

From Minneapolis to the Klondike in 1898

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IN LATE JANUARY, 1898, James H. Brown, a Tacoma, Washington, businessman, returned from a two-months trip to Minnesota and Wisconsin. His report of the impending Klondike rush from that section was accounted "little short of marvelous." He was quoted as saying: "The people all over the two states are greatly excited, especially in Minnesota, and the rush will begin next month." The high quality of the people struck him, and the "sturdy lumbermen" particularly arrested his attention. These men were prepared, he asserted, to endure the hardships of the trip to the Yukon.¹

Brown's observations regarding the excitement in Minnesota are confirmed in part by letters of inquiry about the Klondike directed to the Seattle Chamber of Commerce. Taking the first four hundred and ninety-nine of these communications from persons all over the country (from S. W. Abbey of New York to Francis Hamilton of Colorado), it is found that seventy-six were sent from Minnesota and bordering states.² The distribution runs as follows: Minnesota, thirty-three; Iowa, fourteen; North Dakota, twelve; South Dakota, nine; and Wisconsin, eight. Thus Minnesota, although less populous than either Iowa or Wisconsin, easily heads the list as having the most persons sufficiently interested in the Klondike to write for information about ways to get there. Apart from their number, another interesting feature of the thirty-three Minnesota letters is their geographical distribution. They were

¹ *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, January 24, 1898. Files of Tacoma and Seattle newspapers used in the preparation of the present article are in the Library of Congress. Unless otherwise indicated, other newspapers cited are to be found in the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society.

² These letters and related material are in fourteen scrapbooks presented to the Library of Congress by Erastus Brainerd, the indefatigable secretary of the Seattle Chamber of Commerce. See especially volumes 5 to 8. For an article based on the collection, see Jeannette P. Nichols, "Advertising and the Klondike," in the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, 13:20-26 (January, 1922).

sent by persons in twenty-nine different towns, mostly small communities. Minneapolis is represented by two letters, St. Paul by only one.

But talking and writing are one thing, action another. How many persons actually left Minnesota for the Klondike? We do not know. Lars Gunderson, a Klondiker from Minneapolis, who arrived in Seattle with his party on the same day that Brown returned to Tacoma, predicted that from the Twin Cities alone "not less than 1,000 men" were bound for Seattle on their way to the Yukon. Some weeks later, in a letter from Sheep Camp, Alaska, Gunderson referred to "several hundred people" from St. Paul and Minneapolis passing through that point.³ These estimates may have been slightly exaggerated. Yet if a careful count were made of all the Minnesota people who, from July, 1897, to March, 1898, bought railway and steamship tickets to Alaska, the number might well be found to approach twenty-five hundred. No wonder Senator Knute Nelson of Minnesota soon became the unofficial representative of Alaska in the United States Senate! The purpose here is merely to trace the steps by which the Gunderson party of sixteen men was organized for a gold-mining and trading venture. The preparations extended over five months, involved an expenditure of several thousand dollars, and appear to have received more public notice than those of any other Klondike organization in Minneapolis, if not in Minnesota.

Lars Gunderson early became interested in the Klondike gold rush. It appealed to his pioneering spirit and his business acumen. Gunderson, who was born in Norway in 1850, went to America with his recent bride in the fall of 1872. They settled first in Stillwater, where their first two children were born. Soon, however, the Gundersons moved to Wisconsin; then, a decade or so later, to Michigan. By 1894 they were back in Minnesota, where Gunderson entered the employ of the Security Savings and Loan Association of Minneapolis. The city directory of 1897 listed him as a book-keeper. In view of the hard times and the lack of jobs, Gunderson

³ *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 24, 1898; *Decorah [Iowa] Posten*, February 4, 1898; *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 9, 1898.

was better off than many others. Yet a routine occupation must have irked him, for he had formerly been in business for himself. As early as 1880, when he was a member of the Wisconsin legislature, his occupation was given as "merchant."⁴ The Klondike news suggested to this man a chance to do something again on his own. Possibly he read the *Minneapolis Journal* of July 20, 1897, which carried a Washington, D.C., story about the virulence of the "gold fever" in the East and reported that "In Washington, Philadelphia and New York companies and expeditions are being formed by the dozen to go to the new gold fields." Why not form a company in Minneapolis?

