

The Klondike Baby - Part 2

In the letter that Jesse Edgren wrote to his in-laws from the Yukon on September 11, 1898 he also said that he was going to train another dog to be a leader, so that he would have three good leaders. He thought that he could sell his team for \$1,500 now, but realized that they were worth that much to him if they were worth that to someone else! He also stated that the dogs had already more than paid their expenses by then. He had another reason for not wanting to sell the dogs; some men were cruel to their dogs. He continued, "we hate to think of the patient brutes through whose efforts we arrived safely in Dawson being beaten."

Jesse continued to tell more about how things were in Dawson, and may have revealed more about himself. "It seems nice not to have any pennies or nickels for change. One feels more like a man handling bigger money. The least change is 25¢. Most of the purchases are paid in gold dust. Of course the weights are always over-balanced and \$100 only buys about \$75 worth; but everything goes on the Yukon. One hundred dollars goes just about as far as \$15 outside. Then you say, what is the use of high wages and high prices when you cannot save any more than in the states. In answer I will say that this is the only country in the world where a laboring man can earn enough in a month to buy provisions for a year. You see his house is of wood and if he builds it himself does not cost him anything."

Unfortunately, Lepha contracted typhoid fever in mid-December of the same year while being pregnant. Their daughter, Mae Eldorado Edgren, was born on December 22 and her mother passed away ten days later on January 3. Lepha's parents received a brief telegram on the following month on February 9 informing them of the devastating news. A letter from "Captain Jack" Crawford, also known as "The Poet Scout," was received the following day with more details. The letter had been written on January 6 and was shared in the Wisconsin State Journal on February 11.



This photo of the funeral of Lepha Mae Bennett was copied from skagwaystories.org. She passed away in the Yukon in 1899, only ten days after she gave birth to her only child. She was buried at Dawson in Yukon Territory,

Crawford wrote, "I have just returned to my cabin from the grave of your beloved child. All that mortals could do has been done. At 12 o'clock noon today we placed her on the sled. Old Glory wrapped around her elegant form and casket, and her own six coal-black, faithful dogs hauled her remains to the church, and thence to the cemetery on top of the hill. A beautiful sermon was preached by the Methodist minister, Mr. Heatherington, after which I attempted to deliver a short eulogy, but my voice was choked and tears blinded me. Not a man, woman or child in the church that did not shed tears. I wish to say a few words about the dear little baby. She is in good motherly hands. A lady physician, Dr. Mosier, of Boston, has taken charge of her and is delighted to have the opportunity of acting the mother's part. Dozens have already tendered their assistance in many ways, and one storekeeper told me today to draw on him for \$50

cash and anything the store had in stock for the baby's use. This young man lived in Madison eight years ago and knows you very well. His name is Harry Hamburger."

At that time, Jesse planned to take Mae back to Madison "at the first boat coming down in the spring." However, Mae's aunt, Ella M. Bresee, went to Seattle and brought Mae back to Madison. Mrs. John McDonald, the wife of a Dawson City merchant and a close friend of Lepha, made the trip to Seattle with the child wrapped in several thicknesses of furs. That trip took two weeks with their boat being hung up on a sand bar for two days. Part of that journey was made in a rough tramway car hauled by mules. It took Mrs. Bresee four days to go out and three days to return back to Madison.

"The Klondike baby" arrived at the home of her grandparents Bennett, 109 East Johnson, at 3:00 a.m. on Monday, July 3. Scores of people flocked to the home to see the child, who was the first white child born in the Klondike. She weighed three pounds at birth and ten pounds at this time.

Captain Jack Crawford, who had served in the Civil War with Grandfather James Bennett, sent \$100 in gold dust with Mae. Many friends of the parents, and men who met the child, also gave her money or gold for her future.

The Wisconsin State Journal reported on July 19 that the Woman's Relief Corps elected the "recently" arrived Mae a membership. Her grandmother was a member at the time and her mother had been. She was "undoubtedly the youngest member in the country." The ladies had sent for a special badge for her.

According to the Monroe Evening Times, Jesse went to Milwaukee on February 27, 1901 "to accept a position with a syndicate that has some claim near Cape Nome, Alaska." He expected to take immediate steps toward developing them. At that time, he was contemplating a return to Dawson City as soon as the weather permitted. He was again married in Milwaukee on October 22, 1909. Mae was living with them at 354 33rd Street in Milwaukee in 1910.

Jesse passed away after being ill for only two days of meningitis while living in Minneapolis; he had gone there to manufacture toys after a fire in Milwaukee destroyed his factory there. Mae continued to live with her stepmother in Milwaukee until she was brought to Madison in July 1921. Sadly, she was seriously ill with tuberculosis and died at the home of her aunt, Mrs. J. E. Lund on August 28 at the age of 22.

The Jesse and Mae Bennett Edgren Papers are stored at the Alaska State Library.



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