

# OLD TIMES AT SKAGWAY

(From the Literary Digest).  
Human nature at its crookedest and cussedest, as well as at its bravest, flourishes in such an out of the way place as was Skagway, Alaska, in the days when the gold rush began. Fred Lockley, pursuing his hobby of turning up choice bits of history and human nature for The Oregon Journal, found a man who had known Skagway in the days of its greatest sinfulness, glory and excitement. On the basis of this acquaintance, Mr. Lockley doth a tale of such crookedness unfold that it would furnish "local color" for any number of "movie" dramas. He writes and quotes:

George R. Dedman used to live at Oregon City, but for twenty-one years past he has lived at Skagway. Recently we were talking of the progress and development of Alaska and its wonderful possibilities for young men with enthusiasm, energy and intelligence.

"Some of these days some chap will come along," said Mr. Dedman, "and will write the story of Skagway. Talk about your movies—the history of Skagway could be dramatized to make a movie thriller that would run to crowded houses. Away back in 1884 an old British sea-dog named Captain William Moore took up the site of Skagway. Captain Moore, who had the government contract to take mail in to the placer-miners on the bars of the Yukon, used to see the Stik Indians come out with considerable quantities of coarse gold. He figured that if there was much coarse gold in the Yukon basin, some day there would be extensive mining development there, and that the site of the city of Skagway would be the logical place to build up a settlement on the coast. He took up a town site, a homestead, a mill site and a trading post. These various rights gave him about three hundred and twenty acres. His place was half a mile wide and about a mile long. He built a log cabin near the beach and made it his home.

"When the discovery of gold in the fall of 1896 on the Klondike was heralded to the world, adventurers from all parts flocked to San Francisco and Seattle on their way to the golden north. The stampeders started from Seattle, for the steamship, the Klondike reached Seattle in July, 1897, with a large amount of gold-dust aboard. As soon as ships could be secured and provisioned the argonauts started northward. The old Indian trail had been by way of Dyea, and on over the Chilkoot pass, thence to the headwaters of the Yukon. This was the same trail that Lieutenant Frederick Schwatka, of Salem, Ore., had taken in his exploring expedition.

"On August 7, 1897, Captain Moore, while on the beach near his cabin, saw a steamer pull in from the South. It seemed about to pass on, but soon it swung around, lowered a boat, and a party came ashore. They told Captain Moore they had seen the smoke from his cabin and had come ashore to ask a few questions. They wanted to know if they were on the road to the Klondike, and where was the best place to go in from. He told them most people went in over the Chilkoot trail, but if they were planning to go in with pack-horses it would be better to go in over the White Pass trail. The spokesman of the party informed him they were planning to go in with pack-horses, and asked who owned the land along the beach. He told them he had taken it up thirteen years before, but they were welcome to unload their outfits on the beach and he would do all he could to help them. Some of the gold-seekers came ashore that night. Next morning they began to unload the outfit. There were about two hundred in the party. The passengers held a meeting, the result of which was that a committee came to Captain Moore and said: "The fact that you have been living here for the past thirteen years and that you say you have taken up this place doesn't in-

terest us. Boats from Seattle and San Francisco will soon be coming up here like a flock of birds and we intend to take up this claim and make a city here. You say you have prior rights. If so, go to it and bring suit to eject us. We are going to jump your claim. We are from Missouri, and if you can put us off you will have to show us."

"Captain Moore, of course, was helpless. He had all the legal rights on his side, but here were two hundred men who had decided to take possession of his claim, and, as they told him, possession was nine points of the law, and if his legal rights were any satisfaction to him he could fight it out on that line in the courts. Frank H. Reed, a former county official from the Puget Sound country, surveyed the town site of Skagway. They divided it into blocks and lots and parceled the lots out among themselves. The town was surveyed so that Captain Moore's log cabin occupied one of the newly laid out streets. They afforded him a lot on which to put his cabin, which he indignantly refused. Eventually a force of men took his cabin away and dumped it in the tide flats. Captain Moore took the matter up in the courts, but decisions in the Alaska courts in those days went to the ones who would pay the most for the decisions. The case dragged its way through the courts, and after four years Captain Moore secured a decision in his favor. Secretary Hitchcock, of the Interior Department, notified all trespassers on Captain Moore's claim to vacate. The matter was finally settled in this way: Captain Moore was to receive twenty-five per cent. of the assessed valuation of all lots. For example, I paid eight hundred dollars originally for my lot, and it was now assessed at four thousand dollars, so I had to pay one thousand dollars for a warranty deed to Captain Moore, being twenty-five per cent. of its assessed valuation.

