



KENO
WALKING
TOUR

KENO WALKING TOUR

A Brief History

The history and development of a community in Keno City began in the early 1900s with discovery of gold in a nearby creek.

The Gustavesons made the area's first mineral discoveries with a gold find at Duncan Creek and a year later, Jake Donaldson found the first silver in Galena Creek, which he staked in 1903. It was another 10 years until silver mining in the district began in earnest, when staking of the Silver King claim by Harry McWhorter and the adjacent Webfoot claim by Jack Alverston took place.

In 1919, Swedish-born John August Kinman and his partner "Rocky Mountain" Bill Elliot staked claims and built a cabin on what is now the Keno townsite. That year saw the beginning of a silver boom when Louis Bouvette staked the Roulette claim on Sheep Mountain (later renamed Keno Hill). As new mining camps were established on Keno Hill, Kinman's yard became a staging area for prospectors, miners and teamsters. Old cabins from Duncan Creek, built during the mineral rush of 1901, were brought to the new boomtown that was growing at the foot of the hill. By 1920, Keno City hosted a full complement of frontier accommodations and services including cabins, hotels and stables.

With improvement to the Duncan Creek Road, Keno City became the centre of a thriving new mining district. Silver ore was hauled by teamsters onto paddlewheelers at Mayo Landing on the Stewart River. In 1922, a record 12,000 tons of ore from Keno Hill was stockpiled in Mayo awaiting shipment. From first exploration of the Silver King mine in 1913 until the close of operations in 1989, the district produced over 214 million ounces of silver, as well as significant quantities of lead and zinc. Newly discovered silver resources are estimated at 100 million ounces.

Today, Keno City is home to a small community of residents and seasonal businesses with strong connections to the mining industry. Keno has developed into a unique tourist destination, founded on heritage, arts and culture, wilderness adventure and an appreciation of the quiet pace of life.

Keno residents invite you to explore the town and take part in the daily life of the community. Keno is a stepping-off point for hiking trails that run through the historic mining areas, scenic valleys, alpine meadows and ecology, with stunning mountain views. Please leave historic objects and mining relics in place for the enjoyment of others.

Please note:

Abandoned mine workings and buildings are unsafe.

✂️ Tolmie Cabin ✂️



Dan Tolmie built this cabin around 1902. Originally from Ontario, Tolmie was a miner, prospector, hotelier and bartender. He came to the area from Dawson to join his partner Charlie Brefalt in developing the Elsa and No Cash claims. Tolmie was known for his thriftiness and work ethic, and although his savings were targeted in a 1932 bank-fraud scandal, he recovered from the setback and enjoyed a comfortable retirement.

Around 1950, Margaret Vera Dorval, better known as “Bombay Peggy”, moved from Dawson City to Keno and ran a brothel from the cabin. The building later became the home of local miner Charlie Mills until his death in the 1990s. The cabin is a private seasonal residence.





Victor Grant, the territorial agent and liquor vendor, built this cabin in 1922. The cabin has housed a variety of owners, tenants and enterprises over the years.

Ted Bleiler moved to Keno to teach school and rented Grant's cabin in the early 1930s. Bleiler was so popular with the children that when he started teaching at the Wernecke camp, many of his pupils made the daily eight-mile return trek up and down the hill to class. Bleiler went on to have considerable success placer mining on Dublin Gulch.

Joe Cody ran a bootleg operation from this cabin in the 1950s. He hid his liquor stash in a false window ledge, which is still visible. In recent years, the cabin was a bakery and, since 2015, it has housed the Keno City Art Gallery, featuring works by local artist and owner Joseph Volf.





White Cabin

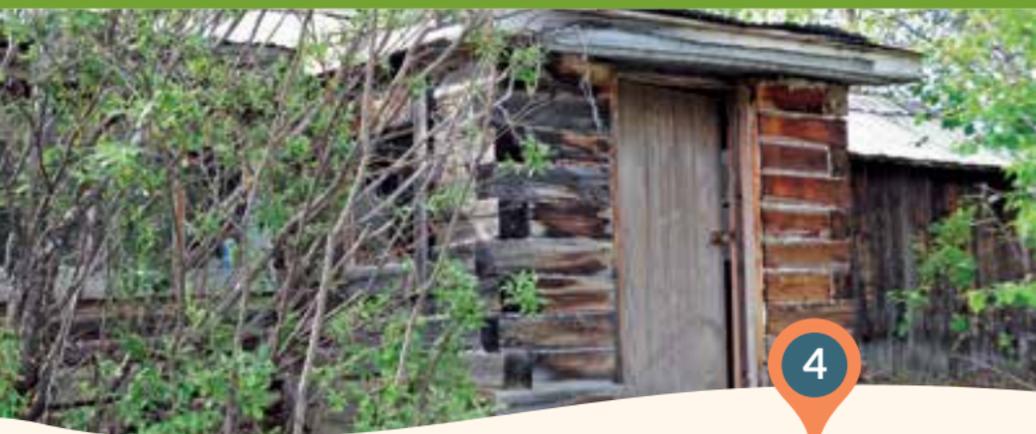


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This cabin belonged to Frank White, an American shipwright who helped to build the SS Keno for the British Yukon Navigation Co., the river division of the White Pass & Yukon Route. The SS Keno, a sternwheeler riverboat, was built in Whitehorse in 1922. It was specially designed to handle the shifting navigation channels and the often low water in the Stewart River.

It is rumoured that White worked himself to death — he died in 1958— and that his ghost lingers in the Keno City Hotel, where he appears by the pool table, recognizable by his wide-brimmed hat and tailcoat. Over recent decades, the cabin has been extensively renovated into a private residence.





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The history of this cabin's construction and early occupancy is unknown, although its style is consistent with other log cabins from the early days of Keno City. The building may have served briefly as an office for the Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation in the 1920s, during operation of its Keno Hill mining camp.

In the 1940s, seamstress Anne Janice, "Alteration Annie", ran her sewing business from the cabin, which acted as a front for a brothel. In Yukon at that time, it was not uncommon for a woman working in prostitution to operate a home-based business, such as a cigar shop, a laundry or sewing service, to provide additional, lawful income.

During the influx of mineworkers in the early 1970s, the 16- by 20-foot cabin housed a dozen people. The side and back additions were built on later and it remains one of the longest continuously occupied private residences in the community.





Prospecting partners and friends, Ernest Corp and David Ryan, built this unique log cabin duplex. They lived in close quarters, but their adjoining cabins had a connecting door to separate them when their famous, periodic bouts of friendly disagreement happened.

Corp wrote an account of his journey to reach the Klondike at the end of the 19th century. Starting from the Mackenzie River, he followed the Keele and Hess rivers over the continental divide, then on to the Stewart and Yukon rivers. His description of this difficult route still survives. After his success on Hunker Creek, Corp followed the rush to Keno. There, he and Ryan made a base from which to prospect throughout the district. They did well in the early days of the Onek discovery and later, in the 1930s, the partners ran the Keno City post office. Corp represented the Mayo District on the Yukon Council from 1934-39.

Geologist Hugh Bostock regularly visited Corp and Ryan. Bostock's pioneering exploration and mapping of central Yukon, on behalf of the Geological Survey of Canada, took place from the 1930s to the 1950s. The cabins were used as a kitchen in the mid-1960s and later as the community post office. The Keno City Mining Museum has recently restored the property and uses it for storage and public events.



Long-time Keno City resident, merchant marine seaman and entrepreneur, Geordie Dobson, moved this house here from Calumet, a nearby abandoned mining camp. It is reportedly one of the oldest buildings still surviving from the early days of Keno, possibly originating from the Duncan Creek rush of 1901.

Dobson was a seaman when he heard about a silver mine in the North and answered the call for “forty men for the Yukon”. He arrived in Keno in 1952 and purchased the Keno City Hotel. Believing there was insulation value in the glass, Dobson began encasing the house in empty, non-refundable, “stubby” beer bottles. He started the project in 1966 and finished the job four years—and 32,000 beer bottles—later. The house is very warm, probably helped by 60 centimetres (two feet) of mortar. In 1992, Dobson received an Exemplary Service Medal in recognition of his 25 years as a volunteer firefighter.

This property is one of the larger lots in Keno City and has numerous outbuildings throughout. It is a private residence, and visitors are asked to obtain permission before entering the property.



The Sourdough Café is a popular draw for visiting musicians and home to the Keno City Music Festival. This building, from the early 1920s, is an original Yukon roadhouse, with a stable on the main floor and living quarters upstairs. In 1949, during a second local silver boom, Massa Sakata renovated the building and opened a popular restaurant. Sakata was well known in the area having previously worked for Treadwell Yukon Ltd. on Keno Hill and in Elsa. He had also operated restaurants and barbershops in Dawson City and Mayo. Joe Rabb operated the busy café in 1965 (Helen Hofer still remembers the blisters on her fingers from washing so many dishes). Luigi and Gina Cambiotti bought the café in the mid-1960s when Luigi was also the local taxi driver. Drago and Anna Kokanov bought the café from the Cambiottis and ran a successful business for several years before selling it to Geordie Dobson.

In 2007, Jim Milley and Jordan Theriault purchased the property from the Dobson estate. They restored the main floor and renovated the building to include a sound stage for live music performances. Milley and Theriault's renovations uncovered traces of a complex architectural history with six distinct periods of additions to the building. The original rough-hewn log core has a roof made from tightly arranged small poles, and original moss and daub chinking, similar to other early era log cabins in Keno. The exact age of the original cabin space remains unknown, although it may date back to the Duncan Creek rush of 1901.

The property includes a small cabin that was constructed in 1952. Although it had many tenants, it is known locally as the Bradshaw cabin. Renowned photographer Kennedy Bradshaw lived here from 1973 until his death in 1981. Bradshaw, who worked at United Keno Hill Mines, chronicled daily life and work in remote Yukon mining communities during the 1950s and 1960s with his detailed and powerful compositions. Visit the Keno City Mining Museum to see a display of his impressive work.





The Keno City Hotel was built in 1927 and run by Bob Palmer and later by Robert Bruce Greaves. Before he moved to Keno, Greaves owned the Red Feather Saloon in Dawson City and served in the Second World War with George Black's contingent. Geordie Dobson bought the hotel in 1960 and, despite working long hours at the mine, he rebuilt and reopened it in 1963. The hotel is rumoured to have two ghosts—Frank White's ghost haunts the bar, while the ghost of the owner of another hotel can be found sitting in room 12. It is said that the hotelier shot himself after losing his wife and sons in a fire that also burned down his business.

In 2006, Leo and Marc Martel purchased the property from the Dobson estate and the hotel underwent extensive restoration. There is a full-service bar and dining room, adorned with period photographs and memorabilia from the hotel's heyday, and 10 bedrooms on the upper level. The restoration work earned the Martels a Yukon Heritage Award in 2015.





Keno City's Anglican congregation converted this hut, which originated at the United Keno Hill Mines, into a church in 1954. Rev. R. Alcock was assisted with the renovations by his warden, Charlie Mills, and by George Pavlovich and Rolph Johanson. The All Saints Church was officially consecrated in 1956.

The first couple to be married in the church was Ann Zawalsky, the local school teacher, and George Esterer, an assay laboratory employee. Mineworker Mike Bailey and Sue Davidson, one of the first women to operate an underground tram, were married here in 1976.

In recent years, the Keno community club has operated the building as a library and meeting room. The library is open year-round and features an extensive collection of reading material in several languages.





Jackson's Hall was built in 1922 and, for many years, it was a community centre, dance hall and movie theatre, operated by Tommy Jackson. There is a copy of the 1925 liquor licence—undersigned by Jackson on behalf of the Keno Club—displayed in the museum.

In the 1960s and -70s, mineworkers and residents attended dances, movies, billiards games, Christmas pageants, after-school recreation and community gatherings in the building. One former mine-employee observed, "For all the dances held there over the years, not one person ever hurt themselves falling down the stairs!"

Although the Keno City Mining Museum was established in 1979, it wasn't until 1996 that the building was officially opened by Father Huijbers. Terry J. Levicki, a geologist for the United Keno Hill Mines in Elsa, was instrumental in developing the museum, along with Keno locals: Drago Kokanov, Mike Mancini, Leo Martel and Yvonne Bessette. The museum is testament to the efforts of many and it chronicles life in small frontier mining communities in the North.

Open daily from late-May to mid-September, the museum features a unique collection of tools, equipment, memorabilia, photographs and archives. Many items tell the stories of everyday life in the isolated mining communities and camps that once dotted the region. The Alpine Interpretive Centre, beside the museum, offers information on the hill and mountain trails accessible from Keno.



Hawthorne Cabin



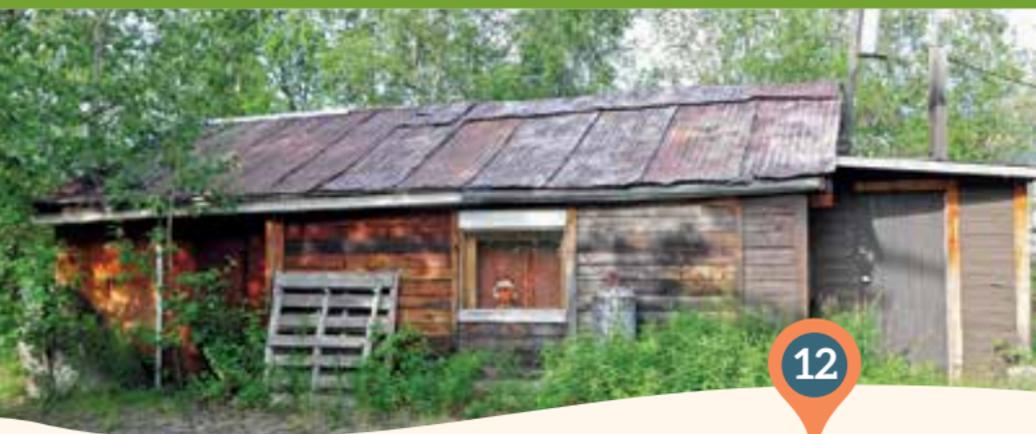
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Jack Hawthorne came to Yukon from Ireland around 1920 to work as a teamster on the Keno-Mayo ore haul. He built this cabin in Keno City as a base for mining and prospecting.

Ruth Ferguson gave Hawthorne a grubstake to work her mineral interests on Sourdough Hill. With Jack Alverson, he worked on the Webfoot claim, adjacent to Alverson's Silver King claim. In 1929, the two men struck an ore offshoot from the Silver King vein that they sold to Treadwell Yukon Ltd.

Hawthorne was one of several victims of the 1932 Mayo bank scandal and he was a key witness to a 1946 shooting at the Chateau Mayo Hotel. Hawthorne held several claims in the Keno City area, which he operated until his death in Whitehorse in 1981.



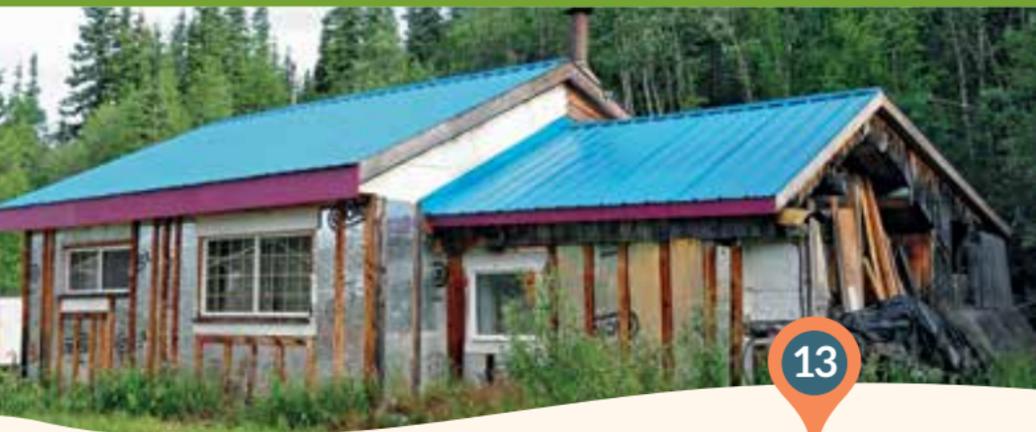


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This cabin originally belonged to “Tommy” McKay, a cousin of Louis Bouvette, one of the founders of Keno City. McKay came from Saskatchewan around 1900. By the 1920s, he was prospecting and mining throughout the Keno-Mayo district as well as in the Ogilvie Mountains. The cabin construction has all the hallmarks of log homes from Keno’s early days; they were built on the spot, often with timbers recycled from abandoned Duncan Creek cabins.

