

Uncle James Howver

The Gold Rush and a Lost Claim

There's Gold in Them Thar Hills!

© Susan McNelley

Some men seek riches. Some men seek adventure. Some men yearn for both. Their stories often stir the imagination. My great-great Uncle Jim's story is a case in point. According to family lore, he had gone to the Klondike and Alaska during the Gold Rush which started in 1897-98. The Klondike, where one of the world's greatest gold rushes took place, is a region in the Yukon Territory of northwestern Canada, just across the border from Alaska. Supposedly Jim had a "gold claim" in Alaska, but as his niece Josephine Pullen noted, upon his death in Seattle no one in the family was able to learn anything about this claim. Where was it located? Did he find gold? Was there something sinister in the circumstances of his death?



The only photo of James P. Howver known to survive – This one was taken with his older sister, Laura Ellen c. 1878

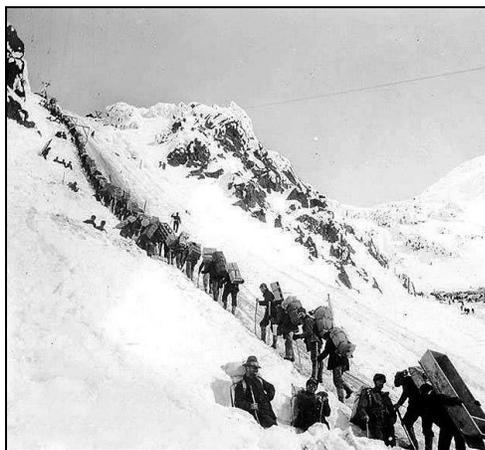
James Paulsel Howver was born on February 5, 1869 in Singers Glen, Virginia, on the other side of the United States. He was the second of six children born to George Howver and Sarah Ellen Paulsel. Sometime between 1871 and 1874, the family moved to Mansfield, Illinois where James' father George worked as a carpenter. In the late 1880s/ early 1890s, family members went their separate ways. George returned to Virginia, leaving his wife and children in Illinois. Laura Ellen, the oldest child, married a young dentist and settled in Gibson City, Illinois. The other children followed various paths of their own. Of Uncle Jim, his niece Josephine wrote "After George Howver left Mansfield, Jim went west to Washington State. I really have no dates on when Jim left Washington State and went to Alaska. The [family in Gibson City] tried to find out something about his property up there when he died, but they could never get any information." (Source: Letter written by Josephine Dixon Pullen to Ann Middleton Aschenbrener, grand-niece of Uncle Jim, sometime prior to 1980.)

It was years before the rest of the story came to light. The availability of public records on the Internet in recent years made the search much easier and yielded results beyond the reach of those searching for answers after James' death in 1927.

It still isn't known exactly when Uncle Jim went to Washington or what he was doing there. But he was certainly in the state in 1897.

On August 16, 1896, a couple of prospectors discovered a sizeable quantity of gold on Bonanza Creek, near Gold Bottom in the Yukon Territory. Miners and prospectors from all over Alaska and the Yukon rushed in to stake their claims. The world learned of the gold strike when, on July

14, 1897, the steamship *Excelsior* landed at the port of San Francisco carrying a half million dollars in gold nuggets. The news traveled like wildfire. Three days later, when the steamship *Portland* arrived in Seattle, there were 5,000 men waiting to greet the sixty-eight prospectors who debarked with another half-million dollars in gold. In 1898, the population in the Yukon soared to 30,000 from a pre-gold rush estimated population of 5,000.



Klondikers carrying supplies ascending Chilkoot Pass, 1898 by George Cantwell. Pub. "The Klondike, a Souvenir, 1900. PD

The Census of Canada in 1901 confirms the family lore. "James Howver" is listed as one of the men living at Soap Camp and Gold Bottom in the Yukon Territory (in northwestern Canada). On the record he is identified as a 31-year-old man from Virginia. He stated that he had arrived in 1897 and had been in the Yukon for 4 years and 3 months. He was working as a miner for a salary of \$200. (Source: 1901 Census of Canada – The Unorganized Territories: Upper Hunker, Gold Bottom (Yukon); Canadian Collection of Ancestry.com.)