If Gunderson asked himself this question he was not long in answering it—in the affirmative. In the *Nye Normanden* of Minneapolis for August 10, 1897, the forming of the Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company "here in town" was announced.⁵ The following February, Lars Gunderson would lead an expedition of some fifty men to try their luck in the Alaskan gold fields. Requirements for membership in the company were five hundred dollars in cash, good health, and a strong constitution. Many had already signed up. Persons desiring further information were asked to write to Gunderson at the Guaranty Loan Building.

This announcement received the particular blessing of the editor, Hans A. Foss. In calling attention to it on the editorial page, Foss referred to Gunderson as "our friend."⁶ He then went on to say that he had viewed with a skeptical eye the various mining companies which were being organized in Chicago, New York, and other places. But when Gunderson undertook an expedition, that was another matter. Here was a man who won the confidence of all

⁴ *Minneapolis Directory*, 1897, p. 489; *Wisconsin Blue Book*, 1880, p. 508.

⁵ The Minnesota Historical Society has a file of the *Nye Normanden* extending from October 29, 1895, to September 14, 1897. Later references were obtained from a file in the library of Luther College, Decorah, Iowa.

⁶ Foss, like Gunderson, was born in Norway. He went to America in 1878. His career as a newspaper man and a novelist is summarized in Olaf M. Norlie, *History of the Norwegian People in America*, 300 (Minneapolis, 1925). One of Foss's novels was translated into English, but in general his writings belong with those described by Dean Theodore C. Blegen as being "still imprisoned in the language of the immigrant and virtually unknown to the American public." See his *Grass Roots History*, 109 (Minneapolis, 1947).

who knew him. Nor were these words merely words of the moment. Later Foss showed his own confidence in Gunderson by naming him special Alaska correspondent for the *Nye Normanden*.⁷ He continued to print Gunderson's letters from the Yukon long after the Klondike ceased to hold the spotlight.

Having announced the forming of a company, Gunderson soon conceived the idea of having it incorporated under the laws of the state of Minnesota. Articles of incorporation were forthwith drawn up and signed, and then, on August 30, 1897, they were deposited with the secretary of state. The incorporation, Gunderson said, was "simply for the purpose of business convenience."⁸

Five persons, the number required by law, signed the articles of incorporation. Gunderson signed first, and he was followed by Frank A. Skog, Guy B. Erwin, Edwin M. Wold, and John Gunderson. The last was Gunderson's eldest son, who was then in business in Winona. Evidently he could not be present when the signing took place on August 23, so George Baumgartner signed for him. Two days later, however, John appeared before a notary public in Winona to say that he executed the articles of incorporation as his "free act and deed." At the first annual meeting, held in Minneapolis on January 11, 1898, Gunderson declared that when the company was incorporated the previous August "there were only two or three of us and we got a couple of blind men to go in so as to form a sufficient number to incorporate."⁹ The "blind men" were Wold and John. The other three signers became members of the expedition. Skog and Erwin, like Gunderson, were connected with the Security Savings and Loan Association.

The articles of incorporation were seven in number. The first estab-

⁷ The appointment had been made by December 28, 1897, as indicated in the issue of that date.

⁸ Minnesota Secretary of State's Archives, Incorporations, Book S-2, p. 124-127; *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 24, 1898. It would be interesting to know how many Minnesota organizations destined for the Klondike were incorporated. The names of several mentioned in the Minnesota papers for the winter of 1898 include the Verndale Mining Company, the Minnesota and Alaska Development Company, the Klondike, Yukon and Copper River Company, and the Gopher Mining and Trading Company.

⁹ A typescript of the "Address of Mr. Lars Gunderson to the First Annual Meeting of the Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company," January 11, 1898, is in the writer's possession.

lished the name of the organization as the "Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company." It also stated the general nature of its business—namely, "to explore for, develop, mine and operate gold, silver and other kinds of mines in any of the United States of America or its Territories, and in the Dominion of Canada, as far as may be, in compliance with its laws and mining regulations; and to buy, sell and trade in such merchandise and produce as may be needful or profitable in the search for, development of and operating of said corporation's properties, claims or mines, or that of any other person or corporation; and to buy, own and operate such means of transportation, by land and water, as may be useful and profitable to this corporation for its own use or for the use of others similarly engaged; and the principal place of its business and transacting the same shall be Minneapolis, Minnesota."