"During the boom days of Skagway Captain Moore would have made a fortune from his claim. In fact, the men who jumped his claim did make fortunes. The jumpers who had laid out the town-site sold lots to the newcomers at good prices. They laid out three thousand and six hundred lots. Soon these lots were all sold. Having no more lots to sell, the claim-jumpers worked out a new plan, which they put into execution, which was to resell all lots whose owners had gone into the mines or were not in actual possession. This led to strenuous times. A man would buy a lot, build a cabin, put his possessions into it, go over the pass to look for a claim, and when he returned a few weeks or months later he found his outfit thrown out into the street, or gone, and some one else in possession of his cabin. This chaotic condition led to constant fighting. Sometimes the same lot would be sold three or four times, each man having what he supposed was a perfectly valid title."

Crook rule continued to thrive in Skagway. By the fall of 1897, the whole of the district was split into two distinct factions, the skinnners and the skinned. The skinnners were in control, according to Mr. Dedman, whom Mr. Lockley quotes further: "The skinnners, however, had a better organization and stuck together, so those who were defrauded were unable to obtain redress. Attention was soon diverted from the claim-jumpers by a new party organized under the leadership of Jefferson R. Smith, from Denver, Col. Most people know him by his nickname of 'Soapy' Smith. Soapy Smith was a most genial and affable crook. He obtained his nickname by a business he made of traveling throughout the West selling small bars of soap at one dollar. He would wrap a ten or twenty dollar bill around one of these small cakes of soap, put an additional wrapper on it, drop it into the pile, and let you pick it out. It was like picking out the rubber ball from under the walnut-shell. To your great surprise, you never were able to pick out the cake of soap around which was wrapped the twenty dollar bill. Soapy wanted to go on over the pass to Dawson, but the Northwest Mounted Police politely but firmly refused permission.

"It was said that 'Soapy' Smith owned the court, the post-office, and the church at Skagway. You couldn't help liking 'Soapy.' He was the most gentlemanly crook that ever scuttled a ship or cut a throat. For example, a preacher came to him for a subscription to build a church. 'Soapy' asked him how much he needed. The minister told him, 'Soapy' said: 'Don't be a piker and go around asking for small amounts. Come out with me and we will raise the whole thing in a couple of hours.' 'Soapy'

and the minister went to each saloon, each gambling house and each merchant and raised the money within a few hours. 'Soapy' would go in and say, 'We are building a church—you are assessed one hundred dollars.' If the saloon-keeper or merchant demurred, 'Soapy' would say: 'Are you going to come through with that one hundred dollars or not? If you don't, it will be apt to cost you ten times that amount in the long run.' They came through, for they knew 'Soapy' would make good his threat. Naturally after that the preacher was 'Soapy's' friend for life, and couldn't believe that 'Soapy' wasn't a big-hearted Westerner who was greatly misunderstood.

"Soapy's gang had a great contempt for the real estate crooks. 'Soapy' and his gang won their wealth in legitimate ways, such as gambling, running saloons and confidence games. I doubt if there was ever a smoother bunko man than 'Soapy' Smith. On the Fourth of July, 1898, 'Soapy' was grand marshal of the Fourth of July program at Skagway. He had fifty mounted men in the parade. He offered President McKinley to furnish a company for the Spanish war, but this offer was declined. 'Soapy' and his gang could part a man from his money the most expeditiously and painlessly of any bunch of grafters I ever saw. 'For example, a man came over the trail one day with a horse. He was going to take the boat that left next day for Seattle. He had a sign on his horse, 'For Sale—One Hundred Dollars.'