James Howver does not appear in the U.S. Census record of 1900. As noted above, he was in Canada. He does appear in the U.S. Census record of 1910, which was enumerated in December of 1909. At this time, "James P. Howver" was living in Eagle, Alaska. He gave his date of birth as February, 1868, and place of birth as Virginia. For the record, he stated that he was 41, single, and working as an engineer. Eagle, Alaska is on the south bank of the Yukon River near the U.S. border with Canada. According to Wikipedia, people were drawn to the area by the Klondike Gold Rush. Eagle had become a supply and trading center for miners working the Upper Yukon River and its tributaries. At the turn of the century, its population had increased to around 1,700.

The next record we have for James Howver is his World War I Draft Registration Card, which James signed on December 14, 1918. "James Paulsell Howver" had shaved four years off of his age, stating that he was born on February 5, 1873 and that he was 45 years old. On the registration card, he wrote that he worked for the Kennecott Copper Corporation as an "Engineer Running Compressor" at the Bonanza Mine in Kennecott, Alaska. Mrs. W. A. Hoover, sister, of Gibson City, Illinois, was named as his nearest relative.

Two years later, "J. P. Howver" appears in the U.S. census of 1920 for Kennecott Village, in the Third Judicial District of Alaska. On this record, he stated that he was 50 years old, single, and working as an engineer in the Copper Mines. Kennecott is in south-eastern Alaska, near the Canadian border. Copper was discovered there in 1900 and the Kennecott Copper Corporation was formed in 1903. The Corporation and company town took its name from Kennicott Glacier located in the valley below. By the mid-1920s, the highest grade of copper ore was becoming depleted. In 1938, the Kennecott Copper Corporation closed its operation. Kennecott is now a ghost town, a national landmark, and a tourist destination.

As stated earlier, James' relatives in Gibson City learned of his death in 1927, but not much more. Alaska did not become a state until 1959. Before that date, record-keeping in Alaska was hit and miss. Fortunately, in November of 2011, his probate record (filed under J. P. Howver)

was located in the Alaska State Archives in Juneau, Alaska. This record tells the rest of the story. According to a report filed in court, James died at Virginia Mason Hospital in Seattle, Washington on April 13, 1927. He had been living in Homer, Seldovia Precinct, on the Kenai Peninsula of Alaska. Apparently, Jim had been ill at the Base Hospital of the Alaska Rail Road prior to his transfer to Seattle. James was 58 years old when he died. The nature of his illness is still unknown.

On January 6, 1932, almost five years after James' death, a W.A. Vinal petitioned the court to become administrator of the estate, stating that he was "familiar with some of the affairs of the said deceased." Vinal received the appointment. No will was found and the administrator "informed the court that there were no known heirs." Did this man try to locate family? One wonders, given that James' family in Illinois did learn of his death by some means. The final settlement of J.P. Howver's estate occurred on January 8, 1940 at the court in Seldovia. This was more than 13 years after Howver's death. According to Vinal, James Howver had filed upon a homestead at Homer in the Seldovia Precinct. In the settlement of the estate, Howver's land was sold by Vinal for \$500, enough to cover outstanding debts and court and administrator fees, leaving a balance of \$208.25, which was deposited into the Treasury of Alaska.

A land grant (Patent No. 1020823) to James P Howver was found registered with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management. It reads, in part: "A certificate of the register of the Land Office at Anchorage, Alaska has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby [. . .] the claim of James P. Howver has been established and duly consummated, in conformity to law." The document continues with a description of the property: "Lot two, the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter and the west half of the northeast quarter of Section eleven in Township six south of Range thirteen west of the Seward Meridian, Alaska, containing one hundred fifty-six acres and twenty-one hundredths of an acre, according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Land." The document is dated November 14, 1928, more than a year after James' death. (Source: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.)

Homer is a city located on the southern end of the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. It's motto is "Where the land ends and the sea begins." Homer was named for Homer Pennock, a promoter for a gold mining company. It turned out that gold mining in the area was never profitable. However, coal was mined here, beginning in the 1890s and continuing until WWII. In addition to their mining operation, Cook Inlet Coal Fields Company constructed a town, along with a dock and a railroad to facilitate its operation. In the U.S. Census of 1940, the population of the town was 325. Tourism, sport and commercial fishing are the dominant industries at the beginning of the 21st century. A popular activity listed for tourists is the Alaska Bear Adventures Day tour.