Article 6 vested the government of the corporation in a board of five or more directors, a president, a vice-president, a treasurer, and a secretary. All officers were to be elected at the annual meeting of the stockholders. In the meantime, the five signers were designated the first board of directors. The article also named Gunderson, president, Skog, vice-president and treasurer, and Erwin, secretary. These officers and directors, it stated in conclusion, "shall hold office as such until the Second Tuesday in January A.D. 1898, and until their successors shall be elected and qualified to act as such." The other articles established September 1, 1897, as the time of the commencement of the corporation's business, the period of its continuance as thirty years, the amount of the capital stock at fifty thousand dollars, the number of shares at fifty thousand, the par value of each share at one dollar, the highest amount of indebtedness or liability to which the corporation could be subject at twenty-five thousand dollars, and the date of the annual meeting of stockholders as the second Tuesday in January.

Once the articles of incorporation were deposited with the secretary of state, Gunderson was ready to launch his company in earnest. To this end he prepared a circular for distribution to interested persons—possibly those who had responded to the August announcement—and a statement regarding the plans and

objectives of the new organization. He also had printed the company's first letterhead with the names of the three officers on it. He sent out the circular on September 4.¹⁰ Both circular and statement were printed in the *Nye Normanden* the following Tuesday, September 7. They are of interest because they reveal how early Gunderson had formed definite ideas for an expedition.

The circular called a meeting of all those interested in the company for September 13 in the Guaranty Loan Building. The purpose, the circular explained, was fourfold: to draft bylaws, to make definite plans for an expedition to the upper Yukon, to determine the number of persons who wanted to go on the expedition, which would not leave before March and probably could not include more than twenty-five persons, and, last, to determine how many shares to sell to persons who did not go with the expedition. The circular went on to say that the personnel of the expedition must be determined before October 15, as it would be "absolutely necessary" to know by that time how many were going in order to make preparations for the purchase of provisions, clothing, and transportation "over the Pacific Ocean."

Gunderson's statement, printed in a column of the *Nye Normanden* adjoining the circular, indicates further that the main outlines of the expedition were already formed in his mind. The Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company, it announced, had an authorized capital of fifty thousand dollars, divided into shares of a dollar each. In order to become a member of the expedition, which would leave Minneapolis for the Upper Yukon the first week of March, 1898, a man was required to subscribe and pay in cash for at least five hundred dollars worth of shares. Anyone who desired could subscribe for shares without participating in the expedition, but no one could buy more than a thousand.

Each member of the expedition would be required to sign a contract to stay with the company until September 1, 1899, and devote all his time to its service. All disbursements for clothing, provisions, and transportation would be at the company's expense

¹⁰ Gunderson's notebook for this period is in the writer's possession. It contains the names and addresses of twenty-six persons living for the most part in Minneapolis, but, oddly enough, not a single member of the expedition is included in the list.

and come out of its treasury. No compensation would be granted any member of the expedition, but after all the expenses had been paid, fifty per cent of the profits would be divided among the members, and the remaining fifty per cent would be distributed as a dividend among all stockholders.

The document then went on to discuss the plan of operations in the field. Although the expedition would depart in a body, it would later be divided into groups of four. Members of each group would live together in a tent and row a boat. On reaching their destination, some of the members of the expedition would work for wages or on shares while others prospected. They might also buy one or more "claims," if they considered it advantageous to do so. A headquarters or "base of supply" would be maintained in a near-by town. Should any of the four-man parties sent out to prospect find a claim worth working, all members of the expedition would immediately assemble there and, if possible, stake claims for everyone. As soon as these claims were recorded they were to be turned over to the company for exploitation until September 1, 1899.

With respect to routes to be taken in order to reach the Klondike, the statement indicated that the choice lay between the Northern Pacific to Seattle and the Soo Line to Victoria. From either of those places, the expedition would go to Juneau or Dyea, thence over the mountains to the inland lakes and the upper Yukon.

