

BRIDGET MANNION, "THE QUEEN OF ALASKA"



Bridget Mannion and her niece Mary Keane in 1921
(Photo courtesy Kathleen Donoghue)

"The Queen of Alaska", Bridget Mannion, was born in Rosmuc, Co. Galway, in 1865.

In 1892, after working as housekeeper to a prominent Seattle businessman, Bridget signed on with an expedition heading for the remote interior of Alaska, and ended up as housekeeper at a trading post in Napoleon Creek, a spot on a small tributary of the Yukon River near the border with Canada. The trading post catered to gold miners and prospectors, fur trappers and Native Americans, and she was the only single non-native woman for hundreds of miles. She later said that in her first six months in Napoleon Creek she received "150 proposals of marriage".

In 1894, in the first ever non-native marriage in the town of Forty Mile Creek, she married Edward Aylward, a successful prospector who had been born in Co. Kilkenny in 1849. She joined Edward in mining for gold, and they were among the lucky ones, becoming very wealthy.

In 1896, she visited friends in Seattle while on her way to visit her mother in Ireland, and a Seattle newspaper headlined a story about her, "The Queen of Alaska". The sub-headline on the story was "How Bridget Manion Found Wealth and a Husband in the Icy North" and says that when she first went to the Yukon in 1892, "There were plenty of men there who had not seen a white woman for a long time." It describes how she won the name "The Queen" by providing a hearty welcome to prospectors during the long winter months in Napoleon Creek. At the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition, Seattle's first World's Fair, Bridget was officially crowned "Queen of Alaska".

Shortly after her return from Ireland, Bridget and Edward retired to Seattle and built a large house in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood. They didn't have any children and after Edward died in 1914, she lived alone although by that time she also had a married sister, Katherine Hatchell, living in Seattle.

On a 1920 trip to Ireland to see her sick mother, Bridget brought her niece Mary Keane back to Seattle with her from Rosmuc. In 1923, a niece of Edward's, Nellie Cullen, also came from Co. Kilkenny to join "The Queen". Both girls stayed in Seattle, married and raised families, with Mary Keane Tomkins dying in 1994 and Nellie Cullen Nolan dying in 2000. Shortly after her sister, Katherine, died in Seattle in 1933, Bridget bought a house near where she was born back in Rosmuc, and in 1948 she moved back to live there. Even in Rosmuc, the locals called her "The Queen". She died in Rosmuc in 1958 and is buried in the local graveyard. Her closest remaining relative in the Seattle area is a grand-niece, Kathleen Donoghue.

AGENTS FOR THE KLONDIKE

Big Speculators Considering the
Question of Sending Them
to the Golden Region.

ALIEN LAW NOT ENFORCED

Plenty of Territory Open to Pre-emp-
tion by Miners—Surveys for Rail-
way Through British Columbia
—Eastern Contingent for
Mines Small.

WORD FROM THE KLONDIKE.

Wall Street Men Not Surprised—Ed-
ward Aylward Writes from
Napoleon Creek, Yukon.

The recent gold discoveries in the Klondike have attracted considerable attention among Wall Street men. Already there are several schemes on foot to form companies to equip expeditions for Alaskan exploration and gold hunting. But the idea that the Yukon district is rich in gold is not entirely new to Wall Street. Several of its capitalists have been watching that part of the country for some time, a few of them having gone so far as to send men there. Apropos of this, a letter recently received by a Wall Street man from his representative sent to Alaska three years ago will be of interest. The letter reads:

NAPOLEON CREEK, YUKON, Alaska,
Dec. 20, 1896.

My Dear Sir: Yours of April 16 reached me about the middle of September. I can assure you that I was glad to hear from you. There is a mail contract for this place, but it is by guess and by God that you get a letter. And we have to pay one dollar per letter.

My wife has left here for a trip to Ireland. She carried with her 150 nuggets of gold, averaging one ounce apiece, which she picked up out here herself.

This country is all excitement. A new field has been struck in the Northwestern Territory. Already 500 claims have been taken up. The gold looks well, and will run from 25 cents to \$8 to the pan. I did not take it in, as I have all I want and more. My gulch is now vacant from my claim up, the boys having looked for the gold on the wrong side of the gulch. The gold runs along the sunny side of the creek, while they looked for it on the cold side. The sunny side is deep, while the frozen side is shallow. The gulch is from 100 to 300 feet wide. I put in all of last Summer sluicing the top of 600 feet off it. I think when I get it ready I will get all the money I want in the 600 feet.

I see a lot in the papers about the hardships of Alaska—men living on clams, finding no gold and other fish stories. The fact of the matter is that the men who come up

here do not find things just as they pictured them in their minds. Some smart writers will say that if you come here you have to fetch money. What can you get for it? When I first came to the Yukon there was one river boat. Now there are five and two barges.