“Windy John” Holmstrom bought the cabin from McKay’s estate in 1948. Holmstrom came to Canada from Finland in 1927 to learn English. He worked on the gold dredges near Dawson City and moved to Keno City in the 1940s to take up work as a carpenter for United Keno Hill Mines. Holmstrom became an ambitious prospector and energetic miner. He held over 20 claims in the region and continued to mine into his eighties.





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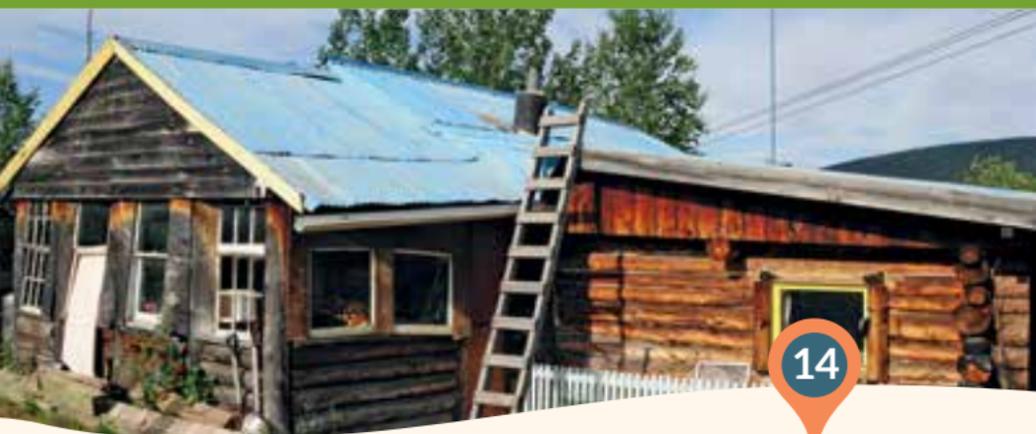
Oscar Miller was a sailor before coming to Yukon in 1912. When he arrived in Keno, he began mining on Duncan Creek and built this log cabin. It is one of the few structures in town still standing from that time.

Miller was part of the early staking rush to the top of Keno Hill. He staked several good mining claims in the area, including the Hobo fraction that cut into the rich Calumet vein on Galena Hill. He later sold the claim to Treadwell Yukon Ltd. In 1945, he used his seaman's skills to repair tramline cables for United Keno Hill Mines.

The original cabin structure became a bedroom when a frame addition was built. The cabin has hosted a variety of residents since Miller's death in 1956. It continues to be a private residence.



Butijer Cabin



Nels Bjornson lived in, and possibly built, this cabin in the early 1920s. The cabin's most famous, and determined, resident was Matt Butijer who lived here in the late-1950s. Butijer staked a claim on Keno Hill and drove a 213 metre (700 foot) tunnel into the permafrost using only hand tools. He also dug a 366 metre (1,200 foot) tunnel into bedrock by himself, using hand tools and a wooden-wheeled barrow. When Butijer was mauled by a black bear, he showed his characteristic fortitude by covering his torn scalp and making his way back to Keno for help. Butijer died in Keno City in the 1960s.

The cabin has been home to mineworkers, trappers and community figures, over the years. The original structure was a single-room log construction with a tight all-weather construction of small roof poles. It was well insulated with moss and clay daub and moose-hair binding. In the 1960s and -70s the property featured an extensive garden, a large grove of white birch and an open air bathtub. At one time, it housed a dog team.

