

# The PAYSTREAK

Volume 11, No. 1, Fall 2009

The Newsletter of the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF)

## In this issue:

AMHF New Inductees	Page 1
Induction Ceremony Program	Page 2
Introduction and Acknowledgements	Page 3
Previous AMHF Inductees	Pages 4-10
Brief History of the Willow Creek Mining District	Pages 11-16
New Inductee Biographies	Pages 17-35
Distinguished Alaskans Aid Foundation	Page 36
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Directors and Officers	Page 36

## Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation New Inductees

### AMHF Inducts Four Pioneers Important to the Willow Creek Mining District

Robert L. Hatcher began the lode mining boom in the Willow Creek mining district with his 1906 discovery of gold-quartz veins on Skyscraper Peak in the Talkeetna Mountains, 50 miles northeast of Anchorage. Hatcher would sell his claims to Orville Herning and the Bartholf brothers. The claims on Skyscraper Mountain later became part of the Independence group of mines on Skyscraper and Granite Mountains. Hatcher would make other discoveries of 'Hatcher Pass Gold' in the ensuing years, including the Talkeetna, Rae-Wallace and Gold Mint deposits, as well as promising gold lodes in the Nuka Bay area of southwest Kenai Peninsula. Hatcher served as a representative of Kenai Peninsula interests during the 1939 organization of the Alaska Miners Association. In 1950, he was found paralyzed in a cabin near Seward and died a few days later. Robert Hatcher's remains lay in an unmarked grave in the Seward Pioneer Cemetery.

Orville G. Herning was instrumental in forming an east-coast based exploration group, Klondike and Boston Gold Mining Company, to search for gold in the Cook Inlet Region, two years after the 1896 discovery of the Klondike Gold Fields. Herning's 1898 voyage into the Cook Inlet region was accompanied by the hardships, trials and tribulations that many pioneers encountered during the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush. By mid-summer, 1898, his group had located placer claims on Willow Creek, and in June, he joined with others to form the Willow Creek mining district. Passing on in 1947, Herning is remembered as a man who did not obtain great wealth from his Willow Creek gold mining ventures, but never-the-less was a competent mine operator, a successful businessman, and an important pioneer civic leader in Wasilla.

Byron S. Bartholf represents a large family group that was instrumental in the development of the gold lodes of the Willow Creek mining district. At least nine other Bartholfs appear in early Cook Inlet history, including Byron's sons, William B. and Charles A. Bartholf, and a cousin William E. Bartholf. The Bartholf family remained active in the district through World War II. Family discoveries include the Gold Bullion, Mabel, Gold Cord, and Lucky Shot deposits, all important producers of lode gold prior to 1950. Byron Bartholf died in Klamath Falls, Oregon in 1939, shortly after leaving Alaska, at the age of 89.

Walter W. Stoll came late into the Willow Creek mining country, but proved to be an exceptional mine operator, perhaps rivaled only by his colleague, W.E. Dunkle. Receiving an engineering degree from the University of Washington in 1911, Stoll ran salmon canneries and other components of the fish trade in the Pacific Northwest, which he often compared to operating a gold mine. In 1936, Stoll became the general manager for Alaska Pacific Mines, Inc., operator of the Independence Gold Mine, which became the largest gold producer (in ore tonnage) in the Willow Creek Mining district. Stoll proved to be efficient with his job, and became one of Territorial Alaska's best mine managers. He died in 1949, shortly before the Independence finally closed its doors.

**Supported by the Alaska Miners Association  
Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF)  
Induction Ceremony, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009  
Sheraton-Anchorage Hotel, Anchorage, Alaska**

**Program**

**The general public is invited to the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF) induction ceremony from 7:00 to 9:00 PM, on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009. There is no charge for admission.**

**Introduction and Purpose of the AMHF**

President Mary Nordale..... 7:00-7:10 PM

**Presentation of Inductees**

Brief History of the Willow Creek Mining District, by Curt Freeman.....7:10-7:25PM

Robert Hatcher, by Beverly Beeton..... 7:25-7:40 PM

Orville Herning, by Chuck Hawley..... 7:40-7:55 PM

Byron Bartholf, by Chuck Hawley..... 7:55-8:10PM

Walter Stoll, by Tom Bundtzen..... 8:10-8:25PM

**Refreshments and Coffee Break..... 8:25-8:40 PM**

**Recollection of Inductees from the Audience..... 8:40-9:00 PM**

**Adjournment ..... 9:00 PM**

## Introduction and Acknowledgements

The November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 induction ceremony of the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF) features four mining pioneers who were important to the development of placer and lode gold mines in the Willow Creek mining district northeast of Anchorage, Alaska. Robert L. Hatcher started the lode gold boom with his 1906 discovery of lode gold on Skyscraper Peak north of Palmer. After making numerous other discoveries near Hatcher Pass and on the Kenai Peninsula, he represented south-central Alaska interests during the 1939 organization of the Alaska Miners Association. Orville G. Herning was a quintessential Alaskan pioneer who endured the hardships and challenges of establishing the first placer mining ventures on Willow Creek and later help found the Willow Creek mining district. South-central historians perhaps know him better as an outstanding civic leader of Wasilla. Byron S. Bartholf represents a clan of miners, the Bartholfs, who were instrumental in the development of lode mining in what became Territorial Alaska's third largest producer of lode gold. Walter Stoll was perhaps the best mine manager in the history of the Willow Creek camp; the Independence Mine that he so successfully operated is now the centerpiece of an Alaska State Park.

The 2009 AMHF induction benefited greatly from the contributions of from two historical experts. Dr. Beverly Beeton is an accomplished author (*Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement 1869-1896*), and a retired Professor of History, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs from the University of Alaska-Anchorage (UAA). Beeton has been tracing the steps of Robert L. Hatcher and his remarkable wife, the national woman's rights activist, Cornelia Templeton Jewett of Chicago, for a number of years. Her scholarly biography of Hatcher reveals many personal observations and additional notations useful to those interested in better knowing the largely unknown man who started the lode mining boom in the Willow Creek district.

Coleen Mielke, a practicing genealogist for more than 25 years, provides much valuable information on two of the inductees—Orville Herning and Byron Bartholf. Mielke has laboriously transcribed Herning's hand written journal notes, more than 800,000 words, which not only provides a fascinating story of Herning's mining and business accomplishments, but also details the challenges faced by his group of gold-seekers as they arrived into the Cook Inlet Region in 1898. Her genealogical research into the Bartholf family helped the AMHF better understand the specifics of family relationships, essential for presenting an accurate picture of Byron Bartholf.

Biographical sketches of Bartolf and Stoll were mainly provided by Charles C. Hawley, who also provided the overview sketch of the Willow Creek mining district. Hawley also selected some of the photos used in the newsletter from UAA archival sources.

Tom Bundtzen and Cristina Laird of Pacific Rim Geological Consulting, Inc. edited and produced the newsletter, and obtained essential photographic materials and additional biographic information for the inductees, especially for the biographies of Herning and Bartholf, through researching online data sources.

## Previous Inductees, Alaska Mining Hall of Fame

### *National Mining Hall of Fame Inductees*

Six charter members of the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation were previously elected into the National Mining Hall of Fame in Leadville, Colorado.

**Stephen Birch:** Founder and developer of Kennecott Copper Mines.

**Frederick Bradley:** Successful manager of Treadwell and A-J Mines, Juneau.

**John Treadwell:** Founder of Treadwell Mines, Juneau.

**Alfred H. Brooks:** Chief Geologist of U.S. Geological Survey in Alaska.

**Earnest Patty:** University of Alaska, and manager of Placer Dredging Venture.

**Clarence Berry:** Prominent Klondike and Interior Alaska miner.

### *Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation Inductees*

#### Fairbanks Spring 1998

#### **Induction Ceremony Honoring Early Yukon Basin Traders and Prospectors**

**Alfred Mayo:** “Captain Al” well-known Yukon River trader, prospector.

**Jack McQuesten:** Known as the “Father of the Yukon” grubstaker for prospectors.

**Arthur Harper:** Well known and respected trader and prospector and promoter of the Yukon.

**Howard Franklin:** Fortymile prospector, discovered first “bedrock” placer gold in Alaska.

**John Minook:** Creole-Athabaskan prospector who discovered Rampart district.

**Felix Pedro:** Discoverer of Fairbanks district in 1902.

#### Nome Summer 1998

#### **Induction Ceremony Honoring Pioneers of Nome Gold Rush**

**John Brynteson:** A ‘Lucky Swede’; an experienced hard-rock miner, discoverer of the Cape Nome district.

**Erik Lindblom:** The eldest of the “Lucky Swedes”, a tailor.

**Jafet Lindeberg:** The Norwegian of the ‘Lucky Swedes’, president and manager of the very successful Pioneer Mining Company.

**Charles D. Lane:** Tough, honest, and wealthy miner who helped the Lucky Swedes in their legal battles.

Juneau Spring 1999

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Discovery of Juneau District**

**Joe Juneau:** Native of Quebec, a California 49er, co-discoverer of gold in the Juneau district.

**Richard Harris:** Irish immigrant, co-discoverer of gold in Juneau district.

**George Pilz:** German immigrant who sent and financed the Juneau and Harris prospecting ventures in the Juneau area.

**Kawa.ee:** Tlingit leader who brought rich gold samples from Gastineau Channel area to George Pilz

**Livingston Wernecke:** Geologist-engineer for the Bradley companies of Juneau.

**Bartlett Thane:** Promoter-founder of the world's largest gold mine, the Gastineau at Juneau.

Anchorage Fall 1999

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Mining Pioneers of Southern/Southwest Alaska**

**Andrew Olson:** Swedish immigrant, innovator at Flat; the original organizer of the platinum mining complex in the Goodnews Bay Mining district.

**Evan Jones:** Welsh immigrant; the true father of Alaska coal mining industry.

**Wesley Earl Dunkle:** Kennecott engineer and innovative geologist, co-founder of Star Air Service, predecessor of Alaska Airlines.

Fairbanks Spring 2000

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Interior Pioneers**

**Emil Usibelli:** Italian immigrant and founder of Usibelli Coal Mine, Inc., Alaska's only and historically largest producer of coal; civic benefactor in Fairbanks.

**John B. Mertie Jr.:** Leading U.S. Geological Survey geologist; outstanding earth scientist, mathematician, and world expert on platinum.

**Fannie Quigley:** Prospector, renowned for her bush skills, legendary Kantishna character.

Juneau Spring 2001

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Early Government Role in Mining**

**Benjamin D. Stewart:** State and Federal mining administrator, Alaska constitutional delegate at Alaska Statehood Convention in Fairbanks.

Fairbanks Summer, 2001

**Induction Ceremony Honoring the Pioneers of the Large Scale Gold Dredging Industry of Nome and Fairbanks Districts**

**Norman C. Stines:** Visionary engineer who planned and supervised original USSR&M activities in Fairbanks district.

**Wendell P. Hammon:** Installed the first three dredges in Cape Nome district; helped design financing for what became USSR&M dredge fleets in Alaska

**James K. Davidson:** Designed and built Miocene and Davidson ditch systems.

Anchorage Fall 2001

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Discovery of Flat District**

**John Beaton:** Co-discovered Iditarod district with William Dikeman.

Fairbanks Spring 2002

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Successful Miners and Engineers of Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

**Frank G. Manley:** Highly successful miner in Fairbanks, Hot Springs district, and Flat. Founder of the First National Bank, Fairbanks

**Herman Tofty:** Norwegian immigrant who worked prospects near Manley Hot Springs.

**Chester Purington:** Acclaimed international mining engineer; wrote treatise on Alaska placer fields.

**Thomas P. Aitken:** Arguably the most successful small scale mine developer during the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush; worked both lodes and placers in Alaska and Yukon.

Anchorage Fall 2002

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Immigrant Pioneers**

**Peter Miscovich:** Croatian immigrant who settled in Flat, Alaska 1910. Pioneered the use of hydraulic mining techniques.

**David Strandberg:** Swedish immigrant who joined the Klondike gold rush in 1898 and the Iditarod rush of 1910. Built placer mining dynasty Strandberg & Sons, Inc.

**Lars Ostnes:** Norwegian immigrant who mined in the Iditarod district and developed placer mines in remote western Alaska for over 50 years.

Fairbanks Summer 2003

**Golden Days Induction Ceremony (also recognized during Fall AMA convention)**

**Kyosuke “Frank” Yasuda and Nevelo Yasuda:** Japanese immigrant and his Eskimo wife, discovered Chandalar gold and founded the community of Beaver.

Anchorage Fall 2003

**Induction Ceremony Honoring Early and Mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Placer Miners**

**John Gustavus (Gus) Uotila:** By 1915, Gus Uotila was known as a tough Iditarod teamster. He mentored placer mining operations throughout Alaska and became a respected overland freighter.

**Simon Wible:** He mined gold, built water canals, and became a wealthy man in California. When the time the gold rush came along, he pioneered hydraulic mine technology on the Kenai Peninsula.

Fairbanks Spring 2004

**Honoring Early Pioneers Associated with USSR&M Dredge Fleet**

**Roy B. Earling:** Built pre-World War II FE Company into one of the most efficient and successful dredge mining firms in the world.

**James D. Crawford:** Well organized manager who acquired new dredge properties and guided FE Company into successful post-World War II period of gold mining.

**Jack C. Boswell:** Engineered the development of the rich Cripple deposit; and helped build giant FE machines used to dig deep placer deposits. Published historian of USSR&M era.

**Genevieve Parker Metcalfe:** Breakthrough woman mining engineer who developed initial plans for FE Fairbanks operations, wrote a landmark thesis on Alaska placer mining, and was a champion athlete and scholar.

**Earl Richard Pilgrim:** First Professor of Mine Engineering at University of Alaska. Independent Kantishna miner and pioneer, and noted FE consultant; “Mr. Antimony” in the US.

Anchorage Fall, 2004

**Honoring Those in the Mining Legal Profession,**

In Cooperation with the History Committee of the Alaska Bar Association

**William Sulzer:** Bill Sulzer became a prominent New York attorney and politician and briefly served as Governor of New York. The ever-optimistic Sulzer mined copper in southeast Alaska and developed gold in the Chandalar district.

**Joseph Rudd:** Shortly after statehood, Rudd drafted the State’s mining law on state lands and was sought for his expertise on natural resource issues throughout his career. He was killed in a plane crash in Anchorage upon his return from Juneau after discussing with other Alaskans challenges to President Carter’s Implementation of the 1978 Antiquities Act.

Anchorage Fall, 2005

### **Honoring the Discoverers and the Developer of Platinum Resources at Goodnews Bay**

**Per Edvard (Ed) Olson:** Born in 1898, Edward Olson was born into a large farm family in Sweden and immigrated to the United States in 1905. In 1934, he assumed the position of general manager of the Goodnews Bay Mining Company (GBMC), the largest supplier of platinum in the U.S. during 1934-1975.

**Walter Smith:** In the summer of 1926, Yupik Eskimo Walter Smith and his young apprentice Henry Wuya found placer platinum in a stream draining a remote, uninhabited coast of southwest Alaska. The GBMC eventually purchase Smith's claims. Smith and Wuya are recognized as discoverers of Goodnews Bay platinum.

**Henry Wuya:** Henry Wuya was born to Eskimo parents in Quinhagak on the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. Wuya was proficient in English when few Yupiks knew English. He mentored with the older and experienced prospector, Walter Smith.

Fairbanks March 2006

### **Honoring Two Pioneers Important to both Canadian and American Mining Communities**

**Ellen (Nellie) Cashman:** Ellen (Nellie) Cashman was a quintessential gold stamper who participated in many gold-silver rushes of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Nellie's final home was Nolan Creek in the Koyukuk district of northern Alaska. Cashman died in 1925 at St. Anne's Hospital, Victoria, British Columbia, a medical facility she helped found several decades earlier.

**Jack Dalton:** One of the premier horse freighters of the Alaska-Yukon gold rush era, Jack Dalton opened up the 'Dalton Trail' for prospectors and trades from Haines to Central Yukon, Canada. In later years he worked as a freight engineer for the Alaska railroad. The Dalton Highway is a tribute to the Dalton family in Alaska.

Juneau June 2006

### **Honoring the Mining Legal Profession, in Cooperation with the History Committee of the Alaska Bar Association**

**Frederick (Fred) Eastaugh:** Nome-born Fred Eastaugh was an Alaskan accountant a ship's officer for the Alaska Steamship Company, and Alaska mining attorney. Eastaugh was appointed to the Alaska Minerals Commission in 1991 by Governor Walter Hickel. Upon Eastaugh's death a year later, Hickel ordered state flags flown at half mast.

Anchorage November 2006

**Honoring an Outstanding Statesman and an Outstanding Prospector Active in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century Alaska Mining Industry**

**Charles F. (Chuck) Herbert:** Chuck Herbert was one of the premier miners of his generation. Educated at the School of Mines in Fairbanks, he mined placer gold deposits, sought metalliferous lodes, and served with distinction in several public roles. During early years of Statehood, he played a crucial role in the selection of Alaska's North Slope Lands. Later as DNR Commissioner, he revitalized the State land selection process.

**Rheinart M. (Rhiny) Berg:** Berg's strength and stamina were legendary during most of his 86 years of life. He worked as an underground miner in the Wrangell Mountains and Fairbanks districts, as a trapper and prospector, and he found the Bornite copper-cobalt deposit. He later developed the Candle placer district on the Seward Peninsula. He gained great wealth, which he mostly gave away.

Juneau March 2007

**Honoring an Outstanding Statesman and a Mine Attorney Active in Southeast Alaska's Mineral Industry**

**Phillip R. Holdsworth:** Phil Holdsworth's professional career extended nearly seventy years. He was a practical miner at the age of sixteen. Later he operated mines, assay labs, and mills. In World War II, he defended a Philippine mine as a guerilla warrior. After serving as Alaska's first commissioner of Natural Resources, Holdsworth became Alaska's elder natural resource statesman before his death in 2001.

**Herbert L. Faulkner:** H.L. (Bert) Faulkner's law career extended for almost seventy years. He was a sheriff, U.S. Marshall and attorney. He would represent almost every major mining company operating in Alaska during his lifetime.

Fairbanks July 2007

**Honoring Two of Alaska's Outstanding Mine Educators**

**Earl H. Beistline:** Earl Beistline had a distinguished career as mining educator at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. Beistline brought to the classroom a unique blend of theoretical and practical knowledge in the field of mining. During all of his adult life, he has been a tireless and outspoken advocate of Alaska mining industry interests.

**Ernest N. Wolff:** Ernie Wolff was a notable personality on Alaska's mining landscape for more than sixty years. During this time he prospected, mined, taught and administered at the University of Alaska, wrote a classic book, *Handbook for the Alaskan Prospector*, and served on public bodies; all of this always in his unique style with a kind of gentle truculence.

Anchorage, November, 2007

### **Honoring Those Involved in the Southwest Alaska's Quicksilver Mining Industry**

**Robert F. Lyman:** Besides operating small scale mercury lodes, he managed Alaska's largest mercury mine at Red Devil, Alaska, which, during the 1950s, produced nearly 20 percent of U.S. domestic requirements of the strategic metal.

**Wallace M. Cady:** Produced, with other USGS colleagues, 'The Central Kuskokwim Region, Alaska', a geological framework of a large, 5,000 mi<sup>2</sup> area centered on Alaska's premier mercury mining region.

**Russell Schaefer:** One of Alaska's 'tough guy prospectors' that accomplished much in the Kuskokwim Mercury Belt of southwest Alaska.

Fairbanks, Spring 2008

### **Honoring Three Attorneys and a Civic Minded Woman Important to the Interior Alaska Mining Industry**

**Luther Hess:** First rate mining lawyer and active mine developer in several interior Alaska gold camps. Helped organize the Alaska Miners Association (in 1939) and served as AMA's first President.

**Harriett Hess:** Worked with husband Luther on a variety of mining education issues and was a pioneer regent of the University of Alaska system. Worked as pro-development, pro-mining Democrats during the Roosevelt Administration.

**Earnest B. Collins:** Pursued a long and successful career in Interior Alaska as a placer miner, lawyer, Alaska Territorial legislator, and delegate to Alaska Constitutional Convention.

**John (Johnny) McGinn:** A smart mining lawyer who, with James Wickersham, cleaned up corruption in Nome and financed many small gold and silver projects in Interior Alaska and Yukon, Canada.

Anchorage, Fall 2008

### **Honoring Two Engineers and a Prospector Who Helped Bring Success to the Kennecott Mines in the Chitina Valley of South-Central Alaska**

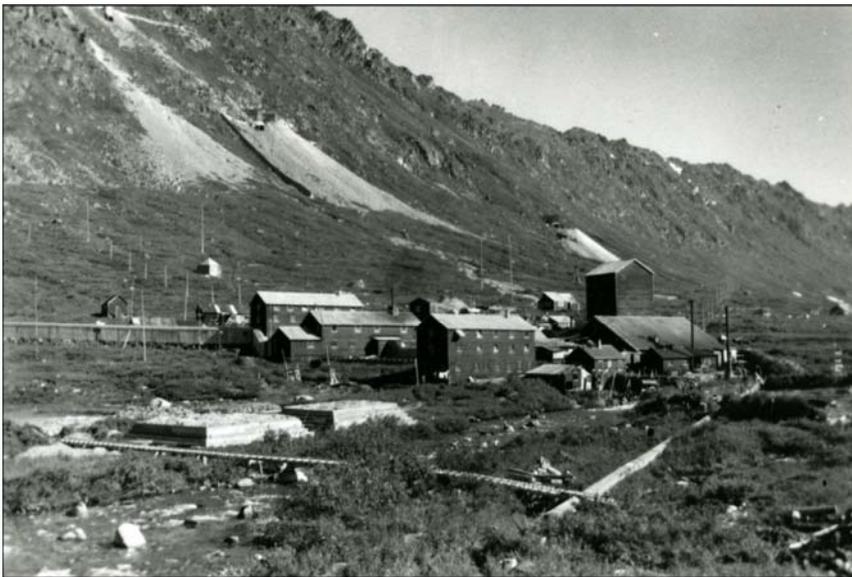
**Earl Tappen Stannard:** An innovative engineer at Kennecott's Alaska mines, and later a CEO of Kennecott Copper Corporation.

**William Crawford Douglass:** A gifted mining engineer and exceptional manager at Kennecott's Alaska mines.

**Reuben Frederick McClellan:** Organized the mining partnership that made the initial discoveries and negotiated the sales of the mineral claims that became the Kennecott mines in Alaska.

## Brief History of the Willow Creek Mining District

Historic Anchorage was known as a railroad town, which is a fair characterization. However, it also had another life - as the gateway to several gold districts: 1) south and southeast to the Girdwood, Kenai, and Port Wells areas; 2) northward to Cache Creek and Peters Creek in the Yentna district, and 3) northeastward to the Willow Creek district - sometimes called either the Wasilla or Hatcher Pass district.



The Lucky Shot Mine camp in its heyday, circa 1940; photo from the Roy Morrison Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.

Gold was first discovered in Willow Creek in 1897, in a placer deposit near its confluence with a north-flowing tributary, Grubstake Creek (a.k.a. Grubstake Gulch). Lodes - hard rock deposits - were discovered from 1906 on in the district, and soon outpaced the district's placer mines. Robert Lee Hatcher's discovery of the Skyscraper lode in 1906 was quickly followed by William E. Bartholf's discovery of the important Gold Bullion deposit in 1907. The district's richest mine, the Lucky Shot, was discovered in 1918. The Willow creek district, powered by the Lucky Shot, Independence, Gold Bullion, Fern and several smaller mines, became Territorial Alaska's third most important historic hard rock

gold producer, following only larger gold mines in the Juneau and Chichagof gold mining districts.

The Willow Creek district grew with Anchorage and it remained a key component of Anchorage's economy until World War II. In its heyday during the 1920s and 1930s, the district attracted attention from California to eastern Canada and Wall Street. Moreover, the district is not exhausted. Discoveries made since 1980 offer some chance of district revival.

The brief table below outlines important discoveries and developments in the district:

- 1) 1897 - Discovery of placer gold by M.J. Morris and L. H. Herndon at the junction of Grubstake (Gulch) and Willow Creek.
- 2) 1898 - First production of gold, about \$4,000 (200 ounces) of placer gold at Grubstake Creek. Introduction of the Klondike and Boston Mining and Manufacturing Company to the Grubstake area, and appointment of Orville G. Herning as manager of the company's placer operations in the Cook Inlet area.
- 3) June 11, 1898 - A meeting was held at Herndon's camp on Grubstake Creek to officially organize the Willow Creek district. Attending the meeting were L. H. Herndon, Billy Morris, Captain Andrews, Orville Herning, and others.
- 4) 1906 - Discoveries on Skyscraper Mountain of gold-quartz veins by Texan

Robert Lee Hatcher - first lodes discovered in the district. The Skyscraper vein was covered by five claims, including the Skyscraper and Smuggler Union. Hatcher and partner J. H. Carnegie sold the Skyscraper claims to Herning (25%) and to the Bartholfs (75%).

- 5) 1907 - Discovery of the Gold Bullion vein in the Craigie Creek-Willow Creek drainage by William Earl Bartholf. Bartholf and his brother(?) Eugene H. Bartholf, also held most of the district's placer claims that were not controlled by Herning.
- 6) 1908 - J.S. Carle begins development of claims on Granite Mountain (next to Skyscraper) – he built a mill and produced the first lode ore in the district. These veins, combined with the veins on Skyscraper Mountain, ultimately became part of the Independence Mine.
- 7) 1911 - Discovery of the Mabel vein - another Bartholf discovery. Milo Kelly purchases Carle's claims and begins to develop a vein on Granite Mountain (Independence) and barely misses discovery of major ore shoot on Independence.
- 8) 1912 - Discovery of Gold Cord vein by Charles Andrew Bartholf, one of Byron S. Bartholf sons.
- 9) About 1915 - Discovery of the Fern on the "Hills" claims - only major claims not first discovered by Hatcher or the Bartholfs. Nearby discoveries of the Little Gem and the Talkeetna or Matanuska properties by

Hatcher were melded into the Fern.

- 10) 1916 - Takeover of the Gold Bullion by the Willow Creek Mining Company founded by L. C. Thomson, a Canadian druggist.
- 11) 1917 - Takeover of the Fern mine by Drumheller (Spokane) interests.
- 12) 1918 - Discovery of the Lucky Shot, the richest and second largest mine in the district by a party of four to five men, including Charles Bartholf.
- 13) 1920 - Beginning of important mining on the Lucky Shot. L. C. Thomson supplied funding that allowed development of the Lucky Shot as part of the Willow Creek mine group that held the Gold Bullion. Hatcher developed and mined the Gold Mint, later called the Lonesome, the southeastern-most mine in the district. Gold Mint, which locally contained high-grade silver, closed after a year or two of operation. Milo Kelly returns to district and searches for, but does not find, the down-dip extension of the Skyscraper that had been cut off by the Martin fault.
- 14) 1931 to 1942 - Most productive mining period. Fern very active under leadership of Thomas S. McDougal. Lucky Shot redeveloped with funding from Thomson supplemented by funds advanced by Pardner's Mines of New York. In the mid and late 1930s, Seattle interests merged by Charles L. Harrison and Walter W. Stoll developed the Independence Mine from prospects on Granite and Skyscraper Mountains - Independence was the largest

mine in terms of tonnage and second largest in gold production in the district.



**Snow covered mine infrastructure at the Independence Mine, circa 1937; photo from the Russ Dow Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

- 15) 1948 to 1951 - Reopened the district after WWII with minor success from 1949 - 1950 on the basis of lease-block mining in the Independence. Walter W. Stoll died in 1949; William Stoll took over but had to close the mine in 1951.
- 16) 1980 to 1984 - Consolidation of district by Dan Renshaw of the Gold Cord family and Texas geologist Starkey Wilson. Reopened both Independence and Lucky Shot, feeding a 125-200 ton per day mill on Willow Creek. Connected Independence with Willow Creek areas with adits and declines. Decline of gold price and failure to identify enough high grade ore forced closure by Wilson's successor, Enserch.
- 17) 1988 to 1989 - Reopening and limited gold production from underground mining venture by Alaska Hardrock Mining, Inc.
- 18) Present - Interest in high grade intercepts

in Lucky Shot found by Starkey Wilson; Full Metal Minerals (FMM) focuses continued interest on district.

Historic gold production (1908-1951) from Willow Creek Mines, as compiled by William M. Stoll:

Lucky Shot-War Baby	252,000 ounces
Independence	188,000 ounces
Gold Bullion	77,000 ounces
Fern	44,000 ounces
Skyscraper vein	27,000 ounces
Gold Cord	16,000 ounces
Mabel	16,000 ounces
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>~ 620,000 ounces</b>

### **Hall of Fame Inductees and Other Major Figures in the Willow Creek District**

Interest in the Willow Creek district remains high, by virtue of its mining importance and history, family relationships, proximity to Anchorage, and scenic vistas. Also, the number of men and women from the district who should be considered for the Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation (AMHF) is a large one, and one that will merit future reconsideration. One district figure, Wesley E. Dunkle, has been inducted into the AMHF. Dunkle was manager of Lucky Shot during its most productive period, but his induction was based at least as much from his long relation to Kennecott and the Guggenheims as from Willow Creek operations. Four others are to be inducted at the November 2009 induction ceremony in Anchorage. Listed in approximate chronologic order they are: Orville George Herning, Robert Lee Hatcher, Byron Sundlon Bartholf, and Walter William Stoll.

### **Miners, Promoters, Financiers, and Engineers of the District**

Dozens of prospectors searched and left footprints in the Willow Creek district. The "Mining Men", i.e. the engineers, managers, promoters of the district, are fewer but still numerous. Some were

men of great skill, others had mostly hot air, but nevertheless most made a mark. None of the mining figures left as many marks as the Bartholf family. In addition to Byron S. Bartholf, who is inducted as founding patriarch of the family, there were William (E. and B.), Eugene H., Charles A. and several other members of the Bartholf family. Of the early mining men that discovered and developed the major discoveries, three names stand out - James S. Carle, William "Billy" Martin, and L. C. Thomson. Carle and Martin developed the first mines in the Fishhook Valley, mines that evolved into the Independence. L.C. Thomson, a Canadian druggist, took over the Gold Bullion in the Craigie drainage from the Bartholfs, and later developed the Lucky Shot gold mine.

In the Fishhook valley, James Carle built a small mill, and produced the first lode ore in the district from a vein that was later part of the Independence. Late in 1911, Carle sold his claims to Milo Kelly, who had an Arizona mining background and had mined in the Prince William Sound area. Kelly and his backers held the property until 1914, and narrowly missed discovering the high grade ore shoot on the Independence. Martin was more successful, and stayed involved in the district for decades. He leased Hatcher's Skycraper claims, and produced about 20,000 ounces of gold from 1913 - 1920. Another mining man, L.S. Robe, had a good eye for ore, and planned larger scale ventures than anyone else from 1910 - 1920, but he lost out to promoters.

In 1920, Milo Kelly returned to the district, and promoted the down-dip prospecting of the Skycraper vein from the Fishhook side into the upper Willow drainage. Unfortunately, the vein had been cut off by the Martin fault. Kelly drove an adit 1,200 feet from the old Brooklyn claim in the prospect called the Kelly Willow in his unsuccessful search for the rich Skycraper vein. The prospectors of the district also had to build trails and rudimentary roads to develop their

prospects. Again, the names Herning, Bartholf, Carle, and Hatcher are prominent. A land trail to Herning's early placer mines split north to Willow Creek, and followed the creek to placers. The same road was also used to develop the Gold Bullion in the Craigie Creek drainage. Another branch split off to the east, over what is now Hatcher Pass, into the Fishhook drainage, to the precursors of the Independence mine. But to more fully develop Skycraper, Independence, Mabel and other eastern mines, another road, the Carle wagon road, left Cottonwood a few miles east of Knik and followed the Little Susitna to the Fishhook basin.

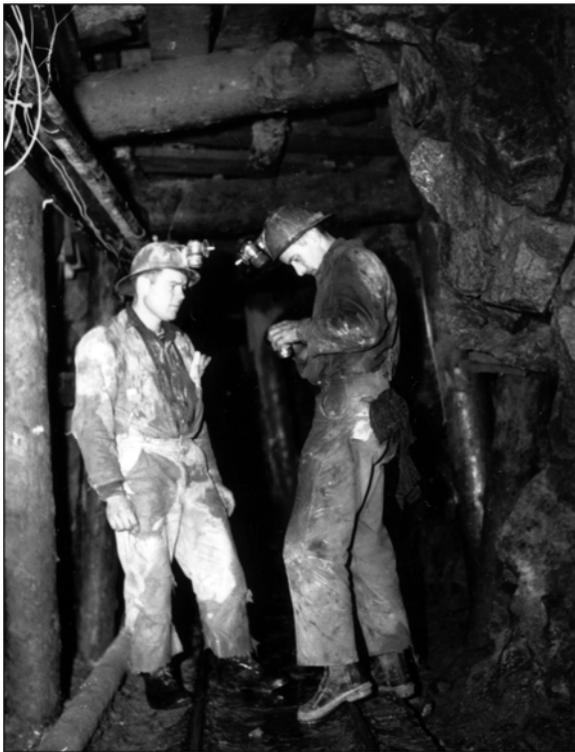


**Milo Kelly**

Although Carle is credited with the first lode gold production, the Gold Bullion property was the first significant lode mine. The Bartholfs probably mined about 14,000 ounces of gold before 1916, when the project was taken over by L.C. Thomson, who guided production of another 50,000 ounces before 1927, when all Willow Creek Mines operations moved to the Lucky Shot property.

In the early to mid 1930s, C. L. Harrison and Walter W. Stoll decided the time had come to consolidate claims on Skycraper and Granite Mountains to mine the Independence and related veins. Their interest aroused former operator Billy Martin, who fought Harrison and Stoll in

court and with a proxy battle. Harrison and Stoll won the proxy battle, and their leases to take over the mines were upheld by Superior Court in Washington State in 1936. By 1937, Independence was in production. Ultimately, its tonnage surpassed that of the Lucky Shot, but the incredibly rich Lucky Shot produced more gold.

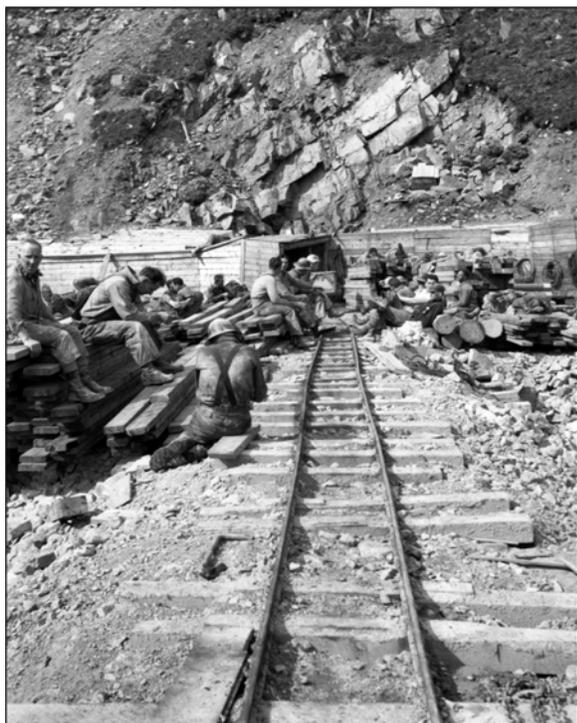


**Underground miners discuss their options in the Independence Mine, circa late 1930s; photo from the Charles Harrison Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

A complete history of financing in the district is yet to be written, but some interesting names emerge. Funds to consolidate the Independence mine came largely from share holders in Washington State, British Columbia, and Alaska - all organized by financier C. L. Harrison. Funds to develop the other mines came from the Middle West, Oklahoma, New York and Eastern Canada. L. C. Thomson, who began financing the Gold Bullion by 1916, came from Montreal, Canada and invested in Alaska mines through 1941. In 1923, the Guggenheims, through the Alaska Development and Mineral Company, looked at properties in the Willow Creek district. They

turned the Lucky Shot down but optioned the Mabel mine and funded extensions of its workings. The mine was too small for the Guggenheims, but workings driven by their engineer, W. E. Dunkle, opened the mine to smaller operations through the 1930s. Financing the Lucky Shot-War Baby mine involved Thomson and more importantly, Pardners Mines of New York. In 1930, Dunkle obtained funding from Pardners to rebuild a mill that had burned during Thomson's operation, in order to earn 50% of Thomson's interest in the Willow Creek Mines - Lucky Shot and Gold Bullion. Pardners was the brainchild of Harold E. Talbott, an Ohio aviation buff and entrepreneur. Talbott enlisted mining engineer Jack Baragwanath to obtain potential valuable mining properties throughout the west and Cuba. The Lucky Shot proved very valuable for Pardners at a critical time in the company's history. Baragwanath operated out of New York, and was perhaps more famous as the husband of vivacious illustrator Neysa McMein than as a mining engineer - although he was a good one. Perhaps worried about a depleting ore body at Lucky Shot, Pardners sold their interest in the Willow Creek Mines in 1938 to Fred Connell, another Canadian and former associate of Dunkle. Working miners of note in the district include Phil Coleman and his boss Albert G. Dodson, who worked at Independence before moving to the Fern. His replacement at Independence was another good miner, Warren Rice. At the Fern, operations ran efficiently throughout the thirties under supervision of T. S. McDougal. At the Lucky Shot mine, G. A. Ulsh was known as one of Dunkle's top hands, and George Rapp and Leo Till both built reputations as mill men while in Dunkle's employ. Under these men, stamp mills recovered gold by amalgamation on copper plates, and locally by cyanide leach in the early days. These early techniques were replaced by complex mills that used gravity, flotation, and cyanide to recover a higher percentage of gold in the ore. The Independence had its share of skilled mill men, including Roy Lynch. One worker who

stayed at the Independence through several seasons was Magnus Colcord “Rusty” Heurlein, later known as one of territorial Alaska’s premier artists. Walter W. Stoll had been a noted athlete at the University of Washington. Temporary labor at the Independence included football players from the University who were paid to use and develop muscle power. A photograph of a mine crew during a lunch break on a sunny day shows mostly strong young men, available in great number before World War II began.



**Lunch break on a sunny day at the Independence Mine, circa late 1930s; photo from the Gustav Johnson Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

Operations in addition to the Bartholfs’ were or became family affairs. At the Independence, sons William M., and Walter C. Stoll assisted their father before World War II, and William M. Stoll attempted to keep the mine going in the difficult 1950s after the death of his father in 1949. At the Gold Cord, engineer sons and grandson still maintain the mine operated by A. L. Renshaw, Sr. Women controlled some key positions and share interests, as Katherine Bartholf, Mrs. Ralph Swan,

Patricia Drumheller, and one miner’s wife, Betty Jean Birch, who was a mining engineer and geologist in her own right.

*By: Charles C. Hawley*

### **Sources:**

Alaska Pacific Consolidated Mining Co., Independence Mine, records 1930-1987. Archives UAA.

Stephen R. Capps, 1915, The Willow Creek District: USGS Bulletin 607

Capps and Ralph Tuck, 1935, The Willow Creek-Kashwitna District: USGS Bulletin 846B

Katherine K. Cohen, 1982, Independence Mine and Willow Creek District, Alaska: Anchorage, Dept. of Natural Resources, Office of History and Archaeology, Division of Parks

Charles Caldwell Hawley, 2003, Wesley Earl Dunkle, Alaska’s Flying Miner: Boulder, CO, University Press of Colorado, esp. Chapter 7, Partners Mines and the Lucky Shot

Coleen Mielke, written communications October 2009, Historian Mielke of Wasilla, AK supplied material on Herning and especially the Bartholf family. Her work transformed largely speculative material to history.

Sidney Paige and Adolph Knopf, 1907, Geological Reconnaissance of the Matanuska and Talkeetna Basins. USGS Bulletin 327.

James C. Ray, 1933, The Willow Creek Gold Lode district. USGS Bulletin 847C

Richard G. Ray, 1954, Geology and ore deposits of the Willow Creek Mining District. USGS Bulletin 1004.

Josette and William M. Stoll, Papers 1914-1987, 1997. Papers, Archives UAA

## **ROBERT LEE HATCHER (1867-1950)**

While a pass in the Talkeetna Mountains carries his name, Robert Lee Hatcher's bones rest in an unmarked grave, and his contributions to mining in southcentral Alaska are generally unknown. After 100 years, it is time to recognize him for his role in the discovery and development of the Willow Creek mining district and in other mining developments in the Talkeetna Mountains and Kenai Peninsula. Hatcher made several of important discoveries in the Willow Creek district, where he developed mines and roads. His discovery of the Skyscraper Vein was the first lode or hard rock discovery in a district that, until then, was a rather marginal placer district. His prospecting career lasted into the 1940s.

In 1939, Hatcher joined with other pioneers to organize the Alaska Miners Association in response to new federal legislation on wage and hours. Perhaps his most unusual claim to fame, however, was his marriage to Cornelia Templeton Jewett, who led campaigns for voting rights for Alaska women and the prohibition of liquor in the territory.

As a young man from a cattle ranch in the rolling grasslands of north central Texas, Hatcher got his first taste of gold prospecting in White Oaks, New Mexico. He came north in 1888, at age twenty-one, and honed his skills prospecting in Atlin, Canada, and south east Alaska for a decade before moving onto south central Alaska.<sup>1</sup>

### **Hatcher's Contributions to the Willow Creek Mining District**

In the September of 1906, Hatcher began the lode gold mining boom in the Willow Creek mining district in the Talkeetna Mountains by recording a quartz-gold claim high on the treeless, granite slopes of Skyscraper Mountain, nearly 5,000 feet above sea level. The outcrop was 1,200 feet above the floor of Fishhook Valley and 200 feet from the crest of the Skyscraper peak in an area of the

Talkeetnas known as Hatcher Pass, which is fifty miles northeast of where Anchorage would be established a decade later.<sup>2</sup>

Hatcher sold one-fourth interest in his quartz-gold ledges to Knik merchant and placer miner Orville George Herning for less than \$1,500, payable half in cash and half in grub. On September 22, 1909, Hatcher and his partner, J. H. Carnegie, used the back of an envelope to deed three-fourths interest in five Skyscraper claims - the 'North Homestake,' 'South Homestake,' 'Tom Boy,' 'Smugler [sic.] Union,' and 'Skyscraper lode claims' - to F.G. [Frank Guiliaem] and W.E. [William Earl] Bartholf for \$6,000. The Bartholf brothers had two years to make four specified payments to the Bank of Seward to finalize the deal.<sup>3</sup> Hatcher and Carnegie's \$7,500 proceeds from their claims would be nearly a quarter of a million in today's dollars. Later, the Skyscraper claims were leased and developed by William "Billy" Martin, who managed the Alaska Free Gold Mining Company. Hatcher and Carnegie's claims, and those on strike across the gulch on Granite Mountain filed by the Bartholf brothers and operated by J. S. Carle, were combined and operated by Milo Kelly from late 1911 to 1914. Together, the claims became the basis for the Independence Mine developed in the 1930s by the Alaska-Pacific Mines, Inc. Today, it is the Independence Mine State Historical Park.

Three years after his 1906 find, Hatcher discovered more quartz veins a few miles away near the headwaters of Archangel Creek, a tributary of the Little Susitna River. Named the Matanuska, this important discovery was also known as the Talkeetna Mine. Along with a 1913 Hatcher find in the same area called the Little Gem or Hatcher's Prospect, the Matanuska Mine later became part of the neighboring Fern Mine operated by Thomas McDougal in the 1930s. The Fern was one of the most important mines in the district; engineer William Stoll estimated its total production as about 44,000 ounces of gold.

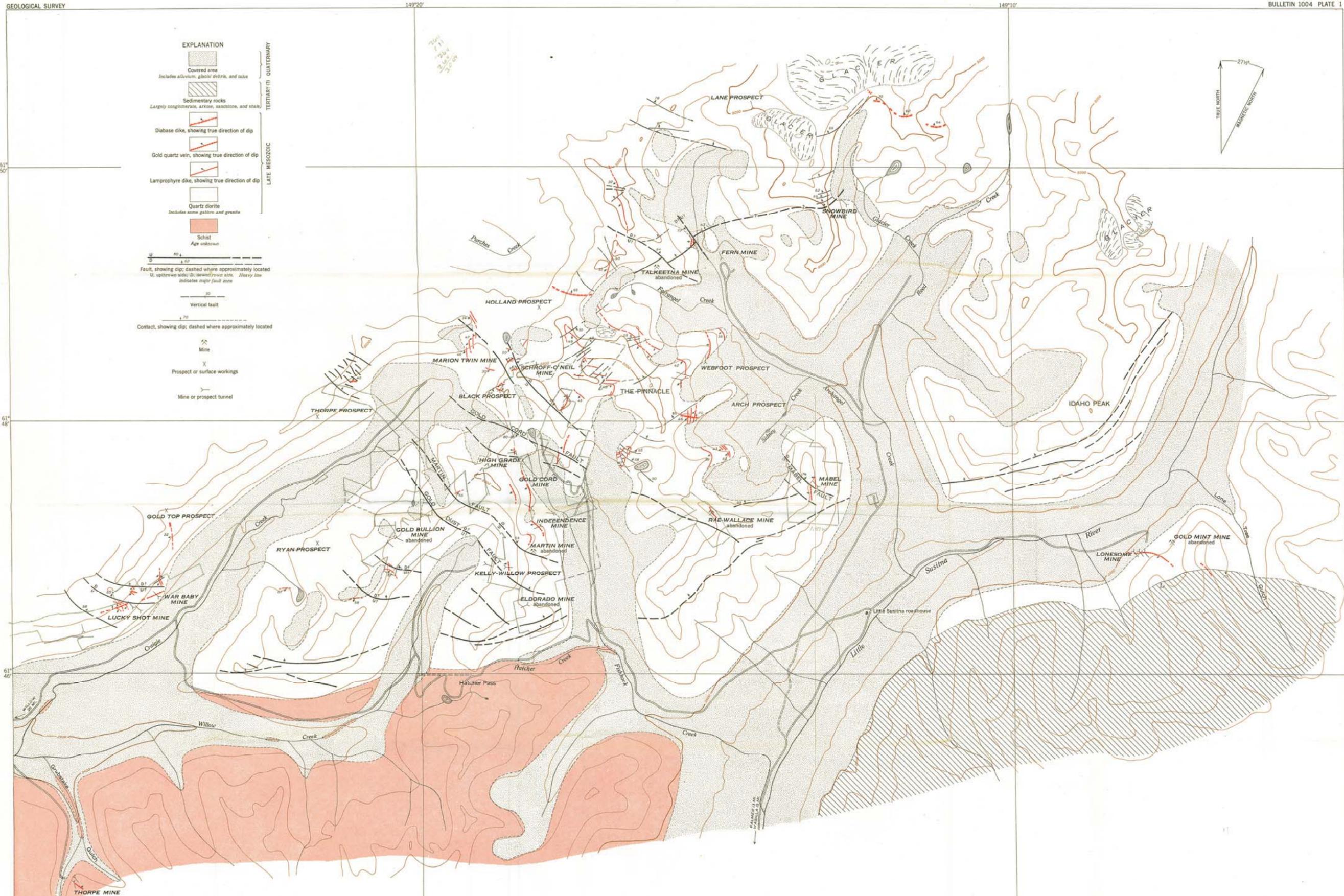
EXPLANATION

- Covered area  
Includes alluvium, glacial debris, and talus
- Sedimentary rocks  
Largely conglomerates, arkoses, sandstone, and shale
- Diabase dike, showing true direction of dip
- Gold quartz vein, showing true direction of dip
- Lamprophyre dike, showing true direction of dip
- Quartz diorite  
Includes some gabbro and granite
- Schist  
Age unknown
- Fault, showing dip; dashed where approximately located  
U, upstream side; D, down-stream side. Heavy line indicates major fault zone
- Vertical fault
- Contact, showing dip; dashed where approximately located
- Mine
- Prospect or surface workings
- Mine or prospect tunnel

TERTIARY TO QUATERNARY  
LATE MESOZOIC

0 60 120  
1:50,000

0 30 60  
1:25,000



Base compiled from U.S. Army Engineers Idaho Peak quadrangle (1942) and U.S. Geological Survey topographic map of Willow Creek district, Alaska (1909-13)

GEOLOGIC MAP OF THE WILLOW CREEK MINING DISTRICT, ALASKA



McDougal, who would be Hatcher's partner in Nuka Bay in the Kenai area, was known as "a canny gold-mine operator - one of the most successful in the district."<sup>4</sup> Heralded as a ten-foot vein of free gold-quartz, Hatcher's Matanuska Mine on the Fairangel Creek in the Talkeetnas was big news the summer of 1909, when Hatcher turned his Willow Creek mining district claims over to Frank Watson, one of the locators of the Matanuska coalfields, for development.<sup>5</sup> Hatcher left the territory to court a lady.

### **Groundhog on the Peninsula**

During the 1910 mining season, Hatcher was back in Alaska prospecting on the Kenai Peninsula. There he filed a joint claim with C. A. "Scotty" McPherson located on a butte near Groundhog Creek in the Moose Pass mining district about thirty-four miles out of Seward via the Alaska Northern Railroad. The Hatcher-McPherson Groundhog claim was purchased by a developer from Spokane named Samuel I. Silverman who established the Seward Gold Company, and sold stock in the enterprise to local citizens and visitors including stewards from steamships docking in Seward. Less than a year after Hatcher and McPherson sold their mine for \$30,000, the Seward Gold Company sold it to a British syndicate for \$225,000 in installments. But, as sometimes happens, the gold disappeared. "Before the first payment fell due [on the Seward Gold Company Mine]...the ledge pinched out and the mine was abandoned."<sup>6</sup> Still, Robert Lee Hatcher was changing his life.

