

TR'ONDEK HWECH'IN CHIEF ISAAC

OPPOSITE

HAN CHIEF ISAAC AND HIS SON, 1899.

Clad in a traditional caribou parka with mittens held in place with moosehide sinew, the chief's bewildered 4-year son stares into the lens of the photographer's camera. The child's father has adopted to the whiteman's clothing of hat, sweater, vest, coat and trousers. He even wears a gold fob chain while a large gold nugget graces his sweater near his Adam's apple. The chief still wears his traditional moosehide mitts.

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Chief Isaac's favourite chair was made from a misshapen birch tree that had been sawn in half. The rest of the chair was made from branches and boards carefully positioned into place.

COURTESY TR'ONDEK HWECH'IN CULTURAL CENTRE

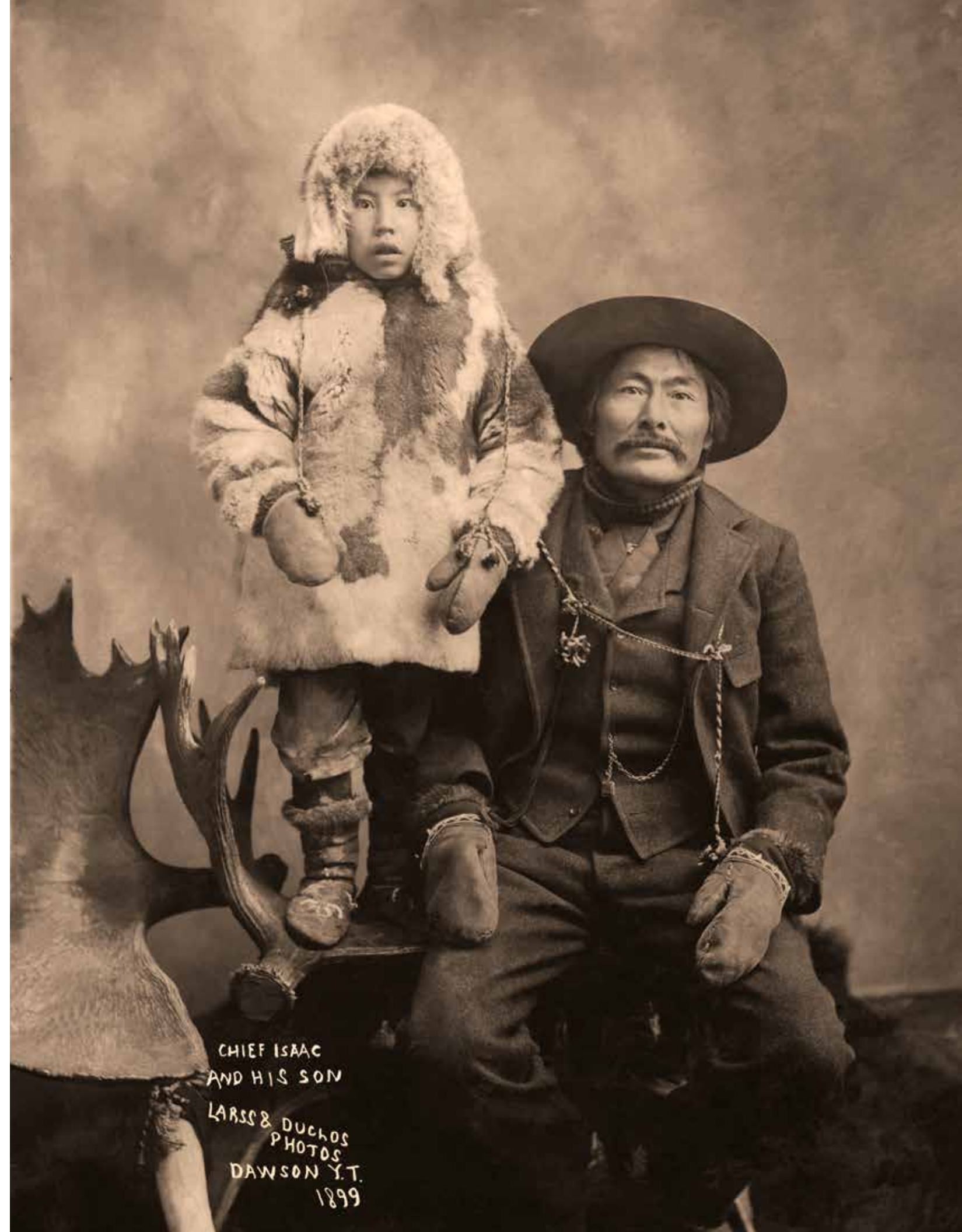
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Great great granddaughter of Chief Isaac of
the Moosehide Indian Village*

An impressive orator, Chief Isaac often spoke at Dawson City celebrations such as Discovery Day and Victoria Day as well as at the festivities of his own people. While Isaac welcomed the newcomers, he never failed to remind them that they prospered at the expense of the original inhabitants by driving away their game and taking over their land. Although they paid little heed to his message, Dawson City residents respected Chief Isaac and even made him an honorary member of the Yukon Order of Pioneers.

