

Yukon Hotel

Dawson City, Yukon Territory

The year 1898 was a lucky time for businessman J.E. Binet. He was in Dawson City, at the start of the Klondike Gold Rush, and he was about to strike it rich.

As word of the gold strike spread, Binet acted fast. He bought a lot on Front Street (now First Avenue), and drew up plans for a simple commercial building, perhaps a hotel or café.

Binet's workers rushed to complete the job with the materials at hand.

The Binet Block, as the building was called, was a narrow two storey building with large display windows at street level. A false third storey, with window and pediment, gave the structure a more substantial feel. There was milled lumber only for the front of the building; the sides and rear walls were of rough logs chinked with mud. The balcony was too shallow to be practical, but did add a touch of elegance.

Binet's own plans for the building were put on hold. The demand for real estate was so great that he rented the Binet Block, even before it was completed in November 1898, to the Federal Government of Canada for office space. Commissioner Ogilvie of the new Yukon Territory agreed to the exorbitant rental of \$1,000 a month!

Although Binet himself never operated a hotel here, subsequent owners did. One owner named the building the Yukon Hotel after an earlier enterprise that had been destroyed by fire.

For a while, the building was boarded up. Then the government of Canada, with encouragement from Dawson natives including Pierre Berton, decided it was worth saving. The current owner, Peter Jenkins, an experienced hotelier who operates another hotel in Dawson, the El Dorado, came forward in 1984.



“This has been a labour of love,” Jenkins remarked about the work involved in bringing the hotel up to current standards. There are new bathrooms and reconfigured walls on the inside.

But the exterior of the hotel is almost identical to images in old photos. In place of original mud chinking, silicone fills the spaces between the logs, keeping out the Arctic winds of the Yukon.

The old Binet Block is one of the few survivors from the early Gold Rush. More remarkable, the building functions as a hotel, a viable commercial enterprise. This might be what J.E. Binet had in mind at the start.

For additional information about Dawson City, Yukon, follow these links:

http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/yt/dawson/natcul/natcul7_E.asp

<http://www.yukonweb.com/community/dawson/>