S.S. *Keno*
National Historic Site

One of a fleet of riverboats that played a major part in the history of the Yukon and the Klondike Gold Rush

Background

In 1869, the Alaska Commercial Company put the first sternwheeler on the lower Yukon River to supply the trading posts from St. Michael on the Bering Sea to Fort Selkirk.

By the time of the Klondike Gold Rush, several companies had established trading posts and sternwheelers, and a basic transportation system was in place.

Sternwheelers were the only practical craft for the Yukon River. The S.S. *Keno*, which was built in 1922, had a shallow two-foot draft. This allowed it to navigate through shallow water, and sections with ever-changing and treacherous sandbars. It had a narrow beam to be able to make turns around tight, narrow curves. The stern-mounted paddle wheel permitted the sternwheeler to land virtually anywhere along riverbanks and it assisted in getting off sandbars. It was protected from snags and sweepers by the hull. The sternwheelers burned wood to provide steam for their power and all along the river wood camps sprang up to supply the fuel.

Historic photo of the S.S. *Keno*
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The S.S. *Keno* worked mainly on the Stewart River hauling silver-lead concentrate from Mayo to Stewart City. It was also used for the early and late season trips to Dawson City.

The seasonal nature of steamboat operations (three to four months in the summer), along with the development of roads, inevitably meant the end of the steamboat era. By 1955, the remaining sternwheelers were dry-docked for the last time.

The sternwheelers, and the transportation companies which ran them, played an important role in the economic development of the Yukon. They brought in all the supplies required by the Klondike's booming population and in subsequent years supplied all of the heavy machinery, which were essential for the success of industrial, corporate mining. The

Reasons for National Historic Importance

The S.S. *Keno* was part of the fleet that played a major part in the history of the Yukon Territory. Without the riverboats, the gold of the Klondike and the silver, lead, and zinc of the Mayo district would have remained in the hills for at least another half century, and the development of the Canadian West and North would have been delayed. The S.S. *Keno* is an example of the riverboats used on the lakes and rivers of the Yukon, and it displays the design and application of steam powered sternwheeler technology.

Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1981.

sternwheelers also made the development of new areas possible and led to the creation of new mines in places such as Mayo.

The sternwheelers were more than a carrier of people and supplies into and out of the territory. They supported a timber industry, contributed to the development and evolution of mining and united the small communities that hugged the riverbank.

Milestones

1869
Sternwheelers began supplying fur traders and prospectors on the lower Yukon River.

1898
By 1898, 57 steamboats owned by a number of companies carried tons of supplies to the goldfields of the Klondike.

1900
The White Pass and Yukon Railway was completed from Skagway to Whitehorse ,thus opening up the Upper Yukon River route.

1914
All sternwheelers on the upper Yukon river are owned by one company.

1922
The S.S. *Keno* was built to transport silver lead concentrate from the Mayo district to Stewart City.

1944
Alaska Highway completed.

1953
Klondike Highway completed.

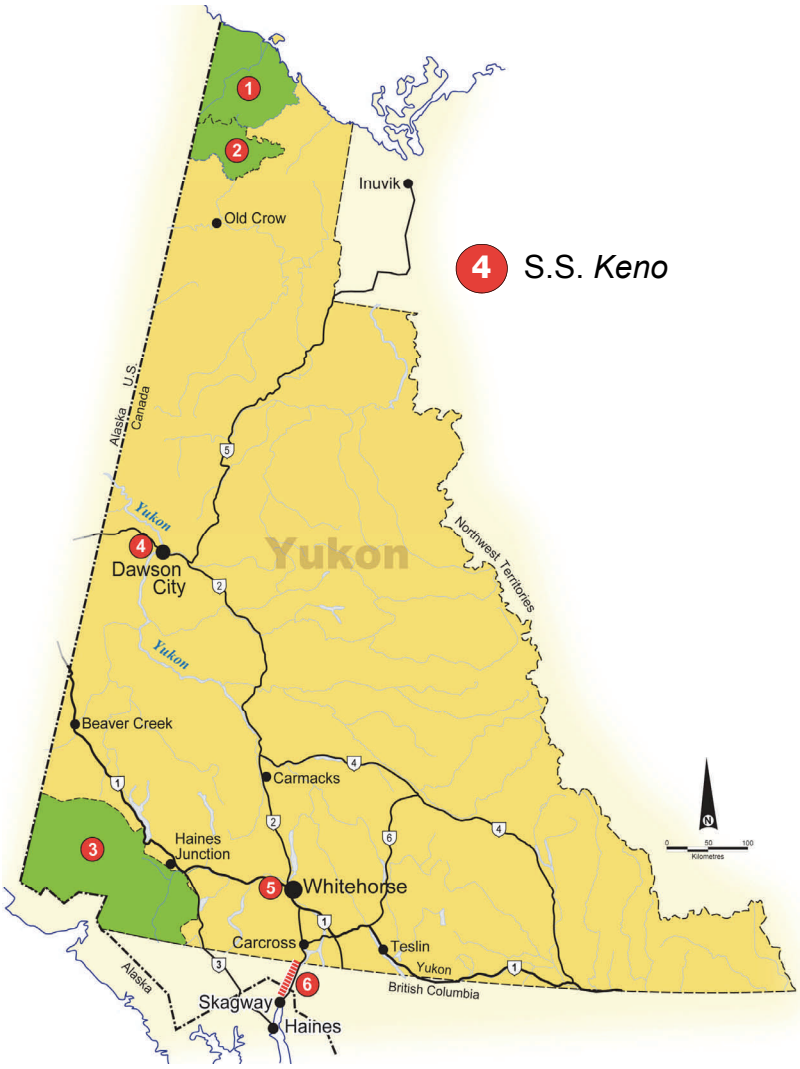
1955
The last sternwheeler was dry-docked in Whitehorse.

1960
The S.S. *Keno* was moved to her present berth on Dawson's waterfront.

1962
Parks Canada refurbished the vessel and declared it a national historic site on July 1st.

Location

S.S. *Keno* is located on Front Street in Dawson City, 541 kilometres north of Whitehorse on the Klondike Highway.



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