The side addition, log porch and sleeping loft were built for Sue and Mike Bailey's growing family. The logs were re-chinked with fresh clay and moss from the McQuesten valley. Other renovations include new windows, roofing and outbuildings.



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Father Henk Huijbers was born in Holland and arrived in Mayo in 1948 to assist Bishop Coudert. Jean-Louis Coudert was the first Bishop of the Whitehorse Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church, established in 1944. The diocese encompassed all of Yukon and the northern tip of British Columbia. Bishop Coudert welcomed many young Oblate missionaries to Yukon until his death in 1965. Father Huijbers originally came for a year but stayed in the Mayo-Keno area for more than 40 years. He celebrated Mass in this cabin with congregations of about eight to 14 people. Father Huijbers was active in the Dutch resistance during the Second World War, which earned him the Silver Resistance Remembrance Cross from the Dutch Consul General in 1982. The church and rectory were sold in the early-1970s and the building has been a private residence for many years.





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The Snack Bar is situated on the grounds of the former Silver Queen Hotel, which burnt down in the mid-1960s. The building is made from three residences that used to stand on the site of the fire hall—two pan-abodes (prefabricated cedar log homes) and a framed house.

Drago Kokanov purchased the buildings from a mining company in the early 1970s and moved them to their present site. Miner and entrepreneur, Martin Swizinski, bought them in the 1980s for his Springmount Operating Company and used them for his crew's bunkhouse and kitchen.

Since 1995, the buildings have housed the Keno City Snack Bar. Owner Mike Mancini offers homemade pizza and other specialties from southern Italian recipes passed on to him by his mother, Josephine Mancini. The building also houses a vast array of 1950s and -60s memorabilia.

The Snack Bar draws diners from around the area. It is a popular gathering point for retired mineworkers revisiting the area. There are budget accommodations for travellers and prospectors in a range of rustic buildings on the property.



The Keno City Mining Museum has four outdoor galleries that house a collection of oversized, vintage mining equipment, vehicles and other artifacts from life in the district. A mural on the north face of building #2, painted by well-known Yukon artist Lillian Loponen, welcomes visitors to town. The mural is based upon archival photos and depicts street scenes from Keno's early days.

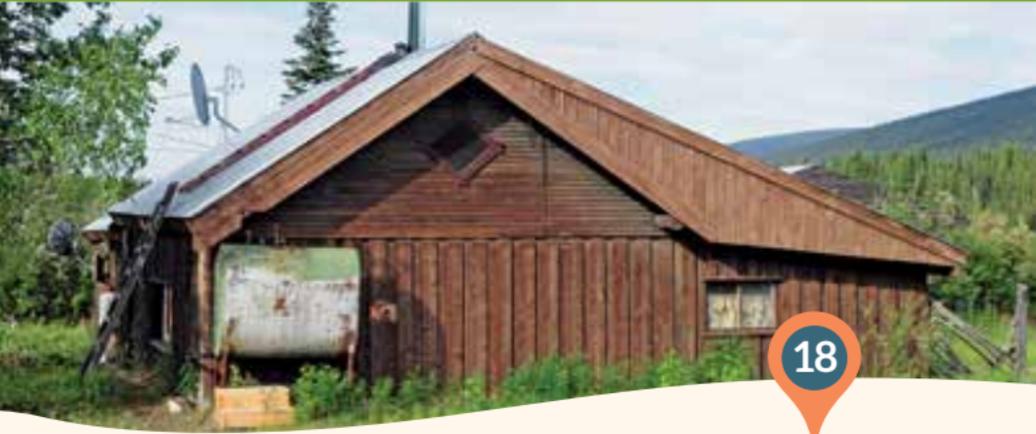
The Cominco Mining Corp. purchased the Keystone drill, in building #2, in a government program to expand Yukon mineral development. The company brought the diamond drill into the Beaver River area in 1929. It was later abandoned about 150 kilometres from Keno City and the museum retrieved and restored it. A complete set of associated tools and parts are also on display.

Other buildings feature equipment such as an overburden drill, early excavators, transportation machinery and metal-smithing tools. There is a portable sawmill that was used over the last century to mill timber for the construction of buildings and for the extensive mineworks, above- and below-ground.





