from the outset. As a Congressman in 1891, he had worked to ensure American naval rights in Pearl Harbor, one of many arrangements that held the islands in the American sphere of influence. Despite this, he was quoted as telling the anti-expansionist Missouri Senator Carl Schurz, “Ah, you may be sure that there will be no jingo nonsense under my administration.”18

If his natural instincts did not lean toward expansionism, those of McKinley’s supporters clearly did, and his foreign policy soon reflected the party line. On March 25, 1898, the President approved $5 million for the purchase of the Danish Virgin
Islands. McKinley had made his first imperialist gesture, but it would quickly be overshadowed by the American declaration of war against Spain exactly one month later. The Spanish-American War would advance U.S. expansionism unlike any event before or since. Although the war prompted Denmark to back away from the Virgin Island sale out of diplomatic courtesy to Madrid, even this was only a delay. The United States eventually purchased the islands for $25 million in 1916.19 But the war itself provided the United States with its first Caribbean possessions, as well as the first American colony in the Far East.

Cuban resistance to Spanish rule had been simmering for decades when open rebellion broke out in February 1895. While New York newspaper publishers William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer unleashed the full force of yellow journalism to stir up support for the revolting Cubans in a campaign to drive the nation toward a paper-selling war with the Spanish, Grover Cleveland responded with quiet restraint. But, even he, in his December 7, 1896 annual message, warned, "...by the course of events we may be drawn into such an unusual and unprecedented condition, as will fix a limit to our patient waiting for Spain to end the contest."20 Under McKinley, patience had run its course by the time of the explosion of the Battleship U.S.S. Maine in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898, and the stage was set for the ensuing four-month conflict.

Hostilities ended on August 12th, whereafter a peace commission determined the spoils of victory. The Senate ratified the Treaty of Paris on February 6, 1899, which ceded to the United States the former Spanish colonies of Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico, while Cuba became an independent American protectorate. Overnight, the U.S. had risen to the ranks of an imperial power in what historian Samuel Flagg Bemis characterized as the "great aberration of 1898."21 At the outset of the war, the U.S. Asiatic squadron under Admiral George Dewey had steamed from Hong Kong to the Philippines and devastated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay before American soldiers
had even set foot in Cuba. After the battle, Dewey waited for the arrival of American troops to capture Manila. A variety of European ships sent to look after local business interests soon joined his squadron, including five German battleships, which, despite their neutral purpose, comprised a force stronger than the American fleet preparing to take the city. If the United States proved reluctant to acquire the Philippines, Germany demonstrated that it was more than willing to fill the vacuum. Two British warships, however, were also in the bay, and rumors began on both sides of the Atlantic that the British had protected the American fleet from German aggression. Although Kaiser Wilhelm II had no intention of waging war with the United States over the Pacific islands, the story contributed to the popularization of Anglo-American friendship on both sides of the Atlantic.

Public and congressional debates over the cession of the Philippine Islands were fierce, but McKinley, with thin Senate approval, chose to annex the entire archipelago. The decision gave rise to the Filipino insurrection, a costly quagmire for the U.S. military, which eventually resorted to suppression techniques not unlike those employed by the Spanish in Cuba. But the move created a U.S. base of operations in the Far East that served American economic ambitions in the region. American interests in the Pacific were widespread, and the need to supply and fortify the new foothold in the Philippines created the perfect excuse for the annexation of Hawaii, which was finalized by a joint resolution of Congress on July 7, 1898. Nine years earlier, the United States had agreed to a tripartite protectorate over the autonomous South Pacific islands of Samoa, in cooperation with Germany and Great Britain. But when the Samoan king died in August 1898, and a civil war erupted on the islands, the protecting powers re-assessed their interests. Late in 1899, Germany and the United States split Samoa between them, while Britain accepted compensation elsewhere.
The German presence in Samoa was indicative of far greater imperialist aspirations, and British concerns over German pretensions, particularly in Asia, were mounting. This worked to the benefit of the United States. In 1898, Great Britain found itself isolated between the Franco-Russian Dual Alliance and the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Perceiving the U.S. as a counter-balance to its European neighbors, Britain shielded the United States from widespread criticism before and during the Spanish-American War. In April, six European envoys met in Washington to recommend that their governments send a common message to American diplomats in opposition to intervention in Cuba, but London barred its ambassador from supporting the measure. At the war’s end, Britain encouraged American annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines, preferring a larger U.S. role in the Pacific to land-grabbing by its Continental rivals.

The great rapprochement between the United States and Great Britain of the late 1890s saw the traditional feelings, born in the Revolution, of hostility and suspicion between Americans and Britons transformed into a common understanding that lasted through both World Wars. Oddly enough, the new relationship took hold after the United States made an aggressive move aimed directly at thwarting British interests in South America. The unsettled location of the border between British Guyana and Venezuela, and Great Britain’s refusal to submit the question to arbitration, led the Venezuelan government to angrily suspend diplomatic relations with London in 1887. Of only marginal importance to Britain, the problem remained unsolved, while the discovery of gold in the region made settlement of the issue even less likely. However, in a gesture seemingly out of character for expansion-averse Grover Cleveland, the president authorized Secretary of State Richard Olney to send an ultimatum on the Venezuelan boundary question to British Prime Minster Lord Salisbury on July, 20, 1895.
In the 10,000 word note, which Cleveland called a "twenty inch gun," Olney invoked the Monroe Doctrine, arguing that British interference in the New World amounted to aggression toward the United States, and that the only proof of British goodwill in the present situation was to submit the boundary question to arbitration. Lord Salisbury's November reply, which made it clear Britain would not arbitrate the matter, prompted Cleveland to make an impassioned message to Congress on December 17, 1895, in which he suggested not only the possibility of war, but called for a commission of Americans to determine the location of the boundary. The public reaction in Britain to this pronouncement was not indignation, but an outpouring of support for a peaceful agreement with the United States. Furthermore, news of Kaiser Wilhelm's congratulatory telegram to Boer President John Paul Kruger after the failure of the Jameson Raid in South Africa on January 3, 1896, gave the British new worries about German intentions and new reasons to encourage strong American ties. Just over a year later, in February 1897, the British agreed to submit the matter to a board of arbitration, which determined the final boundary line on October 3, 1899. Although the boundary itself was never of major significance to Britain, its arbitration concession, according to historian David Healy, "cleared the air and calmed old suspicions." More importantly, it prompted British recognition of "Americans into the ranks of the civilizing powers."

Thereafter, events around the world drove Britain toward the realization that a strong American ally was ever more important. In September 1898, when French and British forces met in Africa at Fashoda, the possibility of war with France emerged. An Anglo-French convention in 1899 ended the African dispute diplomatically, but threats appeared elsewhere. The French also had designs on China, where British economic interests were enormous. Moreover, by the middle of 1898, the Germans had seized the port of Kiaochow, and the Russians had taken both Port Arthur and Talienwan.
Hence, the American presence in the Philippine Islands was a welcome buffer against encroaching European powers, whom author Margaret Leech described as moving in “to feast on the crumbling empire of China.”

Though the American economic stake was considerably smaller than that of Great Britain, Washington and London shared a determination to protect their respective Asian interests. On September 6, 1899 and March 20, 1900, Secretary of State John Hay sent his famous Open Door Notes to the capitals of Europe, affirming American commitment to the British assertion that open access to Chinese markets should be maintained by all Western powers. The Chinese themselves were beginning to threaten good business. Shortly after it issued the second Open Door Note, the United States contributed 2500 troops to the international expeditionary force of 20,000 that rescued besieged Westerners held in Peking in the wake of the Boxer Rebellion on August 14, 1900.

Meanwhile, the Boer War erupted in South Africa in October 1899. Just as Britain had lent tacit approval to the United States in the Spanish-American War, the U.S. now showed its sympathy with the British cause by declaring neutrality. As the Empire threw its might against the hopelessly outnumbered former Dutch colonists of the Transvaal and Orange Free states, the war became universally unpopular in Europe. Among the Anglophobic elements in American society, the British were also condemned, but the administration was unmoved by domestic complaints. Before the war, in a letter to Henry White, the First Secretary of the American Embassy in London, Secretary of State John Hay acknowledged that “all the Irish, and many Germans” believed that Washington should support the Boers, but wrote, “I hope, if it comes to blows, that England will make quick work of Uncle Paul [Kruger]. Sooner or later, her influence must be dominant there, and the sooner, the better.” In June 1900, after the Boers had proven themselves extremely difficult to defeat, Hay expressed his
exasperation by making reference to the American problem in the Philippines: “We do occasionally kill a Filipino, but what man has ever seen a dead Boer?”

In just three years, the United States had gone from clamoring to defend Venezuelan sovereignty in the face of perceived imperialist bullying, to defending the interests of a fellow colonizing power. Great Britain and the United States had developed a mutual need for each other. This being the case, there were still several unresolved issues between London and Washington, including the ill-defined boundary between Southeast Alaska and British Columbia. Disputes between the United States and Britain, diplomatic historian R.G. Neale wrote, “are and were settled upon a basis of hardheaded realistic appreciation of the national interests and not upon sentimental effusions of international fellowship.” In the aftermath of the Venezuela boundary dispute, the British Ambassador to Washington, Sir Julian Pauncefote, and Secretary of State Richard Olney, signed a general arbitration treaty on January 11, 1897. The agreement would have paved the way for the negotiation of all outstanding Anglo-American disputes. William McKinley, who assumed office before the Senate vote on ratification, strongly supported the treaty, but the Senate rejected it. Many Senators were unwilling to yield American foreign policy decisions to an arbitration board, while others did not share in the suddenly friendly disposition toward the British. The same apprehension existed outside the Congress, and lasted throughout the Spanish-American War, even among McKinley’s Republican legions. Regarding the party convention in 1900, Hay wrote: “We had great trouble to prevent the Convention from declaring in favor of the Boers, and of the annexation of Canada.”

But sentiment within the administration was firmly on the side of the British, and calls for Canadian annexation were now relegated to the margins of political debate. American-Canadian relations, however, remained somewhat strained due to tariff issues, fisheries competition, and the dispute over the proper location of the Alaska boundary.
the one diplomatic issue particularly relevant to the Klondike. Forty years before the United States entered the scene, the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1825 established the boundaries between Russian America and the British possessions in the Northwest. The northern portion of the border followed a straight line down the 141st meridian, but the boundary of Southeastern Alaska followed a much more complicated path. In the words of the treaty:

The line of demarcation between the possessions of the High Contracting Parties... Commencing from the southernmost point of the island called Prince of Wales Island... shall ascend to the North, along the channel called Portland Channel, as far as the... 56th degree of north latitude; from this last-mentioned point the line of demarcation shall follow the summit of the mountains situated parallel to the coast as far as the... 141st degree of west longitude.

...That whenever the summit of the mountains which extend in a direction parallel to the coast... shall prove to be at a distance of more than 10 marine leagues from the ocean, the limit between the British possessions and the line of coast which is to belong to Russia... shall be formed by a line parallel to the windings of the coast, and which shall never exceed the distance of 10 marine leagues therefrom.38

When the U.S. purchased Alaska in 1867, the purchase treaty recognized the boundary established by the convention between Russia and Great Britain. But the exact location of the line was indefinite. There was little geographic information available about the territory in question, and it was not clear what the “mountains situated parallel to the coast” were. At the time of the purchase, however, neither the Americans nor the British considered the matter pressing.

Five years later, news of the Cassiar gold strike in British Columbia was sufficient to attract the attention of President Ulysses S. Grant to the imprecise boundary. In 1872, he called for the appointment of a joint commission to settle the issue, but Congress was unwilling to act.39 Twenty years passed before Secretary of State Blaine took the first diplomatic action in the matter, proposing a two-year Anglo-
American survey of the border region. The result was an 1892 treaty that provided for eleven teams, four American and seven Canadian, to undertake the survey. In December 1895, the surveyors presented a joint topographic report and maps to be used as the basis for a boundary settlement, but their work went largely ignored. The issue would have been addressed by Cleveland's general arbitration treaty had it not gone down to defeat in the Senate in 1897.

It took the biggest event in the history of Alaska and the Yukon to attract the attention of policy-makers in Washington, Ottawa, and London to the boundary question. In July 1897, when word of the gold discovery in the Klondike reached Seattle, thousands of Americans began charging northward. The quickest route to the gold fields took miners through the archipelago of Southeast Alaska and up Lynn Canal. Two American towns, Skagway and Dyea, sprung up at the end of the deep inlet where miners disembarked to begin their journey overland to the Yukon River tributaries in Canada. In February 1898, months after the founding of the two towns, Canadian Interior Minister Clifford Sifton and Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier made statements before the Canadian Parliament calling the head of Lynn Canal "disputed territory." This was cause for the United States to take new interest in the matter.

In May, representatives of Great Britain and Canada, meeting with American officials in Washington, established a Joint High Commission for the resolution of the boundary question. The issue proved so contentious because of the very different arguments the two sides brought to the table. If the Canadians could prove that prospectors were setting foot in Canada from the moment they disembarked from their ships, businesses in Victoria and Vancouver could outfit would-be miners without their having to pay American duties upon arrival in the northern ports. Canada had begun the negotiations by making the sweeping claim that, according to the terms of the 1825 treaty, the heads of all the inlets in Southeast Alaska were actually in Canada. "This
unwise claim,\textquoteleft historian Norman Penlington noted, "exposed the Dominion to the subsequent charge of its being a 'manufactured' claim."\textsuperscript{43} The U.S. commissioners observed that Canada had never asserted sovereignty over the inlets before the gold rush, but were nonetheless initially willing to offer Canada partial control of the port of Pyramid Harbor at the head of the Chilkat Trail. However, news of the proposed arrangement was leaked, and strong opposition from the western states prompted the American commissioners to withdraw the Pyramid Harbor offer. The commission adjourned having settled nothing in February 1899.

It was not until October 20th of that year that Secretary of State John Hay and Reginald Tower, the British charge d'affaires in Washington, agreed to a \textit{modus vivendi} creating a provisional boundary across the Chilkoot Pass, the White Pass, and the Chilkat Pass, the three main routes into the interior from Lynn Canal. The agreement included the understanding "that the citizens or subjects of either power, found by this agreement within the temporary jurisdiction of the other, shall suffer no diminution of the rights and privileges which they now enjoy."\textsuperscript{44} Throughout the Klondike stampede, American and Canadian authorities respected the provisional arrangements. The status of the boundary remained unsettled during Consul McCook's entire service in the Yukon, but the issue did not affect his substantive work at the consulate. The dispute undoubtedly contributed to nationalist posturing in the Yukon, but it caused the most concern at the national level in Canada, where it fueled considerable rumblings until and after the conclusion of the matter in 1903.

Meanwhile, the attention of foreign policy makers in the United States was focused on various plans for the construction of an isthmian canal across Central America. In 1850, Great Britain and the United States had signed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, which stipulated that canal construction across the isthmus was to be a joint Anglo-American effort. But the U.S. was emboldened by the war with Spain, and
looked now to building and controlling a canal unilaterally. Early in 1899, British Ambassador Sir Julian Pauncefote submitted a draft treaty he and John Hay had drawn up that would have allowed the U.S. to do just that, but British Prime Minister Lord Salisbury would not consent to the accord without first consulting Canada in regard to the Alaskan boundary. As historian Charles S. Campbell explained, "Canada’s chief bargaining weapon for extracting concessions on issues directly relating to her was the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty." Ottawa urged London to make no changes to the original canal treaty until the U.S. agreed to submit the disputed boundary to arbitration. Undeterred, the U.S. Senate passed a bill in 1899, sponsored by Senator John Morgan of Alabama, which supported the construction of a canal through Nicaragua, and on June 10th, President McKinley appointed a commission to study various canal routes. On May 2, 1900, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed a canal bill put forward by Congressman William Hepburn of Iowa. Both the Morgan and Hepburn bills were in flagrant violation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.

As American intentions became clearer every day, the British found themselves ever more deeply embroiled in the Boer War and were increasingly determined to maintain positive relations with the United States. Although Canada was faithfully sending troops to aid the Empire in South Africa, Britain felt less and less compelled to hold up the re-negotiation of the 1850 treaty in order to secure an American consent to arbitration on the boundary issue. In January 1900, London appealed to Ottawa to acquiesce on the subject of the treaty, and the Canadian government, in no position to refuse, agreed not to object. The first Hay-Pauncefote Treaty of February 5, 1900 abrogated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, and allowed for U.S. construction and ownership of an isthmian canal. The Senate, however, rejected the treaty because of its ban on fortification of the waterway, and the House subsequently passed the Hepburn bill. On even this point the British proved willing to concede, and on November 18, 1901, the
second Hay-Pauncefote Treaty paved the way for an American built, owned, and fortified isthmian canal. All the while, Canadian demands for arbitration of the boundary dispute went unheeded.

The American refusal to arbitrate the Alaska boundary issue seems ironic in light of the U.S. demands leveled at Britain in 1895 regarding the Venezuelan boundary. But the United States now found itself in a very favorable bargaining position, and it took advantage of the circumstances. The U.S. aversion to arbitration stemmed, at least in part, from a previous American diplomatic experience in the north that took place just before the improvement in Anglo-American relations. In 1881, the Treasury Department declared what was essentially a *mare clausum* in the Bering Sea, in reaction to foreign competition for the valuable Alaska Northern Fur Seals that spent the summer months on breeding grounds on the Pribilof Islands. Pelagic sealing, the practice of killing seals from boats on the open ocean during the animals’ two thousand-mile annual migration from California, severely threatened the survival of the seal population. It had also begun to cut into the profits of the Alaska Commercial Company, to which the U.S. government had granted exclusive Pribilof sealing rights in 1870. Over twenty years, the federal government had earned over $6 million from the rent and taxes remitted by Alaska Commercial, which approached the original purchase price of Alaska. In 1886, when the Revenue Marine Service, the forerunner of the U.S. Coast Guard, began seizing pelagic sealing vessels in the Bering Sea, the Governor General of Canada protested on the grounds that such action violated the principle of Freedom of the Seas.

