Frank Manley—(or Hilliard B. Knowles)—was a Texan that made a fortune in Alaskan gold and the California oil fields. His fabulously rich claims on Cleary Creek in the Fairbanks district were nearly rivaled by similarly rich ground in the Iditarod district that he worked with another inductee Tom Aitken. A founder of the First National Bank of Fairbanks (now KeyBank), Manley’s legacy is in his namesake town of Manley Hot Springs.

Herman Tofty—belongs to the tradition of Alaskan miners of Scandinavian heritage. His Alaska legacy is in the Central Yukon Country near Rampart and Manley Hot Springs just after the discovery of gold in the Fairbanks area. He was a valued member of the civic and mining community of Tofty; his geological heritage is recorded in the ‘Tofty Tin Belt’.

Chester Purington—his career took him across four continents. Purington’s classic study of Alaska placer mines was the bible of its time and now furnishes valuable historical information of placer mine activities during the peak of the Alaska-Yukon gold rush. Purington died in the Great Japanese Earthquake of 1923, one of the most distinguished mining engineers of his day.

Thomas Aitken—this Scottish immigrant was responsible for one mine success story after another in the Klondike, Fairbanks, Iditarod, Nixon Fork, McGrath, Mayo, and Kantalshna districts. Although the Great Crash of 1929 robbed him of much of his wealth, his hard work, mining abilities, good business sense, and willingness to take risks allowed Tom Aitken to stand above most others during the Alaska-Yukon mining scene of the early 20th Century.
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation
Induction Ceremony, March 7th, 2002
7:30PM to 9:30PM, Westmark Hotel, Fairbanks, Alaska
During the 18th Biennial Conference on Alaska Mining

PROGRAM

The Induction Ceremony will be preceded by a book signing of *Rock Poker to Pay Dirt: "The History of Alaska's School of Mines and its Successors*" by author Leslie M. Noyes. This event is sponsored by the University of Alaska Press------6:00-7:30PM

Introduction and Purpose of the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF), by Earl H. Beistline, President------7:30-7:45PM.

Comments from Dermot Cole, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner------7:45-8:00PM

Frank G. Manley, by Chuck C. Hawley------8:00-8:15PM

Herman Tofty, by Chuck C. Hawley------8:15-8:30PM

Coffee Break------8:30-8:45PM

Chester W. Purinton, by Tom K. Bundtzen------8:45-9:00PM

Thomas P. Aitken, by Tom K. Bundtzen------9:00-9:15PM

Recollections of the four inductees by relatives and general attendees in the audience------9:15-9:30PM

Closing of Ceremony------9:30PM

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The March 7th, 2002 AMHF Induction ceremony will feature four inductees: Frank Manley, Herman Tofty, Chester Purinton, and Thomas Aitken. This year is the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Alaska’s Golden Heart City, so it is fitting that we celebrate the lives and careers of four mining pioneers that played important roles in Fairbanks and the nearby districts. Chuck Hawley wrote the biographies of Herman Tofty and Frank Manley. Tom Bundtzen wrote the biographic summaries for Chester Purinton and Tom Aitken.

Because of the general lack of published accounts of all of these mining pioneers especially for Purinton and Aitken, the AMHF would like to especially acknowledge the assistance of:

Karen Erickson,
Connie Bradbury ---Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,
John Brock, Al Archer, and Bob Cathro--- Canadian mine consultants
Jane Gaffin---Whitehorse historian
Neil MacLeod, John and Andrew Miscovich---longtime Flat residents
William F. Stroecher---Alaska KeyBank,
Candice Waugaman---Fairbanks historian
Jan MacKell---the Cripple Creek Mining District Museum, Colorado, and
Darlene Hamilton---the Seattle Public Library
For all their important contributions and research contacts.
Previous Inductees
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame

The four Alaskan mining pioneers to be inducted in the March 2002, ceremony in Fairbanks join thirty others previously inducted in ceremonies held between 1998 and July 2001, in Fairbanks, Nome, Juneau, and Anchorage.

Six charter members of the AMHF Foundation—Stephen Birch, Frederick Bradley, Alfred H. Brooks, John Treadwell, Earnest Patty, and Clarence Berry–were previously elected into the National Mining Hall of Fame in Leadville, Colorado.

Yukon River traders Alfred Mayo, Jack McQuesten, and Arthur Harper, Fortymile discoverer Howard Franklin, Athabascan miner and Rampart discoverer John Minook, and Fairbanks district founder Felix Pedro were inducted during the 16th Biennial Interior Mining Conference held in Fairbanks in 1998. That same year, at Nome's Centennial celebration, the three 'lucky Swedes' - Erik Lindblom, Jafet Lindeberg, and John Brynteson - and gold rush mine-backer Charles Lane were added to the list.

In May 1999, AMHF induction ceremonies at the Juneau-Douglas Museum added four more pioneers: Joe Juneau, Richard Harris, George Pilz, and Tlingit leader Kawa.'ee. They were all associated with the gold discovery of what would become Alaska's capital city.

Three more mining leaders were inducted during the annual Alaska Miners Association Convention in Anchorage in November 1999: platinum miner Andrew Olson, coal pioneer Evan Jones, and mine innovator/geologist W.E. Dunkle.