The statement next explained that there was no capitalist behind the undertaking. The stockholders, whether they accompanied the expedition or not, owned and controlled the company. It was not an enterprise lightly entered upon, or what the "Americans" called a "wildcat scheme." Uncertainty and risk were involved in it. Yet, with the many opportunities offered by a rich new country, a man with energy and stamina could scarcely fail to make expenses and something on the side. It was absurd to suppose that the only way to make money in the Yukon was to dig for gold. There were hundreds of ways to make it in a short time by turning a little capital and enterprise to account.¹¹

¹¹ These observations on making money reveal Gunderson as the characteristic American he describes in his handbook for Norwegian immigrants — *Amerikanske Skildringer*, 83 (Chicago, 1886).

After September 1, 1899, each member of the expedition would be free to leave the company and "try his own luck," or to return home. The owner of shares who remained at home would naturally be interested in the company up to that time. On vote of the stockholders, the property which had been accumulated would either be sold or managed as seemed best.

A closing paragraph of plans and objectives declared that Lars Gunderson, the originator of the undertaking, was "well known" in Minneapolis. He had been connected for several years with one of the largest companies in the city engaged in the loan and investment business. Those desiring further information and terms for agents selling shares were referred to Gunderson at the Guaranty Loan Building.

The circular of September 4 indicated that the company was to have two groups of stockholders: those who went with the expedition, and those who stayed home. The number of stockholders in the second group is not known. It was probably very small. Yet it was large enough to cause Gunderson to remind those attending the company's first annual meeting of a previous understanding that the sixteen directors whom they were to elect, in accordance with the bylaws, "should be the sixteen men that have been selected to go to the Yukon Gold Fields."¹²

In his original announcement of August 10, Gunderson had said that he would lead some fifty men to the Klondike. A month later he reduced the number to twenty-five. Still later, probably in October when transportation arrangements were made, the number was finally reduced to sixteen. Information is lacking regarding the reasons for these changes. Possibly some men who in August had been eager to go had cooled off by October. Gunderson's statement of plans could hardly be called glamorous, and press reports of the sufferings endured by early Klondikers on the trail may have convinced the weak-kneed that home was best for them. At all events, Gunderson stated at the January meeting, "As agreed on at one of our meetings in the fall, we have taken sixteen members for the expedition." He gave their names in this order: Lars

¹² Gunderson, "Address," January 11, 1898.

Gunderson, G. B. Erwin, Frank A. Skog, Halvor Quam, Frank G. Doll, J. P. Steele, Lars Gunderson, Jr., Martin Hybertson, Ole Sandheim, Morris Lee, Ole Stenvig, Anton Anderson, N. F. Petersen, Ole Wold, I. E. Hartley, and Martin Clausen. Those present duly elected these sixteen men directors, and named Gunderson, president, Erwin, secretary, and Doll, treasurer.¹³ A new letterhead was printed bearing the names of the directors and officers, and giving Dawson City, N[orth] W[est] T[erritory], as the company's address.

The annual meeting was obviously not the place to discuss the individual members of the expedition. A reading of their names had to suffice. But Gunderson and Foss, it seems, already had plans to place the essential facts concerning each man before the Norwegian American group in the city.¹⁴ If these people were going to follow to advantage Special Correspondent Gunderson's letters to the *Nye Normanden*, they needed to know such facts.

The *Nye Normanden* of January 25, 1898, reported the departure of the expedition on the twentieth. Then for each member it gave name, place and date of birth, date of immigration (only four were born in the United States), occupation, and last place of residence.¹⁵ From these biographical data several observations may be made. The men with two exceptions were of Scandinavian stock. Nine were born in Norway, and seven of them came to America as late as 1892 or 1893. Two were born in Denmark, one in Sweden. A majority were young men in their twenties. The average age on January 20, 1898 (three celebrated birthdays on this day), was thirty. The occupations most liberally represented were trading and carpentry. At first blush, it seems astonishing not to find a single miner in the group. The organization in truth might well have been called the Monitor Trading and Building Company. In a measure gold merely provided the incentive for organizing a group to do business in a new country. Moreover, it

¹³ Gunderson, "Address," January 11, 1898; *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 12, 1898.

¹⁴ *Nye Normanden*, January 18, 1898.

