Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation to Induct Three Mining Pioneers

Three individuals stand out in the large-scale development of the placer fields in the Nome and Fairbanks areas: Norman C. Stines, James M. Davidson, and Wendell P. Hammon. They were men of exceptional vision and uncommon energy and ability. From 1920 until 1926, Stines, Davidson, and Hammon initiated, explored, consolidated, planned, and carried out the early development of the dredge camps at Nome and Fairbanks. Hammon installed the first three modern dredges at Nome and the first extensive thaw fields anywhere in the permafrost north. Davidson, using his civil engineering background, planned and acquired lands for the ditch route into Fairbanks that bears his name. Much earlier Davidson and partners constructed the famed Miocene ditch of the Seward Peninsula. Stines, the youngest of the three men, acted as overall promoter, and planned and supervised the initial developments at Fairbanks. Other engineers, younger or more qualified for operations management, took over development and mining at Nome and Fairbanks. They followed the giant steps of, Stines, Davidson, and Hammon.

Norman C. Stines - Top photograph.
James M. Davidson - Middle photograph.
Wendell P. Hammon – Bottom photograph.
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame
Induction Ceremony, July 19th, 2001
11:15 am to 12:00 noon Westmark Hotel, Fairbanks, Alaska
As part of the 2001 Golden Citizens Luncheon Program

PROGRAM

The Opening of the Induction Ceremony follows the Invocation, Guest Introductions, and Pledge of Allegiance for the Golden Citizen's Luncheon; coordinated by Meadow Riedel, 2001 Golden Days Coordinator, Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce.

Introduction and Purpose of the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF), by Earl Beistline, President, AMHF.

Introduction of new inductees by Charles C. Hawley, Chair, Honors Committee, AMHF

Comments from Dermot Cole, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

Norman C. Stines, by Tom Bundtzen

James M. Davidson, by Mary Nordale

Wendell P. Hammon, by Chuck Hawley

Recollections of the three inductees by relatives and members of the audience.

Closing of Ceremony

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The July 19th, 2001 Alaska Mining Hall of Fame induction ceremony is co-sponsored by the Golden Citizen's Luncheon of the Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce and the Fairbanks Historical Preservation Foundation. We would like to especially thank Meadow Riedel, Golden Days Coordinator for the Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce for inviting our participation in the Golden Citizens Luncheon program, and well known Fairbanks historian and author Dermot Cole for offering commentary about the importance of our three AMHF inductees to Alaska and the community.

AMHF Honors Chair Charles C. Hawley prepared much of the biographical sketches for all three inductees from his research files and from published accounts (see bibliography). He has described the relevant importance of the gold dredging industry to the economies of both Nome and Fairbanks during the early part of the 20th century and how this industry was advanced by inductees Stines, Davidson, and Hammon.

AMHF secretary Tom Bundtzen and an anonymous reviewer reviewed the biographical sketches and incorporated revisions into the text. Ms. Nori Bowman of Pacific Rim Geological Consulting, Inc. prepared the July, 2001 AMHF Newsletter for publication.
In addition, Bundtzen and Bowman constructed a pictorial history that summarizes the activities of the USSR&M Company. The history will be made available for viewing before and after the Golden Citizen Luncheon ceremonies.

Previous Inductees
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame

The three Alaskan mining pioneers to be inducted in the July, 2001 ceremony in Fairbanks join twenty-seven others previously inducted in ceremonies held between 1998 and May 2001 in Fairbanks, Nome, Juneau, and Anchorage.

Six charter members of the AMHF Foundation--Stephen Birch, Frederick Bradley, Alfred H. Brooks, John Treadwell, Earnest Patty, and Clarence Berry--were previously elected into the National Mining Hall of Fame in Leadville, Colorado.

Yukon River traders Alfred Mayo, and Jack McQuesten, Fortymile discoverer, Arthur Harper, Athabascan miner, Howard Franklin, Rampart discoverer, John Minook, and Fairbanks district founder Felix Pedro were inducted during the 16th Biennial Interior Mining Conference held in Fairbanks in 1998. That same year, at Nome's Centennial celebration, the three 'lucky Swedes' - Erik Lindblom, Jafet Lindeberg, and John Brynteson - and gold rush mine-backer Charles Lane were added to the list.

In May 1999, AMHF induction ceremonies at the Juneau-Douglas Museum added four more pioneers: Joe Juneau, Richard Harris, George Pilz, and Tlingit leader Kawa.'ee were all associated with the gold discovery of what became Alaska's capital city.

