



History of Nome





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*T*he "Three Lucky Swedes, " Jafet Lindberg, Erik Lindblom and John Brynteson,

discovered gold on Anvil Creek in 1898. News reached the gold fields of the Klondike that winter and by 1899 Anvil City, as the new camp was called, had a population of 10,000. It was not until gold was discovered in the beach sands in 1899 and news reached the outside that the real stampede was on. Thousands poured into Nome during the spring of 1900, as soon as steamships from the ports of Seattle and San Francisco could reach the north through the ice.

*I*n the treeless location, tents soon covered the landscape, reaching the water's edge, and

extending most of the 30 miles between Cape Rodney and Cape Nome. Buildings of finished board



lumber began going up as early as 1899, as soon as ships reached Nome from

*T*he gold camp's "Hey Day" was the first decade of this century. Once the largest city in

Alaska, estimates of it's population reached as high as 20,000 but the highest recorded population in 1900 was 12,488. The U.S. Census of 1900 listed one-third of all whites recorded in Alaska as living in Nome.



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*D*ue to fires (1905 & 1934) and violent storms (1900, 1913, 1945 & 1974), very little of

Nome's gold rush architecture remains. Although most of the remaining examples are not grand, they have a touch of the Victorian detail popular during the gold rush period. Two major events altered the physical appearance of present-day Nome to a great degree. The fire of 1934 completely destroyed the business section on Front Street and portions of residential area surrounding it, changing the character of the commercial district. The other event was World War II. Nome was the last stop on the ferry system for planes flying to the U.S.S.R. for the Lend/Lease program. The airstrip in current use was built and troops were stationed here. Signs of military presence include the numerous Quonset huts and knock-down buildings (usually long narrow buildings put together from five foot sections).



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Today, air travel has replaced the steam ship as the chief mode of travel to Nome, and

residents make their living from means other than the gold pan and rocker. The legacy from the gold rush remains. That legacy is only a small part of the contemporary community, adding to the flow of people and events from the past 96 years of Nome's history.

The Naming of Nome: In February 1899, a group of 42 men who had staked property and mining claims on the Snake River near Nome City, officially agreed to change the name of the new mining camp to Anvil City, because of the confusion with the Nome River, which was located four miles to the southeast, and with Cape Nome, the point of land located twelve miles from the city.

The name change only made the situation even more confusing. The town was locally

known as Anvil City for much of 1899, but the United States Post Office Department insisted on calling the community "Nome," apparently because it was thought that a town called Anvil City would be easily confused with the village of Anvik on the lower Yukon. A competing town site had been established at the mouth of the Nome River and it was also called Nome City. The Anvil City merchants feared that the Post Office might decide to move the "Nome" Post Office from Anvil City on the Snake River to Nome City on the Nome River. After a vote was held the merchants reluctantly agreed to change the name of Anvil City back to Nome.



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Against it's wishes the city was stuck with the unusual name of Nome. Unlike other towns

which are named for explorers, heros or politicians, Nome was named as a result of a 50 year-old

spelling error. In the 1850's an officer on a British ship off the coast of Alaska noted on a manuscript map that a nearby prominent point was not identified. He wrote "? Name" next to the point. When the map was recopied, another draftsman thought that the ? was a C and that the a in "Name" was an o, and thus a map-maker in the British Admiralty christened "Cape Nome."