Remember, each man here lays in a year's supply of bacon and beans and flour, &c. That is the custom—grab what you can get in the Fall. This Fall each man got 100 pounds of flour, 25 pounds of sugar, and everything else according. There is lots of bacon and beans here, and lots of whisky at \$20 a gallon and \$6 a bottle. I like whisky, but it does not stay with you like flour on a cold day.

As for my part, I have everything I want for a year. I take advantage of such things and keep a good supply of food on hand. Lots of friends of mine write me, thinking I am starving. But I certainly am not.

As for the outlook in this part of Alaska, it would seem to have a bright future. There is gold everywhere. Men are claim poor. Some got five or six claims in different gulches, and do not know which to start in on first.

I suppose that people in your part of the country think we do like the ground hog—go in our holes in the Fall and come out in the Spring. That is not so. Anybody that wants to, can work all the year round. Burn the ground, save the pay dirt, and work it in the Spring. One fellow made \$50,000 last Winter. I had four men burning for me on shares, and one of them made as high as \$150 in one fire.

My claim is looking better as I go up the gulch. The gold is coarser and there is more of it. I got a fifteen-dollar nugget only yesterday. I burn holes ahead, so as to keep on the pay streak, and wash the top of it in the right place when the water runs. Your truly,

EDWARD AYLWARD.

Published: July 28, 1897

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Edward (or Frank) Aylward was born in Co. Kilkenny, Ireland, in November 1849. His mother was Bridget Grant. He emigrated to the USA in 1867 settling first in California before travelling to the Yukon to mine for gold. North-west of Juneau, Alaska, there is a lake which early miners called Aylward Lake (later renamed Auke Lake) after Edward who had staked mining claims nearby in 1884. In 1894 in the first wedding to take place in Fortymile, Edward married Bridget Mannion, a woman from Co. Galway, Ireland. They mined together in Napoleon Creek until 1896 when Bridget returned to Ireland to visit her family. Shortly after her return from Ireland, Bridget and Edward left the Yukon and moved to live on Seattle's Capitol Hill where Edward died on 29th March 1914. He is buried in Seattle's Calvary Cemetery.

THE QUEEN OF ALASKA

Title Earned by a Seattle Woman on the Yukon.

NOW OWNER OF GOLD NUGGETS

3 Sept. 1896

How Bridget Manion Found Wealth and
a Husband in the Icy North—A
Visitor to the City.

A queen has been visiting Seattle for several days past and few persons have been aware of the fact. Not a real crowned queen, ruler of nations, or one who has a court filled with brilliantly dressed subjects, but the woman who has sprung into local fame as "The Queen of Alaska." She is Mrs. Aylward, of Napoleon gulch, eighty-five miles from Forty-mile creek, a tributary of the Yukon. While the career of this woman is not as remarkable as that of many another noted person, still the fact remains that four years ago she was a servant, and now she is a lady whose wealth would place her among the higher classes, if she so desired. In brief, her history is as follows:

Soon after the great Seattle fire of 1889 Miss Bridget Manion was a cook at the Yesler residence, on James street, between Third and Fourth avenues. In the course of events she went with Capt. Healy and his family to Forty-mile creek, where he is now in charge of the trading post. That was four years ago last July. She was only the housekeeper, but with Mrs. Healy was the first woman to go into that frozen country. There were plenty of men there who had not seen a white woman for a long time, and as she was single, her hand was sought by them in marriage. Not being of the marriageable nature just then, she kept on working at very good wages, accumulating a small fortune.

After Miss Manion had been at Forty-mile

for a long time, and as she was single, her hand was sought by them in marriage. Not being of the marriageable nature just then, she kept on working at very good wages, accumulating a small fortune.

After Miss Manion had been at Forty-mile for a year and nine months, Mr. Aylward was successful in gaining for a wife the first lady of the land. At that time he had located several claims which were paying well. Together they worked the claims, which was not very hard, as the gold was picked up in nuggets. It was at about this time she won the name of "queen." Prospectors were entering the country, and at times were very short of supplies, and during the months when work was out of the question they always found a hearty welcome at Napoleon gulch. Many a man owes Mrs. Aylward a debt of gratitude for having cheered his dark hours.

Last May she left the little home in the gold region and started for the Coast. During the week of August 10 she reached San Francisco. Of course her clothes were not of the latest fashion, and in company with a friend she was fitted out at the Emporium. While there many of the ladies of the city, whose husbands had gone north in search of the glittering gold and to whom she had been a friend in the hour of need, called on her and expressed their thanks. Since then she has visited Tacoma and is now in Seattle, the guest of old friends.

After visiting friends in this city Mrs. Aylward will leave for Boston, to spend a month or more in that city, and then will cross the Atlantic to old Ireland, where her mother now lives at the town of Galway. Returning from there she will again leave for her Northern home, there to remain with her husband for several years, when they will have acquired an independent fortune, and then they will seek the more civilized world. Mrs. Aylward has with her many nuggets, which she has individually picked up on the claims. She has a \$100 necklace, made of nuggets, which she wears around her neck, and also a valuable bracelet.