Three more mining leaders were inducted during the annual Alaska Miners Association Convention in Anchorage in November, 1999: platinum miner Andrew Olson, coal pioneer Evan Jones, and mine innovator/geologist W.E. Dunkle.

In March, 2000, three distinguished interior mining pioneers were inducted during ceremonies in Fairbanks: Kantishta legend Fannie Quigley; Usibelli Coal Mine Inc. founder Emil Usibelli, and geological standout John Beaver Mertie.

In May, 2001, Benjamin Duane Stewart, long-time Territorial Commissioner of Mines, was inducted in Juneau.

More than 100 men and women have been nominated for the AMHF Foundation. All of these nominees remain active. The principal task of the AMHF honors committee is to select new potential inductees through internal research efforts, and to receive additional potential nominees through solicitation from the general public. We encourage all those interested and knowledgeable about Alaska's mining history to nominate new members for the AMHF Foundation.
During World War I and after the fall of Imperial Russia, Stines left mining, and began a brief State Department career as military attaché in Russia. In 1917, just before the Bolshevik Revolution, Stines moved about $2,000,000 worth of platinum, vitally needed for wartime manufacturing, out of Russia to Yokohama, Japan. After the Great War, Stines continued working for his British employers, examining potential mines in the Balkans.

From 1920 through 1926, Alaska became the centerpiece of Stine's career. During this brief seven-year period, he made his Alaskan reputation as an outstanding large-scale placer mining man with tremendous vision. His conceptual abilities and leadership were called on repeatedly to develop the dredging fields at Nome and at Fairbanks. Two other men, Wendell P. Hammon, and James M. Davidson, were critical to these endeavors. These men were almost thirty years older than Stines, and Stines was the man who often maintained an eighteen hour workday on duty in Fairbanks or Nome. Hammon, a major industrialist for more than twenty years could delegate much responsibility to key men like Stines in the mining field. Davidson, associated with a major water supply works since 1901 at Nome, carried out the critical conceptual work needed in order for the large-scale dredging scheme to succeed in Fairbanks and Nome.

Stines was the optimist who believed early on that cold water thawing technology of frozen gravels would be economically viable, despite considerable skepticism as late as 1925. Behind the scenes was the United States Smelting Refining and Mining Company or the USSR&M Company, (hereafter in this text, "U. S. Smelting") of Boston. The exact relation of Stines and U. S. Smelting is uncertain, but from 1920 on they backed Stines and led him to lead the Alaska field projects into the development and early mining stages.
In 1920, Nome was thought to be a larger and richer placer field, or at least less difficult than Fairbanks, and Nome was Stines’ original target. Ironically, time would prove that the ground dredged in the Fairbanks district was considerably richer than the placer dredged in the Cape Nome district. Stines visited Nome in 1920, liked what he saw, and went to Boston either to obtain financing or to corroborate an opinion already held by the mining company. Stines began to obtain options in the Cape Nome district for U. S. Smelting. Following a 1921 contact and a 1923 survey by Davidson of potential water availability at Fairbanks, Stines also became convinced of Fairbank’s potential. In February 1924, after acquiring Davidson’s options, Stines optioned ground in Fairbanks that included Fish, Ester, Fairbanks, Goldstream, and Cleary Creeks. Stines could also delegate and could obtain a high-level of performance from his non-professional crews. His assistant, later in charge of Fairbanks operations, was Crosby Keen. A key driller, who had known Stines since 1903, was Mike Ercog.

As drill results from the creeks around Fairbanks began to pour in, Stines conceptually planned and accurately predicted costs of an operation that ultimately lasted until the 1960s.

In 1926, Stines was placed in charge of exploration for U. S. Smelting throughout Alaska, Canada, Mexico, and the western United States. Stines left the company in 1929, and, in 1932, opened consulting offices in San Francisco and in Vancouver, British Columbia. Subsequently he reopened a placer mine in the Caribou district of central British Columbia, Canada. In 1933, Stines joined with two well-known Alaska mining men, Ben Bromberg and Sam Godfrey, in a dredging operation in Idaho. In 1938, Stines was again affiliated with U. S. Smelting as the general manager of the Bol-Inca placer dredging operation in Bolivia.

In 1939, Stines renewed Alaska operations, and from then until his death in 1955 had mining projects in Alaska. During the war years and until 1950, Stines held public positions or was a spokesman for business and professional groups in Alaska, especially in Fairbanks.