¹⁵ For some unexplained reason, Martin Clausen's name was omitted. Fortunately it has been possible to obtain from Mr. Clausen the kind of information that was published concerning his companions in 1898. Clausen to the writer, June 4, 1947.

was believed at the time that no particular experience was needed for placer gold mining. Nearly half of the men were fairly recent immigrants— young fellows who had come to the United States as an economic depression was beginning.¹⁶ None of them appears to have been out of work when he joined the company, but some probably were not doing too well. Having pulled up stakes once before and being still young, they could not resist the appeal of the Klondike venture, for it might better their fortunes. All the men were residents of Minneapolis except Anderson of Sleepy Eye, and Hartley and Clausen of Eau Claire.

How the sixteen Monitors, as they called themselves, looked before they left Minneapolis is known, for John Gunderson of Winona took a picture of the whole group outside the Gunderson home at 3251 Clinton Avenue.¹⁷ The house still stands. Clad in Klondike regalia, including fur caps and boots, the Argonauts look seriously and directly at the cameraman as if to say, "We are ready, let's go." The elder Gunderson's expression is inscrutable as he alone gazes into the distance. A man of medium size, he has a long jaw and wears a heavy mustache. Only four members of the group, including young Lars, are clean shaven. The two Wisconsin men stand together; so do the two "Americans." Steele looms up as the largest man in the party.

The September statement had indicated that each member of the expedition would be required to sign a contract to stay with the company until September 1, 1899, and devote all his time to its service. Such contracts were drawn up. They apparently were signed at the first annual meeting. Wold's agreement or contract with the Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company is dated January 11, 1898. The others probably were identical. According to it, the company engaged to employ Wold for a period of nineteen months,

¹⁶ Norwegian immigration, which was high in 1892 and 1893, dropped sharply in 1894 because of the depression. Norlie, *Norwegian People in America*, 309; Carlton C. Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States*, 251 (Northfield, 1938).

¹⁷ Mr. Ole J. Wold, a member of the expedition, kindly loaned the writer his copy of the picture, on the back of which he has identified each man by name, position, and national origin. For a sketch of Mr. Wold's experiences in the Klondike and later in northern Minnesota, see the *International Falls Daily Journal*, December 14, 1937.

from February 1, 1898, to August 31, 1899. Wold in turn engaged to give his time and labor to the company for the same period. His duties were outlined in these words: "The said party of the second part [*Wold*] hereby, upon his honor, pledges himself to labor faithfully and diligently for the said party of the first part [*Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company*] at all times and under all circumstances, willingly and unreservedly, and to obey all orders of the officers and executive committee. The principal character of the employment shall be first to assist in getting a sufficient supply of provision[s], clothing, hardware and other necessary utensils from the place where the same may be procured [*sic*] to the best advantage to the seat of future operations. Second, to engage in cutting, rafting and floating logs, timber or lumber down the Yukon River. Third, to explore for gold or other precious metal in what is known as the Yukon Gold Fields, or contiguous territory or other gold bearing regions. To work gold claims according to the best methods known, whether by the day or on lay, if so required."¹⁸

The company on its part agreed to furnish Wold with food and clothing. Transportation was not mentioned. Nothing specific was stated about food except that the supply was to be "good and sufficient." With respect to clothing and wearing apparel, however, the contract was specific. Thirty-seven items, with the cost of each, were listed in a "schedule," which was attached to and made part of the contract. Clothing and footwear included two pairs of duck pants, flannel lined, two woolen overshirts, a fur cap, a sleeping bag, and a pair of rubber hip boots. The total cost for each man was \$90.87. At this rate it cost \$1,453.92 to clothe all sixteen men.

Compensation was provided for as follows: "As full compensation for the services rendered and pursuant to this contract by the said party of the second part the said party of the first part hereby covenants and agrees to pay and deliver through its proper disbursing officers to said second party on the 31st day of August, 1899, in common with others similarly employed, one-half of all the net earnings of the said company, figured pro rata for each

¹⁸ Mr. Wold has kindly allowed the writer to use several documents relating to his connection with the expedition, including his contract and his stock certificate.

member of the expedition in accordance with the by-laws of the company.”