Uncle Jim lived in the Yukon and in Alaska for thirty years. He certainly lived a life more adventurous than most. He might indeed have discovered gold, but probably not in the form he expected. Instead of gold nuggets, he, or at least his heirs, might have been able to profit from the tourism industry. At the beginning of the 21st century, rooms in some of the lodges on the tip of the Kenai Peninsula go for \$500 a night and more. In any case, James P. Howver certainly didn't live long enough to enjoy his property. And, because of the circumstances outlined above, neither did any of his relatives. His land claim passed out of the family forever.

Our Family History

Soap Camp & Gold Bottom
Locality by name of other settlement

IN YUKON TERRITORY.
POPULATION BY NAMES

No. in Family	No. of Family	NAME OF EACH PERSON IN THE FAMILY	Sex	Color	Relationship to Head of Family	State, Province, or Country of Birth	Age at last Census	PLACE OF BIRTH	Year of arrival in Canada	When Naturalized	Years in Yukon	Present Nationality	OCCUPATION	POSITION	SALARY
		Rice, E. Lmer, J.	M	w	son	S	3 months	Calif. U.S.			3 1/2	Canadian			
57		Catell, William, R.					24	Ill.	1907		1/2	U.S.	miner		
		Sutcliffe, John					45	York, Ont.	1907		1/2				
58		Kirkpatrick, Amos, H.			Head		22	Ontario	1898		3		Emp		
		Howser, Charles					47	Ill.	1879		11	German	Emp		
59		Engelstrom, Arthur			Head	M	41	Sweden	1898		3	Swedish	own act		
		Inquest, Charles					32		1898		3				
60		Dugan, John				S	65	York, Ont.	1879		2 1/2	American			
		Dunn, William, H.					32	Eng.	1894		3	British	Engines	own act	
61		Bell, Peter					43	Scot.	1880		2 1/2		miner	Eng	200
		Juhala, John			Head	M	32	Fin.	1897		4	Fin.	own act		
		Juhala, Emma	F		Wife		24		1900		1 1/2	Can. U.S.			
		Juhala, Felty			Daup.	S	4	Sweden			1/2	Can.			
		Juhala, Harold	M		son		11	Sweden			1/2				
62		Chambers, William, J.			Head	M	44	Que.			1 1/2		own act		
		Mallett, Joseph					47				1 1/2				
		Lefebvre, Ernest					35				1 1/2				
		Amogoffin, Benah, J.					31	Canada	1897		4 1/2	U.S.			
63		Moore, Emma			Head	S	36	Manx	1899		2 1/2	Irishman	miner	own act	
		Hanson, Betty	F				42		1901		1/2	Manx	book	2,500	
64		Koch, Dan	M		Head		32	Ill.	1897		4	U.S.	Engines	Manager	
		Abbott, James					35	Eng.	1886		3	British	miner	Emp	200
		Howser, James					36	Eng.	1897		4 1/2	U.S.			200
65		Sutherland, Jim			Head		33	Manx	1898		1 1/2	Can.	layman		
		Zander, Peter					33	Sweden	1898		3 1/2	British			
66		Haley, Walter, Ch.			Head		33	Eng.	1897		4	British		Emp	250
		Bishop, Fredrick					33		1882		4	British		Emp	250
		Allen, Arthur, J.					29		1889		4	British		Emp	250
		Manuel, Edward					32	Wash.	1890		4	British	book	Emp	250
		Traver, David				M	31	Ind.							

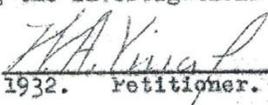
1901 Census of Canada for Soap Camp and Gold Bottom in the Yukon Territory. James Howser is located 8th from the bottom.

50-1-11 C
REGISTRATION CARD

SERIAL NUMBER	3444	ORDER NUMBER	
1 NAME James Paulsell Howser			
2 PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS			
3 (Date) (Month or P. M. or D. M.) (City or town) (County) (State)			
Age in Years	Date of Birth		
45	February 5 th 1873		
RACE			
White	Negro	Oriental	Indian
5 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	7	8
U. S. CITIZEN		ALIEN	
Native Born	Naturalized	Citizen by Father's Naturalization & has Registered & Sworn	Declared
10 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	11	12	13
14 Non-declared			
15 If not a citizen of the U. S., of what nation are you a citizen or subject?			
PRESENT OCCUPATION		EMPLOYER'S NAME	
16 Engineer running Compressor		17 Kennecott Copper Co.	
18 PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT W. KENNECOTT, ALASKA			
19 NEAREST RELATIVE			
Name	20 Miss Dr. H. G. Howser (Sister)		
Address	21 Gibson City, Ill.		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE			
P. M. C. O. Form No. 1 (Rev.)			
James Paulsell Howser			

World War I Draft Registration Card

The documents below and on the next two pages are from the probate record of J.P. Howver.