With Davidson and Hammon, his work revitalized Fairbanks and Nome, then in danger of becoming ghost towns. Older citizens of Fairbanks, Alaska remember Norman C. Stines with esteem.

JAMES M. DAVIDSON (1853-1928)

When James M. Davidson, who studied civil engineering at the University of California, arrived in Dawson City, Yukon Territory, in 1898, he had about a quarter-century of civil engineering and mining experience in his native California. Davidson was born at Ft. James, Siskiyou County, California on December 3, 1853, three years after his father, William, a native Virginian, had arrived, crossing the plains from Indiana. William was satisfied with life as a farmer, but James M. Davidson was a restless and observant man, quick to perceive and understand a problem and devise a solution.

Davidson attended the University of California, where four of his friends were James Budd, later governor of California; and mining or metallurgical experts, Professors S.
B. Christie, George C. Edwards, and Henry Webb. After leaving the university in the mid-1870s, Davidson returned to Siskiyou County and was elected County Clerk, serving for four years. He also filled non-elective posts in the clerk's office and, at the same time, mined on the Klamath River. A period of ill health led Davidson out of mining work into farming, an endeavor that he periodically returned to throughout his life. Like many other Americans, Davidson was virtually wiped out in the financial panics of the early 1890s, and came north after the Klondike discovery to recoup earlier prosperity. As a trained civil engineer with mining background, Davidson was much better prepared than most of the stampers. He crossed Chilkoot Pass into the Yukon early in 1898, but since he did not approve of either Canadian law or Canadian mining methods, he left for Alaska Territory. Davidson mined on Mastadon Creek in the Circle area in the fall and winter of 1898. Davis learned about the discovery at Nome indirectly through a letter from Magnus Kjelberg, one of the Swedish community on the Seward Peninsula, to one of his friends at Circle. Davidson embarked for Nome on the first riverboat of the 1899 season, and arrived in Nome on the 4th of July in 1899. He used the last of his available funds to buy a lot to pitch his tent. On July 10, 1899, Davidson set up the first surveying transit in Nome. With another engineer, George Ashford, Davidson soon had a thriving surveying and engineering business in Nome. In a surveying-related venture, Davidson and B. D. Blakeslee produced and sold a "Map of the Nome Peninsula" in 1900.

As the camp exploded, thousands of men and women packed the beaches and backwaters at Nome, which led to serious sanitation problems. Quickly recognizing the serious water quality problems in the crowded camp, Davidson located the Moonlight Springs water right on September 25, 1899. The pure water springs were developed by Davidson partly with an investment from the Pioneer Mining Company of the "lucky Swedes," Lindeberg, Lindblom, and Brynteson. Moonlight Springs water is still used in Nome.

Davidson was active in both the technical and promotional parts of large-scale placer mining in Alaska. His work and plans were critical to the development of large-scale mining at both Nome and Fairbanks. By 1901, Davidson noted the scarcity of useable water at Nome for mining, then entering a large-scale hydraulic mining stage, and devised and planned a solution. In association with W. L. Leland and W. S. Bliss, Davidson formed the Miocene Ditch Company and began construction of the Miocene Ditch, a major engineering and construction feat. This ditch extends from the Nome River, just below Buffalo Creek, to Anvil Creek and the Nome coastal plain. The ditch divides north of King Mountain; an easterly fork diverted water into Dexter Creek. The west fork furnished water to upper Snow Gulch, and, through an 1800-foot tunnel, into Anvil Creek. Construction, managed by Davidson, started in 1901; the ditch was complete and in operation in 1904. During the same period, Davidson assisted Leland and Bliss with successful mining operations.