### **Marriage and Success as a Prospector**

In 1911, at age forty-four, Hatcher married a forty-four year old nationally known woman's rights and prohibition leader, Cornelia Templeton Jewett of Chicago, whom Robert Lee met while she was on a tour of Alaska after attending the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle in 1909. While Robert Lee was a secretive man due to the nature of his prospecting work, Cornelia was a public woman who gave speeches, wrote articles, and ended up on the front page of

newspapers. This marriage of prospector and reformer allows us to know about Robert Lee Hatcher, the man, because Cornelia wrote about their Alaska adventures and took numerous photographs of their mining operations. She left us a full photo record of Hatcher's Gold Mint Mine effort in the Willow Creek district and commissioned Alaska's famous artist Sydney Laurence to do a painting of the Hatcher Relay Station on the Sustina River.

After their marriage, Robert Lee went on to make other major strikes in the Willow Creek district and on the Kenai Peninsula. While Hatcher regularly leased or sold his gold claims for others to develop, he would work two mines in the Talkeetna Mountains himself - the Matanuska, also known as the Talkeetna, mine from 1911-17, and the Gold Mint, also known as the Lonesome, in the early 1920s. Later, he prospected and mined in Nuka Bay, southwest of Seward, with Tom McDougal in the late 1920s and 1930s, and worked the Old Gilpatrick mine in Moose Pass area in the 1930s, Hatcher was first and foremost a prospector, with a good eye for quartz veins. He preferred being on horseback or on foot with his dog "Blue", searching the mountains for the next lode strike.

### **Gold Mint Mine**

After World War I, Robert Lee Hatcher turned his attention to the development of another of his gold claims in the Talkeetna Mountains. For the better part of four years, from 1919 to 1922, Cornelia was with Robert Lee, cooking for the crew and taking photographs as freight was moved in, the mine set up, and mining and ore milling began at the Gold Mint mine southeast of the Little Susitna River. Originally known as the Hatcher mine, the vein was "narrow and (according to one observer) as crooked as a Scotsman's cane." The vein was a novelty in the area because it was "brightened by a few spots of extreme richness in places carrying a high silver content together with gold," While it had masses of quartz, it had barren intervals.<sup>7</sup>



**Robert Lee Hatcher; photo from Dr. Beverly Beeton.**

During the summer months, the Hatchers and their hired men moved their mining equipment and materials from Wasilla, where they now lived, having moved from Knik when the railroad came through the Valley making Wasilla the transportation center. They would drop equipment and supplies at their Relay Station, at 30 mile in the Talkeetna Mountains, half way between Wasilla and the Gold Mint Mine,<sup>8</sup> where they had a cabin and shed. Once the Little Susitna River froze in the winter, they would haul the materials to the mine, where the Hatchers established a camp, and installed one of the six stamp mills in the district. Their Gold Mint Mining Company camp consisted of a log bunk-house and log mess-house and cache, the stamp mill, and four tent houses, one of which was home for Cornelia and Robert Lee. A half-dozen men helped them bring in the stamp mill and pipes for water power from the Lone Tree Creek. Developing a mine was extremely hard work, and both Hatchers were 55 years old. Besides, they weren't making money. While they took out \$38,000 of gold (nearly

\$400,000 in today's dollars) from the Gold Mint Mine, the operation failed. They had invested a total of \$50,000 in the mine, camp and stamp mill, both their own money and money loaned money by backers,<sup>9</sup> but they "lost the vein."

### **Leaving the Willow Creek Mining District and Alaska**

At the end of the summer in 1922, Cornelia left Alaska in poor spirits and bad health.<sup>10</sup> After spending time in Detroit getting medical care, Cornelia went to San Diego to enjoy the warm weather, and to take a course to prepare herself to be a hairdresser. Two years later, Cornelia officially ended her Alaska adventure. Relocated in Long Beach, California, she resigned as president of the Alaska

Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and Robert Lee disposed of her piano by selling \$2 raffle tickets. He closed the Wasilla house and ended his career in the Talkeetna Mountains.

Robert Lee Hatcher left the Willow Creek mining district to prospect and mine on the Kenai Peninsula. As president of the United Mining and Development Company, Robert Lee was in Seattle in 1938 raising money to develop the Gilpatrick property at Moose Pass. His reputation as a lode gold expert made it relatively easy for him to get financial backing, even during the Depression and after his failure at the Gold Mint Mine. In the 1940s, when he was in his seventies, he was still staking gold claims on the Kenai Peninsula; the most notable of these strikes was the one near Hope that was developed by a Seward pharmacist, Elwyn Swetmann and his wife Viola. In 1939 when the Alaska Miners Association was formed, Swetmann and Hatcher were founding directors representing the Seward district at the Association's initial meeting in Fairbanks.<sup>11</sup>

## Back to Dust

In the summer of 1943, Robert Lee Hatcher, “the man whose gold discoveries set in motion Independence, Martin, Talkeetna, Jam, Ray Wallace and Gold Mint” mines in the Willow Creek mining district, celebrated his seventy-sixth birthday in Anchorage by announcing yet another gold discovery near Seward. Heralding the new find “as the greatest gold discovery of his career,”<sup>12</sup> Hatcher showed his ore samples around Anchorage, but there was little interest in his latest find even though the estimated value was “about seven dollars a ton.”<sup>13</sup> A gold mine was no longer a good investment. Gold mines were closing because the United States War Production Board deemed gold mines non-essential to the war effort and ordered them closed during World War II.

In 1950, at age eighty-three, Hatcher was found in his cabin on Ptarmigan Creek twenty-three miles north of Seward; he was paralyzed on his left side and unable to speak. When he died in the Seward hospital a few days later, the local newspaper reported that “very little is known about him here except that he prospected and mined.”<sup>14</sup> His remains are in an unmarked grave in the Seward Pioneer Cemetery.

By: Dr. Beverly Beeton

## Sources:

I am not an expert on mining in Alaska. My major contribution to the history of Robert Lee Hatcher is a better understanding of him as a man through his relationship with Cornelia Templeton Jewett Hatcher and thanks to her great granddaughter, Robin Rustad, bringing Cornelia's photographs of Hatcher and his mining camps back to Alaska. These three scrapbooks are the Cornelia Templeton Jewett Hatcher Papers, 1867-1953 donated to the Anchorage Museum Resource Center and are referred to here as “CTJH Papers.” While I used newspaper accounts for reports of Robert Lee Hatcher's gold finds, I relied on mining experts' accounts for analysis. Stephen R. Capps, *The Willow Creek District, U. S. Geological Survey Bulletin*, 607 (Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office, 1915). Mary J. Barry, *A History of Mining on the Kenai Peninsula*, (Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Company, 1973). Rolfe G. Buzzell, *1997-1998 Cultural Resource Survey of Proposed Transportation Enhancements at Independence Mine State Historical Park* (State of Alaska: Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks, Office of History and Archaeology Report Number 69, 1998). Kathryn Koutsky Cohen, *Independence Mine and the Willow Creek Mining District*, (State of Alaska: Department of Natural Resources, Division of Parks, Office of History and Archaeology, 1982). Dorothy Page, “Old Mines and Miners,” *Touchstone* (Summer 1980): 40-45. A. W. Reeder, “The Willow Creek Mining District,” *Alaska Sportsman* (May 1965 and June 1965): 15-19 and 24-28. Doug O'Harra, “Tunnel of Dreams,” in *We Alaskans, Anchorage Daily News*, 9 October 1994, 9-14. W. M. Stoll, *Hunting for Gold in Alaska's Talkeetna Mountains, 1897-1951* (Ligonier, Penn: William L. Stoll, 1997). Ron Wendt, *Hatcher Pass Gold: An Historical Guide to the Willow Creek Mines* (Wasilla, AK: Goldstream Publications, 1992).

A major source of my understanding of Knik and the Willow Creek mining district is the collection of diaries of Orville George Herning, 1900-1947. Herning was the manager of the Boston Gold Mining and Manufacturing Company and owner of the Knik Trading Company that moved to Wasilla after the coming of the railroad. He recorded almost daily notes about the goings on in Knik and Wasilla for nearly half a century. His notes are brief, but they are an excellent source for an understanding of the area and change over time. They are not used extensively because they are difficult to read and considerable knowledge of the place and players is needed for his notes to be meaningful. The original diaries are Orville G. Herning Diaries in Papers, Dartmouth College Library, Hanover, New Hampshire. Typescript copies transcribed by Louise Potter are at University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives and Anchorage Museum Library and Archive. Coleen Mielke is in the final phase of preparing a new, indexed typescript of Hernings' Diaries for publication.

The Alaska 1900 census shows Hatcher born 24 June 1867 in Montague, Texas, with father from Tennessee and mother from Missouri and arriving in Alaska 1888. Later, he reported his father from Ohio. The 1900 census shows Hatcher living in Douglas, Alaska, across the channel from Juneau. He died in Seward, Alaska, 24 September 1950 and was buried 1 October 1950 in the Seward Pioneer Cemetery, Seward Seaport Record, 24 and 25 September 1950 and Certificate of Death, Alaska Department of Health Bureau of Vital Statistics. Skagway Alaskan, 12 May 1915 and June 1915. While in Juneau, he filed a claim as the Juneau Eagle River Quartz Gold Mine, Gerrit Heinie Snider, *Centennial: 100 Stories of Alaska* (Anchorage, Alaska: Color Art Printing, 1966), 137.

<sup>2</sup> Capps (1915): 50. “Some say two Japanese [George Yamado and K. Yago] made the first discovery but, as aliens, were unable to record the claim.” Cohen: 31-32.

<sup>3</sup> Herning, October-December 1907. Knik (and Willow Creek), Miscellaneous Papers, Vertical File, University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, Fairbanks, Alaska. Herning and the Bartholf brothers were the major placer miners in the Talkeetnas in the early years according to the mining historian of the area. Stoll, 26. Thus, they had the knowledge and the money to see the value of the deal and finance it.

<sup>4</sup> *Seward Gateway*, 31 July 1909; Wendt, 29; Capps (1915): 76; Stoll, 88.

<sup>5</sup> *Seward Gateway*, 31 July 1909. Two companies worked these mines—the Talkeetna Mining Company and Hatcher Gold Mining Company. Cornelia was an officer and stockholder in both. CTJH Papers.

<sup>6</sup> *Seward Gateway*, 9 June 1912; *Alaska-Yukon Magazine* (November 1910): 320; and Barry, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Stoll, 258.

<sup>8</sup> The Relay Station was 15 miles from Wasilla because the markers indicate the miles from Knik.

<sup>9</sup> Herning, February 2, 1921. The Gold Mint Mine, also known as the Lonesome Mine, was worked by a number of operators with limited success in the 1930s and 1940s. However, “by 1950 the old prospect was quiet again.” Stoll, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Notes by Cornelia’s daughter in CTJH Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Barry, 171-73 and 209.

<sup>12</sup> *Anchorage Daily Times*, 21 June 1943.

<sup>13</sup> “From Ketchikan to Barrow,” *Alaska Sportsman* (October 1943): 21.

<sup>14</sup> *Seward Seaport Record*, 29 September 1950. Certificate of Death, September 24, 1950 [Buried October 1, 1950], Alaska Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. At the time of Robert Lee Hatcher’s death, his wife Cornelia was hospitalized in Arkansas where she died two and one-half years later at age 86.

## ORVILLE G. HERNING (1868-1947)

Prospectors began searching for Alaska's mineral wealth at Alaska purchase in 1867, and even before. The pace of development increased in Southeast and along the Yukon in the 1870s. Good prospects at Willow Creek in the Forty-Mile in 1886 and at Circle in the 1890s resulted in minor stampedes. These minor rushes became a torrent after the discovery of gold in the Klondike in 1896, the focal point of the Alaska-Yukon Gold Rush. All across America, entrepreneurs, usually without too much knowledge of minerals, created prospecting syndicates, raised funds, and headed north and west to strike it rich. One of these entrepreneurs was Orville G. Herning. Like most others, Herning did not obtain great wealth from the mines, but proved to be a competent mine operator and later, a successful businessman and civic leader.

Herning was born in Eyota, Minnesota on July 30, 1868. He lived in Liard, Minnesota and also in Naugatuk, Connecticut - the later location is where he met Martha Amelia "Mattie" Rogers, whom he married on October 10, 1894. The Hernings had two sons; short-lived Elmer who was born on October 18, 1895 and died on August 14, 1906; and George Stanley, born on December 6, 1904 and died in 1987. George Stanley mined the New Bullion on Craigie Creek, also in the Hatcher Pass district.