IN THE PROBATE COURT, FOR THE PRECINCT OF SELDOVIA, THIRD DIVISION,	
TERRITORY OF ALASKA.	
.....) IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF,)	P E T I T I O N .
J. P. HOWVER, DECEASED.)	
.....)	
TO, ****RALPH V. ANDERSON, Commissioner, Ex-officio Probate Judge, Seldovia Precinct, Third Division, Territory of Alaska, GREETING,	
Your petitioner petitions and shows to the Court;	
1---That he is a resident of the precinct of Seldovia and Territory of Alaska, residing at Seldovia for more than three years, last passed; That he was formerly the U.S. Commissioner &c. of said precinct. That as such commissioner, ex-officio Probate Judge, his attention was called to death and estate of the said J. P. Howver. That investigation showed that J. P. Howver was formerly a resident of this precinct---That he died at Virginia Mason Hospital, in the City of Seattle, State of Washington, on the 13th, day of April, A.D. 1927---Leaving at the time of his death property in this precinct subject to administration, and, in so far as your petitioner knows or has been able to learn, he died intestate.	
2---That no administrator has ever been appointed to administer the said estate	
3---That your petitioner made investigation, learned the facts of the death of the said J. P. Howver; That he had filed upon a homestead at Homer, in this precinct; That such filing and proof was not accom- plished; that on or about the 9th, day of October, 1931, at Anchorage, and at the Land Office you petitioner made necessary affidavit and received from the Register of that Office Patent to the lands filed upon by the said J. P. Howver, deceased	
4---It appears that the deceased was ill at the Base Hospital, of the Alaska Rail Road, and died indebted to that institution.	
5---Your petitioner went to Seattle, Wash, and on the 12th, day of Nov. 1931, secured a duly certified copy of the death of J. P. Howver	
Your petitioner prays that he be appointed administrator of the estate of the said deceased, J. P. Howver, as he is familiar with some of the affairs of the said deceased; and in view of the fact of making the investigations hereinbefore set forth.	
	
Dated January 6, 1932. Petitioner.	

PROBATE COURT SELDOVIA PRECINCT THIRD DIVISION TERRITORY OF ALASKA

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE)
 OF)
 J.P.HOWEVER, deceased)
 FINAL ACCOUNT AND PETITION
 FOR FINAL HEARING
 Before Floyd W Viken U.S. Commissioner

COMES NOW, W.A.VINAL, as administrator of the estate of J.P.H
 HOWEVER, deceased and on this 27th day of November 1939, renders and
 exhibits to the court, and thus informs the court of the conditions of
 the estate, and prays the court for an order ~~announcing~~ setting
 the date and time for a hearing thereon,

THE ADMINISTRATOR files as his final accounting the following
 receipts.

From sale of real estate	\$500.00
From all other sources	None

Disbursements

Anchorage Base Hospital	160.00
Publishing Notice in Seward	
Gateway	15.00
For traveling expenses to anchorage and in settle in Administration duties.	50.00
Former affidavit in Seattle Death Certi	1.00
Affidavit in Seattle	.75
Administrators Commission 7% of \$500	35.00
Probate Fees approximate Approx	30.00
To balance (in hand for Distrib)	<u>208.25</u>

SO ID W.A. VINAL, as administrator of the estate of J.P.HOWEVER
 deceased, prays that his final account as filed be approved and allowed
 and settled, after due notice of time and place of hearing thereof.

THE ADMINISTRATOR further informs the court that there are no
 known heirs.

W A VINAL (SEAL)
 Administrator

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA)
 TERRITORY OF ALASKA)

W.A.VINAL, being first duly sworn, says: That the foregoing
 account filed this day by me as and for my last final account of the
 administration of the estate of J.P.HOWEVER, deceased, is in all
 respects just and true, and according to my best knowledge, information
 and belief, contains a full true and particular account of all my doings
 receipts and disbursements and of all sums of money belonging to said
 estate which have come into my hands as administrator.

