

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

STRIKING IT RICH

In August 1896, three people led by Skookum Jim Mason, a member of the Tagish First Nations, headed down the Yukon River looking for his sister Kate and her husband George Carmack. After meeting up with George and Kate, who were fishing for salmon at the mouth of the Klondike River, they ran into a prospector who had been mining gold on the Indian River. The prospector told Carmack he had been getting promising results from areas around the mouth of the Klondike River. The group set out down one of the river's tributary, Rabbit Creek. On August 17, 1896, the crew found their strike!

WHO MADE THE DISCOVERY?

It is not clear who made the actual discovery. Some accounts say that it was Kate Carmack, while others credit Skookum Jim. George Carmack was officially credited for the gold discovery because the actual claim was staked in his name. He was a white man and, because of the strong racist attitudes of the time, the group agreed to use George's name to register their claim. They felt other miners would be reluctant to recognize a claim made by anyone but a white man.

LIFE AFTER THE STRIKE

Skookum Jim moved away and built a large house for his wife and daughter. He spent his winters hunting and trapping. Each spring he returned to the Klondike. Highly regarded by his people, Skookum Jim was known as a generous family man. He had the foresight to place what remained of his fortune in trust, and when he died in 1916 he left a substantial sum in trust for the benefit of Yukon Indians. For his role, Skookum Jim Mason was designated a Person of National Historic Significance and he is an inductee in the Canadian Mining Hall of Fame.

George Carmack died a rich man in Vancouver in 1922. His second wife, Marguerite, inherited his wealth. Even though his first wife, Kate, may very well have been the person who actually discovered the gold claim that made them all rich, George gave her nothing when they parted.

Kate Carmack could not produce legal documents to prove she had ever been married to George. Because of this, she was entitled to nothing by law and was left penniless. She returned to her Tagish clan and lived off a government pension in a cabin that Skookum Jim built for her. In 1920, Kate died during a flu epidemic. She was 63.

It Could Have Been Kate!
A Readers Theater Script About the Klondike Gold Rush

READER 1: North in the Klondike - up that way,
 Gold was discovered one summer's day

READER 2: And it kindled a rush for "gold or bust"

READER 3: It was eighteen ninety six – August.

READER 4: Who discovered that gold in Rabbit Creek?

READER 5: Skookum Jim on a lucky streak!

READER 6: A First Nations fellow – Skookum Jim?

READERS 1-6: That's what they say, and it could have been him.

ALL: Who discovered that gold so long ago?
 There is debate – so we really don't know.
 It could have been his sister Kate.
 It could have been Kate – or maybe her mate.

READER Kate was salmon fishing in the deep Klondike.
 Her brother dropped in, and they searched for a
 strike.

READER And one of the group struck placer gold.

READER Maybe one, maybe all – as the story is told.

It Could Have Been Kate!
A Readers Theater Script About the Klondike Gold Rush

READER Now Kate was married to George Carmack.
His skin was white, not brown or black,

READER So the claim was registered in his name.

READER That name still lives in Gold Rush fame.

ALL: Who discovered that gold in Rabbit Creek?
Skookum Jim on a lucky streak?
Or it could have been his sister Kate.
Could have been Kate – or maybe her mate.

READER They renamed Rabbit Creek – Bonanza.
Bonanza Creek – an extravaganza!

READER Then folks from all over the world rushed in

READER Panning for gold and wanting to win.

READER Stampeders flocked to Dawson City.
River-rafting solo or in committee.

READER Overlanders came from Edmonton

READER To mine for gold in the midnight sun.

ALL: Who discovered that gold in Rabbit Creek?
Skookum Jim on a lucky streak?

Or it could have been his sister Kate.
Could have been Kate – or maybe her mate.

READER Old time miners were "Sourdoughs"
Tenderfoot miners were "Chee-chakos"

READER All of them panned, and dug, and pitched,

READER But few of them ended up rich.

READER And which of our discoverers ended up rich?
Well, all of them, but here's the glitch:

READER Jim saved his fortune, but still lived well

READER And when he died, his last farewell...

READER Left money, in trust, for the native clans
To benefit his Yukon fans.

READER But sister Kate didn't fare so well.

READER Her fortunes rose and her fortunes fell.

READER Although it was not her intention,
George left her to live on a government pension,

READER Alone in a cabin that was rather grim.