In March 2000, three distinguished interior mining pioneers were inducted during ceremonies in Fairbanks: Kantishna legend Fannie Quigley; Usibelli Coal Mine Inc. founder Emil Usibelli, and geological standout John Beaver Mertie.

In May 2001, Benjamin Duane Stewart, long-time Territorial Commissioner of Mines, was inducted in Juneau.

In July 2001, three individuals important to the development of large scale dredge operations at Nome and Fairbanks-Norman Stines, Wendell Hammon, and James Davidson were inducted during Golden Days celebration in Fairbanks.

Iditarod discoverer John Beaton was inducted during the November 2001, Alaska Miners Association ‘Alaska History Night’ activities in Anchorage.

More than 100 men and women have been nominated for the AMHF Foundation. All of these nominees remain active. The principal task of the AMHF honors committee is to select new potential inductees through internal research efforts, and to receive additional potential nominees through solicitation from the general public. We encourage all those interested and knowledgeable about Alaska’s mining history to nominate new members for the AMHF Foundation.
FRANK MANLEY (1867-1933)

A song of the California Gold Rush asks “Say, What Was Your Name in the States?” In California or Alaska in the early days, it was a question not asked lightly. Nicknames concealed many identities. Who was Water-front Brown, or Two Step Louie, the Forty Horse-Power Swede or, on the distaff side, Finn Annie or the Utah Filly? Prominent civic and mining leader, Frank G. Manley, would have at least paused before answering: Frank was born in Corryell County, Texas in 1867 was christened Hilliard Bascom Knowles. When Frank came to Alaska in the late 1890s, he left Mrs. Alice Knowles and two young sons, Tom and Claude, in California. He also may have had a reason or two to change his name. One family anecdote tells that Frank (or Hilliard) had to leave Placerville, California, in a hearse after he was caught selling liquor to the Indians. Another tells that he came to Alaska because he accidentally killed a man in a barroom fight. But like many other Alaskans of questionable name, Frank Manley, or Hilliard Knowles, became a valued Alaska citizen who contributed much to the young Alaska territory.

According to author Virgina Crowe Sims, Frank Manley arrived in Alaska by way of the vessels City of Topeka and The Rustler and disembarked at Dyec. The Klondike had not yet been struck, but the Circle camp had some rich diggings. Manley joined the Circle City Miner’s Association on November 11, 1896. After the Klondike discovery, Manley moved to Dawson where he bought, and then sold, No. 61 Below on Bonanza Creek before it became a substantial mine. Throughout his Alaska career, Manley changed hats in mid-stream to switch to other businesses. When he returned to Seattle in 1900 he bought and operated a livery stable.

After Felix Pedro’s gold discovery at Fairbanks, Manley returned to Alaska and acquired rich claims on Cleary Creek. Manley acquired the Discovery and Nos. 4 and 5 Below Discovery claims on Cleary Creek from Captain Barnette, the founder of Fairbanks. Nos. 4 and 5 below were very rich. Manley sold or leased some of his Cleary ground to brothers Tom and William Aitken; at the beginning of a long continued association with Thomas P. Aitken. Reportedly the Cleary Creek claims produced $4,000,000 worth of gold before they were sold to the forerunners of the Fairbanks Exploration Company in the 1920’s.

Manley had several other associates at Cleary Creek including father and son D. T. and Ben Boone. In one partnership, Manley bought out all his partners except the Boones who would not relinquish a good thing. As an aftermath, the Boones filed suit on the division of the interests on Cleary Creek. Judge James Wickersham ruled in favor of the Boones, but his decision was reversed by the Circuit Court of Appeals that held for Manley.

Manley left Alaska briefly in the summer of 1907 for Seattle, but the Boones were ready for retaliation. Manley was extradited from Seattle to
Texas to face a perjury charge for lying about the value of a jackass; the Boone testified against him. Allegedly years before, Manley tied an ordinary jackass on the tracks of the Sante Fe Railroad, which proved fatal to the jackass. In settlement with the Sante Fe, Manley recovered damages for a good jackass. The charge was almost certainly trumped up. Manley told a *Fairbanks Times* reporter that the real object of the trial was to keep him out of Alaska so "designing persons," read "the Boones," could capture his wealth. The litigation with the Boones led to another law suite when Manley's own attorney sued him and won a $20,000 judgment.

Litigation in Texas, although time-consuming, did not stop Manley's civic and entrepreneurial ventures in Alaska. According to long-time Fairbanks banker William Stroecker, Manley put up half of the capital for a new bank in Fairbanks. His friend Sam Bonnifield put up most of the rest. The bank became the First National Bank of Fairbanks, the forerunner of today's Keybank branch in Fairbanks.

Manley also had extensive interests in the Hot Springs District which began with option of gold claims in Baker Creek. In 1906, Manley bought the interests of miner-farmer J. F. Karschner to a hot spring site and began to construct a resort in the Alaska village which now bears his name, Manley Hot Springs. Manley's resort, completed in 1907, included a palatial three and one-half story log hotel, hot spring-fed swimming pool, a stable, and a couple of warehouses. Although Manley was often absent because of the Texas litigation and other business affairs, the resort complex operated profitably for four years during the heyday of the Hot Springs district boom between 1907 and 1911. The lodge and swimming pool structure burned in 1913. The resort exists today but on a much less grand scale than envisaged by Manley.