W.A.VINAL (SEAL)
 Subscribed and sworn to before me this 27th day of November, 1939
 FLOYD W VIKEN (SEAL)

FLOYD W. VIKEN
 U. S. COMMISSIONER
 SELDOVIA, ALASKA

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE)
OF)
J.P.HOWEVER, deceased) NOTICE OF FINAL HEARING
In PROBATE Docket No 47
Floyd W Viken Probate Judge

NOTICE is hereby given that W.A.VINAL, administrator of the above entitled estate, having filed in this court his final account of his administration of said estate, the hearing of the same has been fixed for Monday the 8th day of January, 1940 at 2:00 P.M. at the court room of said court, at Seldovia Alaska, at which time all persons interested in said estate are notified then and there to appear and show cause, if any they have why said account should not be settled and allowed and the funds in hand paid into the Territorial Treasurer.

Witness my signature this 27th day of November, 1939

FLOYD W VIKEN) SEAL
FLOYD W. VIKEN
U. S. COMMISSIONER
SELDOVIA, ALASKA

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE)
OF)
J.P.HOWEVER, deceased) IN PROBATE DOCKET NO 47
Before FLOYD W VIKEN
ex-officio Probate Judge

DECREE OF SETTLEMENT OF ACCOUNT

W.A.VINAL, the administrator of the estate of J.P.However filed in this court his final accounting on the 27th day of November, 1939. January 8, 1940 at the court Room in Seldovia at the hour of 2:00 P.M. was then and there fixed as the time and place for a final hearing on said account; Notice was posted as required by law setting forth the time and place for the hearing.

NOW ~~WHEREAS~~ DUE NOTICE having been given and the court being fully informed in the matters concerning the estate, the final accounting having been examined and approved and accepted.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED AND DECREED that the said account be accepted, allowed and distribution made and the estate settled.

It is further ordered that the balance of the funds on hand be paid into the Treasury of Alaska as there are no known heirs.

Done in open court this 8th day of January, 1940

Floyd W Viken (seal)
U.S. Commissioner

FLOYD W. VIKEN
U. S. COMMISSIONER
SELDOVIA, ALASKA

James Paulsel Howver's land grant, filed with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management:

Anchorage 05395

4-1040-R

The United States of America,

To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

WHEREAS, a Certificate of the Register of the Land Office at Anchorage, Alaska, has been deposited in the General Land Office, whereby it appears that, pursuant to the Act of Congress of May 20, 1862, "To Secure Homesteads to Actual Settlers on the Public Domain," and the acts supplemental thereto, the claim of James P. Howver has been established and duly consummated, in conformity to law, for the Lot two, the northwest quarter of the southeast quarter and the west half of the northeast quarter of Section eleven in Township six south of Range thirteen west of the Seward Meridian Alaska, containing one hundred fifty-six acres and twenty-one hundredths of an acre, according to the Official Plat of the Survey of the said Land, on file in the GENERAL LAND OFFICE:

NOW KNOW YE, That there is, therefore, granted by the UNITED STATES unto the said claimant the tract of Land above described; TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract of Land, with the appurtenances thereof, unto the said claimant and to the heirs and assigns of the said claimant forever; subject to any vested and accrued water rights for mining, agricultural, manufacturing, or other purposes, and rights to ditches and reservoirs used in connection with such water rights, as may be recognized and acknowledged by the local customs, laws, and decisions of courts; and there is reserved from the lands hereby granted a right of way thereon for ditches or canals constructed by the authority of the United States. Excepting and reserving, however, to the United States all the coal in the lands so patented, and to it, or persons authorized by it, the right to prospect for, mine, and remove such deposits from the same upon compliance with the conditions and subject to the provisions and limitations of the Act of March 8, 1922 (42 Stat. 415). And there is also reserved to the United States a right of way for the construction of railroads, telegraph and telephone lines, in accordance with the Act of March 12, 1914 (38 Stat. 305).

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I, **Calvin Coolidge,**

President of the United States of America, have caused these letters to be made Patent, and the Seal of the General Land Office to be hereunto affixed.

GIVEN under my hand, at the City of Washington, the **FOURTEENTH**

(SEAL) day of **NOVEMBER** in the year of our Lord one thousand

nine hundred and **TWENTY-EIGHT** and of the Independence of the

United States the one hundred and **FIFTY-THIRD**

By the President: *Calvin Coolidge*

By *Diana B. Engle*, Secretary.

M. P. LeRoy
Recorder of the General Land Office.

RECORD OF PATENTS: Patent Number **1020823**

6-9189 GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE