

COMPASS

THE ONBOARD MAGAZINE OF HOLLAND AMERICA LINE



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SAVOR THE JOURNEY

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Alaska has stolen many hearts away during its history,
with the roots that some Irish immigrants planted
being a proper testament and tribute.
Lisa Maloney and Sean McGrane





Image Image

WHEN IRISH EYES ARE SMILING

Alaska has stolen many hearts away during its history, with the roots that some Irish immigrants planted being a proper testament and tribute.

BY LISA MALONEY AND SEAN MCGRANE

Both the Irish and Alaskans often say there's a common link between the two places. Is it a mutual appreciation for fishing and freedom, or shared love of good fun? Whatever the connection, it began with Irish immigrants who arrived in a series of gold rushes and stayed to become crafters of the state's history and participants in some of its most dramatic stories.

THE IRISH HAVE LEFT AN INDELIBLE STAMP ON ALASKA.

AN ADVENTUROUS ANGEL

Perhaps the best known of these Irish adventurers was Nellie Cashman, originally from Cobh (then known as Queenstown) in County Cork. Her story of Alaska adventure actually has its roots in Tombstone, Arizona, where she owned a restaurant during the famous shootout at the O.K. Corral. But Cashman was an adventurous wanderer, and she pulled up stakes to follow silver and gold strikes north through Colorado and then on to Cassiar, British Columbia. Wherever she went, she was known for grubstaking miners, feeding them when they were broke and hungry.

Cashman's legendary kindness was matched by her bravery. When word reached her that a group of miners she knew had become stranded in a mountain pass, sick with scurvy, she pulled on her boots and winter gear and led a party of men up to the pass with a supply of critical food supplies, earning the moniker "Angel of the Cassiar."

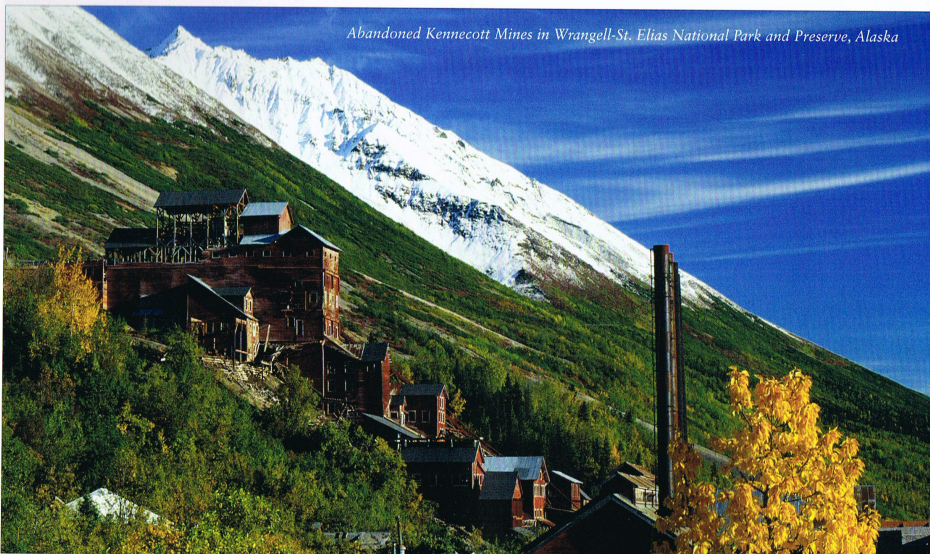
It wasn't long before Cashman followed gold north and west to Dawson City as part of the 1898 Klondike Gold Rush. Eventually she found herself in Alaska, first in Coldfoot and finally in the mining town of Wiseman, some 60 miles north of the Arctic Circle.

Around the 1920s, Cashman decided to visit a nephew in Arizona. Now in her 70s, she began her journey by harnessing her dog team and mushing 750 miles to the end of the train line in Nenana — about the same as mushing three-quarters of an Iditarod with no support, a feat that escapes many a hearty young musher today. During the trip to Arizona and back, she developed a cold that eventually drove her to St. Joseph Hospital in Victoria, British Columbia — a facility that she'd helped raise the money to build. She stayed there for almost three months before passing on January 4, 1925. To this day, if you take a detour into Victoria, you'll find a memorial to Nellie, the Angel of the Cassiar, in the Ross Bay Cemetery.