Manley mined with Tom Aitken on Glen Creek in the Hot Springs District, and then, in 1910, stamped to the new Iditarod Mining District with Aitken and Henry Riley. Manley possibly was associated with Aitken in the fabulous Marietta Association claim at Flat; Manley and Aitken were definitely co-owners of ground on Willow Creek in the district. Aitken and Manley were also involved with a hard-rock lead discovery south of Galena and in the Keno Hill silver district in the Yukon.

Another Manley partner was longtime Fairbanks attorney John T. McGinn. The Chisana (Shushanna) district in the eastern Alaska Range was discovered in 1914 and was a short-term wonder. Manley, McGinn, and two other Manley miners at Cleary Creek, Jack Price and E. J. Ives, made money in the rich early days of the Chisana district. With McGinn, Manley also made a very profitable California investment. The men bought acreage near Bakersfield and hit an oil field that attained production worth $4,000,000 before Manley's death. McGinn and Manley were less successful in oil-drilling ventures in Texas.

After his successes in the Flat-Iditarod area, Manley set up headquarters in San Francisco, but visited Alaska frequently and maintained his northern ventures. In the 1920s, he mined at Cleary Creek, perhaps acquired the large low-grade Willow Creek placer at Flat, and purchased a half-interest in the Roth Coal Mines in the Nenana field south of Fairbanks. Shortly before his death, Manley sold his Willow Creek property to a mining partnership organized by W.E. Dunkle, but he had mining plans of his own. Manley moved a big dragline from Fairbanks to Thistle Creek in the Yukon Territory in anticipation of a new operation.

In September 1932, before he could open a mine at Thistle Creek, Manley was seriously injured in an automobile accident and was laid up for several months. He seemed to be recovering but was felled by a heart attack on January 30, 1933 at his home in Rutherford,
California. He was survived by his second wife, Lucile, and sons Thomas and Claude of his first marriage.

In his last years, Manley’s hearing failed, but the handicap was largely ignored by Manley and his numerous friends throughout Alaska and northern Canada. At his death the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner noted that Manley never lost a youthful demeanor nor an erect carriage; his age was marked mainly by snowy white hair and his increasing deafness. Author Sims wrote “But the little town in Interior Alaska which has been called, in order, Baker Hot Springs, Karshner Hot Springs, (simply) Hot Springs and Manleyville, is still very much Manley Hot Springs.”

Frank G. Manley or Hilliard B. Knowles was one of Alaska’s premier mining men and a founding citizen of Fairbanks, Alaska.

Herman Tofty spent the first years of his life on a Norwegian farm that had been in the Tofty family at least since 1597. He was born in 1873 to Andrew (Anders) and Anne, nee Haarstad, Tofty as the fifth of seven children and the next to youngest son. The nearest community to the family farm was Kristiansund, near the mouth of a fjord, an ocean-invaded valley which must have seen many Viking flotilla embark and return in earlier centuries. Sometime after 1877 but before 1880, the Tofty family immigrated to the United States, and was registered in Faribault, Minnesota in the 1880 census. Like many Scandinavian immigrants of the period, they were lured to America by the promise of fertile, almost free lands, offered by railroad companies. Within a few years, the family moved west to Fuller Township, Coginchaug Co., South Dakota where they were among the first homesteaders. The Tofty family suffered a severe loss in 1886 when mother, Anne, died at age fifty-one. Of Herman’s siblings only his oldest sister, Mary, was out of the teen years. His youngest brother Magnus was probably only nine years old. A few years later the family began to disperse.

Herman appears to have been the most adventuresome of the family. His next oldest brother Olaf (Ole) left home for the lead-silver mines of Idaho. Herman sought more distant but perhaps more immediate riches when he left for the newly discovered Klondike diggings in 1898. Herman is registered at both the Lake Bennett and Chilkoot Pass checkpoints in late spring of 1898. He and four companions, Jason Walsh, J.C. Hallady, Joe Warleburn and W. Terry, registered with skow number 1135 on Lake Bennett, apparently with sufficient
supplies to satisfy the Canadian entry requirements of the Mounted Police. Ground near the discovery points in the Yukon Territory was already heavily staked, so Tofty headed down river to Alaska. On October 11, 1898 he recorded the No. 3 Surrey Gulch and Pup Off of No. 2 Below on a tributary to Gunnison Creek, Rampart District, Alaska Territory. In the spring of 1899, Tofty recorded No. 21 Below Eureka Creek in the Hot Springs district, the district where he later had his greatest success.

Tofty probably had no mining background before he joined the rush to the Klondike in 1898, but he must have been a quick learner, also an organizer as it was reported that in the fall of 1900 “Tofty and men are working on the upper end of No. 24, Little Minook, Junior Creek.” Tofty apparently was the leader of a group of men that included Hart Smith, and Foley, Austin, and Goss, of unknown first names.

Based on articles in the *Alaska Forum* and *Rampart Miner*, Tofty mined mainly in the Rampart District from 1900 to 1905 where he was also a notable part of its social and civic life. Nineteen hundred two records show that Tofty and pioneer miners Carlo, Walbridge, and Foley brought down a load of lumber by barge from Eagle to construct a new jail and courthouse at Rampart. Tofty found very rich ground on Glenn Creek where some pans ran as high as $3. In 1904, Tofty assigned his Glenn Creek lease to Sinclair.

The first major discovery of the Hot Springs district, which for a while was called the Sullivan District, was made in 1906 by M. J. Sullivan. His discovery and another by C. P. Snyder and George Kemper on January 1, 1907 near the mouth of Tofty Gulch caused a flurry of activity in the district. Tofty may have been associated with Sullivan in these discoveries, as a newspaper article, *Hot Springs Echo and Tanana Citizen* reported that “Messrs Tofty and Sullivan are in from their new diggings. Without being overconfident, [sic] they say they think well of it and intend to thoroughly prospect the new creek.” In prospecting, Tofty produced 376 ounces of gold in six weeks on Tofty Creek. The new district was blanketed by twelve association claims each of 160 acres located between July and October in 1907. Tofty was a principal in all twelve associations. M. J. Sullivan was a principal in seven.

The commercial center of the district was the village of Tofty where the Hot Springs-Tanana winter mail-trail intersected Sullivan Creek. The village boasted three roadhouses and a Post Office which was active from 1908 until 1943.

In general pay-in the Hot Springs district is deeply covered by tens of feet of the frozen deposits that the miners called muck. The paystreak in Sullivan Creek often was seventy feet deep, leaving no option at that time other than shafting and winter drift mining of the deep pay. The pay in Tofty Gulch was much shallower, buried by less than ten feet of frozen soil matted with vegetation and tree roots. The developers of the gulch, possibly including Herman himself, stripped the frozen soil and developed the creek as an open cut. To prepare the frozen muck, it was blasted with dynamite, after sinking holes in the permafrost with steam points to place the explosive charges. Steam-driven scrapers then delivered the pay gravel to elevated sluices for recovery of the gold.

Miners in the district were developing new techniques. The use of steam points was only a few years old and it may well be the first use of dynamite in overburden removal in Alaska. Tofty definitely used steam points in his operation as the *Hot Springs Echo and Tanana Citizen* of July 27, 1907 reported that he had ordered a boiler from Fairbanks.

In September 1908, Tofty left briefly for the family home in South Dakota, his first time outside in eleven years. His father was about eighty-two years old.
and would live only three more years. Before he returned to Alaska, Herman
toured the southern states from Florida
to Texas and had an enjoyable time. A
reporter noted, however, that “he is glad
to be back where he is free of city
ordinances and suspenders...”

Although Tofty, often “Tofty” to his
friends, returned to Alaska, he was now
a well-to-do man and evidently tired at
last of northern climes. He disposed of
his claim interests in 1908 and left
Alaska in the summer of 1909 almost
certainly a prosperous miner. Herman
visited South Dakota, and then moved
bifely to Boise, Idaho where his brother
Ole was a hard-rock miner. But Tofty
determined to go further south. His
Passport (No. 34560) was to be
forwarded to him in La Paz, Bolivia
where he presumably mined and
prospected for several years. In 1917,
Tofty left Bolivia and moved to British
Guiana, initially working for Demerara
Bauxite Company on the upper
Demerara River. At this point, he also
tired of the bachelor’s life and married
Caroline Menezes, a lady of Portuguese
descent, in Georgetown on July 28,
1917. Four children, Alma, Herman,
and twins Kenneth and Lloyd, followed
quickly between 1919 and 1921.

Although life as a bauxite miner was
probably more stable, it may have not
satisfied the financial needs of his new
family. The streams of British Guiana
carried both gold and diamonds.
Herman, thoroughly familiar with
alluvial mining, returned to alluvial
prospecting in search for a last stake. He
died in the jungle, either of tropical
disease or—by family tradition—at
the hands of hostile natives, on March
4, 1922, leaving very little to his wife and
young children. His tangible legacy
included 64 small diamonds totaling 11
15/16 carats valued, then, at $100.
Caroline immigrated to New York but
died in poverty in 1926. One of the twins
died; Alma and her two brothers entered
the New York Foundling Home as
indigent children.

Herman’s Alaska legacy is in the
central Yukon country near Rampart and
Manley Hot Springs where he was a
valued member of the civic and mining
community. The nearly deserted
settlement of Tofty remains;
geologically his heritage is recorded in
the Tofty Tin Belt, an intriguing belt of
placer gold-tin deposits that extends for
several miles in the Hot Springs district,
nearly through the village of Tofty. As
Tofty’s grandson (son of Alma), John S.
Graham III, has written (1997), “No
ordinary man, Herman Tofty left an
indelible mark on the history of North
and South America—a mark that
endures 124 years after his birth and 75
years after his death.” Graham’s
appellation that his grandfather was “a
quintessential miner” seems apt.

Sketch courtesy of Jenny Hawley

CHESTER WELLS PURINGTON
(1871-1923)

Acclaimed geologist and mining
engineer Chester Wells Purington was
killed in Yokohama during the Great
Japanese earthquake of September 1,
1923 while attempting to save the lives
of his two young children. Purington
had re-entered the large apartment
complex that his family lived in when it
collapsed and burned. Purington’s
body and that of his little girl were never
found. His young son Frank was pulled
from the wrecked building, but died a
few hours later. His wife Charlotte was
running an errand in another part of
Yokohama, and thus she survived one of the worst natural disasters of the 20th Century. The earthquake ended the life of one of the most distinguished mining men of his era.

