

THOMAS, Henry

That there's

Gold. The very mention of the word put a sparkle in the eyes of young men eager for excitement and hungry for riches in the 1890s.

They travelled hundreds of miles by horse and train with few belongings and less money, hoping to strike it rich in the untamed wilderness of the Yukon.

Along with these wild-eyed prospectors came businessmen, bankers, bartenders and others. Henry Thomas was a former Belleville banker who moved to Orangeville in 1890 and six years later headed north to Dawson City, Yukon Territory to become manager of the city's first bank.

His grandson, William S.

Wills, says Thomas worked for the Canadian Bank of Commerce. Dawson City's branch was in a large log cabin. Presumably, its safe was made of something sturdier than logs.

Thomas was a big, burly man and at six feet, was above average height for the times. Wills has been told that while Thomas was sitting in a saloon

gold, boys!

one day, a man walked in claiming to be a professional wrestler. He challenged Thomas to a match and was soundly defeated by the pencil-pushing bank manager.

In the photograph below, Thomas is shown with former prime minister Sir Mackenzie Bowell and Judge John Franklin Wills (mayor of Belleville

from 1913-1916) as part of a committee comprised of residents from the Quinte area. The committee's purpose is unknown but it was likely connected with the heady days of the gold rush.

It is worth noting that shortly after Thomas left the bank in 1904, his replacement fired one of the bank's employees — poet Robert Frost.

Intell

Remember when

Sunday May 17, 1992