THE HARRISBURG THAT DIDN'T LAST

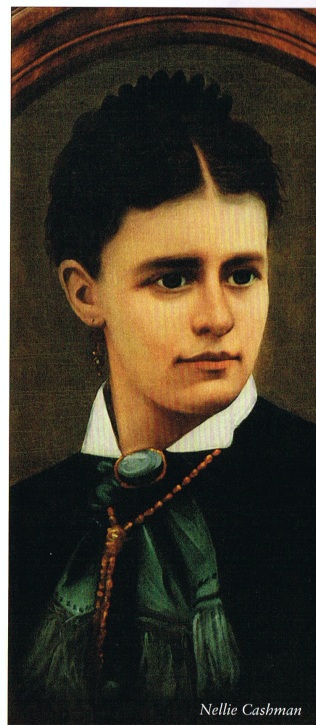
One of the biggest Irish place names in Alaska never made it onto modern maps. Richard Harris, an Irishman from Drummadonald in County Down, and Joe Juneau, a Québec Canadian, were hired to scout for gold in Southeast Alaska. And they found it, at what would become the Alaska-Juneau Gold Mine, which in turn birthed a town that they initially named Harrisburg.

But when Harris left in 1881 to visit family in the Lower 48, Juneau spread some gold around, called a miners meeting and had the town — which would eventually become the state's capital — renamed. But at least Harris's name lives on in his personal letters, which remain in the University of Alaska Anchorage archives.



Abandoned Kenecott Mines in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska

Blind Rommel / Huber Images / eStock Photo



Nellie Cashman



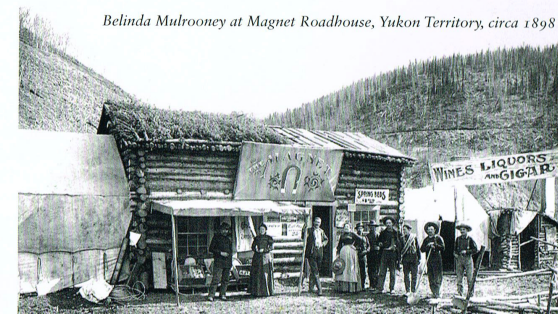
Panning for gold

THE MINING MULROONEY AND HER FORTUNE

The big Klondike Gold Rush came with an even bigger catch: It took a year for the first two ships bearing gold and news of the strike to reach their ports in Seattle and San Francisco. So by the time eager prospectors started streaming north, all the promising claims had already been staked by local miners in the area. Some prospectors turned back in despair or disgrace; others worked a claim for someone else or found the cash to buy the owner out; and yet others set up to "mine the miners," offering goods and services in exchange for cash or gold.

The Irishwoman Belinda Mulrooney, of County Mayo, was one of the latter. It's said that upon finally reaching Dawson City, she flipped her last coin into the Yukon River, making a wish as it fell. This wish must have paid off, because she was able to sell all the goods she'd brought with her from Skagway including silks, rubber hot water bottles and clothing. She built a restaurant in Dawson City and became a rarity among women of those days because she owned mining claims: either abandoned claims she heard of in her restaurant and then staked, or claims received from miners in exchange for grubstakes.

Mulrooney also built a hotel midway between Dawson City and the Klondike mining area. She outfitted it with luxury goods including imported chandeliers, a grand piano and Champagne, all of which were hauled over White Pass with assistance from

