

Borderlands

A Conference on The Alaska-Yukon Border

YUKON HISTORICAL &
MUSEUMS ASSOCIATION
BOX 4357
WHITEHORSE, YUKON
Y1A 3T5

**Whitehorse, Yukon
2-4 June 1989**





Borderlands Introduction

On June 2-4, 1989, a conference dealing with the Yukon/Alaska/B.C. border and the issues surrounding this border was held in Whitehorse, YT, Canada. This venture was jointly sponsored by the Yukon Historical and Museums Association (umbrella organization for Yukon Museums and Historical societies), Yukon College, The University of Victoria's Public History Group, and the Alaska Historical Society.

The Conference theme revolved around the history of the Yukon/Alaska and B.C./Alaska border, the impacts on people living in those regions, and the future significance of the border to northern peoples. Conference sessions were arranged by geographic regions from southern coastal areas through central areas, and north to the Arctic coast. Presentations within sessions were arranged in rough chronological order. Although a wide variety of information was presented for each region, uniform coverage for these areas spanning the entire time period from native pre-contact to present was not achieved.

In all, there were approximately one hundred and twenty people who attended the three day conference. Participants came from many areas within the Yukon and Alaska, as well as other parts of Canada and the lower 48 States, and ranged from Northern native elders to professors from Western and Eastern institutions. Approximately thirty five academic and non-academic speakers presented papers at

the conference on a broad range of topics.

Four separate speaking sessions were held over the weekend, as well as an opening film festival which took place on the Friday evening. The "Northern Heritage Film Festival" as it was entitled, saw a collection of works shown that dealt with Yukon/Alaska issues and relations of the past and present. This exhibition set the stage for the weekend conference, and gave participants a glimpse of what might be expected during the next two days. On Saturday, an overview session was held to set the context for the whole borderlands area and the history of the boundary itself. On Sunday, two thematic sessions were held; the first dealt with topics related to the boundary in Klondike Gold Rush times and the second was a session on contemporary issues concerning the boundary. The final session on Sunday dealt with debriefing participants and preparing summary comments. One Alaskan and one Yukoner presented their impressions on the conference and reflected on the conference theme.

The conference was a great success, and did prove to be the "exciting international, cultural, and educational" event as previously billed. One aspect of the conference which was of particular interest was the differing views people held as to what a borderline or boundary was-- particularly those of the aboriginal people in attendance who held a markedly different view of the border as being a harmful physical and cultural barrier compared to

many of the other speakers who were not as directly affected by its presence. Generally, however, the information that was presented and exchanged certainly contributed to an improved understanding of the borderline and the implications this boundary has for the people associated with it. As one speaker said, "Border lines mean many different things to different people." This sentiment was expressed repeatedly throughout the conference, and the underlying message seemed to be that a greater level of cross-border communication and cooperation on pertinent issues would be necessary in order to address the differences.

John Ryder
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