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## MARGARET MITCHELL: QUARTZ QUEEN OF THE KLONDIKE by Jane Gaffin

Jane Gaffin is a Whitehorse-based freelance writer who specializes in mining.

(Information for this piece relied on Lode Mining in Yukon: An Investigation of Quartz Deposits in the Klondike Division by mining engineer T.A. MacLean, Canada Department of Mines (Honour Roll), Government Printing Bureau, Ottawa, 1914; Margaret and Marie by Darrell Hookey, Yukon Reader, 1998; Gamblers and Dreamers by Charlene Porsild, UBC Press, 1998; and Only a Working Girl: The Story of Marie Joussaye Fotheringham by Carole Gerson, The Northern Review, Winter 1998.)

Mrs. Margaret J. Mitchell (Hall of Fame) wasn't known as "Stampede Maggie" for nothing. Further to the 50-year-old enigma stampeding with the throngs over the Trail of '98, she stampeded around Dawson City streets chasing prey while bearing a lantern for a weapon.

She was definitely a colourful, forceful character, endowed with a strong, fiery, outspoken, cranky, scratchy personality and a warped sense of humour. Some described her as coarse as a fishwife and crude as a miner. In other words, she was a holy terror. She was aggressive, haughty, indignant, bold and never forgot a grudge. But she had a sharp eye for numbers and a good business head for mining, which earned her the title of "The Quartz Queen of the Klondike".

Dawsonites didn't particularly take a shine to the spunky Mrs. Mitchell, who had her own ideas about etiquette and how the world should turn. Her inimitable style of settling disputes in the rough, highly-competitive, corrupt, male-dominated mining world was bopping a miner over the head with her trusty lantern. More than once her actions were rewarded with an overnigher in jail. Nothing cooled her zeal, though.

When she came into town from her cabin, she frequently disturbed the peace--usually while in hot pursuit of a young woman whom Margaret couldn't stomach.

Her arch rival was a 39-year-old women's libber from Ontario who appeared in Dawson in 1903. She was 16 years younger than Margaret, who was born liberated in 1848 and didn't need lessons. Instead of devoting strict attention to writing verse about the working girl and leaving mining to Maggie, this young upstart immediately became a thorn in the older woman's side as a cheat selling interest in mining property she didn't own.

For five years, Margaret stalked Marie Joussaye Fotheringham with disregard that the younger woman's newly-found husband was a former member of the North West Mounted Police. The older woman knew every move the younger woman made. One January night,

Margaret chased her around the streets and in and out of restaurants, stores and houses with her omnipotent lantern.

Marie was sore and retaliated by seeking a peace bond against Margaret and her lantern in court. Three days later, January 28, 1908, after an hour of what was comical exchange to every one in the courtroom except for the principal players, Margaret was placed under peace bonds costing \$200 for a year. Judge Craig then treated both ladies to a stern lecture about proper behaviour in polite society.

Margaret's time, when not consumed with Marie matters, was spent very productively. She meticulously pored over the ledgers in the office of the federal government mining recorder, a graft-infested kingdom in its own rights that was dubbed the Department of Corruption. During the peak of the Klondike gold rush and for 20 years thereafter, the Dawson mining recorder's office was infamous for the amount and extent of its bribery and crooked practices.

Margaret made it her business to be in the right place at the right time doing what was right for her. She was a speculator in properties and a gambler who grubstaked others for a percentage of any gold they might find.

Margaret, like other women mining entrepreneurs of the day, would hire men to carry out the heavy representation work, such as moving gravel on her Hunker Creek and other claims. Heaven help anybody who tried to cheat her. Seemingly, she had counted every gram of her gold still in the creeks and the quartz and knew how many specks of dirt equalled a cubic yard.

She was heralded as "The Quartz Queen" in recognition of the number of claims she owned and her ability for raking in wealth like a casino dealer from option payments on valuable properties she had found to be open for staking.

Plenty of good mining ground was forfeited from lack of representation work when the hordes of Klondike prospectors dashed off to Nome and other Alaskan gold rush camps in 1898-99; or claims lapsed because prospectors, who refused to pay bribes, couldn't move through the queue to the recorder's wicket with the necessary speed to file assessment work on time and would lose their properties. Additionally, the inadequate mining laws of the day didn't provide legally secure tenure of any miner's property.

Margaret watched with hawk-eye vigilance. While researching mining records is when she had discovered what she had suspected all along about Marie Fotheringham not owning the Clear Creek claims. Whenever Marie ended up in court for misrepresenting claims or for not paying debts, Margaret was always present as a one-person jeering section.

Even if Dawsonites didn't care much for Maggie Mitchell, the geologists admired her. The Mitchell Vein is still well-known in geological circles.

D.D. Cairnes (Honour Roll) of the Geological Survey of Canada reported on the Mitchell Group of claims in his 1911 GSC publication titled Quartz Mining in Klondike.

In 1912, mining engineer T.A. MacLean of the department of mines visited the Mitchell Group of 31 claims which extended over the summit of the divide between Gold Bottom Creek and the right fork of Hunker Creek. Mrs. Mitchell's cabin was a half mile north of the King Solomon Dome summit.

Mrs. Mitchell had optioned her property to a Mr. A.E. Garvey of Vancouver, British Columbia, and he intended to develop it during the field season of 1913, MacLean wrote. Work was confined mostly to the Egan, Castle, Arctic and Portland Fair, the latter mineral claim where the Mitchell cabin was built.

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell was said to be physically and mentally spry until her death at age 72 in 1920.

She was inducted into the Yukon Prospectors' Association's Hall of Fame in 1988. Her name is inscribed on a brass plate attached to the Hall of Fame artpiece displayed in the foyer of the Yukon government administration building. Her name also is engraved in the base of the bronze prospector statue that watches over downtown Whitehorse from Main Street and Third Avenue.

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