Isaac was born on the "Alaska side" of the US/Canadian border and spent his young manhood in the Forty Mile area until he married his wife Eliza and joined the people at the mouth of the Klondike River. The couple had 13 children, four of whom survived to adulthood. The most influential leader of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in, Chief Isaac led the Han people from some time before the Yukon gold rush until his death in 1932. In many ways, he was a bridge between the old ways and the new, mediating between his people and the newcomers. He arranged with government and church officials to move the Tr'ondek Hwech'in to Moosehide after they were displaced from Tr'ochek. He didn't want his people to become too civilized and would learn bad habits from the white people. As a result he convinced the government to move his people three miles downriver to Moosehide.

About 1892, Chief Isaac met Bishop William Bompas and was baptised. While the Anglican Church claimed Isaac as a Christian, he followed a middle path between the gospel and the ways of his ancestors. He attended church conferences and participated in services. He was also honoured as a keeper of the First Nations traditions and was often asked to lead in potlatches in other communities such as Fort Selkirk, Forty Mile and Eage.

In 1902 Chief Isaac travelled to the land of the newcomers on a visit to San Francisco, Seattle and other coastal cities. He was interested in all that he saw and glad to meet old Yukon friends. Nonetheless, he told a Seattle reporter: "Yes, I have seen so many strange and great things that I am tired and want to return to my people."



Water played an important role in placer mining and the summer of 1905 was so dry that John T. Lithgow, the Controller of the Currency for the Yukon, proposed to the miners that Charles M. Hatfield, a rain maker from California, be given a \$10,000 contract to come to the Klondike. It turned out that Hatfield was too

busy in California to come north but he agreed to come the following year for \$10,000—\$5,000 put up by the government and \$5,000 by the miners. Hatfield arrived on 6 June 1906 with an assistant and his brother and the trio set up on the King Solomon Dome at the headwaters of Hunker, Quartz, Sulphur, Dominion



THE MOUTH OF THE KLONDIKE RIVER EMPTYING INTO THE YUKON RIVER WITH DAWSON CITY ON THE LEFT AND KLONDIKE CITY ON THE RIGHT SHOWING THE OLD INDIAN VILLAGE OF MOOSEHIDE.

Joseph Francis Ladue staked a claim to 160 acres of boggy flats at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers that he named Dawson City after the renowned geologist and scientist George Mercer Dawson. Across the Klondike River from Dawson City a second smaller town came into existence that was named Klondike City. Much of this location was built on the unoccupied Moosehide First Nations village. After conferring with the clergy and police Chief Isaac moved the Moosehide First Nations people three miles downriver once Dawson City began having white married couples with young children. The prostitutes from Dawson City's 2nd Avenue were run out of town and across a bridge that spanned the Klondike River and forced to live in Klondike City—resulting in the name change to Lousetown. This altered map of Dawson City and Klondike City was compiled by Joseph Davis, a Judge from Helena, Montana.

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and Bonanza Creeks. There was very little rain and the miners wanted a meeting to cancel his contract. With the contract cancelled, the rain maker loaded all his equipment into a buggy and was en route to Dawson City when the skies opened with a downpour. Hatfield left Dawson City having only been allowed expenses from the contract and was never heard from again. According to Chief Isaac, he had four of his medicine men making "big medicine" so that Hatfield would make no rain. As a result the First Nations medicine men took full credit for the heavy rains.

The Han people lived along the Yukon River in eastern Alaska and western Yukon Territory with one of their largest camps being at the junction of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers. It was near here that George W. Carmack, Skookum Jim and Dawson Charley made the first big gold strike and within two years some 30,000 gold seekers had poured into Han Territory. The newcomers' hunting and timber cutting left the native population in near poverty. Chief Isaac was so worried about the future of his people that he sent some of their most sacred tribal possessions to the Han elders in Alaska for safekeeping.

On 15 December 1911 Chief Isaac was quoted in the Dawson City News: "All Yukon belong to my papas. All Klondike belong my people. Country now all mine. Long time all mine. Hills all mine; caribou all mine; moose all mine; rabbits all mine; gold all mine. White man come and take all my gold. Take millions, take more hundreds fifty millions, and blow 'em in Seattle. Now Moosehide Injun want Christmas. Game is gone. White man kills all moose and caribou near Dawson... Injun everywhere have own hunting grounds. Moosehides hunt up Klondike, Up Sixty Mile. up Twenty Mile, but game all gone. White man kill all."

Chief Isaac died of influenza at age 73. During his lifetime, he experienced unbelievable changes and worked hard to ensure his people's survival. The strength, wisdom and spirit of Chief Isaac continue to inspire the Tr'ondek Hwech'in.



HAN CHIEF ISAAC OF THE MOOSEHIDE FIRST NATIONS

The chief holds a bow with string guard and wears a decorated hide quiver while standing in front of his tent near the Yukon River's edge on the Dawson City side of the Klondike River. The North west Mounted Police barrack appears in the top right background.

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