The United States and Great Britain submitted their dispute in the Bering Sea to an international arbitration tribunal comprised of two Americans, two Britons, and one member each from France, Italy, and the Kingdom of Sweden and Norway. The U.S. argued that, because the seals summered on American soil, they became the property of
the United States, no matter where the animals traveled. Senator John Morgan, who served as a member of the tribunal, contended that the United States "have such rights over these fur-seals as any owner of land animals would have over domestic or domesticated animals, when found on the public highways." Not surprisingly, on August 15, 1893, the tribunal ruled against the United States on all five points considered in the dispute. The U.S. reluctantly agreed to the terms and enacted legislation accordingly. In their ruling, the arbitrators established a series of regulations intended to protect the declining seal herds, but the decision allowed pelagic sealing on the open ocean during most of the year. In just the first season following the arbitration, record-setting harvests drove the seals to the brink of annihilation. The situation was so dire that the House of Representatives voted, in December 1894, to slaughter the entire herd so as to keep any remaining profits in the United States, but the bill was tabled when it was thought that the British might agree to amend the new restrictions.

Frustrated by American reluctance to pay damage claims for vessels seized on the open sea, the British refused to re-negotiate. As a result, seals became scarce, the industry declined, and the United States was left with a bitter arbitration experience.

When the U.S. finally agreed to address the Alaska boundary question, it did so on its own terms, and well after the Klondike gold rush had seen its heyday. By then, President McKinley had been assassinated (in the seventh month of his second term in office) in September 1901, and Theodore Roosevelt had ascended to the presidency. Consul McCook had died in October. But the way in which the United States and Britain resolved the boundary dispute further underscored the difficult position occupied by Canada in Anglo-American relations. In what was another cautious gesture recognizing American neutrality in the Boer War, Britain eventually agreed to a U.S. adjudication plan, and a convention established the Alaskan Boundary Tribunal on
January 24, 1903. There were to be no third-party participants this time, and both sides would have equal representation.

"The tribunal," the agreement read, "shall consist of six impartial jurists of repute." Canadian officials were under the impression that these jurists were to come from the bench, or from some other "impartial" setting. Great Britain appointed two Canadians, the Lieutenant-Governor of Quebec, Sir Louis Jetté, and Allen Aylesworth, a prominent Ontario attorney, to the tribunal. The Chief Justice of England, Lord Alverstone, joined them. Taking no chances, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed his Secretary of War, Elihu Root, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, and Senator George Turner of Washington. All three had previously voiced their opinions on the proper location of the boundary. In a letter to the Colonial Office in London, Lord Minto, the Governor General of Canada, expressed his concerns over the American appointments: "The appointment to the tribunal by the United States government of gentlemen who are not judges, and whose views leave no room for expectation of a judicial consideration of the question, changes the whole situation." Indeed, Roosevelt had made careful political choices, having no intention of conceding any U.S. territory to Great Britain.

On October 21, 1903, the Tribunal issued its decision, and the United States was largely vindicated. John W. Foster, the attorney presenting the American case, described the verdict as "a substantial acceptance of the most material claim of this country, and the result has been so regarded on both sides." It was most certainly viewed as a diplomatic defeat on the side of the Canadians. Lord Alverstone, the only member of the Tribunal from Great Britain itself, had voted with the three Americans in a 4 to 2 decision. The two Canadian representatives refused to sign the award, and published a statement declaring that the majority had "ignored the just rights of Canada." Alverstone was accused of sacrificing Canadian interests for the sake of
Anglo-American relations. As W.L. Morton described it, "The Alaska boundary award was a humiliating experience for Canada. Canadians felt they had been treated with contempt by the Americans and let down by the British."56 The public reaction among Canadians was strong. In an anonymously-published 1904 booklet entitled Canada's Alaskan Dismemberment, the author alleged that the U.S. position on the boundary was "part of a policy of aggression upon the Territorial rights of the Dominion of Canada... that might be immediately relieved by secession from the Empire, and alliance with the States."57

Historian Norman Penlington came to the straightforward conclusion that, "The United States had the better case, the superior diplomatic skill, and the greater power to ensure victory."58 The Boer War had weakened Britain's diplomatic influence, and Canada was in the awkward position of having limited control of its own foreign policy. There was, admittedly, also an undercurrent of American conceit throughout the affair, at least on the part of the Big Stick president. It was evident in his appointments to the Tribunal and even more so in a personal letter Roosevelt wrote on July 23, 1903, before the Tribunal had convened:

I wish to make one last effort to bring about an agreement through the commission... But if there is a disagreement I wish it distinctly understood, not only that there will be no arbitration of the matter, but that in my message to Congress I shall take a position which will prevent any arbitration hereafter; a position, I am inclined to believe, which will render it necessary for Congress to give me the authority to run the line as we claim it, by our own people, without any further regard to the attitude of England and Canada.59

Such rhetoric would not have helped the cause of Anglo-American relations had it been made public, but the stronger the United States grew, the tighter its bonds to Britain became. In the aftermath of the Alaska boundary dispute, brought to a head by the Klondike gold rush, Ottawa saw the need to take a greater role in the conduct of its foreign relations and established the Canadian Department of External Affairs in 1909.
But in 1898, when Consul McCook arrived in Dawson City, the North West Mounted Police and the Yukon Field Force were on hand to ensure that Canadian sovereignty was recognized on Canadian soil. Canada’s approach to the gold rush reflected its uncertain place between London and Washington, and the suspicion with which it viewed the United States. To some degree, that mistrust can be understood in light of history and London’s handling of the Alaska boundary question. For the most part, however, Canadian fears stemmed from a danger that no longer existed. At the turn of the twentieth century, the threat of American encroachment on Canadian sovereignty went no further than the treaty claims produced in the heat of the boundary dispute. The new American expansionist horizon stretched far beyond North America. Furthermore, as the United States took its place on the world stage and moved ever closer to Britain, the likelihood that either the Americans or the British would act to damage their relationship was small. In this regard, Canada’s position between the two powers actually enhanced its security. The perception of the situation in Ottawa, though, was not so optimistic, and the uneasy Dominion made every effort to show that the Union Jack was flying over the Klondike.

The earnest Canadian display of force in the Yukon set the orderly tone of life in Dawson City that has become legendary in gold rush history. While Washington’s response to the stampede did include the re-militarization of Alaska (after the Army’s 20-year absence),
pressing concerns elsewhere muted its diplomatic interest in the trans-national event. The State Department’s establishment of the small Dawson City consulate was unquestionable proof of the American recognition of Canadian sovereignty in the region. Yet Dawson City was no less American as a result, and the Yankee population generated a substantial workload for Consul James McCook. In August 1898, he arrived to occupy his humble post. Though far from the center of attention in terms of the numerous and varied diplomatic issues facing Washington, the
events in Dawson City were amazing in their own right, and the American consul had a unique vantage point from which to view them.
1  Alvey A. Adee, Second Assistant Secretary of State to James C. McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 2, April 9, 1898, in U.S. Department of State, Consular Instructions, 1800-1906, Record Group 59, Volumes 164-182, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.


3  U.S. House, Foreign Relations 1898, 57.


17 Morgan, 294.

18 Pratt, 215.


22 Bailey, 514-515.

In keeping with his anti-expansionist policies, Cleveland disliked the arrangement, citing it as an example of the "impolicy of entangling alliances," and suggested in 1894 that the United States withdraw. 

Pratt, 200; Bailey, 466.

Campbell, 234.

Campbell, 225.

Healy, 23-30; Bailey, 477-493.

Bailey, 485-486.


Healy, 29-30.

Pratt, 260-261; Neale, xiv-xvi.

Margaret Leech, In the Days of McKinley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), 147.

Bailey, 526-530.


Neale, 165.


Lewis Green, The Boundary Hunters: Surveying the 141st Meridian and the Alaska Panhandle (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1982), 54-63.

Penlington, 37.


Penlington, 39.


Campbell, 232.

Campbell, 239-242.

Bailey, 533-535. Campbell


Williams, 50-51.

Canada, House of Commons, Sessional Paper No. 149, 1903 in Munro, ed., 41.


Lord Minto to Colonial Office, March 6, 1903, in Canada, House of Commons, Sessional Paper No. 46a (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1904), 62.

John W. Foster, The Alaskan Boundary Tribunal (Washington: Judd and Detweiler, 1903), 9.

"Statement by the Canadian Commissioners;" London Times, October 21, 1903 in Munro, ed., 62.
In February 1897, U.S. soldiers established garrisons at Haines, Dyea, and Skagway to maintain order and patrol the questionable boundary. By 1900, there were forts at St. Michael, Tanana, Eagle, Nome, and Valdez. *The U.S. Army in Alaska*, 32-45.
Chapter 3: The First Year

On April 9, 1898, when the State Department sent word to Philadelphia of James McCook’s consular appointment, Second Assistant Secretary of State Alvey A. Adee also sent instructions regarding his official compensation. The salary for McCook’s office was to be $3000 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1898. Prior to that date, he would be permitted to retain fees for services that could total as much as $2,500 annually. It was fitting that his earliest instruction should involve the subject of money, in that money would prove to be a problem in Dawson City from the outset. McCook would collect no fees before the period of his salary began, because he did not arrive at his post for nearly four months.

In accepting the appointment, the new consul was required to send the department an oath of allegiance, a consular bond, and a one-dollar passport fee. He confirmed that he was a resident of the state of Pennsylvania, and noted his home address: 1409 Walnut Street, Philadelphia. He also stated that he had been born in Ireland and had never resided in the country in which his post was situated. On May 17th, the department informed McCook that the U.S. consul general in Ottawa reported that Dominion authorities had granted his office temporary recognition. The following week, he wrote to the department saying that he would leave for Dawson City, “North British America,” on the 30th of that month.

A notation at the top his letter suggested that it was filed under “Dawson City, B.N.A.,” whereas a previous communication had been labeled “Dawson City, B.C.” The confusion over how to address items sent to and from Dawson continued for some time. McCook referred to the location of his post alternately as North British America, British North America, and the North West Territory until his despatch of September 20th, when he finally listed his address as “Dawson City, Yukon Territory,” which he used consistently thereafter. Officials of the State Department were no less confused
than McCook. They addressed their instructions to the North West Territory, occasionally using the spelling, “Northwest,” but generally preferring the designation “N.W.T.” when writing to Dawson City. It was nearly two years before the department, in March 1900, sent its first communication to Consul McCook at “Dawson City, Yukon.”\(^5\) The territory came into being on June 13, 1898, when the Yukon Territory Act received royal assent\(^6\), but the Klondike was so far removed from Washington that even details such as these seemingly escaped notice by the State Department.

The distance was so great, and the means of travel so complicated, that McCook was unable to keep the schedule he had expected to follow. On June 10th, he wrote to the department from Seattle, saying that he would leave for St. Michael on the 12th aboard the steamer Roanoke. He explained that he had spent the $200 allotted to him for the purchase of furniture, “which I trust,” he wrote, “will be duly honored.”\(^7\) The letter did not arrive in Washington for seven days, but that was a minimal delay compared to the long time it would take for mail to travel between Dawson and the outside world. When he sent his next despatch from Dutch Harbor, Alaska, the department did not receive it until a month later.

The Roanoke arrived in Dutch Harbor on June 19th. McCook wrote that the ship was expected to leave for St. Michael on the 22nd, but the furniture he had bought for the consulate was not travelling with him. Space on ships heading north was at a premium. The “office furniture,” he explained, “and my own Stuff had to be shipped by the S.S. Alliance that carries the U.S. Mails.” In trying to ship his supplies, McCook had his first lesson in the astronomically high prices attached to nearly every good or service associated with the gold rush. Although he secured a $50 per ton reduction in the usual freight charges, it cost him $562.50 to ship his $200 worth of furniture to Dawson City. “It appears to be an exorbitant price,” he wrote. He also reported
purchasing $200 worth of provisions, the freight charges for which exceeded $300. Evidently, shipping rates were based upon both weight and volume. Remarking, "I don’t see how the Stuff could measure 150 cubic feet," he said that he would try to have the furniture measured upon his arrival, to ensure that he had been charged correctly.8

On July 1st, the consul wrote from St. Michael, saying his ship had arrived there five days earlier, but because the Yukon River was unusually low, "it is impossible to tell how long we will be getting up the river." Boats arriving from upstream brought reports of steamers run aground on sandbars, and boats that were due in port a week earlier had not yet arrived. While waiting in St. Michael, McCook heard rumors of a stampede from Dawson to a creek near Rampart City. He reported that new gold discoveries "on this Side," referring to the boundary, "will prove a blessing to so many who have taken their lives in their hands striving to obtain this precious metal." Already he understood something of the desperation of the would-be miners who had flocked northward only to discover that fortunes were not easily made; soon, he would encounter disappointed prospectors by the hundreds. Other rumors were circulating as well. "There have also been some two thousand persons started... for Kotzebue Sound," McCook dutifully reported. Having heard that the mail ship on which his furniture was stowed was delayed at Dutch Harbor, he wrote, "I will be very fortunate if it arrives at Dawson this Year."9

A week later, McCook was still in St. Michael, but three riverboats carrying passengers had arrived from Dawson City. In his despatch of July 8th, he wrote that the trio of vessels was thought to be carrying $8 million in gold. Of the 180 passengers on one boat, there was "not a single male passenger but had some gold dust or nuggets." The outgoing commandant of the North West Mounted Police in Dawson City, Captain Charles Constantine, had relinquished his post on June 24th and was passing through
St. Michael during the consul’s brief sojourn there. Constantine gave McCook some idea of what to expect in the coming months, including an anticipated shortage of provisions over the winter. He explained that there had been only about 6000 people in Dawson the previous year, but that there were about 30,000 people there now, and adequate provisions were unlikely to arrive in time. Furthermore, the Mountie warned the consul of the difficulty he would face in finding quarters, leading McCook to believe that he would have to have a house built on a leased lot. In his report, he wrote, “On account of the very high price of living at Dawson, a good many are selling their outfits & supplies and [are] trying to get out of the Country.” Before McCook had even arrived in the Klondike, he offered very prescient advice to those still considering a trek north: “No one Should go in without funds to keep them for at least two years.” It was a warning he would repeat several times. He may have encountered some Alaskan boosters on his trip, as he interestingly included the opinion that “the best prospects for intending gold Seekers are on... the United States Side.”

On July 29th, he could finally report that he had set foot in Dawson City. The Roanoke had arrived three days earlier, and in the meantime, McCook had been frantically searching for reasonable office space. Captain Constantine’s warnings had proven correct. Fortunately, the Alaska Commercial Company temporarily offered the consul a tiny workspace, which he described as “a corner of an office of theirs in their warehouse.” In that corner, the United States consulate in Dawson City had its humble beginning. While searching for alternative arrangements, McCook immediately realized the cold reality of Klondike prices: “I have ascertained that no suitable location can be rented at less than $200 per month anywhere in the town proper. A proper building could not be erected at less than several thousand dollars.” But McCook dove into his responsibilities, quickly discovering that there would be “a large amount of work trying to regulate the business of the steamers, none having crew lists or shipping articles.”
This was not surprising, considering that Dawson shipping companies had hitherto been free of consular requirements. McCook's challenge would be in enforcing U.S. government regulations where there had been none before. He was alone in this responsibility, and his remoteness was underscored by the fact that his first despatch from the Yukon took a full five weeks to reach the State Department.

The next unpleasant condition he discovered was the pervasiveness of destitution, a subject that occupied no less than 13 of his despatches in the first year of his service in Dawson City. After only a week, helpless Americans were pouring into his office. "I am waited on daily," he wrote on August 2nd, "by persons who have spent their all in the wild stampede for gold and been unsuccessful." Aside from those few who belonged to Masonic or similar organizations, impoverished American prospectors could expect no aid in leaving northern Canada. "Those who call on me think it very hard when I tell them that I have no authority to send them to the States," he wrote. He described some of those he saw as being in a "pitiable condition," and seemed genuinely moved by their predicament. McCook asked if some provisions might be sent before the start of winter, so that the destitute could apply for aid, but by the time his message reached its destination, it would have been too late for the U.S. government to offer assistance before the cold set in. Considering the possibility that scores of Americans might be stranded in Canada without sufficient food after the close of navigation, he commented, "This state of affairs may never occur again in a Foreign Country." His pleas for help for the destitute, however, were to no avail.

The provision of general welfare to U.S. citizens in Dawson was not without precedent. During the winter of 1897-1898, a United States military relief expedition entered the Yukon to take supplies to stranded Americans. The $200,000 effort sparked a flurry of communications between British Ambassador Sir Julian Pauncefote and Secretaries of State John Sherman and William R. Day. Although a Congressional
appropriation provided for the expedition on December 18, 1897, the British did not offer final consent to the mission until late February, and only on the condition that American soldiers entering Canada “shall not be under arms, and that arms and munitions of war shall go through Canadian territory as baggage.” Despite the diplomatic wrangling, the expedition proved more symbolic than practical, and included Reverend Sheldon Jackson’s infamous failed experiment to import Scandinavian reindeer as pack animals. By the following summer, the U.S. military was occupied elsewhere, and the State Department was not in the business of providing relief. But when McCook addressed the subject of the destitute masses in his despatches, the State Department would often forward them to the War Department.

The number of impoverished people in Dawson City was not surprising given the staggering costs of living. Rent of $200 to $300 per month, the consul reported, would not be considered exorbitant. The prices of provisions were 25 percent higher than they had been the previous year. “Everything is entirely out of Proportion,” he wrote, before reiterating his warning: “No one on the Outside can realize it. No one should come here without a couple thousand dollars in pocket and two years supplies.” A hastily scribbled note at the bottom of an August 4th despatch read: “Output of gold exaggerated five fold.” In the first of several lengthy reports McCook sent to the department regarding general conditions in the Klondike, he described Dawson City as “the largest mining camp probably in the history of America,” an unusual pronouncement considering his position. It was “High in latitude, but infinitely more in the price of everything for what you get.” He complained that suitable lots for businesses on First Avenue could not be purchased for less than $40,000 to $50,000, while those on Second Avenue, “which is but a bog,” sold between $5,000 and $10,000, saying, “Theatres, dance halls, saloons & gambling houses are about the only ones that can afford this.” Other businesses rented office space in hundreds of small
cabins on the river front, while restaurants were in wooden shanties and tents. Average residents of Dawson did not live in the high-priced center of town. He described the “population” as living “in log cabins and tents strung out for miles.”