In 1898, Orville G. Herning was instrumental in forming an east-coast-based mining exploration venture to prospect the north. In the spring of 1898, the Klondike & Boston Gold Mining Company of Massachusetts, with E. C. Davis Company as its official broker, hired two expedition teams to search for gold in the Cook Inlet area of Alaska. The first team was headed by Colonel E. J. Meagher; his men were Fred Falconer, I. Fonda, E. R. Chapman, W. J. Hayes, J. H. Bates, H. L. Grover, Frank Churchill, Charles Wolcott and M. Cameron.

The second team was headed by Orville Herning; his men were Edward Kirkpatrick, Fred M. Young, William H. Thorne, George F. Butler, Michael Dineen, H. P. Daniels, Daniel Coleman, George H. Brown and George F. Burrows. Herning was a thirty-year-old Connecticut-based salesman. He and his team left Boston, by train, on March 23, 1898 and arrived in Seattle five days later. The men had reservations aboard the *S. S. Whitelaw*, scheduled to sail for Alaska on April 1<sup>st</sup>.

The morning of their departure, Herning was told that the *Whitelaw* would not be sailing; she had burned in the Alaskan town of Skagway. It wasn't going to be easy to find passage aboard another northbound ship since all vessels destined for Alaska were loaded to capacity with gold rush stampedes. It took the men twelve days to find room aboard the *S. S. Dirigo* which sailed from Seattle's Yesler Wharf on April 12, 1898.

Two days north of Seattle, the *Dirigo* began to wind its way through the protected waters of Alaska's Inside Passage. The ship bypassed the small fishing village of Wrangell and made a short stop at the mining town of Juneau before sailing north on the 2,000 feet deep (but narrow) Lynn Canal. At the northern extremes of the Canal, the ship swung wide around a small island known as Eldred Rock, where the 150 foot Steamer, *Clara Nevada*, had exploded nine weeks earlier, killing all aboard. Once safely around the uncharted rock island, the *Dirigo* steamed to the northern reaches of Chilkoot Inlet, then veered east into Taiya Inlet and docked at Skagway, the largest town in Alaska, population 10,000. Here, the men inspected the remains of the burned out *S. S. Whitelaw* as well as the partially submerged *Mercury*, a bark that had fallen victim to Skagway winds four days earlier. They also took a short side trip to Dyea, population 5,000, to see the infamous Chilkoot Pass where thousands of men, and a few hardy women, were climbing the torturous thirty-three mile Pass with dreams of striking it rich in Canada's Yukon Territory.

From Skagway, the *Dirigo* backtracked south on Lynn Canal and into the Icy Straits where she experienced mechanical problems and anchored for repairs near the Tlingit village of Hoonah, on the north shore of Chichagof Island. The chief engineer diagnosed the ship's mechanical problem as a faulty condenser; the ship would have to limp 40 miles back to Juneau to order the new part. While the team waited eight days in Juneau for the new condenser to arrive from Seattle, they enjoyed a working-tour of the Treadwell Quartz Mine on Douglas Island. With repairs completed, the *Dirigo* was preparing to leave Juneau when she accidentally rammed a coal transport called the *Czarina*. The collision cut a large hole in *Czarina's* side and she had to be beached at Douglas Island to avoid sinking.

Finally out of Juneau, the men sailed past Glacier Bay and Brady Glacier before entering open ocean for the first time in their journey. The next scheduled stop was the Port of Valdez on the Valdez Arm of Prince William Sound. Six miles from Valdez, the *Dirigo* ran aground at low tide, leaving her bow high and dry and her stern in sixteen feet of water; there she lay stranded until the next high tide released her and she sailed into Valdez for the night. The following morning the ship departed in a blinding snowstorm and sailed through Prince William Sound where a foot of dense white snow floated on the water surface. The *S. S. Dirigo*, originally built as a two-mast schooner, was converted to steam power in late 1897. At 843 tons, she had one-fourth the tonnage of most steamships traveling between Seattle and Alaska. As she entered the Gulf of Alaska, the storm intensified, and the ship's smaller size reacted accordingly: she was rolled from gunnel to gunnel for the next two days. The waves were so relentless that a young Massachusetts man named Burrows (from the Revere Expedition Party) died, reportedly of seasickness, and was buried at sea, as the ship entered Cook Inlet.

Orville Herning's destination was an outpost called Tyonek near the head of Cook Inlet. It was

primarily an Athabascan Indian village, but it also had a nearby Alaska Commercial Company outpost which was a major supply source for anyone entering South-central Alaska. The trip from Seattle to Tyonek had taken twenty days, fifteen days longer than expected. Freight was lightered ashore from the *Dirigo* and left in great stacks on the muddy Tyonek Beach. Herning's team went to work moving their supplies to a location above the high tide line and building a series of tents for cooking, sleeping, and storage. Once situated, their first major goal was to locate Willow Creek in the extreme southwest corner of the Talkeetna Mountains, 110 unmapped miles from Tyonek. Unfortunately for the team, the rivers were still full of ice which meant Susitna River access to the Willow Creek mining area would be delayed for another two weeks..

Miners continued to arrive at Tyonek every day, and before long, 300 novice prospectors populated the beach. Expectations were high and tall tales of secret gold strikes were the talk of the day. Boodlers, selling imaginary claims and "priceless" treasure maps, were abundant. The beach resembled a shipyard with hundreds of first time boat builders scratching their heads in confusion. The most economical way for Herning's team to obtain a boat was to build one, but that option did not seem practical. Not only was lumber scarce, but the men had heard many stories about newly constructed boats disintegrating in the rough Cook Inlet waters. Instead of building, Herning decided to buy a boat with a proven history; he purchased a sea otter boat from a Tyonek merchant for \$75. The merchant assured him that the boat was built for seal hunting and was very strong. Anxious to try out their boat, the men took it out for a quick trial run on a sunny afternoon; it handled nicely as the team rowed out into the deep waters of Cook Inlet. However, without warning, the sunny weather turned into a late afternoon gale force wind. Rowing for their lives, it took the men an hour to reach shore while the waves brutally battered their boat. Safely back on land, the men

were convinced that a lesser boat would have cost them their lives; the sea otter boat turned out to be a very wise purchase and would save their lives many more times during the next few seasons. The experience also gave the team a lifelong respect for the weather and waters of Cook Inlet.

Two prospectors died the first week at Tyonek. One (unnamed) man died from natural causes. The second young man, from the Patterson Expedition Party of Kansas, became gravely ill after eating desiccated cabbage. With no medical help available, the men on the beach did what they could to comfort the dying man. One of Herning's men played his violin while the rest of the team sang "In the Sweet By and By". The deaths were a sobering experience to everyone, even the most hard-bitten old timers.

In late May, the rivers were ice-free and it was time to locate Willow Creek. The men chose the most practical route, which began with a two-part sloop ride to Knik Station. Part one took the men 30 miles, from Tyonek to Fire Island at the head of Cook Inlet (three miles from present day Anchorage) where they spent the night on the beach and waited for the next high tide; part two of the journey took the men from Fire Island to Knik Station, an additional forty miles.

Knik Station was barely a spot on the map in 1898; it had a small Alaska Commercial Company outpost, thirty-six Athabaskan residents and three Non-native residents. Here, Herning's team learned about a system of ancient Athabaskan walking trails that laced through South-central Alaska. Historically, the trails were used by seasonal nomadic hunting parties, and were narrow and hard to find. Herning hired two



**Herning family washing dishes on Knik Beach, circa 1901 - Elmer (with shovel), Mattie, and Orville Herning(?); photo from Alaska's Digital Archives.**

Athabascans, at the going rate of \$6 per trip, to lead his men over the trail from Knik Station to Willow Creek. The team and their guides left Knik, reaching the foothills of Bald Mountain by the end of the third day. Their fourth day's progress was not as good; after ten hours of climbing their way over and around the snowy remnants of last winter's avalanches, the Native guides seemed to be lost. In an effort to summon help, they set a dry spruce tree on fire and shot their rifles into the air. Receiving no reply, the team set up camp for the night and dried their clothing.

The next morning, the guides had regained their sense of direction and led the team to a group of miners on who were already actively mining gold at Grubstake Gulch, off of Willow Creek. Their names were, L. H. Herndon, Billy Morris, Brainard, E'Van and Captain Andrews. Herning's team spent two days prospecting with Captain Andrews to "learn the ropes".

Within a week, Herning's team had located fifteen full placer claims on Willow Creek, and built a

sluice box that produced a good sample of placer gold, a piece of silver, and reportedly, one ruby. On June 11, 1898, Herning, and his men, Edward C. Kirkpatrick, George H. Brown, Fred M. Young, William H. Thorne, George F. Butler, George F. Burrows, Michael Dinneen, H. P. Daniels and Daniel Coleman, joined the Grubstake Gulch miners, to establish the Willow Creek mining district, and appointed L. H. Herndon as recorder. The end of this historic meeting was punctuated with a strong earthquake that shook the gold dust off the recorder's table.



**Orville G. Herning; photo from Coleen Mielke.**

After two weeks at Willow Creek, Herning and two of his men left on a re-supply run to the mouth of the Susitna River. Travel on foot was slow; the men were plagued with clouds of voracious mosquitoes that emerged from the wetlands along the creek's edge. Without the aid of netting, the insects were unbearable. With every breath, the men inhaled mosquitoes; their only relief was a nightly smudge fire or the hope of a strong breeze.

At the end of the third day on the trail, the men could smell heavy smoke. Thinking it might be a forest fire; they found refuge on a sandbar in the

middle of a small side-stream and waited. Within thirty minutes, they could hear the approaching fire. The men buried their blankets and supplies in the wet sand and crouched in the shallow water as the flames raced down the banks on both sides of the stream. The men were surrounded by fire, and slapped frantically at the sparks that ignited their clothing. Once the fire had consumed all of the dry vegetation in the immediate area, the danger seemed to be over. The men were elated to discover their damages were limited to wet blankets, holes in their clothing and singed hair.

To celebrate their survival, as well as the subsequent demise of the mosquitoes, the men said a prayer of thanks, shared a drink of Jamaica Ginger and retired for the night.

The next morning, as soon as the men had traveled outside of the burned area, the mosquitoes returned with a vengeance. So intolerable were the bugs that Herning decided to build a raft and float the Susitna River for relief. It didn't take long to fall the trees then build and launch the raft. On the second bend in the river, the hastily built raft struck the bank and fell apart, dumping the trio into the swift cold water. The men

struggled their way to shore and decided it would be safer to continue on dry land and battle the mosquitoes.

Travel along the river was slow, and food was short. The three men made plans to buy food at the Alaska Commercial Company (AC Co.) store at Susitna Station, which was closer than their supply camp. They weren't sure exactly where the Station was, they only knew that it was on an island roughly 30 miles from the mouth of the Susitna River. Tired and hungry, but fearing another broken raft disaster, the men continued downriver on foot, for two more days with no sign

of the Station. They passed dozens of small islands, and at each one, they let out signal whoops but received no reply. On the sixth day, they ate the last of their food...one piece of bacon for each man.

In hungry desperation, the men decided to try their luck with another raft. It took two hours to fasten three 24' spruce trees together. Herning wrote their names on the tree stumps as well as the log ends of the raft. If their attempt failed, and no one lived to tell their story, the names written on the trees would record their fate. The plan was for one man to stand on the bow of the raft, with a long pole, and keep it from hitting the banks; a second man would stand on the stern, with a 16' oar and propel the raft; the third man would stand on the side midsection to help steer. The trio pushed the raft out into the swift current of the Susitna River; before long, they were traveling at (what Herning guessed to be) 10 miles per hour. Floating hour after hour, the men came to a section of the river where the current overpowered their control of the raft. The raft was now steering itself and picking up speed; they were totally at the mercy of the river. A group of Athabaskan Indians, from a village two miles downriver, heard the men scream and came to their rescue. Paddling birch bark canoes, at a high rate of speed, the valiant Natives caught up with the raft, threw the men a towline, and began the heroic struggle of pulling the raft to shore against the fast current. Overjoyed with their escape from certain death, Herning eagerly paid the rescuers two bits each to take his men to the Station, a distance of two more miles.

The three men were a sorry sight when they arrived at Susitna Station: one had no shoes and his pants and shirt were nearly gone, the other two men only had the soles of their shoes left and their pants were worn off to the knees. The AC Co. agent, James Cleghorn, fed the men a welcome banquet of pork and beans, corned beef, bread, butter, cheese, canned peaches, canned apricots, crackers and tea with cream and sugar. After

dinner, Herning hired the Natives to transport the trio to the mouth of the Susitna River, a thirty mile, three-hour canoe trip for \$6.