"He walked up and down the streets of Skagway, leading the horse, looking for a purchaser. One of 'Soapy's' men examined the horse and decided to purchase it. The owner made out a bill of sale. The buyer handed him a one hundred bill. A group of Soapy's men were standing around. One of them said: 'Let me see that bill; I think it's a counterfeit.' He looked at it and said: 'No it seemed to be a good bill after all.' One of the other men said: 'It doesn't look very good to me; let me see it.' The man who purchased the horse led the horse away while the discussion was going on as to the merits and demerits of the bill. The former owner of the horse said, 'Well, I will have to be going. Where is my one hundred bill?' No one knew. It had disappeared. The man put up a terrible holler, but every one laughed at him. Finally they threatened to put him in jail for creating a disturbance if he didn't go aboard the ship and behave himself. The man was nearly frantic. The crowd dispersed. The owner of the horse hadn't the faintest idea which one of them had his bill. Every one he went to with his story of the horse gave him the horse laugh. Finally one of Soapy's gang said: 'If you will go aboard your boat and suit your hollering I will take up a collection for you, though I greatly doubt your ever having the one hundred dollar bill you claim you had. They took up a collection and raised ten or fifteen dollars for him, which settled the matter. He went away feeling grateful to them.

"All of the money secured in this way went into a common pot and was divided among the gang. One of the gang, who helped split the pot told me they had to pay five hundred dollars a week to the owners of the Skagway paper to keep them from publishing anything detrimental to the operation of 'Soapy' Smith and his associates.

"There was considerable jealousy and bad blood between the real estate grafters and the confidence gang under 'Soapy' Smith. It was a case of the pot calling the kettle black. The honest citizens were afraid to criticize either side for fear of getting in bad."

"But the villain invariably gets felled in the last chapter, and so it was in Skagway. However, before the grand falling out of rogues which permitted some honest men at least to get their dues, 'Soapy' Smith and his gang indulged in further "real" dramas. As Mr. Lockley quotes the story: "Soapy' Smith led an adventurous life and came to a sudden and spectacular end," said Dedman. "The feud between the two factions in Skagway—the claim-jumpers and 'Soapy's' gang—had been simmering for months. The end of Soapy's reign came with the robbing of a miner named Stewart, who had just come out from the Klondike with a poke of gold dust. He had about two thousand and seven hundred dollars in coarse gold. He put up at the Occidental hotel. One of the clerks at the Occidental was in the pay of 'Soapy,' and at once informed him that this man had placed two thousand and seven hundred dollars in dust in the hotel safe. One of the

smoothest members of 'Soapy's' gang was a man who looked very much like a minister—a sort of solemn, sad-looking chap, who would inspire confidence in any one. He came to Stewart and said he was on his way in to the gold mines, but that he had heard so much about its being a fake and there being no gold there that he wanted actually to talk to some one who had been there. He wanted to see Stewart's gold, just to convince himself that there was gold in there. Stewart was very cautious and didn't care to show the gold.

"Finally several friends of the preacher appeared and were introduced to Stewart. They adjourned to a saloon and one after the other congratulated Stewart on his luck, and set up the drinks. Finally one of the men said, after Stewart had accepted hospitality from various members of the gang: 'There is an ugly rumor going around town that you haven't any gold; that you are just faking about it.' Stewart was indignant and offered to go over to the hotel and get his poke of dust to prove that he was no faker. One of the men went with him. The bag of gold dust was brought back to the saloon. They went into the back room to look at it. It was passed from hand to hand and within two minutes it had disappeared. Stewart's new-found friend helped him try to locate it, but it had gone beyond recall. Stewart went out, vowing vengeance. He went to the other gang and told them that if miners were going to be held up in broad daylight he would fill the Seattle papers with the outrage so no one else would come to their town.

"A committee of thirteen was appointed to investigate the loss of Stewart's gold. One of 'Soapy's' gang got cold feet and started for Dyea. 'Soapy' brought him back, pulled a gun from his belt and told the fellow what he thought of him. He kicked him all the way to the saloon used as their headquarters. The man subsided meekly and promised thereafter to obey orders.

"The committee of thirteen met on Sylvester's wharf. Word came to 'Soapy' that they were planning mischief against him and his association. 'Soapy' had been drinking. When the word came to him he said: 'I will go down there and chase the whole bunch into the bay.' 'Soapy' took his rifle and started for the wharf. Frank H. Reed was on guard and told 'Soapy' he couldn't come in. 'Soapy' started for Reed with his rifle. Reed caught the barrel of the rifle and pushed it down just as 'Soapy' fired. The bullet went through Reed's groin. As Reed fell he shot 'Soapy' with his revolver through the heart. Doctor Cornelius, who runs the Cornelius hotel here at Portland, was one of the men who performed the autopsy over 'Soapy' Smith.

"The death of Reed and 'Soapy' Smith started a clean-up of Skagway. 666 quickly relieves Constipation, Biliousness, Loss of Appetite and Headaches, due to Torpid Liver.—Adv.

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