The cost of goods and services were no less inflated than property prices. McCook wrote that breakfast and lunch cost $1.50, while dinner sold for $2.50. But, “Lunch was $5.00 last winter and [I] suppose it will be as high in a Couple Months.” Lodging in a bunk cost $1.50 per night, while “a better Hotel Charges $6.50 for a bed per night.” Contemporary accounts related similarly high prices. Tappan Adney, a correspondent for Harper's Illustrated Weekly, reported several examples in Dawson during the winter and summer of 1897-1898. Among these, Adney noted that watermelons sold for $25 apiece, oranges for up to $1.50, and apples for as much as $1.00. Champagne could be purchased for between $20 and $40 per pint. Lars Gunderson, head of the Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company, reported summer prices of $3.00 per dozen eggs or pound of tobacco, $.50 for a glass of whiskey or a cigar, $.40 for a pound of sugar, and $.30 for a pound of beans. He confirmed McCook’s report that a meal of meat, bread and butter, beans, and coffee in a restaurant sold for $2.50. The wages Adney described were correspondingly high. Miners employed on working claims received up to $1.50 an hour, skilled woodcarvers earned $17.00 for a ten-hour day, while daily wages for bartenders and faro dealers were $15 and $20 respectively. A restaurant cook received as much as $100 per week plus meals. But McCook found a large number of people who could earn no living whatsoever, writing, “There are hundreds here who cannot obtain labor at any price.”

The consul described the great irony of the Klondike Stampede, when he wrote that nearly all the creeks in the vicinity of Dawson City “were staked months ago.” He explained that some 40,000 people had come to Dawson by way of the White and Chilkoot passes, and some 20,000 were then in and around the town, but hundreds were
going away daily. Those who had come could not afford to stay long. Although he reported an estimate of the previous year’s gold output to be within a range of $8 to $12 million, the vast majority of those who had come to make their fortunes were not enjoying the fruits of the productive creeks. McCook was a businessman, and understood economies of scale. He foresaw the future of interior mining in the Yukon and Alaska when he wrote, “Organized Co’s with capital will do much better by buying claims as they can work them much more cheaply than individuals.” And he again suggested that prospects for American gold seekers were better on the “U.S. side,” where no import duty had to be paid on goods, and the Crown collected no 10% royalty on gross output.24

In Dawson City, mining matters were of secondary concern to McCook during his first two weeks. He spent much of the time urging American shippers to comply with U.S. foreign port laws requiring them to leave crew member lists and shipping articles with the local U.S. consul. Crew lists served as a record of employment, while shipping articles were essentially contracts, describing the terms of service, including compensation, to which crewmen agreed upon signing up to work on a steamer. Once the consul had a vessel’s crew list and shipping articles in hand, the seamen concerned had some protection from unlawful discharge. In his despatch of August 9th, McCook reported that most steamers arriving in Dawson did not have either type of list, and so he had begun insisting that “no crews should be shipped from St. Michaels to Dawson City before signing Articles before a Shipping Commissioner.”

His insistence was problematic, however, in light of U.S. Consular Regulations, and McCook was aware of this fact. In his letter to the department, he quoted from Appendix 2, Paragraph 1143 of the regulations, which specified that these requirements applied to “the Master of every vessel... other than vessels engaged in trade between the U.S. and British North American possessions.” Nonetheless, McCook contended that
Dawson was a port where more steamers from the U.S. would “arrive and depart during the open Season than any other Port,” and should therefore be governed by “the same rules as any other Foreign Port.” He was concerned that if captains were not required to file shipping articles at the consulate, they would ignore other requirements. Among these, no American ship was to leave a foreign port without a bill of health issued by the consul, which McCook referred to as “a Very most important matter in this Port where so much sickness prevails.” He concluded, “Kindly advise me in this matter.”

The State Department did not acknowledge the despatch until October 21st, but its reply suggested tacit approval of McCook’s actions in stating that the attention of the Deputy Collector of Customs at St. Michaels would be called to the matter. In any case, McCook continued the practice of demanding that ships’ masters produce shipping articles and crew lists.

In his zeal to bring American justice to the Yukon and the Dawson shipping business into line, McCook felt somewhat constrained by the limitations of his consular function. Frustrated by the fact that criminals in the Yukon could so easily escape to Alaska, he went so far as to ask the State Department if it were “advisable that I should be clothed with Authority say as a Commissioner to sign warrants when properly produced to have the criminal brought back here and stand his trial.” Thomas Cridler, offering a brief lesson in international law, replied, “The Government of the United States cannot authorize its officers to issue process within British jurisdiction for crimes committed there,” adding, “Moreover, there are nine commissioners in various parts of Alaska who have power to issue warrants in extradition cases.”

Despite this apparent penchant to seek increased responsibilities, McCook was faced with a mounting workload. After spending only a few days in Dawson, he suggested that the department assign a consular agent to Forty Mile City, a community on the Yukon River 52 miles closer to the Alaskan boundary, where between 2000 and
3000 prospectors were expected to winter. On August 12th, he recommended one
Edward Spencer for this proposed post, describing him as a native of Seattle, who was
"well known to Senator John L. Wilson of Washington." With good reason, McCook
understood the importance of political connections. Upon receipt of the proposal in
September, the department sent word that the recommendation was being held in
abeyance. Regardless, by the end of that month Spencer had decided to remain in the
area of Dawson City rather than move to Forty Mile, so McCook sent word that his
name should be withdrawn from consideration, and he did not mention the man again.²⁸

Meanwhile, his office quarters in the Alaska Commercial Company warehouse
were becoming increasingly cramped, prompting him to write, "I am practically without
headquarters as the portion of office I had the manager of the Co. needs for transacting
private business and I have to get out." It is unclear where the consul was living in these
first weeks, as he would later occupy rooms adjoining the offices he rented for the
consulate. In fact, while still working out of the ACC building, he informed the
department that he was obliged to draw one month's salary early, because he was in
need of funds, and looking to build a cabin on account of the high price of boarding.²⁹
Space must have indeed been difficult to find, as McCook was not the only government
official working at the warehouse. Another was D.W. Davis, a Canadian customs
collector, with whom McCook would experience his first diplomatic row.

"I beg to report that I removed my office on the 13th inst. to the Rutledge
Building on Front St.," the consul began his despatch of August 15th. He went on to
describe how the abrupt move had been necessitated by an incident that occurred on the
evening of the 12th, when both he and Davis were conducting business on board the
Alaskan Exploration Company steamer Linda, which had just arrived in port. For no
obvious reason, the customs collector chose that evening to tell the consul that he would
have to remove the American flag he had raised on the ACC warehouse flagpole.
McCook explained that on the day after his arrival in Dawson City, July 27th, he had hoisted a flag, and it had remained there ever since. He contended that this was an appropriate symbol to announce the location of the consulate, and it is understandable that the Alaska Commercial Company, being an American enterprise, had no objections. However, McCook’s desk within the ACC building had been moved closer to that of Mr. Davis, and some friction may have arisen as a result. He mentioned that, “all went well until I put up a consulate Shield over the entrance or door to the place I had.” Probably in full view of the Canadian official, the placement of the shield may have seemed like a gentle affront.

In any case, D.W. Davis decided to make the flag an issue, and told the consul, “I will not stop in a building floating the Stars and Stripes. Either you or I get out.” But, according to McCook, he was willing to tolerate the situation on one condition, saying “the only way you can float the Stars and Stripes on that building is by having my flag on top.” McCook described his reaction: “I said the Stars and Stripes has floated under no flag as yet and I did not propose it should now... I kept perfectly cool, went away, removed the office papers... and rented an office about midnight.” On a page he marked “Confidential,” the consul added that Davis had been born in the United States and was known in Dawson as a “renegade American.” The incident made good newspaper material, and a small story headed “Took Old Glory Down: American Consul and His Flag Routed From an Office,” appeared in the Washington, D.C. Star in September. The State Department filed a clipping of the article with McCook’s August 15th despatch.

The story also made it onto the front page of the Klondike Nugget, a Dawson City newspaper with which McCook would later become painfully familiar. In a style uncharacteristic of the paper, the August 17th issue attempted to downplay the significance of the incident:
The *Nugget* hopes that the affair may be considered on both sides as merely a personal matter, and we publish the facts that the half-known truth may not be handed around from mouth to mouth, increasing in size and importance until it might become international at last by accretion to the original story.32

McCook included the article with his next despatch relating to the matter, sent four days later, in which he demonstrated that he understood his relative importance to the local business community: “as a Customs officer in Dawson is of far more value to the Company I was located with than is a United States Consul, so here it is Judicious to be somewhat Diplomatic.” The Crown Prosecutor, F.C. Wade, had apparently stepped in to alleviate any remaining tension by telling the consul that his coming to Dawson would “create a better feeling among Americans and Canadians,” in the presence of the customs collector. Taking McCook aside, he attributed Davis’ behavior to the fact that the man had probably had “a drop too much.” Nonetheless, McCook had been offended by the flag ultimatum, and he became ever more irritated when the collector showed no sign of offering an apology. He ended his despatch with the accusation that the North West Mounted Police made Americans in small boats fly the Union Jack over the Stars and Stripes.33

McCook had difficulty letting issues go, and he stewed over the flag controversy for some time. In an unrelated despatch dated September 24th, he briefly described the events again, adding that Davis had boasted, ‘I’ll bet you a hundred dollars I’ll have you removed.’34 After the State Department received the first two despatches describing the incident, Third Assistant Secretary Thomas Cridler wrote in his reply, “...the matter has been carefully examined and, while regretting any friction should have occurred, the Department approves your action.”35 Cridler’s acceptance of the consul’s handling of the flag incident was interesting considering the U.S. Consular Regulations which advised that the national colors be displayed on American holidays or in order to show respect for the customs, ceremonies, and festivals of the country in which a
consulate was located. With regard to flying the flag, they clearly stated that "it is not usually necessary that it should be unfurled daily." But Cridler did include this admonition with his approval: "It is not doubted that you will do everything you properly can to amicably adjust any differences that may exist between you and the officer referred to."

The note was mailed from Washington on September 13th, but did not arrive in Dawson City until six months later. In thanking the department for its approval in March 1899, McCook demonstrated his continuing indignation when he wrote: "Don’t you think that under the circumstances the least he can do would be to apologize for his uncalled for remarks...?" He sent two slightly different versions of the same despatch, suggesting that he may have reconsidered his first letter and re-written it, but mistakenly sent both. In one version, he described the incident as "very humilitating to me," adding that, "were I not holding the position I do there would have been a different end of the affair." But he assured the department that he continued to conduct business with the customs collector, and moreover, had a good relationship with Dominion authorities in general. As an example, he cited his recent appearance at a farewell meeting for the outgoing Gold Commissioner, Thomas Fawcett. It was an ironic mention given the fact that his participation in that event ignited a lengthy public battle with the publishers of the *Klondike Nugget* that marked McCook’s most troubling times in Dawson City. That experience was made worse by the tendency he displayed in the flag controversy to take affronts personally and seriously.

After the consul’s run-in with D.W. Davis, the U.S. consulate acquired its first trappings of permanence in the Rutledge Building at 226 Front Street. The new location was probably a great help to McCook, as the large number of people who wanted to see him forced him to keep office hours from nine in the morning until nine in the evening. McCook did not intend to stay in the building for more than a month, because he
believed it to be poorly constructed and unfit for winter. The two second-floor rooms he rented together cost $150 per month. An interesting note, attached to the despatch describing the new offices, read: “Here is an exceptional case. Under the law we can only allow Dawson City $600 a year [for rent].” (Regulations stipulated that a consul was allowed 20% of the amount of his salary for rent costs, while the Rutledge Building rent amounted to $1800 per year.) The note went on: “If we make him pay $1200 we will deprive him of nearly half of his salary... a chance of starvation if everything else costs proportionally,” adding, “Is not an application to the emergency fund warranted?” It offered an insight into the workings of bureaucracy in its final line: “At any rate, we ought not to dodge by filing, I think.” McCook’s State Department superiors were clearly aware of his difficulties, but no emergency funds were produced for the Dawson City consul. Instead, he received a brief instruction telling him that a limit of $600 was lawfully allowed for rent, “and you will be expected to pay the balance.”

True to his intentions, the consul moved his offices in late September to the three-story McDonald Building on Second Street, the avenue that he had earlier described as a “bog.” Sounding quite happy with his new location in the substantial log structure, McCook wrote: “The office is said to be the most comfortable quarters in Dawson and though not large is one of the best appointed.” He again rented space on the second floor, but this time secured a one-year lease at a comparatively reasonable $75 per month. The building sat next door to the Bank of British North America, and had been so recently built that it still lacked glass in its windows. It was only after he had moved into the McDonald Building that the furniture he had purchased in Seattle finally arrived in Dawson. Despite the fact that the shipment did not include any of the lamps McCook had purchased, as well as other items, he still had to pay the full $562.50 charge he had been quoted before his departure. For the office, he paid for
the installation of a wooden railing, and bought shelving, shades for the windows, and the glass to fill them.42

Barely two weeks after moving into the building, McCook was forced to evacuate himself and all of the consular belongings to safety. "On the morning of the 15th," he wrote, "we were visited with a very serious conflagration." The October fire devastated much of the business district, but the McDonald Building and the consulate inside were spared. A very relieved consul sent the department a description of the disaster from the front page of the *Klondyke Miner and Yukon Advertiser*, which began with the headline: "Terrific Calamity: One Fourth of Dawson's Businesses and Business Houses Swallowed by Fire." The newspaper attributed a fortunate shift in the wind to the fact that the rest of the town had not been engulfed. But good fortune only lasted so long in the case of the consulate.

Six months later, on April 27, 1899, McCook reported that the McDonald Building had been completely destroyed, with "not a log left," by an enormous fire that had swept through Dawson City the previous evening. "The great fire of last October," he wrote, "was nothing in comparison to this." He recounted the details of the community's efforts to stop the inferno, including the pulling down of buildings in the path between the fire and the warehouses of the Alaska Commercial Company and the North American Transportation and Trading Company. The townspeople managed to save the warehouses, which McCook described as containing "more goods of all descriptions than the rest of Dawson combined." He heaped praise upon the police and soldiers for maintaining "complete order" throughout the crisis, and remarked that it was "very fortunate indeed that this dreadful fire did not occur in winter time."43 McCook saved all of his official papers and most of the furniture, but little else. He estimated the loss of government property to total $262.50, while his personal losses amounted to $835.25. It was a considerable blow to him, and he noted, "When I had
the honor of being appointed Consul at this post I had to come out of my own expense, and spent about $1000 in outfitting and purchasing goods which was [sic] necessary for me to have in this locality.”

At the time of his appointment, McCook may well have thought that his unofficial fees would provide him a tidy profit, but reality had proven otherwise. Thomas Cridler responded with tempered sympathy, saying, “The Department regrets that it has no appropriation at its disposal out of which it could properly make good your personal losses in the fire... your only remedy is to petition to Congress.”

After the fire, McCook put the surviving consulate furniture in storage and secured a room at the Melbourne Hotel at a rate of $125 per month. He used his one room for both home and office until later in May, when an attack of pneumonia sent him to the Red Cross Hospital for several days. On May 27th, he reported his removal of the consulate to the Green Tree Hotel on Front Street where he found two rooms for $80 per month. By June 10th, however, the tiny rooms had proven “entirely too small and inadequate to handle the business done at this Consulate,” and McCook moved once again. He rented two rooms on the second floor of the Bodega Building for $100 per month. The new home of the U.S. consulate was in the center of town, on the waterfront. Thus, in just over ten months, the consulate had moved five times between six different locations in rented rooms in Dawson City. It was a humble post indeed.

But the workload for this diplomatic outpost was substantial, and early on McCook sought help in conducting his duties. On August 25, 1898, he reported hiring his first consular clerk, Oran J. Fry, who was a 27 year-old native of Russianville, Indiana, who had worked in the grocery business. McCook sent the department a specimen of Fry’s handwriting, from which it is evident that Fry wrote the text of several later despatches that the consul signed. For the more prestigious position of Vice Consul, McCook submitted the name of Ronald Morrison in his despatch of September
3rd. Morrison had been in the mining business in Colorado, and made an attractive candidate for Vice Consul because of his familiarity with mining laws. McCook described him as “a man of excellent reputation and business ability,” and added that Morrison would be going to the United States in two weeks and would call at Washington. Two and-a-half weeks later, McCook requested that John Doherty, a bookkeeper from California, be appointed Deputy Consul, saying, “It is necessary to have both a Vice and a Deputy.” Doherty, like Morrison, was well acquainted with mining, and McCook observed that, “everyone [has] been more or less interested in mining matters.” The department must have concluded that the work in Dawson warranted the positions, as it approved the appointment of both men in their respective capacities on November 4th.

Either the lure of gold proved too much for Oran Fry, or wages were higher elsewhere, because the young clerk resigned in November to work on a mining claim 20 miles from town. McCook reported that it appeared to be impossible to hire anyone as clerk for anything like the amount allowed, so “it being absolutely necessary to have someone, I have taken the liberty of sending to Philadelphia for my son Alexander McCook.” Alexander, he noted, was over 18 years old. McCook apparently needed the help quite urgently, as he expected his son “to come in over the ice although it will cost a year’s salary to outfit and get here.” The department approved the appointment of his son on February 25, 1899, and allotted $500 for the clerk position for the remainder of the fiscal year. However, Alexander McCook did not arrive in Dawson City until late the following summer. In April, the consul hired one N.B. Forrest as a temporary clerk, expecting him to work for about one month as the younger McCook made his way to Dawson. But when Alexander finally arrived, he was stricken with typhoid fever and incapacitated, so his father was forced to employ someone else. The man he hired was named John Quincy Adams.
The steady stream of indigent Americans who came to the consulate seeking some type of relief undoubtedly made the need for office help acute. Just a month after his arrival, McCook was reporting, “I am appealed to daily by unfortunates, who cannot get work and have no money to take them out.” Even Colonel Samuel Benfield Steele, commander of the North West Mounted Police in the Yukon, sent inquiries to McCook regarding certain destitute Americans. On October 3, 1898, he sent a letter informing the consul that an American citizen named McCue was in the police barracks and was ill from heart disease. “Our surgeon informs me that he will die here of the disease if not sent out,” Steele wrote. McCook forwarded the letter to the State Department, saying, “I wish instructions when such appeals are made.” Thomas Cridler responded, writing, “only destitute American seamen can be relieved, under the law, at the expense of the Government.”