“Ma” Erickson’s House



Axel Erickson came to prospect on Christal Creek in 1919 and, with his partner “Tommy” McKay, staked early claims on Keno Hill. Erikson’s wife, Caroline, or “Ma” as she was known, ran a boarding house where she entertained senior mine staff with food and drink. “Ma” was also a bootlegger. The RCMP never caught her and she maintained a very good relationship with them—calling them out to investigate her competition. After Axel died and “Ma” left town, the house was used as a stable but Frank and Willie Tveter later completed renovations on the building. It remains a private residence.



Royal Canadian Mounted Police Post



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The Keno City RCMP detachment operated from 1923 to 1937, and continued as a sub-detachment until 1961. The building had two cells—the bars of which were made of wood. In 1925, a young constable, Gordon “G.I.” Cameron, was sent from Vancouver as an undercover officer to investigate prostitution and the illegal sale of liquor. After only two weeks on the job, he had brought several charges against hotels as well as individuals.

The original RCMP structure is no longer standing. The current building was constructed in the 1950s and, for a short time, was a residential detachment. The building is accessible from a path that leads between the main road and the lower end of Wernecke Road and Friendship Lane. Please note that all adjacent buildings and laneways are private residences.

Keno City Community Club – Recreation Hall



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Constructed as a Canadian centennial project in 1967, this building has served as the heart of the community for many years. It houses the community club offices, a kitchen, sound booth, stage, and recreation equipment in the large gymnasium. The recreation hall hosts weddings, dances, community gatherings and film festival screenings. A large gazebo with picnic tables and a firepit is located across from the recreation hall for use by locals and visitors.



Keno Hill Signpost



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The Keno Hill signpost is located near the top of Keno Hill at the end of Signpost Road. At an elevation of about 1,800 metres (6,000 feet), the site is perched above the steep slopes of Gambler Gulch, on the edge of Louis Bouvette's Roulette claim. The location offers exceptional views over the McQuesten and Keno Ladue river valleys, and the Wernecke and Ogilvie mountains.

United Keno Hill Mines erected the original wooden signpost in the 1950s when they hosted a group of visiting scientists for the International Year of Geophysics. Each sign names a city represented by a delegate at the symposium, and shows the location's distance and direction from Keno.

Close to the summit is a memorial cairn for Alfred K. Schellinger. A mining engineer, assayer and geologist, Schellinger first came to the district to inspect Bouvette's new discoveries on behalf of Yukon Consolidated Gold Corporation. Schellinger managed the activities on Keno Hill in the early 1920s before moving to Treadwell Yukon Ltd. "Shelly" is fondly remembered throughout the district.