The agreement made stipulations also with respect to procedure in case of bad conduct, sickness, or death of the man under contract. Not only was the party of the second part to use his best efforts “physically and morally” to advance the interests of the company, but he agreed to “discourage in others ungentlemanly conduct or rowdyism.” Insubordination, drunkenness, or gambling were declared to be “proper and sufficient reason” for the discharge of the second party. If the second party became sick, he was to be “properly provided for” while sharing equally with the others under the terms of the agreement. If he died, his earnings were to go to his legal representatives. The terms of the contract with respect to care of the sick fit in with Gunderson’s original announcement concerning the quality of members desired. If the company was to permit sick members to share equally with others while providing for them, its expedition could not afford to start out with weaklings. If a healthy man became incapacitated after the expedition got under way, that was another matter. “We have selected our party with care,” declared Gunderson en route, “so as to get hardy, strong men.”¹⁹

According to the terms of the contract, members of the expedition were to assist in transporting a “sufficient supply” of provisions, clothing, hardware, and other necessities from the place where they might be obtained “to the best advantage” to the seat of future operations. The schedule attached to the contract indicated precisely the articles of clothing and footwear with which the company equipped each man. But what about provisions, hardware, and other things? Gunderson’s talk at the annual meeting throws some light on this question. First of all, he said that the “committee on purchasing supplies,” appointed some weeks earlier, had purchased “out-fits”—that is, the wearing apparel listed in the contract. But the committee, Gunderson continued, had obtained only “part of the provisions,” namely, meats. They consisted of three tons of “smoked and salted dry pork, bacon, ham and dried beef.” By buy-

¹⁹ *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 24, 1898.

ing them in Minneapolis rather than on the Pacific coast, the committee saved a hundred and fifty dollars. As for the remainder of the provisions, it seems evident that Gunderson and the other members of the committee had decided to buy them in Seattle. He suggested this indirectly by saying that "The committee has not finished everything so we are not prepared to make a final report at this time, but will to the directors later when we complete all the purchases."

In reporting the arrival of the Gunderson party in Seattle a few days later, a local newspaper announced that the group had purchased fifteen tons of provisions in the city and was going to expend "something like \$8,000" there altogether.²⁰ Although this was an overstatement, the Monitors certainly bought several tons of supplies in the port town. They reached Alaska with an outfit weighing sixteen tons. It included large quantities of flour and beans. A picture published in the *Minneapolis Tribune* of March 27, 1898, shows the "Bags Containing Outfit of the Gunderson Party" at Sheep Camp in Alaska.

No figures on the total cost of this huge outfit are available. The size of the company's treasury is not known. In his talk on January 11, Gunderson reported that the treasurer had received \$4,845.00 in cash. This officer should have taken in at least \$8,000.00 by the time the expedition got under way if each of the members paid the \$500.00 required. Certificate No. 581 for 130 shares of stock was issued to Wold on January 19, 1898. Of the amount of cash received by January 11, Gunderson reported, \$2,443.01 was still in the treasury. He accounted for the \$2,401.99 expended as follows: merchandise, \$1,773.49; provisions, \$483.44; commissions, \$2.00; and expenses, \$143.06. If the amount spent for clothing, \$1,453.92, is deducted from \$1,773.49—the sum spent for merchandise—\$319.57 remains. The latter sum probably was spent for tents, stoves, utensils, sleds, revolvers, and other camping equipment. Every man was provided with a Colt revolver. The expedition had five tents in Seattle, but one was lost on the dock.

Part of the sixteen-ton outfit was to be used for trading purposes.

²⁰ *Post Intelligencer*, January 24, 1898.

In Gunderson's words, "we have bought more both of outfits and provisions than we expect to use ourselves." He explained briefly, in his address before the company's first annual meeting, that the expedition expected to reach Dawson City by the middle of May with ten to twenty tons of provisions. As steamboats could not get there until long after that, prices would be very high. The Monitors ought to be able to dispose of everything they had to sell at from a dollar to a dollar and a half a pound. Later they might obtain a store and go into the mercantile business. "But," Gunderson concluded, "it would be a waste of time to picture out at this time what we will do when we get there."

With the election of officers and directors and the signing of contracts on January 11, 1898, the final steps leading to departure were taken. Arrangements for transportation by rail and water had already been made. A Northern Pacific tourist sleeping car was engaged to carry members of the expedition from Minneapolis to Seattle. January 20 was the day scheduled for departure.