The law provided for destitute seamen because their abandonment by boat captains was not uncommon in foreign ports, and Dawson was no exception. In fact, McCook was particularly concerned with the plight of such men and expressed frustration with offending vessel masters, accusing them of treating the Yukon River like the Missouri or Mississippi. “This is a different proposition,” he wrote, “putting men ashore 4000 miles from where they engaged and where the cost of living is ten times as much as anywhere on the globe.” After receiving this despatch, Thomas Cridler passed it on to the Solicitor’s Office for suggestions, and was sent back a note beginning, “I hardly know what to advise in this case.” Although abandoning seamen was punishable by a fine of up to $500 and six months imprisonment, the difficulty in prosecuting captains for the crime lay in the fact that victims had to present their cases before an appropriate District Attorney in the United States. The State Department could do little more than instruct McCook to do all he could to prevent the unlawful discharge of men and to collect evidence against offenders.
As winter approached, the consul became increasingly apprehensive about the fate of abandoned seamen after the close of navigation, writing, “I hardly know what to do. They will come for assistance. This is an unprecedented Port.” He asserted that there was probably no port in the world with the amount of shipping experienced at Dawson City. Although the problem persisted, seamen did not pre-occupy the consul that winter, and he recorded only a few examples of his having to send men out at government expense. In one case the following June, he arranged for six “completely destitute” seamen, four of whom were patients in the hospital, to get to St. Michael. But the countless indigent persons who were not eligible for government aid were a constant concern to McCook, even if they were not in the general vicinity of Dawson. In the spring of 1899, a prospector who had wintered in Eagle City, Alaska, brought the consul news of Sydney K. Smith, a Missourian, who, having lost all of his fingers to freezing, suffered from scurvy in the Alaska Commercial Company station in Eagle. McCook asked the ACC agent in Dawson to instruct his counterpart in Eagle to provide the man with provisions, and reported this to Washington. His despatch was forwarded to the Governor of Missouri, but, interestingly, Senator William Lindsey of Kentucky later asked the State Department to make every effort for Smith’s relief. This plea was passed on to McCook, with the reminder that no government funds were available for the man’s aid. Nonetheless, McCook transmitted to the State Department a $45 bill from the ACC for items provided to Smith, perhaps hoping that the Senator’s influence would have changed the standard policy. The reply he received stated bluntly: “The bill was incurred by you and the Department sees nothing for you to do but pay it.” He tried for over a year to persuade the department to pay the A.C. Company invoice, but his efforts were in vain.

McCook’s sincere feelings toward the least fortunate members of the Dawson City community were demonstrated in his participation in the Citizens’ Relief
Committee, which operated from December through February, until local authorities assumed its functions. But in the depth of winter in 1898-1899, the Yukon government had no funds to aid the ill and impoverished, and, with respect to the government in Ottawa, McCook wrote, “We hardly hope for assistance from that source in time or in amounts large enough to meet the necessity.” The committee met once a week at the U.S. consulate, which McCook for no obvious reason called, “the most appropriate place to discuss the situation.” Each afternoon from one o’clock to four o’clock, a member of the committee came to the consulate to take applications for hospital care. The hospital bills of persons taken into the committee’s charge were guaranteed, and applicants were accepted regardless of nationality. In reporting this to the department, McCook noted that, “Scurvy is increasing to an alarming extent,” and expressed doubt that donated funds would bear the full burden of the sick. He forwarded to Washington a letter from T.H. McGill, an Ensign of the Salvation Army, attesting to the alarming conditions in Dawson, as well as a letter from Reverend William Judge, the Superintendent of St. Mary’s Hospital, stating that the institution had admitted 829 patients through the end of 1898, and was in debt over $60,000. The State Department, with nothing to offer other than sympathy, gave a subsequent January 31st despatch on the work of the committee to the press.

With respect to his official duties, the consul reported early success in enforcing U.S. shipping regulations and ensuring the rights of shipping company employees. In one rambling despatch in late September, he wrote:

> The Co’s here now know that the man who works on a vessel is now protected, that he gets his wages paid to him and the captains who say ‘to Halifax with the Law’ have to come to me and do the square thing.

But violations of the law continued, and McCook later reported two incidents that had taken place in September. Six or seven crewmen of the steamer John Cudahy had been
paid off in Dawson without his knowledge, an act which was strictly forbidden, and just two days before he had written his triumphant statement about the protection of seamen’s rights, the steamer Sarah unloaded cargo all night and departed leaving part of the crew on shore. In the latter instance, the shipping company settled the matter to McCook’s satisfaction, but he was upset that it had occurred. In his view, he gave captains a good deal of leeway, but many persisted in doing “just as they please.”

The following summer there was little improvement in the situation and similar incidents took place that he duly reported to Washington and officials in Alaska, as well as to the companies involved. It seemed evident that much of the fault lay with the lack of supervision at St. Michael, and McCook felt frustrated that legal proceedings were either not put in motion or had no effect on owners and masters. In September 1899, he described the difficulty in bringing American shippers into compliance with consular regulations in his peculiar diction: “Owners and Masters of American vessels need not fear to violate the shipping laws of the United States as far as they concern navigation on the Yukon River.” A year earlier, he had alleged that the shipping commissioner at St. Michael was an employee of one the companies.

Early in the summer of 1899, he took note of an instance in which the crew of the steamer Robert Kerr had become insubordinate after the ship had gone aground for the winter the previous September. The purser doubled the crewmen’s wages to keep them from deserting and the men were then demanding this extra pay even though the agreement was illegal. Occasionally, the captain of a tramp steamer short of manpower would hire destitute men along the Yukon if they would agree to work for room and board only. On arrival at Dawson, these men would often demand back wages. After reporting these examples of greed on the part of seamen, McCook expressed himself forcefully and bitterly: “The ingratitude of men and the selfishness of the individual is
exhibited in no place under the sun more than in Dawson, it is get all you can, anyway you can.”

McCook chose not to become involved in the legal proceedings that grew out of an incident involving the steamer Yukoner. On July 25, 1899, he reported to Washington about a lawsuit that had originated in a supposed mutiny. The Yukoner was a British-registered steamboat with an essentially American crew and passengers. The previous winter, the vessel had been iced in on a tributary of the Yukon in Alaska, and the deteriorating relationships between the unreasonable captain and the others on board led to his leaving the ship, coming to Dawson on another, and then filing suit against his former crew for mutiny. When the Yukoner docked in Dawson on June 24th, the North West Mounted Police promptly arrested six of the accused mutineers. Canadian authorities had the authority to make the arrests, because, although the alleged crime took place in Alaska, the vessel was under British registry. The Mounties marched the men to jail and confined those remaining aboard ship. The defendants’ attorneys and the presiding judge consulted the consul, but evidently he made no effort to get the men released from prison because he believed that it was strictly a matter of Canadian jurisdiction.

The mutiny charge was dropped because of Colonel Steele’s contention that the men had not signed shipping articles and therefore did not constitute a legal crew. However, they were then held on piracy charges, since one did not have to be a crewmember to qualify as a pirate. The purser of the steamer, one of the defendants, wrote to explain the situation to his former schoolmate, Canadian Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier. He also wrote to President William McKinley to complain about the U.S. consul’s inactivity in the matter. Walter R. Curtin, a young man on board the Yukoner, recorded these details in his published diary, commenting, “The American Consul, J.C. McCook, does not seem to know how to act in this matter.” According to
Curtin, the purser wrote to the President that “our distinguished Consul, McCook, was dancing his heels off at the Monte Carlo while American citizens were unjustly languishing in a British jail.” The consul probably made the correct decision in allowing the matter to take its course, and the reference to his dancing no doubt came from the pages of the Klondike Nugget, which had been highly critical of McCook from April through the first week of June. The defendants were released from jail on nominal bond after sixteen days and did not appear in court again. Curtin assumed that “instructions” from Ottawa to the Queen’s Counsel were the deciding factor.

As in consulates elsewhere, the Dawson office received many pleas for assistance from Americans who needed information, legal advice, or who were in trouble with local authorities. The NWMP kept a tight check on the activities of the Dawson populace, but such strict adherence to a law and order standard was bound to lead to some violations of personal liberty. In April 1899, McCook noted that he was sent for almost daily by American citizens who were in jail convicted under a Vagrancy Act that allowed for the arrest of men with no visible means of support. Early the next month, he enclosed with a despatch to Washington records and correspondence concerning the case of “Chicago Ed” Posey, a Black American whom McCook felt had been unjustly sentenced to six months of hard labor. From March on, the consul had devoted much time and effort to obtaining a release for Posey, eventually pledging that he would personally be responsible to see that “he would not be a charge on the community.” His endeavors failed, but the exchange of notes between McCook and Colonel Steele revealed the philosophy of crime prevention that motivated the North West Mounted Police.

On March 18th, after learning that Posey had been denied the right to secure witnesses to prove his good character and work experience in Dawson, McCook wrote to Colonel Steele in protest. Ten days later, he wrote again, noting Posey’s willingness...
to work and the unfairness of some being convicted under a vagrancy law in a town where hundreds were without work and loitering in saloons. By April 1st, the consul had made inquiries into Posey’s work experience, acknowledging that the man had foolishly gambled away his earnings, as had many others. He also stated that he knew several witnesses who would testify on Posey’s behalf and that he personally had paid the prisoner’s $4.00 liquor bill at one of the saloons. That same day, Steele answered that Posey’s police record in Chicago showed that he had been a door to door peddler who scouted the interiors of homes and gave the house plans to a gang of thieves, a fact that Posey denied to McCook. In Steele’s letter of April 24th, he went from the specific to the general in his final word on the case, noting the lawlessness of Skagway and the criminal element that poured into Dawson City:

As I stated before there is a large criminal class here preying not only on Canadians but upon U.S. citizens and it is our duty to prevent them from committing crime... If they do not like the country and will not work, they can go elsewhere.80

On the previous day, the consul received from Posey a poorly written letter that showed the man’s lack of education. He asked for justice, saying that he knew no one in Dawson who would say he had ever betrayed anyone’s trust. But Steele did not budge. When McCook was convinced that the police had made an error or had violated a person’s rights, he was seemingly always ready to take an active role in seeking redress. He was as well aware of the inequities in the law enforcement policies of Dawson City as any other American.

Another case in which the consul took an active part transpired the following August. On the 11th, McCook learned that on the evening before a policeman had gone on board an American ship, the Seattle No. 3, and arrested a crewman without a warrant for a fight that had taken place in the engine room. The seaman was kept in jail overnight. McCook promptly sent Steele a letter that was, in effect, a directive on
international law. If a complaint about an incident on a foreign ship existed, it was customary for local authorities to inform the consul representing the vessel’s home country. The consul would then seek the aid of those authorities in imprisoning the offender if the matter were serious. McCook argued that no crime had been committed in the Yukon Territory, only a “trivial matter” on board an American ship. That same day, the other participant in the scuffle was arrested on the ship and taken before Steele. The police issued fireman P.M. Rivand, who had been in jail all night, a fine of $20.00 and costs for disturbing the peace. His shipmate, Thomas Triton, received a fine of $10.00 and costs in lieu of one month in jail. Rivand complained to McCook that the incident had only been a quarrel.

Writing to Colonel Steele again, McCook protested that only discipline on the ship had been affected, and that the master had ample authority to handle the situation. He claimed that his argument was in keeping with diplomatic tradition, for although a ship is under the law of the port where it is docked, “it was found long ago that it would be beneficial to commerce if the local government would abstain from interfering with the internal discipline of the ship.” So read the U.S. Consular Regulations. Steele was not the type to back down. He replied that he had consulted with his legal advisor and that the offense did indeed affect the peace of the country and the tranquility of the port, and that it was punishable by the Criminal Code in effect. “This case is as much in our jurisdiction as if the case was murder,” he wrote to the consul. McCook sent him a third letter that day answering that the policeman had exceeded his authority in going aboard a foreign vessel, that the ship had discharged its cargo and was ready to clear and hence had been detained unnecessarily, and that the tranquility of the port had not been affected.

McCook continued to pursue the matter, receiving a letter on August 14th from J.A. Aikman, the law partner of the Crown Prosecutor, F.C. Wade. The attorney used
the term “assault” to describe the incident in question and contended that under the same standard that allowed a local policeman to arrest a murderer on board a foreign vessel, there also existed the authority to arrest someone for assault. McCook issued yet another reply, arguing that the “quarrel” had occurred in the engine room, “away from any interference by outsiders,” and that he had reported the incident to Washington, including information about the ship’s being detained. Perhaps McCook would have argued the point less vigorously had he received the Third Assistant Secretary’s missive on the subject a bit sooner. On September 7th, Thomas Cridler wrote acknowledging the custom of local authorities to yield discretion to consuls, but added, “it cannot be said that this practice is uniform, nor so well established as to warrant the assumption that it is in pursuance of an understanding arrived at between the two governments.” He concluded, therefore, that the vessel and its crew were within local jurisdiction and did not consider “this government to be in a position to object to the action of the British authorities in this case.”

Despite his personal battles over jurisdiction with the Canadian authorities, McCook was consistent in his expressions of admiration for the North West Mounted Police. In his first few weeks in Dawson he passed on to the department the report of an Englishman who compared the Yukon to Botany Bay, saying, “The way things have been run here [the] past twelve months was a disgrace to Civilization,” and was under the early impression that the town was run by “saloon keepers and fast women.” But even then, he expressed confidence in the new Yukon Commissioner, William Ogilvie, who was “adjusting matters so that many evils existing will be done away with.” The Mounties took an active role in maintaining mail service to Dawson, even when U.S. mail contractors were doing a less than satisfactory job. Grateful for this effort, McCook reported in March 1899 that “The mail service going out all winter has been excellent thanks to Colonel S.B. Steele of the North West Mounted Police and the
excellent force under him. In May of that year, he sent one of his long reports to the department on the general conditions in the Klondike. In it, he offered high praise for the rule of law and its fair enforcement:

...and yet with all the temptations, all the drinking, all the gambling, everyone is held in subjection, and law and order prevails. The terror of sawing wood for the government when you are once caught doing wrong, and the knowledge that no political influence can get you off, and that all, rich or poor, are treated alike, has a considerable influence in preventing crime. Thanks to the law being enforced here we have a comparatively quiet and safe city and one can walk through the streets at any hour without fear of molestation.

His accolades were not reserved for the police. He went on to commend the City Health Officer for maintaining good sanitary conditions and the government for its expenditure of $13,000 to pay for the construction of drainage ditches in its fight against the spread of typhoid fever through stagnant water.

Dealing with the authorities, McCook sometimes met success in his efforts on behalf of beleaguered American citizens. In July 1899, he reported on an alleged kidnapping that had taken place in Alaska. Two men had forcibly taken Powell Hausler, a man working for the same company, in a conflict over money matters. On board the unhappy Yukoner, where the supposed mutiny either did or did not occur, Hausler’s captors handcuffed him until the ship crossed the Canadian boundary. There, a NWMP constable arrested him, and he was held in jail on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses. McCook took statements from Hausler and witnesses on the Yukoner, investigated the defendant’s immediate history, and presented his information to Commissioner William Ogilvie. Unsatisfied that local authorities had jurisdiction in the matter, the Commissioner told McCook to refer the case to the Minister of Justice in Ottawa. He may have been transferring responsibility, but the gesture demonstrated a certain respect for the consul’s efforts to ensure justice. McCook did not relate the final outcome, but Hausler was released on bail. In another instance, McCook was able to
secure the release of an individual convicted of stealing wood and sentenced to the usual six months of hard labor. Working through Colonel Steele, he produced evidence to show the man’s innocence.93

The responsibilities of American consuls also included the disposition of the estates of deceased U.S. citizens.94 However, there was no treaty in effect between the United States and Great Britain addressing this issue, and by local law the Public Administrator in Dawson City did this work. McCook was often not notified when Americans died, and problems developed because he would not always be fully knowledgeable of the pertinent facts when corresponding with relatives of the deceased in the U.S.

In matters relating to larger issues between the United States and Great Britain, the consul in Dawson City played little part, even as the question of the unsettled Southeastern Alaskan boundary persisted. On January 19, 1900, the department sent McCook a copy of the modus vivendi establishing the provisional boundary, but in his first year in the Yukon, the only boundary with which McCook dealt was the long-settled line following the 141st meridian. On February 26, 1899, McCook reported to the department that Carl Waisner95, a Finnish prospector in the area of the McQuesten River, had approached him with news of the discovery of certain Russian boundary markers well to the east of the recognized boundary. Waisner’s companions had informed him of their finding stone monuments on the tops of hills, and, as McCook explained, “Said stones had Russian letters or marks on [them] and were placed similar to those used in Russia and Finland to make boundarylines.” The “Finlander” offered to point the markers out to McCook, but the consul asked instead that the discoverers come to the consulate to make a statement. McCook remained skeptical, writing, “There have been one or two hoaxes this winter; this may be another, but I think not.” He added that a local newspaper had gotten word of Waisner’s visit with him, and included
a clipping of an article headlined: “Strange Hieroglyphics on Mounds.” If the Finlanders were correct in their assessment of the monuments’ purpose, the article concluded, then “the Klondike is in Alaska.”

A few days later, McCook sent the department word of a second discovery of boundary markers near Fort Selkirk, “in exact line being due south of those at McQuestion [sic] River.” He included a March 7th article clipped from the Yukon Sun, which described the second discovery as having been made by different men than those who reported the first. The Sun took a much more cautious approach to the findings than had the other newspaper, saying the discovery, “...which while having no actual weight as regards the fixedness of the line from Mount St. Elias north to the Arctic ocean... may be of great interest to students of history.” But Second Assistant Secretary of State Alvey A. Adee showed some interest in the reports and sent an internal memo dated April 7th to a Mr. Kasson. This was probably John A. Kasson, the onetime Iowa Congressman and former Minister to Germany who served as a member of the 1898 United States and British Joint High Commission established to adjust differences with Canada. Adee’s note read:

This will interest you. Fort Selkirk is very nearly on the 137th meridian, the north-and-south line first contemplated by Russia in the negotiations of 1823-24, but afterwards abandoned for the 141st meridian as a concession in favor of Great Britain.

The cordial reply Adee received from Kasson revealed the more pressing interests of the department: “Would it not be wise to invite the special attention of the Russian Examiner to any mention found in their records of the Lynn Canal, or its border land? That is the center of our... contest.” McCook only mentioned the monuments in one more communication to Washington, on June 3rd, when he reported that, having no funds to investigate or photograph the markers, he could offer no new information on the subject.
His funds were always short, and McCook sent several despatches on the subject of his high rent, prompting the department to reply with no less than five instructions specifying that his rent allowance could not be increased above the $600 limit. On April 6, 1899, McCook went so far as to ask for an increase in his salary, saying, “One can live better on $20 per week anywhere in the States or anywhere else in Canada or Europe than he can here on $100 per week.” He stressed the hardships of his post: “this is outside of the deprivation of living comforts and the dread and risk of sickness.” And he emphasized the size of his work load: “I know that the official returns are small, but the responsibilities and the general work done at this office are as much as any other post in the gift of the President.” He was probably not surprised to hear from Thomas Cridler that Congress had not increased the salary of his office, but he was given a glimmer of hope in the line: “The subject of an increase in your salary will be given consideration in the next estimates to be submitted to Congress.”

Despite his money troubles, James McCook did not appear unhappy with his life in Dawson City. He seemed to take quite well to the subarctic winters, informing the department at the end of March 1899 that “For six months of the year, October to March, no one could ask for a healthier place to live.” Days later, the New York Times printed a portion of McCook’s February 11th report on conditions in Dawson. (The State Department had circulated that particular despatch among the consular reports that it regularly released to the public.) The excerpt appeared under the headline: “Dawson City in Winter: United States Consul McCook Says It Is Preferable to Summer.” He reported that the lowest temperatures of the winter had occurred in November, when the thermometer dropped to between forty and fifty degrees below zero, but even the coldest weather was “nothing to be dreaded when one is warmly clad.” By Yukon standards, the weather had been mild, reducing the price of wood to $15 per cord, when a cord had cost $60 the previous winter. The article appeared on
page four, reflecting the diminishing importance of the gold rush among other events in the outside world. On the front page, the two leading articles dealt with Emilio Aguinaldo’s army in the Philippines and the German political maneuverings in Samoa.\textsuperscript{103} Interestingly, his despatch in praise of the weather was written just eleven days after the consul informed Washington that he had fallen into a snow bank and badly frozen his hand, causing him to fear that he might lose the tip of his little finger. He had his next three despatches written for him, and received a kind note of concern from the department.\textsuperscript{104} But apparently the accident was not enough to dampen his warm feelings for the cold.

Little is known of McCook’s personal life, but some incidents and statements hint at what he was like. The summer of 1898 with all its activity saw the arrival of two society matrons who came to see what Dawson was all about. Mrs. Mary Hitchcock was the widow of a Navy Commander and her companion, Miss Edith Van Buren, was the grand niece of the former President and daughter of a General Van Buren who had been Consul General to Japan in the 1880s. Probably in their forties and extremely wealthy, they arrived on July 27th from St. Michael with two Great Danes, two dozen pigeons, two canaries, and one parrot. They set up housekeeping in West Dawson, across the Yukon River, in a huge tent that measured forty feet by seventy.\textsuperscript{105} The \textit{Klondike Nugget} printed the news of their arrival, noting that “they travel for pleasure, and are simply ‘doing’ the Klondike country as they have done many other famous points of interest in Europe and America.”\textsuperscript{106}

The women soon paid a visit to the consulate on business and McCook opened a bottle of “sherry” which they had to drink from tin cups. Mrs. Hitchcock became suspicious of the drink when he offered water with it, but she tasted it, decided it was old Bourbon, and “politely but firmly declined.”\textsuperscript{107} The consul must have made a good impression, however, for the \textit{Nugget} of August 7th reported that the ladies had given a
select dinner in McCook’s honor. The menu included mock-turtle soup, roast moose and potato balls, asparagus salad with French dressing, peach ice cream, and French drip coffee. After dinner, everyone listened to reports of the war with Spain and cheered so loudly in adoration of “Old Glory” that the neighborhood became alarmed. There may have been refreshments on the menu that the paper did not mention. The next Sunday, McCook called again. They enjoyed ice cream, cake, coffee and wine with a group that had assembled. Three days later, the two matrons dropped by the consulate to leave some mail on the way to a theater performance and McCook decided to join them. He spoke of the flag incident and his grievance against the Canadian customs official, and Mrs. Hitchcock noted that paperboys were using that item to sell their papers. The two adventurous tourists departed at summer’s end and no doubt McCook was sorry to see them go.

An indication of his status in the community was his election as a “patron” of the celebration of the Queen’s birthday held on May 24, 1899. The other three men distinguished with that honor were members of the Yukon Council: Commissioner William Ogilvie, Colonel Sam Steele, and Judge Calixte Dugas. Unfortunately, McCook was in the hospital recovering from a bout with pneumonia when the affair took place. There is no record that the consul frequented public amusement places on a regular basis, but he did play cards in the evenings as a member of the Dawson Club. He had strong feelings against the gambling halls because of the way miners and others lost their hard-earned money inside them. In May 1899, he wrote that as many as one thousand people in Dawson lived off the miners in occupations associated with gambling. He called it a greater tax than the Canadian government’s royalty on the mines.

On April 7, 1899, after McCook had made it through his first winter in the Klondike, he requested a two-month leave of absence to take effect in the latter part of
September. He planned to attend the October meeting of the National Exposition of American Manufacturers to be held in his home city of Philadelphia. The department granted the leave on May 12th. In July, after receiving confirmation of his request, he wrote that the American commercial companies in Dawson had elected him as a delegate to the convention and asked for permission to so act. The department, however, withheld its consent to this second request, pending further review. Thomas Cridler, in his response, wrote that several consuls had received similar invitations, but “the usefulness of the Consul might be seriously impaired by allowing such liberty of action upon his part.” The decision was of no real consequence, however, as McCook’s travel plans were delayed, and he missed the convention for which he had so long planned.

The consul’s plans to return to Philadelphia in September were foiled by the late arrival and subsequent hospitalization of his typhoid-stricken son, Alexander, as well as the unfolding murder trial of Arthur Goddard. The accused was suspected of killing a man named Prater, a printer for the Klondike Nugget, who had lived in the same cabin as his alleged killer. As McCook explained it, Goddard had crushed Prater’s skull with a hatchet and afterwards cut his throat with a razor. The consul did not appear to doubt Goddard’s guilt, but he did suspect a motive, saying, “it is supposed by many that he got worried and excited over the Nugget attacks.” Because McCook was often the subject of these attacks, his reasoning is somewhat suspect in this case. But whatever Goddard’s motives, he must have had powerful friends, because on June 19th, the State Department sent McCook a telegram via Seattle. Reports of the May murder had reached Washington, and the department asked McCook to secure time for Goddard’s parents to render evidence of his insanity.

Washington sent six communications to the Dawson consulate regarding the Goddard case, and McCook sent early word that he believed the accused suffered from
an "unbalanced mind not feigned."\textsuperscript{117} The influence of John J. Jenkins, a United States Representative from Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, was evident in the State Department instructions. After McCook offered to delay his vacation in order to sit through the trial, Jenkins expressed his approval of this idea, and the department asked McCook to wait. Arthur Goddard’s father, Harry, arrived in Dawson City at the beginning of September, and the jury ruled that he was unfit to stand trial for reasons of insanity on the 18th of that month.\textsuperscript{118} McCook left for Philadelphia immediately thereafter, and Vice Consul Ronald Morrison handled all communication with Washington for several weeks thereafter.

McCook’s departure was significant in its timing in that Dawson had passed its peak as a population center. The Spanish-American War had eclipsed the Klondike gold rush as a centerpiece in the headlines before McCook had even arrived in Dawson City, but another event was beginning to displace Dawson as the destination of choice for fortune-seekers in the far north. The consul had been insisting upon the potential wealth of Alaskan gold since his stay in St. Michael in July 1898. Over fifteen months, he sent numerous inquiries about Alaska to the State Department, including questions on the rights of aliens and women to stake claims. With respect to aliens, unlike the Yukon, Alaska was not open to claims held by foreign citizens. With respect to women, Thomas Cridler wrote, “I have to say that female citizens of the United States have the same rights in this matter as male citizens.”\textsuperscript{119} But on occasion, McCook would have information on Alaska to offer the State Department, such as in September 1898, when he told Washington that, in Alaska, “The prohibition of liquors is but a mere farce.” That despatch was forwarded to both the Treasury and Interior Departments “for confidential information.”\textsuperscript{120}

On June 20, 1899, McCook could report triumphantly that the discoveries of gold on the beaches of Cape Nome “have been fully confirmed,” adding, “This also
bears out my predictions that from Alaska's territory more gold will be taken out than will ever come from this territory." The fact that his confidence proved to be foresight spelled the end of the teeming Klondike city at the zenith of its history, where he had spent his last year. He wrote, "A great number of people are stampeding to the new gold fields at Cape Nome, all the boats sailing from here [are] taking away all they can carry to St. Michaels." He left a quieter town than what he had found upon his arrival, and upon his return it would be quieter still. But Dawson had taken its toll on Consul McCook, largely because of the stinging pen of the publisher of the Klondike Nugget.
1 Alvey A. Adee, Second Assistant Secretary of State to James C. McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 2, April 9, 1898, in U.S. Department of State, Consular Instructions, 1800-1906, Record Group 59, Volumes 161-182, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
2 McCook to William R. Day, Assistant Secretary of State, Philadelphia, Despatch No. 1, April 14, 1898, in U.S. Department of State, Despatches from United States Consuls in Dawson City, Canada, 1898-1906, Record Group 59, Microfilm T-560, National Archives and Records Administration Pacific Alaska Branch, Anchorage, AK. Hereafter, all communications from the consul will be listed by despatch number (unless unnumbered), by origin, and by date.
3 Instruction No. 5, May 17th, 1898, Consular Register: From the Department to Dawson City, in U.S. Department of State, Registers of Correspondence of the Department of State, 1870-1906, Record Group 59, Ml17, Rolls 41-44, 54, and 69, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.
4 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 27, September 20, 1898.
5 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 132, March 12, 1900.
7 McCook to Moore, Seattle, Despatch No. 3, June 10, 1898.
8 McCook to Moore, Dutch Harbor, Despatch No. 4, June 19, 1898.
9 McCook to Moore, St. Michaels, Unnumbered communication. July 1, 1898.
11 McCook to Moore, St. Michaels, Despatch No. 5, July 8, 1898.
12 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 6, July 29, 1898.
13 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 7, August 2, 1898.
16 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 8, undated. (for example)
17 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Unnumbered despatch, August 4, 1898.
18 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 8, undated. Received by the Department September 12, 1898.
19 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 8, undated.
21 Carl L. Locke, Klondike Saga (Minneapolis, 1965), 95.
22 Adney, 467-468.
23 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 8, undated.
24 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 8, undated.
25 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 11, August 9, 1898.
26 Instruction No. 18, October 21, 1898, Consular Register.
27 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 21, August 31, 1898; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 10, September 30, 1898.
28 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatches No. 9, undated, and No. 12, August 12, 1898; Instruction No. 9, September 9, 1898, Consular Register.
29 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 10, August 6, 1898.
30 McCook mentioned in Despatch No. 13 (August 15, 1898) that the "U.S. flag floated there before my arrival," but he contradicted this statement in an unnumbered despatch of November 1, 1898, when...
he stated: “No flag was on the flag pole of the warehouse when I arrived... I asked if they had none to fly they said not so I said put one up I'll get and so Old Glory was hoisted.”

3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 13, August 15, 1898.
3 Klondike Nugget, Dawson City, August 17, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 15, August 19, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 29, September 24, 1898.
3 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., unnumbered instruction, September 13, 1898.
3 McCook to David Jayne Hill, Assistant Secretary of State, Dawson City, Despatch No. 67, March 15, 1899. (Two versions indexed consecutively.)
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 14, August 17, 1898. The attached note was addressed to a Mr. Carr (probably Wilbur J. Carr who became Chief of the Consular Bureau in 1902) and signed with the initials “S.H.M.”
3 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 26, December 1, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 30, September 28, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 34, October 1, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 33, October 1, 1898.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 88, April 27, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 91, May 5, 1899.
3 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 59, July 8, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 94, May 24, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 95, May 27, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 103bis, June 23, 1899.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 19, August 25, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 24, September 3, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 27, September 20, 1898.
3 Instruction No. 20, November 4, 1898, Consular Register.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 49, December 20, 1898.
3 Unnumbered Instruction, February 25, 1899, Consular Register.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 77, April 7, 1899.
3 McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Unnumbered Despatch, August 31, 1899.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 18, August 24, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 38, October 7, 1898.
3 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 21, November 28, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 16, August 19, 1898.
3 Instruction No. 16, October 19, 1898, and No. 17, October 21, 1898, Consular Register.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 26, September 9, 1898.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 102, June 15, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 73, April 6, 1899; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 46, May 13, 1899, and No. 47, June 5, 1899, and No. 159, June 20, 1899.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No.218, April 30, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Instruction No. 159, June 20, 1900.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 52, January 1, 1899.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 29, September 24, 1898.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 43, October 19, 1898; Consular Regulations, paragraphs 205-207, pp. 77-76.
3 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 158, September 14, 1899.
3 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 43, October 19, 1898.
72 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 99, June 8, 1899.
73 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 121, July 25, 1899.
75 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 121, July 25, 1899.
76 Curtin, 252.
77 Curtin, 264.
78 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 83, April 16, 1899.
79 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 89, May 4, 1899.
80 Colonel Samuel B. Steele, NWMP. Superintendent, to McCook, Dawson City, April 24, 1899, in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 89, May 4, 1899.
81 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 129, August 11, 1899.
82 Sworn statements of P.M. Rivand and Thomas Triton, August 11, 1899, in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 129, August 11, 1899.
83 Consular Regulations, paragraph 307, p. 118.
84 Steele to McCook, Dawson City, August 11, 1899, and McCook to Steele, Dawson City, August 11, 1899, in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 129, August 11, 1899.
85 J.A. Aikman, Advocate, to McCook, Dawson City, August 14, 1899, in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 133, August 16, 1899.
86 McCook to F.C. Wade, Crown Prosecutor, and Aikman, Dawson City, August 16, 1899, in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 133, August 16, 1899.
87 Crider to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 89, September 7, 1899.
88 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 29, September 24, 1898.
89 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 69, March 31, 1899.
90 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 93, May 24, 1899.
91 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 93, May 24, 1899.
92 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 119, July 21, 1899.
93 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 127, August 8, 1899, and No. 135, August 18, 1899.
94 Consular Regulations, Article XXIII, pp. 154-161.
95 McCook identifies Waisner's first name as "Carl" in his despatch, but the newspaper clipping he includes with the despatch refers to "Charles" Waisner.
96 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 60, February 26, 1899, and attached unattributed newspaper clipping (hand dated February 18, 1899).
97 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 63, March 7, 1899, and attached correspondence.
98 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 97, June 3, 1899.
99 Crider to McCook, Instruction No. 26, December 1, 1898, No.34, March 7, 1899, No.61, July 10, 1899, No. 65, July 19, 1899, and No. 88, September 6, 1899, Consular Register.
100 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No.75, April 6, 1899.
101 Crider to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 45, May 12, 1899.
102 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 69, March 31, 1899.
103 *New York Times*, April 2, 1899, 1, 4.
104 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 56, January 31, 1899; Adee to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 36, March 7, 1899.
106 Hitchcock, 113.
107 Hitchcock, 154.
108 Hitchcock, 165-166.
109 Hitchcock, 194, 214.
110 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 94, May 24, 1899.
111 McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 112, July 7, 1899.
112 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 93, May 24, 1899.
113 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 76, April 7, 1899, No. 110bis., July 1, 1899, No. 118, July 20, 1899; Cridler to Mc Cook, Washington, D.C., Unnumbered Instruction, May 12, 1899.
114 Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 78, August 15, 1899.
115 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Unnumbered Despatch, July 11, 1899.
117 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 114, July 11, 1899.
118 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 151, September 7, 1899, and No. 162, September 18, 1899.
120 McCook to Moore, Dawson City, Despatch No. 29, September 24, 1899.
121 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 103, June 20, 1899.
Chapter 4: The Ugly American

Although the consul worked long hours as an advocate for Americans and took his official duties quite seriously, his public reputation suffered badly at the hands of a fellow countryman. Eugene C. Allen, the ambitious young editor of the *Klondike Nugget*, had rushed to Dawson from Seattle in the spring of 1898 to start the Yukon’s first newspaper. “From its inception,” historian Lea Kajati Ehrlich noted, "the Nugget concentrated on covering, or creating, controversial local issues.”¹ Self-crowned champion of the American miner, Allen vigorously criticized Canadian policies and government officials at every opportunity, making him popular among American miners and an influential voice in the community. He should have been a natural ally of the consul, but McCook accidentally found himself on Allen’s bad side in the wake of one of the *Nugget’s* most successful campaigns of personal destruction.

The Canadian government appointed Thomas Fawcett as the Yukon’s territorial Gold Commissioner in the summer of 1897. Fawcett, a surveyor by trade, arrived in Dawson City unprepared for the demands of his new position. It was the responsibility of the Commissioner, working in a one-room cabin with two assistants, to record all the mining claims filed in the Klondike region. The flood of prospectors pouring into the office made work intense, so to improve efficiency Fawcett kept his registry books closed to public inspection. Having relatively little knowledge of the claims area, he made mistakes incorrectly identifying claim locations, and, on occasion, assigned the same plot of land to two different claimants. Although historian Pierre Berton concluded that Fawcett was personally honest, there was ample opportunity for corruption in his office. Clerks could take advantage of the closed books, selling information on unclaimed land and accepting bribes from miners seeking priority in the claim line.²

The blunders and graft in the Gold Commissioner’s office were a perfect target for Eugene Allen’s *Klondike Nugget*. In July 1898, when mistakes revealing certain
information gave some claimants on Dominion Creek an early advantage over others, the newspaper used the occasion to launch an assault on the Commissioner. On July 12th, it called for his resignation. In answer to those who argued that Fawcett was doing the best he could, the *Nugget* responded, "if this is his best, then Lord help us whenever he falls short of his superlative efforts." Allen's crusade had its effect, for the Canadian government reluctantly began an investigation into the corruption charges leveled against Fawcett, and ultimately decided to dismiss him without indictment.

The former Commissioner remained in Dawson for some time after his dismissal. In March 1899, before his departure, officials honored him with a farewell banquet, where the consul's troubles with the *Nugget* began. McCook agreed to deliver a speech at the dinner party on behalf of Fawcett. Afterwards, Eugene Allen thought his remarks were all too complimentary of the man he had worked so hard to disgrace. He and McCook exchanged words on the matter the following morning, and on March 18th, Allen ran an editorial criticizing the U.S. Consul for speaking highly of a corrupt and deposed official. Perhaps if McCook had ignored the public reproach, he would have fared better, but he responded to the editorial with a letter that appeared on the front page of the next issue of the *Nugget*. Allen printed it under the headline, "Consul McCook is Petulant," and added interlinear commentary of his own. McCook diplomatically denied endorsing or condemning Fawcett, but his tone was self-righteous:

Now, sir, there is not in the records of the United States or Great Britain any one of the name McCook that ever did a dishonorable act. I am too proud of the name in American history to do anything dishonorable, such as sanctioning fraud.

Allen would not give McCook an inch, going so far as to chastise him for writing his letter on plain paper rather than consular stationary. The editor referred back to
McCook's dinner address as the consul's "first speech in Dawson — or anywhere else, so far as we know." 

A few days later, McCook sent newspaper clippings to Washington with an explanation of the situation. Assuring his superiors that he would not fall into "a similar trap" again, he expressed regret and hoped that the incident would be overlooked. Perhaps under the impression that Allen was Canadian, he called the editor a "Renegade Englishman" and accused him of being willing to abuse anyone in order to sell a paper. It was a mistake, he wrote, to have responded to the editorial instead of immediately filing a libel suit. In fact, McCook would reveal his propensity to resort to legal means soon enough.

Unfortunately, three days before sending that despatch, McCook had made his own trap much bigger by writing a second letter to the Nugget. It was a terrible misstep. A rambling epistle that began by rebuking Allen for judging his conduct, the letter wandered in several directions, going so far as to include a criticism of a Canadian postage stamp. In it, McCook boasted of knocking an Irishman down the stairs of the consulate and pontificated on the rights of American citizens. Full of mistakes in grammar and punctuation, it also displayed McCook's tendency to randomly capitalize words. On the first of April, Allen published the letter in its entirety, describing the consul in his introduction as, "the illustrious and resplendent minister plenipotentiary… deliverer of obituaries and farewells" and "writer of letters destined to live for years as models of diction and gems of literature." Allen suggested titles for the piece including, "The Wail of the Postage Stamp," and "A Feather from the Eagle’s Tail," and thanked McCook for the best laugh he had had in months.

The following week, Allen felt compelled to assure his readers that the letter had indeed been written by the man question:
The letter of Colonel McCook's published in the April 1st issue of the Nugget has been mistaken by some of our readers for an attempt at an April Fool joke on the American consul. The original, with all its eccentricities of capitals, punctuation, synthesis and syntax is on file at the office, and can be seen by friends. 

Convinced that more fun was to be had at McCook's expense, the editor ran a cartoon on the front page of the April 8th Nugget that depicted the consul wearing stars and stripes and sitting at a school desk. With a grammar book opened on his lap, he sits with tears rolling down his cheek as he learns his "First Lessons in English Composition." Apparently, the cartoon was the straw that broke the camel's back, for McCook immediately filed a $5000 suit against the Nugget on the grounds that his character had been maligned in the March 18th and 22nd editions of the paper.

But McCook had already given Allen more material than the young editor could have ever hoped for. On April 7th, the consul spent the evening at the Opera House. On his way home, someone brought him word that a ship captain named Storey was waiting to speak to him at the Phoenix, a local dance hall and saloon. A steamer whose former captain was wanted for arrest was in need of a new master, and Storey had arrived from Circle City to take over the ship. After conversing with the captain, McCook moved to the bar for a drink. Then the fun began.

The details of what happened next are uncertain, but the story printed in the Klondike Nugget of April 12th was not at all flattering to the consul. Under the headline "And He Had a Glorious Time," the article began:

Consul J.C. McCook, the American representative to the Yukon territory, constituting the buffoon of a dance hall crowd while in a state of intoxication, was a lamentable spectacle witnessed at the Phoenix on Thursday morning last.

The paper reported that McCook was pleasantly drunk when he started a fight with a young man who had made the mistake of admitting that he was a Canadian. As the scuffle persisted, McCook offered to buy drinks for anyone who claimed to be an
American. Eventually finding themselves on the floor, the combatants drew the attention of the dance hall girls, who distracted the consul from his fight. Turning his attention to "lighter things than upholding the dignity and greatness of his country," he gave one of the girls his gold watch and distributed a collection of gold nuggets among the rest. Then, he invited them to go through his pockets for anything else of value, and soon all of his pockets were turned out.

The low point of the early morning came when someone in the crowd pinned a "small symbol of the Stars and Stripes" to the seat of McCook's pants, and:

Taking hold of the bar-railing, he bent forward until his coat-tails stuck out conspicuously and then called "Kick me, Pete." This referred to the aforesaid night porter, who not wishing to disappoint the expectant throng, Pete several times planted the toe of his boot against the consul's posterior.\textsuperscript{15}

McCook apparently urged the porter on to the point where he began his kicks with a running start from across the room. When the fun was over, a pair of men helped the consul to the back door, but they left him to make his own way home. After falling in the street, he had to crawl to the consulate office building on his hands and knees. Or so the paper reported.

Eugene Allen, of course, played up the indignity of the event as well as he could. In an editorial titled, "The Eagle's Drooped Wings," he expressed utmost regret that the Nugget was forced by the magnitude of the situation to discuss a man's private life, and begged "to assure the American council [sic] that there is not the slightest personal animus in our remarks," before making the following appeal:

Consul J.C. McCook, we beseech you, by all that you hold sacred, to sever your connection with your office by a voluntary resignation before you have further trailed that glorious flag in the mire, to the sorrow of your compatriots and the derision of their foreign cousins!\textsuperscript{16}

The day after the story was printed, McCook sent a "confidential" despatch to Washington that described his version of the events. He contended that he had been
drugged and framed by the editors of the *Nugget*, whose offices were in the same building as the *Phoenix* saloon. Calling the account "entirely false," McCook went on to attack the character of Pete McDonald, the owner of the saloon, as well as that of A.F. George, the *Nugget*'s city editor. He called George an "anarchist" and accused him of being the former editor of a socialist newspaper in San Francisco. He blasted local authorities for not shutting the newspaper down and called for an investigation into George's dangerous history. A note on the cover sheet of the despatch reveals the reaction his tirade eventually received in Washington: "...the Dept. doesn't deem it expedient to make the investigation suggested." But the consul also reported that he had filed a second lawsuit, this one for criminal libel, against both Allen and George.¹⁷

The next day, McCook sent a more subdued despatch including a sworn statement from a gentleman who testified to McCook's walking home unassisted from the *Phoenix* on the infamous morning, explaining that the consul had slipped on some ice, but quickly got back to his feet.¹⁸ That afternoon, McCook sent yet another despatch that included a certification from the Dawson City Health Officer attesting to the fact that he had been examined on April 8th and was diagnosed with symptoms stemming from the influence of a "poisonous narcotic or anesthetic."¹⁹ But the public attack continued with the next issue of the *Nugget*, which featured another cartoon caricature of McCook on the front page. Beneath the words, "Is sleeping in the Klondike vale tonight," the consul was pictured lying in an open grave, while Uncle Sam sat beside him. The summons served on Eugene Allen and A.F. George in the libel suit was printed in full.²⁰ Every detail of the consul's battle with the newspaper was on display for the townspeople of Dawson City. On April 19th, a McCook cartoon made another *Nugget* front page. This time he was pictured sitting on the riverbank surrounded by garbage, "To Go Out With the Ice in the Spring."²¹
At a preliminary hearing on April 26th, a magistrate ruled that there was enough evidence in the case to justify a trial. McCook sent word to Washington that, "there is no doubt of our securing a conviction and sentence to imprisonment." In the same despatch, he requested an investigation of Eugene Allen and his brother for their association, as McCook was now apparently aware, with a Seattle newspaper known for a history of slander. He was clearly grasping at straws in defense of his badly damaged image, charging that he had been offered a chance to pay off the *Nugget* in return for silence previous to the attacks on his character.22

The jury trial of May 30th returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," exonerating the newspaper from criminal charges and dropping McCook's $5000 claim for damages.23 The June 3rd *Nugget* ran the front-page headline, "The Nugget Upheld... The Story as Published was Absolutely True," and included a complete account of the trial.24 It took the consul a week to report the outcome in his next despatch. When he did, he claimed that witnesses had perjured themselves, the jury was made up of the young and unemployed, and that it was exceedingly difficult to obtain a guilty verdict in Dawson. But McCook also offered to resign from his assignment should that be the desire of the department, though he added that he would like to stay in order to disprove the slanderous accusations leveled against him. Furthermore, he promised that he would never touch liquor again.25

Although he obviously feared losing his post, McCook never received orders to leave Dawson. The department expressed its disapproval of his involvement with the paper and his legal action, but it had more important concerns elsewhere.26 He revisited the subject of his unfortunate battle with the *Nugget* in a July despatch in which he expressed regret for having resorted to lawsuits, but his anger toward the newspaper remained.27 It had been a tumultuous spring. Just two weeks after the *Phoenix* incident, the April fire burned his office out of existence and destroyed many of his personal
belongings and provisions. It was not surprising that the consul wanted some time away. On the very day that he walked into the *Phoenix*, McCook had applied for the leave-of-absence he had hoped to take in order to attend the National Exposition of American Manufacturers. Providentially, perhaps, the court sessions were finished before the consul’s ill son Alexander finally arrived in Dawson.

Despite his earnest efforts on behalf of Americans, McCook became the victim of a newspaper campaign capitalizing on American nationalism. Eugene Allen built his reputation by attacking Canadian officials, yet the American consul received his most stinging criticism. The publisher stirred the pot of American patriotism in the Yukon by questioning McCook’s ability and integrity, consistently playing to the community’s respect for the dignity of the United States. He would have used other means to sell newspapers had his methods not proven so successful. McCook, of course, made himself an easy target by playing into Allen’s hands, but the attacks did not continue indefinitely. McCook quickly disappeared from the front page, while the work of the consulate went on. It is interesting, and perhaps telling, that historians have tended to hold to Thomas Fawcett’s honesty even when describing the gross negligence associated with his work. While few (if any) accept the *Nugget*’s accusations of fraud against the Gold Commissioner, there has been little hesitation on the part of historians to accept the same newspaper’s unflattering portrayal of Consul McCook.

2 Adney, 437-438.

3 *Klondike Nugget*, July 12, 1898.

4 Ehrlich, 13.


6 *Klondike Nugget*, March 22, 1899.

7 *Klondike Nugget*, March 22, 1899.

8 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 70, March 30, 1899.

9 *Klondike Nugget*, April 1, 1899.

10 *Klondike Nugget*, April 5, 1899.

11 *Klondike Nugget*, April 8, 1899.

12 Bankson, 306.

13 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 78, April 13, 1899.

14 *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899.

15 *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899.

16 *Klondike Nugget*, April 12, 1899.

17 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 79, April 13, 1899.

18 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 80, April 14, 1899.

19 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 82, April 14, 1899.

20 *Klondike Nugget*, April 15, 1899.

21 *Klondike Nugget*, April 19, 1899.

22 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 87, April 26, 1899.

23 Bankson, 317-318.

24 *Klondike Nugget*, June 3, 1899.

25 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 98, June 7, 1899.


27 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Undesignated Despatch, July 7, 1899.

Chapter 5: 1899-1901

By the latter half of 1899, life in Dawson City was already slowing down. "A great number of people have left for the outside to the new gold fields of Cape Nome," reported North West Mounted Police Superintendent P.C.H. Primrose, "and the numbers leaving, I think, have been in excess of those coming in."\(^1\) As the community became gradually quieter and summer turned to fall, McCook became increasingly anxious to take his first leave of absence in nearly 14 months. His fight with the *Nugget*, the subsequent court proceedings, the arrival of his typhoid-stricken son, and the murder trial of Arthur Goddard that delayed his departure must have made the season seem endless. On September 20th, he and young Alexander left Dawson on the steamer *Bonanza King*, bound for Philadelphia.\(^2\) A week later, Superintendent A. Bowen Perry took command of the Yukon police district, relieving Colonel Sam Steele, who would soon be fighting in South Africa.\(^3\) The city to which McCook returned in the spring of 1900 was not the same as the one he had found in 1898, and just as the gold rush petered out, so did the consul’s health. In just two years he would be dead. Yet in spite of his gradually weakening physical condition, and the embarrassing beating his public image had taken, McCook continued diligently conducting the business of the consulate.

His first leave proved a welcome respite from the daily responsibilities of his post, but he did not escape town before a new annoyance presented itself. Early in September, the *Nugget* reported that the Governor of Alaska Territory, John G. Brady, had appointed Dr. Willis C. Everette\(^4\) as “commissioner for Alaska, with the privilege of living in Dawson.” The position reportedly entitled Everette to sign acknowledgments, receive affidavits, and perform other functions that Dawson residents “...formerly had done by Consul McCook.” The *Nugget* added, “As a rule, however, people preferred to get along without it rather than pay the consul the exorbitant fee of
$5 which he charged." Governor Brady apparently saw no problem with his appointment of an official to serve in a foreign country. In fact, he was concerned with British encroachment into Alaska. In a speech he made to the Seattle Chamber of Commerce the previous June, Brady said that he was “vexed” and “in company with all Alaskan Americans, bitter against” Great Britain, which he contended was vigorously seeking the cession of an Alaskan port. Whether the move was intended as an act of defiance or not, his appointment of Everette went unquestioned by many Dawsonites in need of notarial services, a fact which would hit the consul in the pocket.

After reading of the governor’s action in the Dawson Daily News, McCook immediately sent word to Washington, arguing that it “will interfere with the prerogatives of this Consulate, and also tend to diminish the only source of revenue I have to assist me in defraying the extraordinary expenses of this post.” Apparently, local officials did not object to Everette’s new title, even in light of the fact that he was already a resident of Dawson at the time he received it. The Daily News simply reported that, “Dr. Everette has decided to make Dawson his headquarters and so informed [Yukon] Governor Ogilvie and the council today in an official document.”

McCook probably had little doubt that the State Department would inform the Alaska governor of his folly, but that was not its initial response. Amazingly, the venerable Second Assistant Secretary Alvey Adee replied to McCook’s protest by saying, “This appointment by the Governor is within the law and no action can be taken by the Department in the matter.”

Vice Consul Ronald Morrison, who took over the operation of the consulate upon McCook’s departure, received Alvey’s instructions in early November. Morrison had already complained to the department regarding the display of the American flag over Everette’s place of business. The note from Alvey came as a great surprise, and Morrison was confounded by the position of his superiors. In a somewhat understated
response, he called the department’s attention to the unusual nature of the appointment, writing, “I have always been under the impression, heretofore, that appointments of United States officials in Foreign countries were made by the President of the United States.” The vice consul’s straightforward observation evidently prompted officials in Washington to consider the matter further. The State Department forwarded Morrison’s despatch and McCook’s earlier complaint to the Department of the Interior. It was not until February 1900, however, that Third Assistant Secretary Thomas Cridler sent word to Dawson City that the Interior Department had instructed the governor of Alaska to “recall the commission” of Willis Everette. The note included no explanation of the earlier instruction, nor in fact any indication that there had been a change of opinion. Officials of the Consular Bureau, inundated daily by despatches from around the world, surely made an occasional mistake in their instructions to consuls. In any case, there is certainly no evidence that the initial position of the State Department indicated any disregard for Canadian sovereignty in the Yukon.

In the mean time, McCook ascertained that a deputy clerk at Sitka had made the appointment in the absence of Governor Brady and under the impression that Dawson was in Alaska. The consul wrote to Dawson City saying that the commission had been rescinded more than six weeks before the State Department did the same. McCook had corresponded personally with the U.S. District Court in Sitka, keeping himself appraised of the situation well into his leave. The court clerk, Albert E. Elliott, had informed McCook that he had cancelled Everette’s appointment on September 22nd. Two months later, the Nugget relayed the consul’s report that the commission had been voided, noting, “this is a very serious matter to a great many people” in that Everette had already done a considerable amount of business taking acknowledgements of powers of attorney. For his part, Dr. Everette insisted that the report was untrue, and refused to stop discharging his “duties.” Meanwhile, he was taking great liberties
with his illegal and revoked commission. In January, the Dawson Daily News accused him, under the front-page headline “Fraud on Its Face,” of charging customers $10 apiece for worthless cards that would supposedly help foreigners secure American citizenship in a U.S. court and, hence, allow them to stake mining claims in Alaska.15

It was not until the middle of March that Deputy Consul John Quincy Adams could report that “Mr. Everette has taken down his ‘sign’ and furled his flag.”16 The man did not give up easily, however. That month, McCook, on his way back to Dawson, received word that Everette had sent a petition to the President requesting to be retained as commissioner of deeds. In a telegram, the consul assured the department that “unimportant persons” had signed the plea.17 Whether the petition aided him or not, Everette remained a thorn in McCook’s side until the very end. In the summer of 1901, the wiley doctor informed the State Department that he was now a commissioner of deeds for the state of Texas, and that the consul was interfering with his work. The department replied that, in such case, he had authority only to legalize documents for use in Texas. He had not so limited himself, and when the Nugget received a copy of the State Department correspondence in September, it warned its readers that Everette was misrepresenting his official position, taking oaths and acknowledging documents for business in Alaska.18 By then, one might argue, Everette had proven the profitability of even the most dubious credentials.

Another Klondike character who caused the consul grief before his first leave of absence was Alice Rollins Crane, whose credentials may not have been as questionable as Everette’s, but she was certainly no less a schemer. A member of the Southern California Academy of Sciences, Crane reportedly received a commission from the Smithsonian Institution to study the Indians of Alaska.19 She arrived in the North in 1897, just in time to find her studies and ambitions thoroughly sidetracked by the Klondike fever. By July 1898 she was in Dawson City where she became part owner
and manager of a mining company as well as an aspiring popular writer. The *Phoenix* saloon incident that the *Nugget* so proudly described at the height of its attacks on the consul inspired Crane to write a play about her experiences in the Klondike, and she informed the press of her intentions. On August 5, 1899, the *Nugget* explained:

> It appears that Consul McCook occupies in the new drama a position of importance relative to that of the melancholy Dane in *Hamlet*. In fact, with McCook left out of the play, there would be a very small margin of play left. 20

The paper recounted a confrontation between the consul and the would-be playwright on Front Street, during which "The atmosphere immediately became murky, and bystanders declare that a distinct rumbling was heard under the ground."

Later that month, while Crane was on a trip to Seattle, she made sure that reporters there were also aware of her impending work. "Of the many bright women whom the fates sent into the Klondike," the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* contended, "none has had a more interesting career in the famous gold camp than Mrs. Crane." A description of her forthcoming masterpiece followed:

> She has made a study of the Klondike people, and her impressions are soon to find dramatized expression in the shape of a play, entitled "Official Life in Dawson," with Col. J.C. McCook, the American consul, as the star character.

> Mrs. Crane, by the way, bluntly says Col. McCook is a disgrace to the proud people he has the honor to represent in the most-talked-about gold camp in the world.

> She tells several stories illustrative of the debauchery she alleges, and does not mince her words in describing his character and the manner in which he is held by Canadians and Americans in Dawson. 21

Her claim to have been the only woman to witness the first execution in the Klondike, a triple hanging carried out on August 4th, also appeared in the story. 22 When McCook received news of his mention in the Seattle paper, he sent a short despatch to Washington that opened, "The enclosed explains itself." He attached two notarized sworn statements from witnesses testifying to the fact that Alice Rollins Crane was not
present at the hangings and that her dishonesty in this matter led them to believe “the whole of her statements with reference to the Yukon Territory, and to certain individuals residing there, are false and unreliable.” He included a clipping from the Dawson Sunday Gleaner, which also disputed Crane’s claim to have witnessed the hangings. That newspaper referred to her as a “grafter” whose “posing as a representative of the press and speaking for Dawson is nauseating.” McCook had apparently learned from his earlier experiences, for he did not press the matter further, even after the Nugget reprinted the P-T’s aforementioned references to him. In any event, the State Department showed no interest in the affair.

There is no evidence that “Official Life in Dawson” was ever performed, or that Crane ever wrote it. Indeed, she never fully realized her literary hopes. In 1901, she did publish Smiles and Tears from the Klondyke, but it was a book comprised of tales whose originators, including William Ogilvie, she failed to credit. Still in Dawson two years later, she married Victor Morajeski, a supposed Polish count, after he told her of a large estate he had recently inherited in the old country. (The fate of retired army colonel L.P. Crane, her husband in 1899, is unclear.) With Crane’s former business partner, William Galpin, the new couple immediately set off down the Yukon on their way to Poland, but the trip soon turned to disaster. Before they made it through Alaska, the Morajeskis and Galpin filed numerous criminal complaints against each other, ranging from assault to conspiracy. Subsequent jury trials at Russian Mission and Nome rendered verdicts of not guilty in every instance. Claiming several miscarriages of justice, the Countess Morajeski charged that Alaskan officials had abused her. She even made her case to President Roosevelt, in what historian William R. Hunt described as “a letter that ranks as a literary classic in the annals of vituperation, complaints against officials, and self-serving cries of outraged innocence.” But this did not help secure a conviction against anyone she accused. She had turned on her husband quite viciously
as well during the eventful river trip, but the pair left on a boat to Seattle in 1904, with little money and even less credibility. Perhaps it was a credit to McCook that one of his most outspoken critics proved to be such a tawdry figure herself.

Surprisingly, the Nugget’s war of words against the consul ceased completely upon his return to Dawson City on April 4, 1900. It was as if the battle smoke had cleared and old grudges were suddenly forgotten. The Allen brothers may have concluded that there was nothing more to gain from attacking McCook so vigorously. As Canadian authorities worked to further integrate the Yukon into the Dominion, and the population of the territory declined, it may have seemed increasingly nonsensical for a newspaper dependent on American readers to continually criticize the only American official in town. It is possible that the community had tired of the paper’s tendency to tear down public figures, and it may have been that the new treatment of McCook was just a reflection of a change in the Allens’ journalistic strategy. Or, the consul may have proven to be a more sympathetic figure among local residents than the publishers had expected, and their new approach was a response to this sentiment. Whatever the circumstances may have been, the Klondike Nugget announced McCook’s return without the slightest hint that it had championed his removal only nine months before.

Both the Nugget and the Dawson Daily News printed details of the consul’s activities during his absence. McCook had had a very eventful leave. He did not arrive home in Philadelphia until November, two months after leaving Dawson, because his son’s poor health had detained them for several weeks at Tagish. He was not home for long, however. Two days before Christmas, McCook sailed from New York to London and spent the next few weeks in England, Ireland, France, Italy, and Spain. His description of British attitudes regarding the Yukon, printed in the Daily News, indicated that the Klondike gold rush was being overshadowed by other events:
In London, the Boer war is the engrossing topic... I met several Dawson promoters there, but they were unable to accomplish much on account of the war... There is not so much interest manifested in London over the Klondike as I expected to find, the mines of Australia and South Africa finding more favor there than the Canadian properties.30

The eclipse of the Klondike was also apparent in Washington, where McCook had spent time both before his departure for Europe and upon his return to the United States in February. There, he had been “besieged for news regarding the Nome country.”31 Before embarking on the long journey back to his post, McCook visited Montreal and Ottawa where he met Canadian Interior Minister Clifford Sifton, with whom he discussed the possibility of a reduction in the 10 percent royalty on Yukon gold output. Evidently, the consul rode in Sifton’s private car from Ottawa to Winnipeg, and then made his way across Canada to Vancouver where he arrived in early March. He returned to the north by way of Seattle and the Inside Passage, travelling across the spring ice by dogsled.32 A few days after arriving in Dawson, McCook presented the *Nugget* with a souvenir handkerchief from Gibraltar.33 Perhaps it was a peace offering of sorts.

It was at this point that McCook began to suffer from a general decline in his health. A lung ailment had forced him to stop and rest for a week at Lake Bennett, delaying his arrival in Dawson by a week.34 Less than a month later, McCook was in the Good Samaritan hospital, although his stay there did not have an obvious effect on his work.35 Fortunately, the consulate had been in good hands during his absence. Vice Consul Ronald Morrison had proven extremely conscientious in conducting his duties and sent regular despatches to the department relating to the sale of ships, the deaths of American citizens, and seamen’s wage claims. However, Morrison had mining interests outside of Dawson, and by the end of February he was no longer in the consulate on a daily basis.36 Apparently aware that this would be the case, McCook made a hasty recommendation to the department while he was in Washington that it appoint his
consular clerk, John Quincy Adams, as deputy consul. The department agreed, and Adams took over the operation of the consulate until McCook's return. Adams received a large number of requests for notarial services as a result of the rush to Nome, and a small controversy stemmed from his signing documents as "Acting Consul" in Morrison's absence. McCook received a stern message from the department as to the seriousness of this offense, but no major harm seems to have resulted, and McCook insisted that Adams had acted "with the best of faith."

Upon his return, one of McCook's first orders of business was finding new office space. In the dead of winter, fire had yet again destroyed the consulate, but Morrison and Adams had saved the important papers and moved them to a small room in the Aurora Building on First Avenue. When McCook found it, he described it as "a chaotic mess for want of room," and in the first week of May he moved the consulate back to a building on Front Street. Thereafter, he was occupied with his usual responsibilities which soon included the issuance of passports. Adams had requested that privilege in order to accommodate Americans interested in traveling to Russia, but the department initially refused. McCook protested, declaring that in terms of the amount of unofficial business conducted, his post stood "about fourth on the list of all the United States Consulates," and although he was "not wishing to add more duties to this office," it was only fitting that Washington should grant him the right to issue passports in such a busy and remote location. The State Department conceded, and conferred that power upon McCook on June 25, 1900. In doing so, his superiors were tacitly elevating his standing and exhibiting a certain degree of trust in his abilities.

There were matters, however, that concerned the department. One was the claim of local entrepreneur Falcon Joslin, whom the Seattle Times described as a "well known Seattle lawyer and Democratic politician," that he had been over-charged by Consul McCook for notarial services. After receiving the complaint, department officials
reviewed the Dawson accounts, and noticed that McCook always charged either $2.50 or $5 for services, while regulations stipulated that the fee for taking acknowledgements and administering oaths was fixed at $2. His response indicated that he was unaware of the schedule of unofficial fees, made mention of the extraordinary cost of living, and asked permission to charge rates similar to those of territorial officials, which, he argued, was what he had hitherto always done. He was duly informed of the appropriate fees, and Joslin’s complaint was eventually settled that summer. Interestingly, McCook had earlier heard that the Washington state Democrat had been lobbying for the appointment of someone named Lindsay to his office, and he mentioned this in a despatch. He was probably quite surprised to receive word from the department that “both United States Senators from Washington have requested the appointment of Mr. Lindsay, as Consul at Dawson City,” and relieved that, “they have been informed that there is no vacancy at your post.”

While McCook may have had some added incentive to end the disagreement with Falcon Joslin quickly, John C. Hessian was not so fortunate. Hessian complained to the State Department that Deputy Consul Adams had charged him $10 for two powers of attorney in McCook’s absence, which by department standards was an overcharge of $6. Thomas Cridler ordered McCook to give that amount back to Hessian in April, but McCook argued the point into June, prompting the Third Assistant Secretary to send him two rare, lengthy and explicit instructions on the matter before the consul finally agreed to provide Hessian with a refund. In the course of the relevant correspondence, McCook claimed that “the Consulate is acknowledged by all residents of Dawson, to be the most respectable, and the best equipped, and the most efficient public office in town,” but Cridler felt it necessary to remind him, “It is known that Mr. Adams has not been as careful as he might.” McCook put up a similar fight in the case of Sydney Smith. Smith was the destitute American whose desperate plight in the
spring of 1899 had moved the consul to ask a store manager in Eagle to provide him aid. McCook tried well into 1900 to persuade the department to pay the A.C. Company bill for supplies given to Smith, but his efforts were futile.48

That year, McCook dealt with issues ranging from complaints against the Deputy Customs Collector at Forty Mile to another sighting of Russian Boundary Monuments near Fort Selkirk. He stepped beyond his authority on a few occasions, trying to stop steamers from leaving the port with too many passengers.49 But in 1900, he was particularly concerned with two issues, the first of which involved the issuance of invoices for gold dust. Although one of the foremost duties of American consuls in any port was the careful invoicing of goods bound for the United States, the Yukon’s biggest export was gold dust. There were obvious problems associated with issuing invoices for an item that practically served as currency in mining communities, and these were further complicated by the miners’ efforts to avoid the territorial royalty.

The consul had apparently been inconsistent in issuing invoices for gold, even after the Treasury Department ordered that amounts exceeding $100 in value must be accompanied by a consular invoice when brought into the United States.50 The Dawson Daily News editorialized that the requirement seemed “an absurdity on the face of it,” but recommended that travelers secure a consular invoice for their gold. The Nugget made a similar recommendation, although both papers acknowledged that the law was not strictly enforced.51 The regulation, though generating some revenue for the consulate, undoubtedly created considerably more work. When McCook asked if the requirement applied only to gold shipped out by steamer or other common carrier, as he had interpreted the order to mean, he was told that it applied even to gold carried out by the owners themselves, as “gold dust imported as a product of mines must be regarded as merchandise.”52
McCook's second major concern in 1900 was the spread of a new disease in the Yukon. That summer, the consul sent Washington a cipher telegram reporting five cases of small pox in Dawson City. He asked whether he should “resume” issuing bills of health, suggesting that he had stopped doing so upon hearing of the outbreak, but by early August McCook was guardedly optimistic that the problem had been contained. Although Dawson had never been a particularly healthy community, Historian Maureen Lux suggested that the 1899 completion of the White Pass and Yukon Railway, linking Skagway with Whitehorse, made it easier for contagious diseases common elsewhere to enter the isolated Klondike. Indeed, McCook’s optimism with regard to small pox was short-lived. In early September, he reported a new case of the disease found in a miner who had come into town from the outlying creeks. By the end of that month, he sent word of four more cases and forwarded the State Department a report issued by the territorial Medical Health Officer in Dawson. The consul’s fear of an epidemic was widely-shared in 1900, and the small pox scare prompted the Yukon government to implement various preventive measures with a siege mentality that included, on at least one occasion, the quarantine of an entire river steamer.

Meanwhile, McCook was becoming concerned with the state of his own declining health. In July, he requested a change of post, citing a heart condition and indigestion attacks aggravated by his “high altitude” and poor vegetable diet. He also expressed the hope that he might work where “the interests of American manufacturers could be advanced.” In making suggestions for his replacement, he described the economic benefits of his isolated office in an uncharacteristically positive light:

There is an excellent opportunity at Dawson for a vigorous man, say from thirty to forty five years of age, the climate is healthy and the opportunities of the best. The unofficial fees rank this post as third in this respect, coming next to Paris and London, and can be continued and improved upon by a good hustler.
A few days later, he applied for an autumn leave of absence. He had not planned to leave Dawson that year because of “the great expense attending the going out and returning,” but he did not feel well enough to face the winter months. The Department granted him the temporary leave, but in response to his proposal for a transfer, it promised only to bear his request in mind in the event that a change became possible. In anticipation of his absence, McCook nominated Hein TeRoller for the vice consulship in August. He explained that Vice Consul Ronald Morrison, who had faithfully run the consulate during McCook’s previous vacation, was now “too busy with his mining properties to give the attention necessary in case of my absence or sickness.” Furthermore, Deputy Consul John Quincy Adams had left for Nome in July, so the nomination was quite pressing. McCook described TeRoller as “a man of excellent standing,” and had probably known him on a professional level for some time. (In January 1899, while working as an agent of the Seattle-Yukon Transportation Company, TeRoller had offered his services in the delivery of a memorial to Washington on behalf of the Citizens’ Relief Committee, a charitable organization with which Consul McCook was heavily involved during his first winter in Dawson. In late September, McCook submitted the application of one F.W. Arnold for the deputy consulship before heading out of Dawson for the winter.

Evidently, McCook went directly to Philadelphia, where he arrived in late November and immediately filed for an extension of his leave. Although he complained of acute kidney problems while on vacation, he continued to correspond with Washington, sending several missives to the State Department on matters that ranged from shipping articles to a suggestion that consular agents be appointed to Whitehorse and Forty Mile. In contrast with McCook’s regularly abundant correspondence, Hein TeRoller sent only 15 despatches from Dawson during the five months he managed the consulate. This paucity, however, was not indicative of a dereliction of duty on the part
of the vice consul. TeRoller appears to have taken his work quite seriously. In March 1901, he sent a lengthy and impassioned despatch to Washington answering charges from H.E. McCarty, a U.S. deputy customs collector at Forty Mile, that the Dawson consulate was irregular in its issuance of despatches. TeRoller protested vigorously, insisting that McCarty was detaining Americans at the United States border and assessing unnecessary import fees. He enclosed the sworn statement of one Martin Raaberg, who claimed that he was made to pay duty on the American dogs that pulled his sleigh into Alaska.\textsuperscript{64}

McCook should have stayed in Philadelphia. Had he retired in 1900, he may have lived considerably longer than he did. But in spite of his increasingly problematic poor health, he set off for Dawson City one more time in 1901. His condition made the long journey especially taxing, and he arrived in the Klondike at the end of March with a severe case of pneumonia. Vice Consul TeRoller reported that McCook was taken to the hospital on March 30th and that the initial outlook was grim: "For a few days it looked doubtful if he would recover from the attack but during the last few days he has been improving rapidly."\textsuperscript{65} The consul was not easily defeated. On April 30th, he reported that he had taken "active charge" of the consulate, even as he was still "convalesing [sic] from the attack of Pneumonia."\textsuperscript{66} On the same day, he reported the case of Luella Day.

Luella Day McConnell was an American physician and the wife of Edward McConnell, a prominent local property owner. She had recently written a letter to the Canadian Minister of Justice in Ottawa accusing high officials in the Yukon territorial government of graft. When word came back to Dawson of her charges, Judge Calixte Dugas, Yukon Commissioner William Ogilvie, Major Z.T. Wood, and Gold Commissioner Edmond Senkler filed a criminal libel suit against her. Day was summoned to appear in police court to answer the charges, but she claimed that she had
a severe illness that prevented her from making an appearance. She sought help from the consulate after a police detachment attempted to arrest her from her sick bed. When she vigorously resisted, the Mounties put her under house arrest, and the local newspapers began to take an interest in her story. In a letter addressed to the consul, she described her situation as the “most trying experience of my life.” Hein TeRoller appealed for mercy on her behalf. In response, NWMP Inspector Courtland Stearns wrote to the Vice Consul expressing his exasperation with Day: “a great deal of unpleasantness would have been avoided if Mrs. McConnell had treated this Court with proper respect.” Stearns sent assurances that Day would not be disturbed until she was fit to appear, and Ottawa eventually ordered a stop to the proceedings against her. But that did not lessen her ire. In 1906, Luella Day published *The Tragedy of the Klondike*, a book in which she described her maltreatment at the hands of the Canadian authorities in the Yukon. Although the State Department refused to take any action in response to McCook’s reports on the affair, she regarded the sickly consul as an ally in her fight, and mentioned him with high praise in her book.