In mid-July, Herning decided to make an unguided, solo trip to Willow Creek. He packed 65 pounds of provisions, and left Knik by boat at 8:30 PM to take advantage of the tides. He arrived at Cottonwood at 10:30 PM and camped for the night. The next morning, he left Cottonwood at 10:30 AM, on a horse he borrowed from a man named Lee, and arrived at Big Lake at 5:45 PM, where he made camp, cared for the horse and slept, in the rain, under a tarp. Herning left Big Lake at 8:30 AM and traveled due north to the Little Susitna River, arriving there at 1:00 PM. After a brief rest and a dinner of fried ptarmigan, he continued on to the base of Bald Mountain, where he spotted some caribou but wasn't close enough to shoot one. The next day, Herning reached the summit of Bald Mountain at 1:00 PM, where he arranged to have Lee's horse taken back to Knik by a prospector who was going that way. From the summit of Bald Mountain, it took him 3½ hours to snowshoe over to his mine.

Herning's team spent a total of 80 days working the ground at Willow Creek (in Grubstake Gulch) that first summer, and produced 39 ounces of gold...not bad considering most of their time was spent staking claims, building cabins, hauling supplies, building dams, and whip sawing enough lumber to build a dozen sluice boxes measuring 12' long x 16' wide x 6" deep.

Grubstake Gulch did contain placer gold, some of it rather coarse and angular suggesting that it had not gone far from its lode source, but it was not a simple placer gold deposit. Developed off and on for more than 100 years, one deposit type appears to have gold concentrated in an alluvial fan at the mouth, while the other deposit type contains placer gold within multiple river channels of Willow Creek. In both cases, gold may or may not be concentrated on bed rock surfaces, which is typical for most river placers. In any event,

Herning realized that the deposit was potentially large, and could be attacked with hydraulic giants operating at a head of about 180 feet that could be developed in upper Grubstake Gulch.

The Boston-Klondike company would later make a valiant effort to develop and mine the deposit, ultimately with three hydraulic giants and thousands of feet of ditch. The mine's heyday was in the early 1900s, but, handicapped by floods, it was never very successful. Only three or four of the original venturers stuck with Herning, who built up his mining team with Indians, including Chief Nicolai from Old Knik. In the meantime, though, Herning assembled other claims, and developed contacts that would serve him substantially in later ventures.

In mid-August 1898, the men broke camp and headed for Knik Station. When they reached the Little Susitna River, they set up camp and were cooking dinner when their dog ran into camp with an angry brown bear sow nipping at its heels. The men scrambled for their revolvers as the cook began screaming and banging cooking pots together. The startled bear stopped within ten feet of the campfire and stood upright, towering over the men. The tense face-off lasted for several seconds before the bear retreated into the brush, leaving her two cubs crying in a distant tree. Assuming the bear would return, the men stood guard all night but they did not see her again. In late August, with the mining season winding down, Herning's team wanted to build two food caches south of Knik Station for future use. The first cache was built at Goose Bay on the west side of Knik Arm. The second food cache was built at (what Herning called) Crescent Bay, on the east side of Knik Arm, directly across from Goose Bay. Herning predicted major growth for Crescent Bay. With its plentiful fresh water, wood, game, and deep Bay, he predicted it would someday be the "Skagway of Cook Inlet". With the food caches completed, the men headed for their main supply camp at the mouth of the Susitna River. En route, they stopped, on the

beach, just west of the Little Susitna River to inspect an abandoned AC Co. store building precariously perched in shallow water at high tide. The 1898 Lake George flood had washed the building from its original Knik River foundation and floated it, intact, including merchandise, down the Knik Arm to the Cook Inlet mud flats. The building and its contents would soon be devoured by scavengers and the Cook Inlet tides.

The discovery and subsequent development of the Skyscraper and Gold Bullion hard rock gold deposits in the Hatcher Pass area soon eclipsed the placer gold deposits on the tributaries of Willow Creek. Herning maintained his placer interests, but soon concluded that "mining the miners" was the way to go, and he opened the Knik Trading Company in 1905, then the leading transfer point on Cook Inlet. While Herning was operating the Knik Trading Company, his wife Mattie wintered in Seward. Mattie helped determine Herning's path in life, as she was 'urban-bound'. Herning built a new house in Wasilla for both of them to live in, but Mattie refused to move in, preferring to live in the growing community of Anchorage, or, later, the established community of Seattle. In 1917, Herning built a general store (the first permanent building) in the new railroad camp town of Wasilla, which he operated until his death in 1947.



**Orville Herning's general store in Wasilla, Alaska, circa 1931; photo from Alaska's Digital Archives.**

When he died, Herning's store and home were sold to Walter and Vivian Teeland. Today, the building is located behind the fire station in downtown Wasilla, is owned by the Wasilla-Knik Historical Society, and houses a coffee shop. Many of the prospectors that landed at Cook Inlet in 1898 stayed, and mined the Willow Creek, a.k.a. Hatcher Pass, district for many years. Many Wasilla streets, businesses and subdivisions are named after gold mines in the Willow Creek mining district - Hatcher Pass, Independence, Lucky Shot, Gold Bullion, Grubstake Gulch, War Baby, Gold Cord, and Gold Mint to name just a few.

Herning was a very civic-minded man. He was the only source of medical aid (and veterinary care) for early Knik residents and Athabascan villagers. He helped build the first school at Knik in 1912. He and J. N. Johnston drew the first detailed map (1898) of the area between Hope and Mount McKinley, showing all rivers, trails, boat routes and gold fields. Before law formally arrived at Knik, Herning was part of an informal court that dealt with local scofflaws, and occasionally he was the unofficial coroner. Orville worked tirelessly to bring a school to early Wasilla. He

wrote a series of letters to Alaska's Territorial Governor, which resulted in funding for the first school in 1917. He drew plans for the building, donated fire wood and gas lamps, and built school desks. As a member of the School Board, he was instrumental in hiring Wasilla's first teacher, Miss Ora Dee Clark. Herning also acted as the unofficial bank of Wasilla for thirty years. He cashed checks, collected debts, carried lines of credit and held money and valuables for people in his safe. He was well respected and hard working, and scrupulously honest. He never forgot a good deed or a scoundrel. He is the unsung

patriarch of the Wasilla we see today and the quintessential Alaskan pioneer.

Orville Herning passed away in Wasilla in 1947, shortly after the end of World War II. He was a faithful chronicler of events. Various attempts have been made to transcribe his rather hard-to-read diaries. Currently the author (Mielke) is now proofing her transcription of hundreds of thousands of words written by Herning over his fifty-year career in Alaska.

*By: Coleen Mielke, 2009, with mining and photographic additions by C.C. Hawley and C.R. Laird*

## BYRON SUNDLON BARTHOLF (1850-1939)

The Bartholf family was in Knik by 1905, and was recording gold discoveries in the Willow Creek district as early as 1907 – the important Gold Bullion discovery made by William Earl Bartholf. At least ten Bartholfs appear in early Cook Inlet history, and almost all had some connection with the Willow Creek mines. Byron Sundlon Bartholf was chosen for induction as the head of a family of dominant importance in the district; he fathered at least two of the more noted miners in the family, William Byron Bartholf and Charles Andrew Bartholf, and remained active in the district until very late in his life.

Byron Sundlon Bartholf was the fourth of eight surviving children, and was born to John D. and Sarah Jane Bartholf of Batavia, Genessee County, New York, on May 1, 1850. As reminded by historian Coleen Mielke, Byron was one day old at the 1850 Census. At least three of Byron's siblings came to Alaska: Frank G. born in 1846, Katherine (Kitty) born in 1851, and Eugene, born in 1859. By the 1870s, Byron's family was on the move westward. Sons William B., John T. and Charles A. were born in Colorado in the 1870s. A fourth son, Ralph S. was born to Byron and a second wife Amelia Amanda Smith in 1900 in the state of Washington.

Prior to Byron's move north, he prospected with four other partners, Enos and Monette Hotchkiss, James Sparling, and Ben Hall, in the Lake San Cristobal area, San Juan Mountain Range, Colorado. The group's 1874 discovery of the Golden Fleece Mine, destined to become one of the richest gold mines of the day, spurred the establishment and development of Lake City, Colorado. Each held a  $\frac{1}{5}$  interest in the claims, and when the claims were sold, Bartholf was paid \$8,000 for his share, a goodly sum in those days.

The Bartholf brothers' activities prior to their arrival in the Cook Inlet Region are sketchy, but Byron and his two younger brothers, Eugene and Frank, provided wild game meat for miners in Dawson, Yukon Territory, Canada, during 1900 and 1901.



**Nine thousand pounds of moose and caribou killed by the Bartholf brothers being delivered in Dawson, Yukon Territory, Canada, February 10, 1900; photo from Alaska's Digital Archives.**

The Bartholf family moved into the Willow Creek mining district of south-central Alaska in 1904 or 1905. District discoveries by the family include:

Gold Bullion (1907) - William E. and Byron Bartholf

Mabel (1911) - Charles A.(?) Bartholf

Gold Cord (1912) - Charles A. and Byron S. Bartholf

Lucky Shot (1918) - Charles A. Bartholf

Discoveries made by the Bartholfs were followed up by development and operations. By 1909, the Bartholfs had built a two stamp mill on Craigie Creek to process Gold Bullion ore. The ore body lay far above the valley floor, and the ore was initially transported to the mill with pack horses. But operations of any efficiency required an enlarged mill fed by an aerial tramway. A tram 3,300 feet long was completed in 1910 to feed an

enlarged mill. Later operations used relay trams to convey ore to a central main tramway. Eventually, a total of 6,300 feet of tram was installed. By 1913, thirty men were mining about 20 tons of high grade ore per day in an open season some four months long. By 1914, production totaled about 14,000 ounces, not bad for a seasonal operation with difficult logistics. A significant increase in production was realized when an infusion of capital was supplied by L. C. Thomson, who leased the property in 1916.



**The Independence Mine ore tram as it appeared in 1937; photo from the Russ Dow Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

The Bartholfs also produced ore at Mabel and Gold Cord but their major property, Lucky Shot, proved to be the best in the district. It was also the scene of a family tragedy. The property was discovered in 1918, and was originally held by Charles Bartholf. By 1921, a substantial operation was underway managed by William B. Bartholf. On an August day, as William moved across the mill, his trousers were caught in machinery and a leg was almost torn off. His cousin Harvey Bartholf shut the plant down and mobilized the crew. The men raced for a waiting rail ambulance, but William died from shock before they reached the train.

This may have been a critical happening to the Bartholfs. Their names, which had been the most important in the district, are heard with less frequency following the 1921 death of William Bartholf. Their name should survive in the district where they discovered most of the ore and began substantial mining operations. The Bartholf family was a tough and long lived bunch, and exceptionally good on the trail. W.E. Dunkle remembered that Byron, while in his 70s, was badly affected by palsy but could still knock over parky squirrels with a pistol at several tens of feet.

Byron S. Bartholf died at age 89 in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Brother Charles A. lived into his 70s, and Byron's youngest son Ralph S. died in California at age 91. Harvey Bartholf, who made a valiant effort to save William B. at the Lucky Shot, was the son of Byron's brother Frank and reportedly died at age 70.

*By: Charles C. Hawley, 2009*

#### **Sources:**

*Note on Sources:* The main published source used was William M. Stoll's "Hunting for Gold in the Talkeetna Mountains". A great debt is owed to Coleen Mielke from her long established project on the Herning diaries and for genealogical work on the Bartholf family. The note about pistol shooting ability of a 70-year old Byron Bartholf is from Reel 1, Tape 3 of the W.E. Dunkle tapes, which are in the possession of the Anchorage Museum.

Anchorage Times, on death of William B. Bartholf, August 22 (p. 5) and 25 (p.8), 1921

William M. Stoll, 1997, "Hunting for Gold in Alaska's Talkeetna Mountains, 1897-1951". Author, Ligonier Pennsylvania.

Charles Caldwell Hawley, 2003, "Wesley Earl Dunkle, Alaska's Flying Miner": Boulder, CO, University Press of Colorado, esp. Chapter7, Partners Mines and the Lucky Shot

Website of Coleen Mielke "My Attempt to Untangle the Bartholf Family Tree, Willow Creek Mining District, Alaska"

## **WALTER WILLIAM STOLL (ca 1888-1949)**

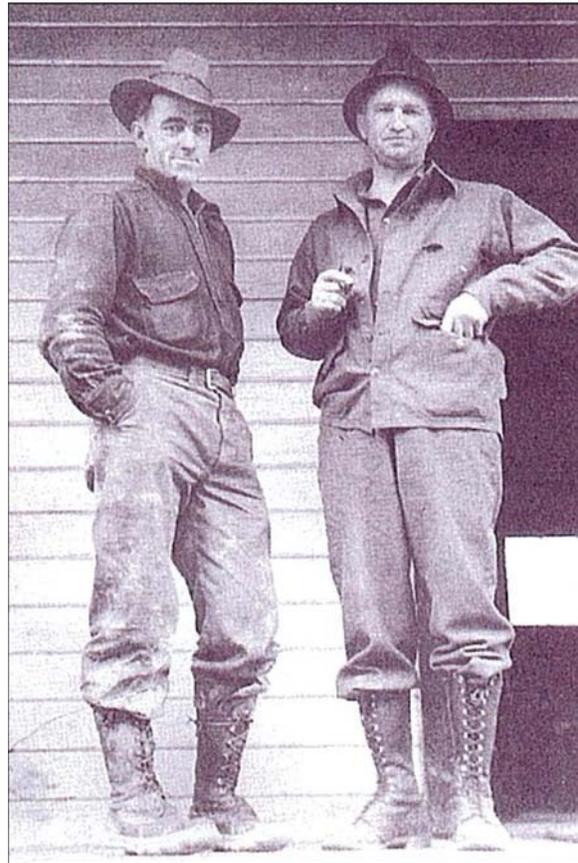
One of the major figures in the history of the Willow Creek district, Walter W. Stoll, was a late-comer to mining, but proved to be an exceptional mine manager - rivaled only by W.E. Dunkle in the district. Before tackling the Independence Mine in 1936, Stoll had mainly been in the salmon trade, acting as General Manager for Gorman and Company, and for his own operations in Cook Inlet. Stoll was prepared by education - he had graduated as an engineer from the University of Washington (UAW). Running large canneries at remote sites far from market was not bad preparation for mining operations. As in the mines, his salmon crews were large and mostly general laborers. Freighting was complex, and power was supplied by hydraulic force or large marine diesels. Production lines in a fish processing facility are comparable to hard rock gold mills. With a base in Alaska, Stoll would at least hear the latest mine gossip and know which properties seemed to have the most potential and the fewest problems.

Stoll was born in St. Paul, Minnesota in about 1888. His family, of probable German origin, moved to the Seattle area in 1900. Stoll graduated from the UAW School of Engineering in 1911. He was an exceptional athlete, lettering in track, but he also managed the student newspaper for four years. Undoubtedly he met some Alaskans, and made contacts strengthened by commercial fisheries work out of Seattle.

Except for Carle's early work, and production by Billy Martin from the Skyscraper gold lode, little had been done on the veins that outcropped on Granite and Skyscraper Mountains in the Willow Creek district. There was little doubt that the Independence vein on Granite Mountain extended into a similar vein on Skyscraper Mountain, one that had been mined by the Alaska Free Gold Company. The Great Depression, consequent deflated prices, available labor, and in December

of 1934, a much higher price for gold, provided an incentive to reexamine the situation.

The Alaska Free Gold Company had produced no ore since 1920, and its shareholders had long looked for new mine management. In 1934, Charles L. Harrison, a substantial shareholder of the company, appeared with a new proposal for a lease that paid a 20% royalty to the shareholders. Harrison offered the same deal to the owners of the Independence Gold Mining Company on Granite Mountain, setting the stage for a substantial operation. Harrison assigned his leases to a 1934 Seattle-based company called Alaska Pacific Mines, Inc. (Alaska Pacific). The deal included Stoll.



**Walter W. Stoll (right) with general mine foreman A. G. Dodson, summer 1939; photo from Wm. M. Stoll (1997)**

At this stage, both Harrison and Stoll preferred a passive operation, where the leases would be

assigned to an established mining company who would finance the operation and pay a royalty to Alaska Pacific. There were interested companies. In May 1935, Alaska Pacific struck a deal with Vancouver-based Bralco Mines Inc. (Bralco), the operator of the Bralorne gold mine in British Columbia. Bralco would form a new company, Bralaska Mining Company, where Bralco would have the controlling interest. The deal appeared secure, and operations commenced.

Billy Martin, an attorney and former operator on Skyscraper Mountain, had other ideas. He claimed that the Alaska Free Gold trustees had lacked the authority to lease the property and that the lease was invalid. Martin also opened a campaign to contact shareholders to urge them to cancel the lease. Although the lease was upheld by the Superior Court (Washington), operational problems and the failure to find new ore below the Skyscraper outcrops disillusioned Bralco who pulled out, leaving Alaska Pacific without an operating structure, and with properties whose reputation had been damaged.

The way was left open for Walter William Stoll to become a miner and the savior of the new company, now Alaska-Pacific Consolidated Mines. Stoll began from scratch. His first crew was hired in early summer 1936, and consisted of his two mining engineer student sons and five men hired at Wasilla, one of whom claimed to be a cook. The budget was about the \$16,000 – all that remained in the company treasury. Later in the season Stoll hired Albert G. Dodson to mine some ore - from uncertain locations - so the crew would have something to show for its efforts. Luckily, ore was found in old workings of the Independence Mine, and before Stoll left in the fall he hired

Dodson to continue mining in the old Carle-Robe winze area (900 level) over the winter months. Dodson drove more than 400 feet of workings during the winter months, then, quickly, another 400 feet. The workings were mostly in ore of greater than 1 ounce gold/ton and Stoll's gamble had paid off. Production in 1937 totaled 11,316 ounces of gold, in 1938 it totaled 18,450 ounces, and in 1939, 24,338 ounces. From 1936 into the war year of 1943, Independence mined more than 149,000 tons of ore. Counting production from the Skyscraper vein (27,000 ounces) the Independence Mine group produced 215,000 ounces of gold through 1951.



**Miners walk out of the Independence Mine at shift change; photo from the Gustav Johnson Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

Stoll was more flexible than some managers in the district. His miners earned the daily district wide wages of \$5 to \$6 for variable skill levels, but his foremen, like Dodson, who made the mine a success, earned more in an annual bonus than were paid foremen and shift bosses at other district mines. Stoll was sometimes accused of paying out too much, and of coddling his miners, but shareholders had no grounds for complaints, and Stoll continued to treat his young miners

about the same way he treated his soon-to-be engineer sons.



**George Lynch (on left) and a young engineer weighing a retort sponge at the Independence Mine, circa 1937; photo from the Russ Dow Collection in the University of Alaska-Anchorage archives.**

World War II had a major effect on all gold mines. In addition to wartime restriction on gold mining, miners and supplies were often not available. For a time, it appeared that the Independence Gold Mine could continue operations as a tungsten mine as the ore contained small amounts of scheelite, a main ore mineral for strategic tungsten. In 1943, this option was lost and the mine closed. The Stolls, by now with two more qualified mining engineers to assist their father, looked optimistically for post war operations. The mine did re-open, and by going to a lease-block system, whereby experienced miners could produce gold for their own account, operations were profitable for a time.

In the fall of 1949, Walter W. Stoll was hospitalized in Anchorage; he was then moved to Seattle after Alaska treatment failed to yield improvement. Death was reported on November 14, 1949. William Stoll kept operations open into 1951, but the mine, operating under the fixed price of \$35/ounce of gold, was not economic, and was closed, not to be reopened for almost 30 years.

Walter W. Stoll managed the transition from fish traps to underground gold mines. He was one of Alaska's best mine managers, and, with his two sons William M. and Walter C., a representative of one of Alaska's foremost mining families.

Walter left his wife Louise C., sons Walter (C.) and William M., a daughter Mrs. William M. Swayne of Port Madison, and sisters Mrs. Victor A. Montgomery of Seattle and Mrs. James M. Coe of Glendale, CA. Mrs. Montgomery was the wife of Walter's long time friend and corporate attorney and a director of Alaska Pacific.

*By: Charles C. Hawley*

## Sources

Anchorage Times, on death of Walter William Stoll, November 14, 1949 (p. 3)

Katherine K. Cohen, 1982, Independence Mine and Willow Creek District, Alaska: Anchorage, Dept. of Natural Resources, Office of History and Archaeology, Alaska Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Charles Caldwell Hawley, 2003, Wesley Earl Dunkle, Alaska's Flying Miner: Boulder, CO, University Press of Colorado, esp. Chapter 7, Partners Mines and the Lucky Shot

Josette and William M. Stoll, Papers 1914-1987, 1997. Papers, Archives @ University of Alaska Anchorage

Walter C. Stoll, 1939, The Independence Mine, Willow Creek Alaska. B.Sc. Thesis, University of Washington

William M. Stoll, 1942, A Study of Operation, Metallurgical Control, and Costs at the Independence Mill, Alaska. Engineer and Mining Engineer Thesis, Stanford University.

William M. Stoll, 1997, Hunting for Gold in Alaska's Talkeetna Mountains, 1897-1951. Author, Ligonier Pennsylvania.

**Distinguished Alaskans Aid  
Foundation as '98ers**

The Alaska Mining Hall of Fame Foundation was incorporated as an Alaskan non-profit corporation on April 27, 1997. The Foundation was organized exclusively for educational and charitable purposes, including donations to organizations that are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the federal tax code. On September 17, 2003, the IRS confirmed the 501(c)(3) status of AMHF, and further categorized the organization under codes 509(a)(1) and 170(b)(6).

The foundation is a non-membership corporation that depends on services provided by its officers and directors, others interested in Alaskan mining, and on donations and grants.

The Foundation is especially indebted to eighteen (18) persons who have each contributed \$1,000 to become 98ers, in honor of the first stampedeers to Alaska in 1898 at Nome.

**The 98ers**

Dr. Earl Beistline	John Mulligan
Thomas K. Bundtzen	Patrick H. O'Neill
Glen Chambers	Elmer E. Rasmuson (d)
Douglas Colp	William Stroecker
Wendell Hammon Jr.	Dr. Robert H. Trent
Dr. Charles C. Hawley	Mitch Usibelli
Dr. Walter Johnson	Joe Usibelli, Sr.
Wallace McGregor	Dr. William Wood (d)
James Moody	Dr. Kenneth L. Zong

(d=deceased)

Most of the 98ers are recognizable as miners of national or international reputation. The late William R. Wood was President, Emeritus, of the University of Alaska. Dr. Wood suggested the organization of the Foundation. The late Elmer E. Rasmuson was an Alaska banker and benefactor, long interested in Alaska natural resource history. Dr. Walter Johnson's career was mainly in Native public health, but he knew many pioneer Alaskans. His own research has taken him to Sweden and Norway in search of the true story of the so-called "three Lucky Swedes" of fame at Nome.

The Foundation is seeking about ninety more 98ers, but it welcomes contributions at every level. For further information contact:

Wallace McGregor Chair, Finance Committee 1212 N. Washington, Ste 12 Spokane, WA 99201	Karl Hanneman Treasurer 626 Second St., Ste 201 Fairbanks, AK 99701
---	--

**Alaska Mining Hall of Fame  
Directors and Officers:**

President--Mary A. Nordale  
 First Division Vice President--David Stone  
 Second Division Vice President--Irene Anderson  
 Third Division Vice President--Paul Glavinovich  
 Fourth Division Vice President--Curt Freeman  
 Secretary--Thomas K. Bundtzen  
 Treasurer--Karl Hanneman  
 Chair Facilities Committee--Mary Nordale  
 Chair Honors Committee--Charles C. Hawley  
 Chair Fund Raising and Publicity--Wallace McGregor

**Board of Directors**

Irene Anderson	Charles C. Hawley
Thomas K. Bundtzen	Wallace McGregor
Curtis J. Freeman	Mary A. Nordale
Paul S. Glavinovich	David G. Stone
Karl Hanneman	Joseph Usibelli Sr.

**Mailing Addresses:**

***AMHF President***

Mary Nordale  
 100 Cushman Street, Suite 308  
 Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

***AMHF Secretary***

Thomas Bundtzen  
 P.O. Box 81906  
 Fairbanks, Alaska 99708

***AMHF Honors Committee***

Charles C. Hawley  
 11401 Olive Lane  
 Anchorage, Alaska 99515  
 phone 907-522-9201

***AMHF Treasurer and Donations***

Karl Hanneman  
 626 Second Avenue, Suite 201  
 Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

***Associate Editors of the Paystreak***

Charles C. Hawley 11401 Olive Lane Anchorage, Alaska 99515	Tom Bundtzen Box 81906 Fairbanks, Alaska 99708
David G. Stone Box 22893 Juneau, Alaska 99802	Curt Freeman Box 80268 Fairbanks, Alaska 99708