Davidson spent many years investigating mining opportunities. He visited every placer mining district then known in Alaska. Both Davidson and Norman C. Stines believed that the Fortymile district could support dredging operations; neither man, however, could obtain financing for the project. Meanwhile, the government was slowly building the railroad that would make Fairbanks relatively accessible and Davidson renewed work at Fairbanks. In 1921, Davidson had conceptually outlined a plan for bringing water to Fairbanks for large-scale dredge operations. After meeting with Norman C. Stines and agreeing to cooperate in the redevelopment of the district, Davidson conducted initial field surveys of a major water diversion-supply system for the Chatanika drainage North of Fairbanks. He maintained an interest in Nome where Hammon and Stines were assembling dredge properties that would use Miocene Ditch water. Davidson told Stines that a ditch
similar to Miocene, but somewhat longer, could bring water from the upper Chatanika to Fairbanks. Davidson explored, calculated water flow, studied the ground conditions, and staked out a ditch route nearly 100 miles long. He then obtained mining options and water rights for the project. In 1923, Davidson convinced Stines and U. S. Smelting that water could be obtained from the Chatanika system, and, with cold-water thawing, that dredging would be feasible. Once convinced Stines, his assistant Crosby Keen, and Davidson held fast on the Chatanika option. As built, the Davidson ditch had 83.3 miles of earthwork section; 6.1 miles of inverted siphon; a 0.7 mile long tunnel, and about 0.4 miles of pen stocks and flumes. Abundant water, cold-water thawing, and reasonable freight rates that followed completion of the Alaska Railroad made large-scale dredging possible in Fairbanks.

Wendell P. Hammon was a pioneer in two industries—horticulture and mining—and a principal in several others, including oil and gas development, and hydroelectric power generation. He balanced his mining and other activities throughout a long and productive life. Hammon began to engage in mining ventures just before the start of the twentieth century; by 1910, he was known to many, accurately, as the “Dredger King”.

Hammon was born May 23, 1854 at Conneautville, Crawford County, Pennsylvania to Marshall M. and Harriet S. (nee Cooper) Hammon. Hammon's first move towards Alaska began approximately in 1906 shortly after the discovery of the rich Third Beach near Little Creek in Nome, and recognition of extensive placer deposits in the Fairbanks district. Originally Hammon believed that dredging possibilities were limited at Nome. In 1907 he considered, and rejected, a large-scale hydraulic operation at Fairbanks. A few small Hammon-constructed dredges arrived in Alaska before 1920. One was a bucket-line dredge used successfully at Shovel Creek, a tributary to the Solomon River on the Seward Peninsula. Shovel Creek’s operator was Newton Cleveland, who had been a Hammon chief engineer. In general, Hammon was not interested in constructing small flume-type dredges for the Alaska trade. His well engineered and constructed boats could not compete with off-the-shelf “home made” placer dredges on small Alaska projects.

One of Hammon's early ventures in Alaska was hard rock, not placer. Hammon aided Louis Shackelford and Bartlett Thane in negotiations in London on the acquisition of Colonel Sutherland’s Perseverance lode mine in Juneau. The Perseverance was renamed the Alaska-Gastineau. Hammon and another famous miner, D. C. Jackling, then helped, technically and financially, to open the Alaska-Gastineau Mine. For a while it was the largest hard rock gold mine in the world.

Hammon, however, was a better placer mine developer than lode miner. By the end of World War I, Hammon recognized that the
placer deposits in frozen ground at Nome and Fairbanks were large enough for consolidated operations and could be mined if the ground could be thawed economically. The first efforts at thawing used steam and heated water; steam thawing had limited success in thawing shallow ground for dredging, but it was too expensive to consider for use on deep buried frozen placer deposits. One young inventor, John Miles, proposed that cold-water thawing was feasible. Hammon Consolidated Gold Fields Company tested cold-water thawing on ground owned by the Alaska Mines Corporation at Nome with satisfactory results. Miles patented the cold water process in 1920, and Hammon purchased the rights to the process for Alaska in 1923. Hammon had already acquired considerable ground at Nome, and the company began cold-water thaw field operations in 1922.

At about the same time, Hammon reexamined the data on the Fairbanks field, concluded that a dredge field could be developed, and optioned placer ground. His crews, including his son Wendell C. Hammon, began drilling in Fish, Fairbanks, Cleary, and Goldstream Creeks in the Fairbanks district and established reserves rich enough for dredge mining. The Hammon Consolidated Gold Fields drill program at Fairbanks (in 1923) coincided with costly start up operations at Nome, and the Company was forced to relinquish some placer claims in Fairbanks. Nevertheless, Hammon retained control of about 457 acres in Cleary Creek and 512 acres on Goldstream Creek, lands of critical value for later operations. Competition between Hammon and U. S. Smelting at Fairbanks was finally resolved when, in 1924, the companies agreed to consolidate all Fairbanks operations through a new company, Fairbanks Exploration Co. U. S. Smelting bought all the Hammon-controlled shares at $110 per share and became the sole owner of Fairbanks Exploration. In September 1926, Hammon also sold his part of the Davidson ditch to Fairbanks Exploration Co.