Campgrounds



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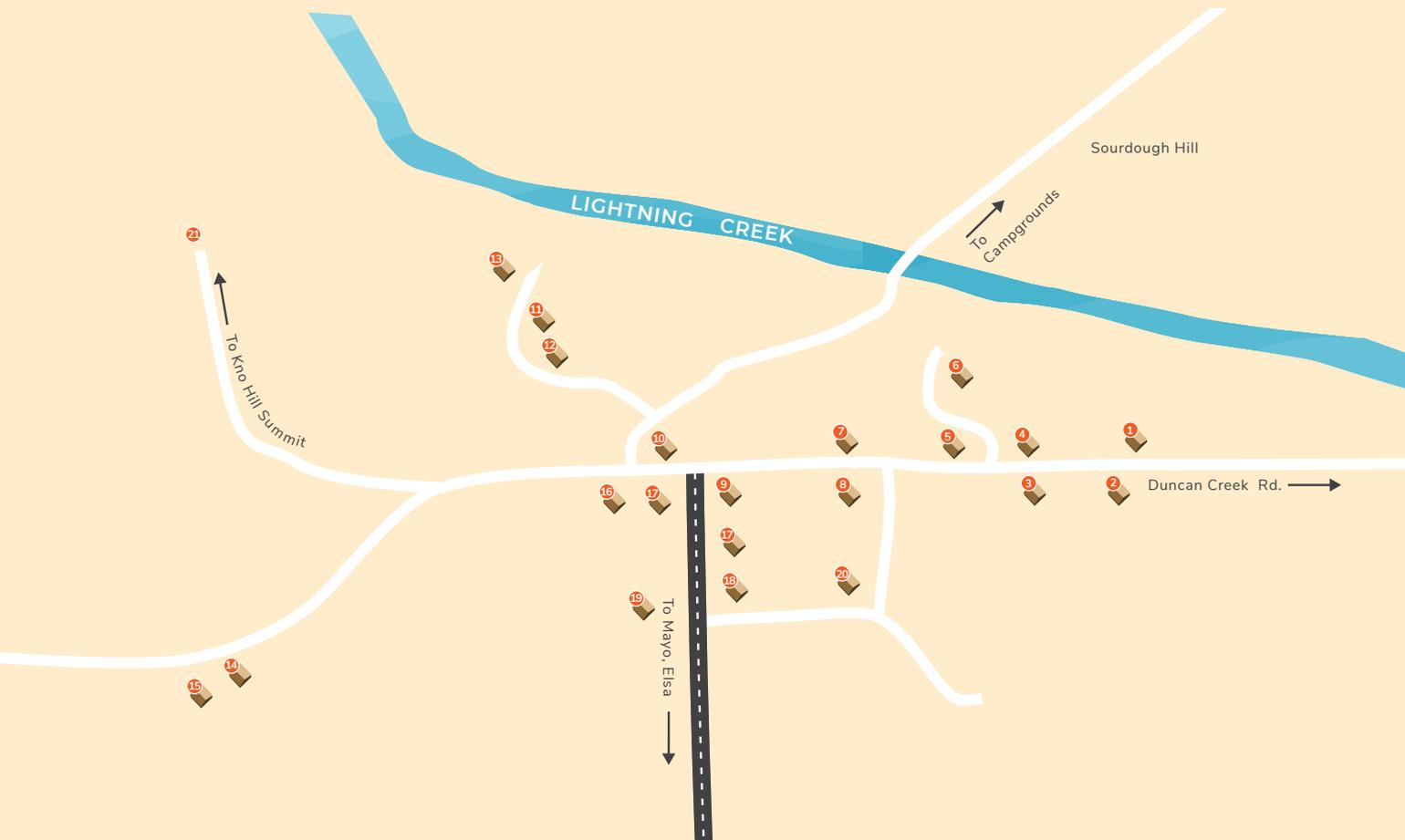
There are several accommodations in Keno City, including a community campground located near Lightning Creek that has a large, enclosed dining shelter and offers outhouses, firewood and water.

Tent sites with more privacy can be found in a second, overflow, campground located close to the entrance of the Duncan Creek Road, to the west of town.

KENO WALKING TOUR

We welcome you to experience our history. Please respect the privacy of the property owners.

- 1 Tolmie Cabin
- 2 Grant Cabin
- 3 White Cabin
- 4 Alteration Annie's Cabin
- 5 Corp & Ryan Cabins
- 6 Beer Bottle House
- 7 Keno Café/Sourdough Tavern
- 8 Keno City Hotel
- 9 All Saints Anglican Church
- 10 Jackson Hall/Keno City Mining Museum
- 11 Hawthorne Cabin
- 12 Holmstrom Cabin
- 13 Miller Cabin
- 14 Butjer Cabin
- 15 Catholic Church and Rectory
- 16 Keno City Snack Bar
- 17 Keno City Mining Museum - Outdoor Exhibits
- 18 "Ma" Erickson's House
- 19 Royal Canadian Mounted Police Post
- 20 Keno Community Club - Recreation Hall
- 21 Keno Hill Signpost





This brochure was produced with the help of Keno City residents and the Silver Trail Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Association. If you have additional questions or comments, please contact the Cultural Services branch, Government of Yukon at 867-667-3458.

Special thanks to Helen Hofer, Charlie Mills, Geordie Dobson, Mike Mancini, Leo Martel, Jim Milley and Yvonne Bessette for sharing their stories and personal recollections. Scott Buchanan contributed updates to this edition.

Please note that all cabins in Keno City are privately owned. Please respect the owners' privacy.

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