

# Nome History

The “Three Lucky Swedes,” Jafet Lindeberg, 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.

In 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 the states with supplies.

The gold camp’s “hey day” was the first decade of the century. Once the largest city in Alaska, estimates of its 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 the whites recorded in Alaska as living in Nome.

Due to fires (1905 & 1934) and violent storms (1900, 1913, 1945 & 1974) little of Nome’s gold rush architecture remains. Most of the remaining examples are not grand. They have a touch of the Victorian detail popular during the gold rush period. Freight costs limited even the gold barons when it came to importing building materials. Two major events altered the physical appearance of present-day Nome to a great degree. The fire of 1934 completely destroyed the business section of Front Street and portions of the 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 here. Signs of military presence included the numerous Quonset Huts and knock-down buildings (usually long narrow building put together from five-foot sections).

Today, air travel has replaced the steam ship as the chief mode of travel to Nome, and its 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 100 years in Nome’s history.

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