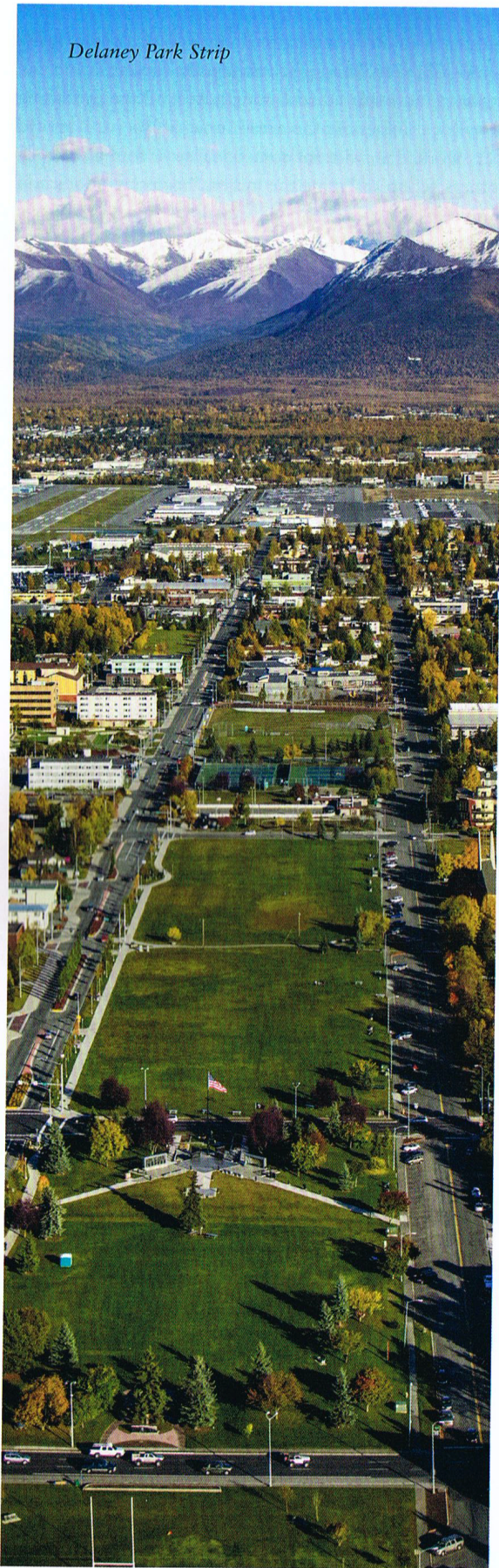


Belinda Mulrooney at Magnet Roadhouse, Yukon Territory, circa 1898

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Clockwise from top: Science History Images / Alamy Stock Photo; History and Art Collection / Alamy Stock Photo; Patrick Evers / AlaskaBook

Delaney Park Strip



Skagway's Soapy Smith — a famous scam artist but not fool enough to swindle Belinda Mulrooney.

But like many prospectors who came before and others who followed, Mulrooney went from true riches to destitute rags — twice. Her first loss was the result of a tragic romance with a charming Québec Canadian, Charles Carbonneau. After spending a couple of years together, with the summers in Dawson and the winters in Paris, Mr. Carbonneau fled Dawson amid charges of embezzlement, taking Mulrooney's fortune with him.

She recreated her fortune in Fairbanks and eventually moved south to Washington, building a stone house that looked for the entire world like a miniature castle. There

she lost her fortune again and eventually died on the streets of Seattle. But you can still see her house in Yakima, where it now houses a flower and gift shop.

**OF ALL THE IRISH
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And you can see Belinda Mulrooney herself as a character in the Irish Western drama *An Klondike* (distributed in parts as *Dominion Creek*), which documents the trials of the three Connolly brothers as they travel to the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush.

A GENTLEMAN'S OFFER

Of all the Irish who came to Alaska for gold, one became so rich that he tried to buy a country. Martin Gately, of Roscommon town in County Roscommon, followed the first gold rush to the Klondike and had great success. In 1904 he followed the next rush to the Fairbanks area and continued his mining adventures on Pedro Creek.

There Gately and a group of concerned Irish, Americans and English pooled their resources and carefully penned a proposal to the Chief Secretary of Ireland, the de facto Crown representative. Gately's proposal was a simple, logical and beautifully written offer to purchase Ireland from the British Empire and return it to the people. Although nobody knows exactly how much money he and his partners had in the bank, the offer included the name of Samuel Bonfield, President of First National Bank, as a bona fide.

The only response Gately received was a one-sentence letter of dismissal from the Chief Secretary's aide: Thanks, but no thanks. Having made his fortune, and also receiving a stipend from the territorial legislature for his role in the gold rush and the building of Alaska, Gately made his way south to San Francisco and then home to Ireland.

IRISH ROOTS STILL NOURISH ALASKA

The Irish have left an indelible stamp on Alaska, not just in stories but in names-turned-places. A quick look at Alaska's maps tells the story in towns like Healy, McCarthy, McGrath and Cordova (which, although a Spanish name, was chosen by the Irishman Michael Heney). But perhaps no Irish-named landmark is so well-used and beloved as the Delaney Park Strip in Anchorage, named for former Anchorage Mayor James Delaney, an Irishman originally from Castlereagh, County Roscommon.

This mile-long stretch of grass draws locals and visitors alike to soak up the sun on long summer days, watch parades go by and gather for festivities. And not far away, in front of the old state courthouse at the intersection of Fourth Avenue and K Street, stands an apple tree that Delaney himself planted.

Over the decades, residents have taken many cuttings from that tree, planting its descendants all over town. And just like those young trees, the story of Irish people in Alaska continues to grow and change, fueled by cherished acquaintances from "across the pond" who still seek the fortune, fun and adventure that have lured people to Alaska for centuries.