Despite Vice Consul TeRoller’s proficient operation of the consulate during McCook’s absence and subsequent illness, he and McCook had a serious disagreement with regard to unofficial fees. While McCook was on leave, TeRoller collected some $1200 in fees for notarial services. The consul was under the impression that this revenue was to be handed over to him upon his return, but TeRoller was under a different impression. In his explanation of the dispute to the State Department, McCook reported that TeRoller had sent him a letter while he was still in Philadelphia. The note allegedly described the vice consul’s contention that he was “not working for glory” and expressed his intention to keep the collected fees. McCook claimed that the letter prompted him to hasten his return to Dawson, requiring him to cross the ice, and as a result he suffered from his terrible bout with pneumonia. In asking the department to
protect his interests, the consul mentioned TeRoller's position as manager "for a Seattle Co who have warehouses and a Store in Dawson and who also operate three river Steamers on the Yukon River." Apparently, he was trying to convince his superiors that he needed the money in question more than the vice consul. "This is a very unpleasant State of affairs," McCook wrote, "No one regrets it more than I do." 71

In answer to the despatch, Thomas Cridler sent McCook a lengthy instruction explaining that, "The Department's usual rule has been that unofficial fees belong to the officer collecting them and that any settlement of differences would be in the nature of a private one between the officers concerned." 72 McCook mentioned the dispute only once thereafter, expressing his expectation of a settlement in the near future. 73 Probably as a result of the disagreement, he submitted the name of Frank W. Clayton for the offices of vice and deputy consul, citing TeRoller's involvement in commercial interests that would prevent him from properly attending to his duties "in Case of my absence or otherwise." Clayton, in his early 40s, was a miner from Seattle. Although he listed "natural ability" as a special qualification on his consular application, he also noted that he had served as the postmaster of Kamilchie, Washington from 1887 to 1888. 74 The Postmaster General could find no evidence to support this claim, however, and the State Department held Clayton's appointment in abeyance. McCook sent a long sworn statement from Clayton explaining his informal service at the post office in Kamilchie in an urgent effort to secure his appointment, but to no avail. 75 In a late August despatch, the consul expressed to the Department his now very low opinion of TeRoller, writing, "Mr. TeRoller has broken his promises made to me and has treated me shamefully, which I will explain better when I reach Washington." But he also expressed his willingness to accept the circumstances, saying, "Now I do not wish to leave my post and leave Mr. TeRoller in charge... but as a good Soldier always obeys
orders I will do as instructed." McCook finally hired Clayton as his consular clerk in early September, but TeRoller remained as vice consul.

The consul wanted TeRoller replaced in a hurry because he was preparing to take another winter leave. Since returning to Dawson City the previous March, his health had never fully recovered. On the first of June, he reported suffering two weeks of bronchitis and heart trouble that prevented him from leaving his hotel. Early the following month he asked for a leave of absence, explaining that the demands of the consulate prevented him from getting the sunshine and exercise necessary for his recuperation. Moreover, "I cannot withstand the rigor of the winter at Dawson," he wrote. He included a recent letter from his doctor in Philadelphia that attested to his vulnerable condition. The physician mentioned that he had advised against McCook's return to Dawson and added, "If he could be removed to a milder climate I believe he would live many years longer." In fact, the consul had less than four months to live. He was determined to stay in the Yukon until the close of navigation, predicting in July that, "although far from being well I feel that I can fight it out all summer." He did manage to make it through the summer.

He even outlived the president who had appointed him. In the days preceding his final departure from the Klondike in mid-September 1901, word of the assassination attempt on William McKinley reached Dawson City. McCook reported that the event "caused consternation and sorrow in this town and locality," and he organized a public meeting at the consulate. Those gathered included "every branch of the Canadian Government at Dawson," and the group adopted a statement of sympathy and condemnation that McCook telegraphed to the Secretary of State on September 12th. One week later, news arrived of the president's death. McCook's final act as the U.S. Consul in Dawson City was to organize a second community meeting for the purpose of framing a resolution of condolence to Mrs. McKinley and the American people.
Afterward, Washington received the following telegram, a doubtlessly expensive bit of prose that seemed to bear the mark of McCook’s unique diction:

The people of the Yukon Territory have received the news of the death of William McKinley, president of the United States, with most profound sorrow. They recognize with heartfelt sympathy the domestic bereavement of his widow and relatives and the national bereavement of the people of the United States. They deplore and denounce the assassination of President McKinley as a crime against the chief executive of one of the most enlightened governments the world has ever known; and brand this crime as an assault upon all enlightened governments and upon civilization and join their assurances with the response which comes from civilized men everywhere that such crimes and such criminals with all accessories must and shall throughout the world, be justly but surely punished and suppressed. Signed, C.A. Dugas, Chairman of Meeting, Edgar A. Mizner, Pres. Board of Trade. J.C. McCook, U.S. Consul.

McCook had to rely on his vice consul and clerk to report the meeting, as he had no time to compose a last despatch before he left. He headed directly to Philadelphia, where he arrived on Sunday, October 27th. His health had been stretched to the limit, and the long trip had taken its toll. In his own home and with his family, James Church McCook died on the evening of October 31, 1901.

"You have probably heard of the death of my father James C. McCook, late U.S. Consul, Dawson City, Yukon," McCook’s oldest son, Walter, wrote to the State Department on November 6th. The son explained that he had applied to administer the consul’s affairs, "my father having died intestate," and inquired as to any salary and fees that were owed the estate. Whatever fortune McCook had accumulated from his years in the confectionery business was apparently now quite modest. The enormous expense of living in Dawson, the cost of traveling between the East Coast and the Yukon, and his whirlwind vacation over the winter of 1900, must have winnowed away much of McCook’s savings. Walter wrote, "The estate left will not be very large and of course any salary that may be coming will help along considerably." He enclosed a
copy of an agreement made with F.W. Clayton, which he had found among his father’s effects, regarding McCook’s entitlement to salary while absent on leave.

In his reply to Walter McCook, Third Assistant Secretary Thomas Cridler explained that the salary agreement was “between your father and F.W. Clayton, who has not been appointed Vice and Deputy Consul.” But Cridler added that the department had asked Vice Consul Hein Te Roller to collect McCook’s personal items in Dawson and prepare them for forwarding to Philadelphia, “provided you... will assume the cost of their transportation.” The tight consular budget was evident to the end. Walter McCook was not yet aware that his father had, in fact, drawn up a last will and testament while he had been a patient in St. Mary’s hospital the previous year, but Te Roller sent a copy to Sallie McCook, the consul’s wife and beneficiary, when news of the death reached the consulate. The will left the entire estate to her. In the Nugget’s last piece devoted to the man it once attacked so mercilessly, it described the modest property McCook had left behind in Dawson, and revealed that the consul himself had tried to make a dollar from the Klondike creeks:

The estate of Mr. McCook in the Yukon territory is of comparatively little value, consisting only of an undivided one half-interest in 30 above on Sulphur, undivided one-half interest in the hillside claim adjoining the upper half, left limit, of 36 below on Hunker, pair of gold scales, a set of the Encyclopedia Britannica, $262 in the Canadian Bank of Commerce, $48 in the Bank of British North America, and a promissory note for $100 of extremely problematical value.

In a second letter to Thomas Cridler, Walter concluded, “Will be pleased to hear from you in due time as to amount of salary due estate on father’s account.” That missive is the last item concerning Consul McCook in the National Archives’ record of State Department correspondence, and it seems a fitting final note considering the trouble that money caused him throughout his consular service.
Over the next four years, six different consuls served in Dawson City. Theodore Roosevelt appointed McCook's replacement, Henry D. Saylor, in December 1901, and he held the post until March 1903. Consul Saylor received the benefit of his predecessor's many pleas for better wages when, on July 1, 1902, his salary was increased to $3500. When he did not return from an oft-extended leave of absence, Saylor was replaced by Louis A. Dent, who resigned from the office less than two months later, in May 1903. Dent's replacement was Leo Bergholz, who served in the Yukon for over a year before he was apparently promoted to consul general and transferred to another post. The next occupant of the office was far and away the most experienced and professional diplomat to hold the title of U.S. Consul in Dawson City.

Norwegian by birth, Gabriel Bie Ravndal was a journalist and politician in South Dakota before he became consul to Beirut in 1898. He served there until his June 1904 appointment to Dawson, where he remained until August 1905. During his short stay in the Klondike, Ravndal sent voluminous despatches to the department on the nature and potential of the north, and became involved with the "International Yukon Polar Institute," a local organization formed with the intention of mounting a polar expedition. Had he stayed longer, his intense fascination with the Yukon and his extraordinary dedication may have produced interesting results, but he was returned to his post at Beirut. Historian Ruth Kark listed his many later accomplishments. Ravndal would serve as consul general to Constantinople from 1910-1914 and again from 1919-1925, spending the intervening years of the First World War in charge of French, British, Russian, Italian, Belgian, Serbian, Montenegrin, and Swiss consular interests in the city. In addition to founding chapters of the American Red Cross in Beirut and Constantinople, as well as the American Chamber of Commerce for the Levant, he also wrote extensively on political and literary matters, "as well as stories of the Vikings." He was a far cry from the Philadelphia candy maker.
Succeeding Ravndal, however, was a consul more in keeping with the amateur tradition of McCook. George C. Cole, a lawyer and former state senator from West Virginia, was the last and longest serving American consul in Dawson City. By the time of Cole’s appointment in July 1905, activity at the Klondike consulate must have been a pale reflection of what it had been in the boisterous days of the gold rush. It was just as well, for Cole had been demoted from consul general at Buenos Aires after the State Department had received numerous complaints regarding his work in Argentina. An internal department memorandum from 1910 summarized his consular service, citing “harsh criticisms of the absolute lack of intelligence on the part of the Consul General,” but it noted a consular inspector’s conclusion that he was “a satisfactory Consul for Dawson.” The United States government maintained a presence in Dawson City until 1915, a surprisingly long time given the very brief duration of the town’s heyday. On February 24th of that year, after nearly ten years at his post, George Cole received a terse telegram from Washington reading “Consulate Dawson closed.” It informed him of his new appointment as consul to Prince Rupert, and concluded simply, “proceed there via Washington for instructions.” That marked the end of the American consular outpost on the Canadian frontier that James Church McCook had opened in a corner of a Dawson warehouse 17 years earlier.

2 *Klondike Nugget*, September 23, 1899.


4 Everette’s name is spelled “Everett” in early diplomatic correspondence and news reports, but appears uniformly as “Everette” in newspaper reports after January 1900.

5 *Klondike Nugget*, September 6, 1899.

6 *The Yukon Sun*, June 6, 1899.

7 McCook to David J. Hill, Assistant Secretary of State, Dawson City, Despatch No. 148, September 5, 1899.

8 *Dawson Daily News*, September 4, 1899. --from a clipping attached to Despatch No. 148.

9 Alvey A. Adee, Second Assistant Secretary of State, to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 95, September 30, 1899.

10 Ronald Morrison, Vice Consul, to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 170, September 25, 1899.

11 Morrison to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 184, November 8, 1899.

12 Thomas Crider, Third Assistant Secretary of State, to Morrison, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 125, February 8, 1900.


14 *Klondike Nugget*, December 20, 1899.

15 *Dawson Daily News*, January 20, 1900.

16 John Q. Adams, Deputy Consul, to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 199, March 12, 1900.

17 Telegram, McCook to Crider, Seattle, March 6, 1900.

18 *Semi-Weekly Klondike Nugget*, September 4, 1901; McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 322, July 25, 1901.


20 *Klondike Nugget*, August 5, 1899.

21 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, August 28, 1899.

22 The date of the execution appears in the Primrose Report in *N.W.M.P. Report 1899*, 44.

23 McCook to Crider, Dawson City, Unnumbered despatch, September 11, 1899; *The Sunday Gleaner*, Dawson City, September 10, 1899. From a clipping attached to Unnumbered despatch, September 11, 1899. The *Gleaner* clipping is notable in that no archival holdings of this newspaper are known to exist. See Mary C. Nicolson and Mary Anne Slemmons, compilers, *Alaska Newspapers on Microfilm 1866-1998* (Fairbanks and Juneau: University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Alaska State Library, 1998), 56.

24 *Klondike Nugget*, September 13, 1899.

25 Hunt, 154-156.

26 The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article of August 28, 1899 mentioned that Alice Rollins Crane was the wife of L.P. Crane of Los Angeles.

27 Hunt, 154-159, 154 (quotation).

28 McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 206, April 6, 1900.

29 In 1899, Superintendent A. Bowen Perry made a “conservative estimate” of the population of the Yukon Territory to be 20,000. In 1900, an April census revealed a total population of 16,463. *N.W.M.P. Report 1899*, 4; Canada, *Report of the North-West Mounted Police 1900*, Sessional Paper No. 28 (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, 1901), 9.

30 *Dawson Daily News*, April 5, 1900.
In a letter to Thomas Cridler, McCook wrote that Deputy Consul John Doherty was “on the outside, that is in the states” when Ronald Morrison and J.Q. Adams were running the consulate. He referred to “Mr. Dougherty” [sic] as “the late Deputy consul.” It is unclear what McCook meant by “late.”

McCook to Cridler, Seattle, Undesignated correspondence, March 7, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Washington, D.C., Unnumbered despatch, February 7, 1900.

McCook to Cridler, Seattle, Undesignated correspondence, March 7, 1900; Instruction No. 137, March 15, 1900, Consular Register.

Telegram, Adams to Hill, Dawson City, January 10, 1900; Morrison to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 188, January 12, 1900.

McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Undesignated correspondence, April 10, 1900; McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 220, May 7, 1900.

Adams to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 197, March 3, 1900; McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 216, April 25, 1900; Instruction No. 143, March 30, 1900, Consular Register; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 163, June 25, 1900.

Seattle Times, March 7, 1900. From a clipping attached to McCook to Cridler, Seattle, Undesignated correspondence, March 7, 1900.

Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Unnumbered instruction, February 7, 1900; McCook to Cridler, Vancouver, British Columbia, Unnumbered despatch, March 5, 1900.

Instruction No. 134, March 15, 1900 and Instruction No. 177, July 23, 1900, Consular Register.

Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 139, March 16, 1900.

McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatches No. 223, May 18, 1900, and No. 234, June 4, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instructions No. 145, April 20, 1900, No. 162, June 23, 1900, and No. 164, June 27, 1900.

McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 223, May 18, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 164, June 27, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 218, April 30, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 159, June 20, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatches No. 229, May 30, 1900, No. 264, September 5, 1900, and No. 208, April 13, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 151, May 23, 1900.

Instruction No. 121, January 10, 1900, Consular Register.

Dawson Daily News, June 9, 1900; Semi-Weekly Nugget, June 17, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 236bis., June 15, 1900; Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 176, July 20, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 243, July 6, 1900; Telegram, McCook to Secretary of State, Dawson City, July 14, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 253, August 4, 1900.


McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 266, September 8, 1900, No. 276, September 24, 1900, No. 279, September 26, 1900, and No. 281, September 28, 1900.

Lux, 108.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 244, July 9, 1900.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 248, July 18, 1900.
Instruction No. 179, August 1, 1900, No. 181, August 8, 1900, and No. 186, September 8, 1900, Consular Register.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 256, August 14, 1900, and No. 257, August 28, 1900.

*Yukon Sun*, Undated clipping in McCook to J.B. Moore, Assistant Secretary of State, Dawson City, Despatch No. 55, January 31, 1899.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 275, September 22, 1900.

Hein TeRoller, Vice Consul, to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 294, March 19, 1901.

TeRoller to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 298, April 9, 1901.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 300, April 30, 1901.

Luella Day McConnell to the Consul of the United States of America, Dawson City, April 10, 1901 in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 299, April 30, 1901.

Courtland Stearns, NWMP inspector, to TeRoller, Dawson City, April 10, 1901 in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 299, April 30, 1901.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 302, May 7, 1901.


McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 302, May 7, 1901.

Cridler to McCook, Washington, D.C., Instruction No. 216, June 19, 1901.

McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 316, July 6, 1901.

Application for Office of Frank W. Clayton in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Unnumbered despatch, July 1, 1901.

Instruction No. 226, August 5, 1901, No. 232, August 30, 1901, and No. 235, September 20, 1901, Consular Register; McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 328, August 22, 1901.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 329, August 24, 1901.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 333, September 4, 1901.

McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 305, June 1, 1901.

James Simpson, MD, to John Hay, Philadelphia, June 12, 1901 in McCook to Hill, Dawson City, Despatch No. 315bis., July 3, 1901.

McCook to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 317, July 6, 1901.

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Walter McCook to Cridler, Philadelphia, November 16, 1901 in U.S. Department of State, *Miscellaneous Correspondence Received*, Record Group 59, Microfilm M179, Rolls 1117-1118, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

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Cridler to Walter McCook, Washington, D.C., November 13, 1901 in U.S. Department of State, *Miscellaneous Correspondence Sent*, Record Group 59, Microfilm M40, Roll 152, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

TeRoller to Cridler, Dawson City, Despatch No. 352, December 23, 1901.

*Daily Klondike Nugget*, November 12, 1902.

Walter McCook to Cridler, Philadelphia, November 16, 1901 in U.S. Department of State, *Miscellaneous Correspondence Received*.

Instruction No. 8, April 2, 1902, Consular Register.

Bergholz was appointed Consul General to “Tienstin” (Telegram. March 24, 1904), but two months later the Department instructed him to return to the Dawson City post. However, on June 7th, Gabriel Bie Ravndal was issued his appointment to Dawson, and no further instructions to Bergholz appear in the register of correspondence. See the Consular Register.

Instruction No. 7, December 12, 1905, Consular Register.

93 Consular Bureau Memorandum, October 22, 1910 in U.S. Department of State, Communications Sent and Received, Record Group 59, Central Decimal File, 1910-1929, Box 1285, Item 123 C67/32, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

94 Telegram, Department of State to George C. Cole, Washington, D.C., February 24, 1915 in Communications Sent and Received, Box 1285, Item 123 C67/53b.
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