Chester Purington was born in Boston, Massachusetts on October 27, 1871 and graduated from Harvard University in 1893. He began his first field work in 1893 on gold deposits of the Appalachian mountain chain. His first professional work in Alaska began in 1895 when he investigated the lode and placer gold deposits of the Juneau Gold Belt-at the time the premier producer of gold for the Alaskan Territory. Purington provided some of the first published descriptions on the placer deposits of the Silver Bow Basin behind Juneau. The Klondike placer strike in Yukon, Canada, which would change Alaska and the Yukon forever, was still two years away. In 1896 Purington returned to the States to work briefly on the economic staff of the U.S. Geological Survey with noted geologist George F. Becker in the San Juan Mountains of Colorado. That year, Purington completed detailed examinations of the Telluride and Rico districts and later worked in the La Plata Mountains.

In 1897, the lure of international travel and the desire for adventure led Purington to central and eastern Europe. He examined mineral deposits and districts in Belgium, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Russia. During his first trip to Europe, Purington became deeply impressed with the mineral development possibilities in Russia and he made several examinations of gold, copper, and iron deposits in the Ural Mountains.

Purington spent the next two years in South America and in various parts of the U.S. In 1900, he decided to acquire some practical experience in the mining field and worked as a laborer in a large hydraulic placer mine on the Rogue River of Oregon and as a hard rock miner at the Camp Bird Mine in Colorado.

From 1902 to 1907, Mr. Purington worked as a consulting geologist and engineer with Godfrey Doveton, of Denver Colorado. It was during this time in his career that Purington's second and most important contribution to Alaskan mining took place. The U.S. Geological Survey received numerous requests for information regarding the costs of operating placer mines in Alaska and the best means to work placer claims. Alfred H. Brooks, then in charge of the Division of Alaskan Mineral Resources of the Survey, contacted Chester Purington in October, 1903 and asked him to conduct an investigation that described Alaskan placer mining methods. Purington was assisted by Sidney Paige, who was also a well known economic geologist. Purington began his study in May, 1904, first examining the placer deposits in the Juneau district. He then traveled to the Atlin and Klondike districts in Canada. A riverboat trip down the Yukon landed Purington at Eagle, where he examined placer mining methods in the Seventymile district. Another riverboat trip landed him at Circle, where he investigated placer mines in that area. Purington then traveled overland via horseback to the recently opened Fairbanks district which would become Alaska's premier placer camp. At Fairbanks, Purington and Paige joined forces with the party of L.M. Prindle of the USGS. Purington notes, "it is due to the fact that the parties worked together in the Fairbanks district that all operations were visited in the few days available". Another river boat trip down the Tanana and Yukon Rivers landed Purington and his party at St. Michael, where he boarded a vessel bound for Nome, his final destination. From August to September, Purington visited mining operations on Anvil, Glacier, Dry, Dexter, and other creeks. He then traveled overland to the Council and Solomon Districts before returning to Nome to board a steamer bound for Seattle on October 4th. Purington and Paige enlisted the mining men
throughout Alaska and Canada to complete the study. Detailed forms provided by the miners included descriptions of the various mining methods used. Every operation was photographed. Sidney Paige, who was in charge of photography, took more than 400 photos. Forty-one photos were used in the final report. Although many of the mining methods documented in Pурингтон’s study are no longer used, some are still and detailed diagrams and photos are invaluable historical records of mining at the time.

Pурингтон spent a significant part of his time in the Yukon and British Columbia. He noted that Canada districts had about 900 miles of roads while the Alaska districts had about 50 miles of roads. He recommended to Alfred Brooks that the US government expend $1,000,000 of roadwork in Alaska.

Pурингтон’s extensive report, published the following year as U.S. Geological Survey Bulletin 263, and entitled “Methods and Costs of Gravel and Placer Mining in Alaska”, became an instant classic, a bible of placer mining methods and costs that was applicable not only to Alaska’s placer mines but to the placer industry in the Western US, and abroad. Pурингтон’s ability to observe and accurately describe the many mining operations he visited enabled him to compare gold recovery technologies, logistic parameters, sampling methods, and geological and engineering characteristics of each placer deposit. He recommended ways in which ground could be processed more efficiently and thus reduce mining costs. Pурингтон remained associated with the Branch of Alaskan Geology and conducted various assignments on a contractual basis for many years.

Pурингтон’s ‘Alaskan classic’ also launched his career as an international expert on mine sampling methods and mine technology development—a reputation which would follow him until his death. Famous contemporaries such as T.A. Rickard, C.S. Herzig, Godfrey Gunther, Herbert Hoover, and Charles Janin utilized Pурингтон’s sampling methods and dredge technology summaries in their professional articles and mining text books. In April, 1905, he married long time friend Charlotte Calhoun Wells of Amesbury, Massachusetts. Like Chester, Charlotte loved to travel and accompanied her husband on numerous international trips throughout his career until his death.

Pурингтон’s expanding reputation quickly gave him work in Colorado, Arizona, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, and Mexico. His Mexican assignment included important geological work on the ore bodies of the Cananea district. In 1908, Pурингтон again heard the call of Russia, and he worked on several eastern Siberian properties held by Orsk Goldfields Ltd. of London. He proved up a large, low-grade placer gold deposit in the Amur River basin 600 miles north of Vladivostok, and successfully installed two bucketline stacker dredges for the firm. The dredges operated successfully for many years under his management.

The year 1911 saw his third and last major work in Alaska’s placer gold fields. He worked mainly on the Seward Peninsula near Nome, and helped install a dredge for the Pioneer Mining Company of Nome. It was here that he became very interested in the problems of thawing frozen ground for large scale dredging operations. Although John Miles cold-water thawing technology was still a few years away, Pурингтон studied the handling of frozen ground and devised improved, lower cost mining methods for permafrost areas of Interior Alaska.

In 1912, Pурингтон returned to Russia and became chief engineering and geological consultant for Lena Goldfields Ltd. of London, which owned a controlling interest in Lenskoi Mines of Irkustk Province, in the Russian Far East. Beginning in 1913, and during the following three years, Pурингтон worked at modernizing many of the antiquated
methods used in the Lenskoi mines. In 1915, Lena Goldfields Ltd produced 480,000 ounces of gold worth $9.9 million (US), and the firm became the world’s largest gold producer—all from placer mines. Working with Russian officials, Purington also stopped the illegal sale of gold from area mines to German banks in China. World War I had begun and Germany, who was at war with Russia, was acquiring substantial quantities of gold to finance their war efforts—ironically from Russian bullion sources. During this time Purington decided to move his permanent residence to London, the headquarters for many Russian mining companies.

In 1916, Purington began an activist role in technical support during World War I. Along with colleagues H.S. Waite of Harvard and A.L. Cantley of London, Purington organized the American Committee of Engineers in connection with the European war effort. The 100 member committee acted as a technical clearing house of ideas in assisting the allied governments during the Great War, and also furnished information to the Council of National Defense in Washington DC. After the United States entrance into the conflict, Mr. Purington served with the Military Intelligence Staff in Washington. In March 1923, six months before his death, he was appointed Major in the Officer Reserve Corps of the United States, in recognition of his distinguished service to his country during the war.

The 1918 Bolshevik revolution changed greatly Purington’s Russian efforts. He had become quite enthusiastic about mineral development potential in Far East Russia. Purington strongly lobbied the Russian government to extend the Trans-Siberian Railroad over the Stanovoi Range to Okhotsk, which he believed was destined to be a major transportation hub in the Russian Far East. He compared the Stanovoi Gold Belt along the Sea of Okhotsk to the Klondike district of Canada in an article published post-humously in the Mining and Metallurgy Journal in November, 1923. Okhotsk was the seaport that Vitus Bering sailed from in his 1741 discovery of Alaska. However, like other Russian-based, western mining entrepreneurs and geologists such as Norman Stines, Charles Janin, and Yulius Brynner, Purington decided to leave Russia until the political situation improved and established an office first in Tokyo, and later Yokohama, Japan.

In 1921 Purington published the first geological descriptions of coal deposits of Sakhalin Island and speculated that Sakhalin Island held excellent potential to develop oil and gas resources. Alaskan-based petroleum logistical firms are now benefiting from that region’s oil and gas fields.

Few American mining engineers or geologists of their era were as well known and as highly respected as Chester Wells Purington. He was a keen observer of all valuable details that pertained to his profession and never lost an opportunity to learn something new. As his close associate A.C. Ludlum states, “He was a fine, sturdy character that breathed good will at every step”. Shortly before his death, Purington wrote a close friend a letter that perhaps best describes his personality and philosophy:

“The profession which I adopted thirty years ago, first that of a geologist and finally that of an engineer of mines, has been enjoyable and profitable in the best sense. There has been no financial success worth mentioning, nor desire for such. Possibly it is not a ‘gainful’ occupation as card-indexed, but that does not worry me. To be a spectator at the pageant of humanity, to observe the marts and peoples of the world, to be sufficiently in touch with affairs, to avoid becoming theoretically dryadsus (boring), and to have enough earth science education to read with keen enjoyment of the parched desert or the snowy sierra, these are the privileges of the engineer or geologist who elects to
take the world for his oyster and to open it!

Photograph courtesy of UAF Archives

THOMAS P. AITKEN (1872-1953)

Thomas P. Aitken was one of the most outstanding mine entrepreneurs that operated in the North Country. Aitken was responsible for one mine success story after another throughout the central Yukon River Region in both Canada and Alaska. He developed both placer and lode metal deposits.

Thomas P. Aitken was born on December 24, 1872 in the Chapel of Monance in Fife, Argyllshire County, Scotland and immigrated to the United States in 1894. His immigration papers listed his occupation as ‘blacksmith’, and stated a willingness to do hard work. In 1895, T. P. Aitken joined his brother William H. Aitken at Cripple Creek, Colorado. There the two industrious brothers were to find a fortune in ‘telluride’ gold near Victor, Colorado. Tom Aitken would travel north with money in his pocket.

In the spring of 1897, Aitken heard the call of the Yukon and boarded the steamer Leah in Seattle and disembarked at Dyea. He placer mined in the Klondike district from 1897-1902. His success there is unknown, but he must have gained some good background in placer mining that served him well for future ventures. In 1903, Aitken traveled to the newly discovered Fairbanks district and staked and purchased rich ground on Cleary Creek. This relatively small stream basin would eventually account for more than two million ounces of placer gold, or about 30 percent of total Fairbanks placer output. At Cleary Creek T.P. Aitken met Frank G. Manley, who owned some of the richest claims on Cleary Creek. T.P. Aitken leased ground from Manley on Cleary Creek during both 1905 and 1906. This arrangement began a long association between Manley and Tom Aitken. Brother William H. Aitken would also work with Tom under the Aitken & Aitken partnership intermittently for many years.

