

# Women of the Klondike.

1 The fair sex was not exempt from "gold fever" - one out of ten stampedeers was a woman. Journalist Annie Hall Strong offered some advice for women headed to the Klondike. Her article, "Hints to Women," first appeared in the December 31, 1897, edition of the *Skaguay News* and was reprinted in newspapers around the country. She wrote that "women have made up their minds to go to the Klondike, so there is no use trying to discourage them." Speaking for the female stampedeers, Strong boasted that "when our fathers, husbands and brothers decided to go, so did we, and our wills are strong and courage unyielding. We will not be drawbacks nor hindrances, and they won't have to return on our account." Strong herself had been one of those who contracted what she termed "acute Klondicitis." She arrived in Skagway in the late summer of 1897.



2 Over a thousand women crossed over the Chilkoot or White Pass trail between 1896 and 1900. Women went into the Klondike with male relatives and on their own. Some who traveled alone signed on to cook and clean for groups of men in return for help in moving their provisions across the passes and down the Yukon River.

3 The presence of women along the trails was noted in the letters and diaries of male stampedeers. In at least one instance, their presence encouraged one man to continue on. In a letter to his wife, Kitty, Fred Dewey wrote, "It is a big day's work to haul 100 pounds a distance of four miles. There are three women alone on the trail and they are taking their own stuff in. I would be ashamed to back down before difficulties that those women surmount."

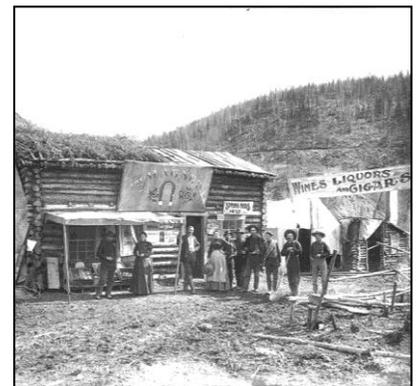
4 Belinda Mulrooney was a favorite subject of newspaper and magazine writers. Scribner's Magazine called her the "richest woman in the Klondike. Of all the legends associated with Belinda Mulrooney, (and there are many), one that typifies her bravado and self-assurance was oft told by the woman herself. According to Mulrooney, when she finally reached Dawson and the gold fields after months of hard travel, she tossed her very last coin, a 25-cent piece, into the Yukon River for luck. She was 26 years old.

5 Belinda had more than just luck on her side -- she was determined to become a success. Mulrooney, the daughter of a Pennsylvania miner, had left home when at 21. She displayed her entrepreneurial bent from the very beginning. She ran a sandwich stand in Chicago during the Colombian Exposition. From Chicago she moved to San Francisco where she ran an ice-cream parlor. When the parlor burned down, she got a job working as a stewardess for the Pacific Coast Steamship Company.

6 There had been gold strikes in Alaska and the Yukon before August 1896. These smaller strikes had attracted those who had paid attention. An earlier strike in Juneau, Alaska, encouraged Mulrooney to head north in 1896. While there, she worked in a small clothing store. When Mulrooney heard about the fabulous new gold strike in the Klondike, she did not waste any time.

7 Thinking ahead, she theorized that it would be the niceties, and not the necessities of life that would bring a fortune in the remote and barren gold fields. She left for the Klondike with many of the necessities other stampedeers were bringing, but also with items few had the time, money or will to carry - silk underwear, bolts of cotton cloth and hot water bottles. She chose well--and made six times her cost back in profits. Mulrooney used that money to open a restaurant in Dawson, charging between \$1.50 - \$4.50 for a meal.

8 Belinda soon turned her attention to the gold fields themselves. Instead of trying to dig gold out of the ground, she mined the miners. Catering to the crowds in the gold fields, 15 to 30 miles away from Dawson, Mulrooney built a two-story roadhouse at the junction of the two most profitable creeks--Bonanza and El Dorado.



- 9 Her Grand Forks Hotel and restaurant was an immediate success. Always one to recognize opportunity, Belinda ordered that sweepings from the floors be run through a sluice--bringing her as much as \$100 a day from the gold dust that fell from miner's pockets and clothing. In addition to the traditional profits from the hotel and restaurant, Mulrooney was able to profit from information gathered from miners sitting around talking about the digs. By the end of the year, she owned five mining claims either outright, or in partnership.
- 10 With the success of the Grand Forks Hotel, Mulrooney was able to buy a spot of land in Dawson on the corner of Princess Street and First Avenue. She sold the Grand Forks Hotel for \$24,000 and put her profits into creating the most impressive building in Dawson. Only the best would be good enough for Mulrooney's new hotel.
- 11 Everything had to be ordered from Skagway or Seattle. Freightng such exquisite goods over the passes or up the Yukon River and into Dawson in 1898 was an achievement in itself. Mulrooney ordered cut glass chandeliers, silver and china linens and even brass bedsteads for her rooms. On July 27, 1898, the Fair View Hotel opened to enthusiastic and impressive reviews. The three-story hotel held thirty guest rooms and a restaurant.
- 12 Among those who visited the hotel in its first days were Mary Hitchcock and Edith Van Dorn, who were "doing" the Klondike as tourists. Hitchcock included a description of the Fair View in her book, "Two Women in the Klondike."
- 13 Mulrooney worked hard to ensure the success of the Fair View Hotel and maintain it in grand style. She traveled down the Yukon River to Skagway to purchase the highest quality provisions and furnishings available for her showpiece. In 1899, she even sailed down to Seattle to select plate glass windows, lumber and a steam heating apparatus for the building.
- 14 Appreciating her keen business sense, a local bank chose Mulrooney to run the Gold Run Mining Company, then deeply in the red. She pulled the company into the black in 18 months.
- 15 By the end of the century, Belinda Mulrooney's hotels and mines had brought her a considerable fortune, but she had also experienced some major financial setbacks. She was eventually sued by owners of the Gold Run Mine for improperly letting lays on mining properties. In addition, the bank holding the mine's mortgage sued her for the debt.
- 16 Understandably tired of Dawson by this time, she decided to try and build back her fortune in the gold fields near Fairbanks, Alaska in 1904. Mulrooney set up the Dome City Bank in Fairbanks. Her touch was still golden and she made a second fortune.
- 17 From there she moved to eastern Washington, and because she wanted to live in style, she built herself a castle near Yakima, living there with her siblings until the late 1920s. When her fortune was depleted, Mulrooney was forced to rent out the castle. She spent the rest of her life in Seattle, where she gave interviews from time to time, talking about her life during the gold rush. She died in Seattle in 1967 at 95 years of age.

## Notes:

Use the space below to note vocabulary words that you do not recognize. Include the paragraph # and what you think the word could mean based on its contextual use. Don't forget to underline or highlight the word in its context above.

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