In ordinary times the departure of sixteen men on a two-year trip would not have attracted much attention in a city as large as Minneapolis. But the pitch of excitement over the Klondike made January, 1898, an extraordinary time. The return of George A. Brackett, reported the *Journal* of January 3, caused the city to revolve for a day about this builder of the Skagway-White Pass wagon road. Potential Klondikers "by the hundred, almost," besieged Brackett at his house and on the streets in quest of fresh information. The excitement seems to have increased as the month wore on. Consequently, the Gunderson party received much publicity in the large American dailies of the city, particularly in the *Tribune*. Interest in the Monitors was no longer confined to Scandinavian readers of the weekly *Nye Normanden*.

On Sunday, January 16, several Norwegian societies in the city joined to give six members of the expedition a farewell banquet at Normanna Hall. The honored guests were Quam, Lee, Stenvig, Sandheim, Hybertson, and Wold. The *Minneapolis Times* of January 16 announced that invitations were out for the banquet. According to the *Journal* of the next day, about a hundred people

were present. They ate food of "a distinctly Arctic character," listened to speeches, and afterward engaged in an "informal hop." But this account was quite eclipsed by the one in the *Tribune*. The inspired reporter told how the guests of honor entered the banquet hall and saw before them, fashioned in evergreens, the old Norse expression of good wishes for a prosperous journey — *Lukka paa Ferdi* ("good voyage"). In olden days, before "Vikings bold dared out on the wild and turbulent sea," people gathered at the banquet board to extend them the hand of friendship. So had a hundred and fifty friends of the Klondikers assembled to wish them luck. Professor Wilhelm W. Wraaman, a local educator, made the principal speech. Someone read a farewell letter that Kristian Prestgard, a Norwegian American author and journalist, had sent from La Crosse. Toasts were made and responded to. Gunderson, described as "the Nansen of the party," addressed consoling remarks to the wives and sweethearts of his "followers."²¹

Four days remained. On January 18 the *Tribune* ran a front-page story about the arrival in Victoria, British Columbia, of the steamer "Corona," carrying passengers from Dawson "with a half million dollars in dust, nuggets and drafts." Such news undoubtedly heightened interest in the local men who were going to Dawson. The next day a reporter interviewed Gunderson concerning the plans of his company. In printing the interview the following morning, the *Tribune* once more gave the names of the sixteen members of the "first organized party" to leave Minneapolis for Alaska. It announced that for two hours before the departure of the train, the special car of the Monitor Gold Mining and Trading Company would be open to visitors at the Milwaukee road's depot.²²

"Cloudy all day." Thus reads the terse report of the United States weather bureau's Minneapolis station for January 20, 1898. But the weather did not keep crowds of people from venturing out to witness the departure of the Klondikers. Again the *Tribune* gave considerable space to the venture. In describing the scene at the depot

²¹ The extra attention given the Gunderson party in the *Tribune* might be traced to Nicolay A. Grevstad, its "chief editorial writer."

²² *Tribune*, January 20, 1898. The *Journal* of the same date and the *Times* of the next day reported the departure, giving the names of members of the party.

the paper stated that from 3:00 to 5:10 P.M. "hundreds of friends of the departing ones, also many curious people, visited the car and were received by the members of the party, with Lars Gunderson at their head, and shown everything of interest among the very many articles comprising the outfit." Among the articles that caught the reporter's eye was Erwin's "typewriting machine." He also noted the cooking facilities in the special car which would enable the men to prepare their own meals.²³ But nobody observed that, despite the careful preparations, something dear to the Norwegian American palate had been overlooked — loaf sugar for coffee.

The experiences of the Monitors on the trip and in the Klondike cannot be recounted here. Suffice it to say that in the main Gunderson's plans of September, 1897, were carried out. The expedition went by boat from Seattle to Dyea, Alaska, the port of debarkation for those taking the Chilkoot Pass route to the upper Yukon. Then began the grueling work of hauling the outfit by handsled up the Dyea Trail, over the pass, and down to Lake Bennett in Canadian territory. The men accomplished it. They also accomplished successfully, in boats or scows they themselves built at Bennett, the at times treacherous descent of the Yukon. Headquarters were established at the confluence of the Stewart and Yukon Rivers, where Jack London spent the winter of 1897-98. In the months that followed the Monitors prospected for gold, engaged in trading, and worked for wages. As August 31, 1899, the time for the expiration of the contracts, approached, the eleven remaining expedition members assembled in Dawson and divided the company's earnings.

²³ *Tribune*, January 21, 1898; United States Weather Bureau, Daily Journals, 1898, National Archives.



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