In 1907, with substantial profits accumulated from Cleary Creek, Aitken moved into the newly discovered Hot Springs District and formed another business partnership with Manley to mine ground on Glen Gulch. At that time, Manley had to return to Texas to face a spurious legal charge, which kept him out of Alaska for a critical time. At one time, Manley owed Tom Aitken more than $220,000. The debt was settled amicably.

In the summer of 1910, Tom Aitken, Henry Riley, and Frank Manley traveled via the steamboat Edna to the new gold rush town of Iditarod. The Iditarod camp was discovered on Christmas Day, 1908 by prospectors John Beaton and William Dikeman, and both staked many claims in the spring of 1909. However, Flat Creek heads into Chicken Mountain, which is underlain by granitic rocks. Because the major gold camps like Nome, Fairbanks, Wiseman, Juneau, and the Klondike did not contain a known gold-granite association, many prospectors of the day did not believe that Upper Flat Creek contained placer gold. When Tom Aitken arrived into the Iditarod district, he found that placer gold deposits in the stream basins
immediately flanking Chicken Mountain had just been discovered. Aitken, Riley and perhaps with Manley acquired, through purchase and staking, a large group of claims known as the Marietta Association at the head of Flat Creek and assembled a large crew of about 100 men to mine the rich, shallow, placer gold deposits. By the 1911 season, the Marietta Association mine was the largest producer of gold in the Iditarod district, and Aitken and Fairbanks partner Henry Riley became two of Flat’s most prominent citizens.

In July 1911, rumors that “outside” capital was coming to the Iditarod district materialized when representatives of the Guggenheim syndicate, headed by W.F. Copeland and A.E. Austin, arrived in Flat. After discussions and meetings, Aitken, sold his share of the Marietta Association to the Guggenheim for a reported $1.5 million, and agreed to be their agent. By the end of the summer, Aitken had acquired most of lower Flat Creek for the Guggenheims. In the spring of 1912, the Yukon Gold Company, operator of the Guggenheim gold mining operations in the Klondike district of Canada, brought in a 6 cubic foot bucket line stacker dredge to mine the Flat Creek ground. The dredge was first positioned on the Marietta Association where it mined some of the richest ground ever mined by a gold dredge in Alaska.

In a well-publicized event, Tom Aitken married artist Beryl Boughton in New York, April 3, 1912. Although the headlines of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer read “Tom Aitken Will Take Bride to Alaska and Live in Seattle,” it seems unlikely that Boughton ever traveled to Alaska that summer, and she disappeared from Aitken’s life rather quickly. His wife of later years is identified in official records as ‘Eliza Aitken’, an emigrant from Australia.

During his years in Flat, the Iditarod Pioneer seemed to follow Aitken’s every move. Aitken and partner Sid Ensor left Flat by dog team on December 12, 1913, and traveled first to the Innoko, Ruby and Hot Springs camps en-route to his winter home in Fairbanks. It was on this overland trip that Aitken saw the need for a unified transportation network in the area. His Ruby interview as published in the Iditarod Pioneer on January 10, 1914 stated: “With an expenditure of, say, $1,000 on this trail, it would be the best in Alaska. It is the logical mail route, covering as it does so many small camps between here and Iditarod”. Aitken traveled to Juneau during 1914-1915 and lobbied the Territorial Legislature to upgrade the Ruby-Ophir-Iditarod overland transportation route. As a result of the effort triggered by Aitken, the Territory committed funds to construct road networks in all three mining districts and improved winter dog team trail maintenance. Parts of this trail system continues to provide access for placer miners and is part of the National Iditarod Historic Trail.

Commencing in 1915, Aitken returned to the lode mining that he learned at Victor, Colorado. The Silver King Mine silver-lead vein on Galena Hill in the Mayo district of Yukon, Canada was first found in 1911 by Harry McWhorter, and two partners. In 1914, McWhorter bought out his other partners and contacted Tom Aitken in Fairbanks, who agreed to finance the project at a larger scale. By the spring of 1915, McWhorter mined 1,180 tons of ore, and shipped the ore to the Selby smelter. In September 1916, Aitken exercised his option and bought the Silver King Mine for $75,000. With a large crew, Aitken mined 1,386 tons of high-grade silver ore during the winter of 1916-1917, which yielded good profits. In 1917, Tom optioned the Silver King Mine to his Alaskan partners J.E. Ives, Frank Manley, and J.L. McGinn for $500,000. However, the Manley partnership failed and was abandoned in 1918. The Alaskan partnership gave up without knowing that just 500 feet further down the drift was one of the biggest and
richest silver deposits ever found in the Keno Hill area. Aitken’s activities in the Mayo Mining district were brief, but his successful development of moderate tonnages of high-grade silver-lead ores at the Silver King mine helped catch the attention of larger mining firms. In 1919, Simon Guggenheim, President of American Smelting and Refining Company, sent engineer R.H. Humphrey North to examine the Keno Hill district. Eventually, United Keno Hill Mines Ltd., consolidated the district, and became Canada’s largest primary silver producer for 40 years. Ore was mined there nearly continuously until 1989.

Tom Aitken’s financial success in the Mayo District led him to invest in Alaskan lode precious metal properties. In 1918, Aitken agreed to lease a number of lode silver-gold claims in the Kantishna district from the Joe and Fanny Quigley. From 1919-1924, some 1,435 tons of high-grade silver ore were mined underground from six deposits on Quigley Ridge. However, high transportation costs, lower silver prices, and lease disagreements with the Quigley’s, forced Aitken to abandon the Kantishna silver project in 1924.

In 1919, Tom Aitken looked at the recently discovered (1918), high grade Perseverance silver-lead vein deposit near the head of Bishop Creek, about 20 miles south of Galena. Aitken operated the Perseverance mine under lease during 1920-1922 and produced a total of 225 tons of ore at an average grade of 75 percent lead and 104-ounce/ton silver. However, transportation costs forced the termination of the project.

In 1919, high-grade gold mineralization found in the Nixon Fork district northeast of McGrath also caught the eye of Tom Aitken, who leased claims from the discoverer E. M. Whalen. Aitken would produce the first ore from the district. His mine crew extracted about 370 tons of high-grade ore that averaged 5-ounce/ton gold. In September, 1920, the Treadwell-Yukon Mining Company examined the new lode gold district developed by Aitken. Treadwell-Yukon offered a lucrative lease-option to Aitken, which he accepted. The Nixon Fork gold mine has intermittently produced high-grade gold ores since the 1920s, including a recent period that took place from 1996-2000.

In general Tom Aitken did better at placer mining than lode mining as illustrated at Candle Creek near McGrath. When Aitken first looked at the Candle Creek placer prospect in 1914, he recognized that the placer deposit was underlain by a monzonite body similar to that exposed at Chicken Mountain in the Iditarod district. He established a partnership with E. McKinnon, purchased the claims from the discoverer Louis Blackburn, and installed an open-cut scraper plant at the head of Candle Creek. The Aitken-McKinnon partnership mined the upper claims from 1915-1917 and produced more than $125,000 in gold from shallow, easy-to-mine ground. Aitken then decided to develop the property at a larger scale. In late 1917, he formed the Kuskokwim Dredging Company (KDC) and purchased a 3 cubic foot, bucket line, stacker dredge that had formerly operated on the Seward Peninsula. The dredge was in production in 1918 and operated through 1926. In 1922, the KDC dredge produced nearly 24,000 ounces of placer gold worth $500,000 from about 225,000 cubic yards of pay gravel, and became the largest gold producer in southwest Alaska.

As reported in a 1924 issue of the Farthest North Collegian, stripping activities conducted by KDC on Candle Creek discovered the complete skeleton of a Pleistocene mammoth. Aitken donated the important paleontological find to the Geology Department at the College in Fairbanks. Ernest Patty stated at the time that the Candle Creek find was the most complete Mammoth skeleton ever found in Alaska.

In May, 1924, Societas Metallicorum, the mining society just
organized at the School of Mines in Fairbanks, invited Thomas Aitken to give a talk on gold dredging in Alaska. At the conclusion of Tom’s presentation, Charles Bunnell, President of the College and also president of the mining society, awarded Aitken the first honorary member of Societas Metallicorum, and gave him a membership pin.

Miners associated with Aitken noted that he worked hard and that he expected them to work hard; they also noticed, as might be expected from his Scottish origin, Aitken was tight with the dollar. But as the late Yukon historian Aaro Aho wrote: “Aitken was never stingy with food. His miners always ate well.” T. P. Aitken was a good money manager and with a combination of mining success and investments, built a multi-million dollar fortune by the late 1920’s. However, much of his assets were lost in the Great Crash of 1929. Aitken managed to retain enough funds to retire comfortably in rural Washington during the mid-1930’s. Anticipating irrigation water from the Grand Coulee Dam project, Aitken bought a farm and produced potatoes. In later life, Tom Aitken was perhaps not as tight as when he acquired his hard-earned assets. Charles F. Herbert, another important Alaskan mining man and former Commissioner of Natural Resources under Governor William Egan, remembers Tom Aitken during the 1930’s as “a short but broad-shouldered man who was considered quite wealthy but not miserly. He grubstaked many prospectors during his time in Fairbanks and would not hesitate to tip a beer or two with miners, prospectors, and citizens in any one of the numerous pubs of the day”. Herbert consulted with Aitken during his thesis research on gold dredging at the School of Mines in Fairbanks. There is a persistent but unsubstantiated report that T.P. Aitken, a strong Anglophile, donated money to build fighter aircraft for the Royal Air Force during the early years of World War II. Tom Aitken’s final resting place is Moses Lake, Washington, where he passed away on March 18, 1953, at the age of 81.

A combination of good business sense, mining ability, and willingness to take risks allowed Thomas P. Aitken—a man with a Midas Touch—to stand above many others in the Alaska-Yukon mining scene of the early 20th Century.
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Selected Bibliography For Herman Tofty

The primary source for this review is “Odyssey of a Miner: From Cheechako to Sourdough to Porkknocker, the Life and Times of Herman Tofty.” By John S. Graham III, Alaska/Yukon Gold Rush Centennial International Symposium on Mining, Sept. 9-14, 1997, Fairbanks, AK. Mr. Graham’s paper is extensively documented. The sources of the quotes cited here are given by Graham.

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**Selected Bibliography For Thomas Aitken**


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