Hammon sold his Nome operations to the U. S. Smelting Refining and Mining Company, although the Nome-based company operated as Hammon Consolidated Gold Fields until 1938. By 1924, Hammon probably had about $4,000,000 invested at Nome and recovery of capital had proven difficult. The purchases of the Hammon interests at Nome and Fairbanks effectively took Hammon out of Alaska as an operator, although as president of Yuba Manufacturing Company, Hammon constructed other dredges for the Alaska fields in the succeeding years.

Wendell P. Hammon and James M. Davidson were contemporaries; each man was near seventy years old as the Fairbanks and Nome dredge fields were coming on stream. Hammon lived many more years, vigorous until the end, still looking for opportunities for his large dredges. Hammon was not primarily an Alaska operator; his great operations were in California. Nevertheless, his presence in Alaska was crucial. Cold water thawing was necessary for the dredge mining of placers in frozen ground. Hammon, through his operating and engineering companies, took a raw patent and small scale experiments to commercial development. The cold water thawing method was improved to great efficiency by his own successors at Nome and Fairbanks.

In California, Hammon was a major force in horticulture, oil production and refining, hydroelectric systems, and power companies. Although a late immigrant to the Gold Rush state, he gained acceptance into the California mining fraternity, reinforced when he married Gussie Kenney, the daughter of 49er Ephriam Kenney, a pioneer miner of Placerville, California. Mr. and Mrs. Hammon lost a daughter, Georgia, in 1915, but their sons Wendell C. and Glenn A. entered family businesses after service during World War I. In his later years, Hammon contributed his time and personal wealth to the support of arts and crafts. His descendents retain a thoroughly justified sense of pride in their distinguished farmer-miner ancestor.

As noted by F. C. van Deinse, himself a noted placer engineer, in an obituary on Hammon, "An attempt to sketch briefly the career of Wendell P. Hammon can hardly do


Distinguished Alaskans Aid
Foundation as '98ers

The Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation was incorporated as an Alaskan non-profit corporation on April 27, 1997. The Foundation was organized exclusively for educational and charitable purposes, including donations to organizations that are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. The foundation is a non-membership corporation that depends on services provided by its officers and directors, others interested in Alaskan mining, and on donations and grants.

The Foundation is especially indebted to fourteen persons who have each contributed $1,000 to become '98ers, in honor of the first stampeders to Alaska in 1898 at Nome.

The '98ers
Earl Beistline
Thomas K. Bundtzen
Douglas Colp
Walter Johnson
Wallace McGregor
John Mulligan
Patrick H. O’Neill
Elmer E. Rasmuson (deceased)
Robert H. Trent
Joe Usibelli, Sr.
William R. Wood (deceased)
Glen Chambers
Mitch Usibelli

Most of the '98ers are recognizable as miners of national or international reputation. The late William R. Wood was President, Emeritus, of the University of Alaska. Dr. Wood suggested the organization of the Foundation. The late Elmer E. Rasmuson was an Alaska banker and benefactor, long interested in Alaska natural resource history. Dr. Walter Johnson’s career was mainly in Native public health, but he knew many pioneer Alaskans. His own research has taken him to Sweden and Norway in search of the true story of the so-called “three Lucky Swedes” of fame at Nome.

The Foundation is seeking about ninety more '98ers, but it welcomes contributions at every level. For further information contact:

Wallace McGregor, Chair
Finance Committee
1212 N. Washington, Ste 12
Spokane, WA 99201
Karl Hanneman
Treasurer
626 Second St., Ste 201
Fairbanks, AK 99701

Alaska Mining Hall Of Fame
Directors and Officers:
President--Earl H. Beistline
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Earl H. Beistline
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Karl Hanneman
Charles C. Hawley
Tom Bundtzen

Mailing Addresses:
AMHF Headquarters
Earl H. Beistline-President
P.O. Box 80148
Fairbanks, Alaska 99708
phone 907-479-6240

AMHF Honors Committee
Charles C. Hawley
11401 Olive Lane
Anchorage, Alaska 99515
phone 907-522-9201

AMHF Treasurer and Donations
Karl Hanneman
626 Second Avenue, Suite 201
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Associate Editors of the Paystreak
Charles C. Hawley
11401 Olive Lane
Anchorage, Alaska 99515
David G. Stone
Box 22893
Juneau, Alaska 99802

Tom Bundtzen
Box 81906
Fairbanks, Alaska 99708