

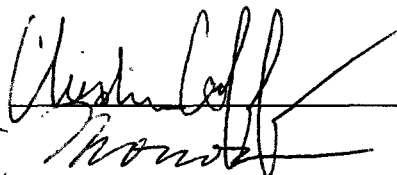
MARGARET KEENAN HARRAIS:


A BIOGRAPHY IN FOUR VOICES

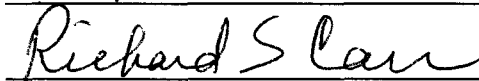
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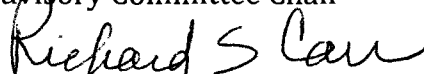
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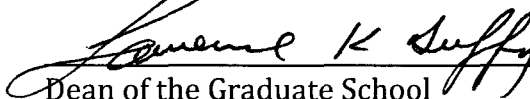


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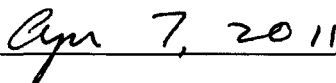
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MARGARET KEENAN HARRAIS:
A BIOGRAPHY IN FOUR VOICES

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
Of the University of Alaska Fairbanks

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

Sarah Doetschman, B.A., M.A.

Fairbanks, Alaska

May 2011

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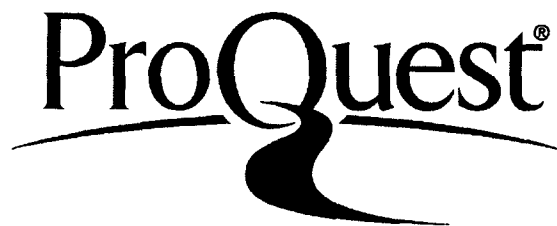
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Abstract

Narrative strategies available to biography are explored through the life of Margaret Keenan Harrais—teacher, educational administrator, judge, and activist. Biography is a particular endeavor requiring flexible inquiry and creative presentation. Margaret is viewed through multiple lenses that explore personhood, encourage readers' introspection, and imply the importance of the individual in history.

The four voices indicated in the title of this dissertation are editorial, analytical, sparsely Romantic, and expository. This biography aims to complicate readers' notions of what it means to be a person in relation to other people by focusing closely on selected episodes in Margaret's career; analyzing their historical, social, and literary import; and finally broadening the perspective to include the entirety of Margaret's life. The roles of the biographer and the reader are examined throughout in an attempt to explore the interconnections between biography and autobiography.

Margaret's life is presented within the contexts of other women teachers in rural areas, as well as other men and women who wrote about territorial Alaska for a non-Alaskan audience. At heart this biography seeks to experiment with the narrative possibilities available to biographers, and to explore the ways in which the effects of these narratives allow for the contribution to general scholarship on the basis of particular experiences.

Dedicated to

Charles Fern Doetschman

and in memory of

Mary Elizabeth Thomas Doetschman

Ruth Gambrill Peterson Kumlin

John Alden Peterson

Howard Kumlin

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Introduction

Narrowing Narrative Choices:

This Biography

Introduction

This dissertation is a biography. It grew out of a life-long interest in the ways individuals and groups depict themselves and others in text. This biography is, therefore, rooted in a love for literature. The subject of this biography, Margaret Keenan Harrais (1872-1964), was at first incidental. However, as I imagine happens with all biographers and their subjects, I have developed a complex relationship with her. By the time I began the composition of this biography, Margaret herself had become most important. The aspects of her life that had become accessible to me determined the form and focus of the biography more than my interests at the beginning of the research process. These interests, nevertheless, remain strong.

In this introduction I will provide an overview of the discussions engendered by biography and ethnography; the overview is intended to provide readers with a sense of the voices that have most informed the narrative choices I made. The initial interests that I brought to this endeavor include how a person is constituted and represented as a self, as well as the potential of *reading* to evoke critical self-reflection that leads to greater understanding of our shared humanity. As a student I have resisted strict disciplinary delineations at almost every step, so this dissertation grew significantly out of a desire to

explore the possibility of academic inquiry that allows for crossover between disciplines. After a general overview, I will preview the structure of this biography with more explicit explanation for the choices I have made.

Biography as a Genre

When I decided that my dissertation would take the form of a biography, I wanted to understand how biography is commonly understood in terms of art and the academy. In his 2008 book *Biography: A User's Guide*, Carl Rollyson describes the fact that biography is largely missing from academic curricula as a symptom: “[T]he disciplines have created almost no space for the biographer, sensing that biography represents an anti-disciplinary or, if you will, an interdisciplinary threat to disciplinary rigor and integrity. To the discipline-bound, biography is corruption; it is an affront to the academically fastidious.”¹ He singles out English departments for not treating biography as a literary genre: “English professors would rather teach second-rate novels than first-rate biographies. The very idea that biography is a genre worth studying is absent in the anthologies that dominate the discipline in college classrooms.”² I cannot recall ever being assigned a biography in a literature course.

The suitability of biography for interdisciplinary study is most pronounced in Susan Tridgell’s *Understanding Our Selves: The Dangerous Art of Biography* (2004). She answers the critique that biographies are not treated as literature by performing literary criticism on a selection of biographies. Intensively approaching only a few texts from many angles, and devoting close attention to ethical and moral effects of narrative

choice, Tridgell examines the potential for biography to contribute to theories of selfhood. Included in her critiques are suggestions for how she might have handled the material differently. Her multi-dimensional approach to analysis of biography helped to provide the foundation for the method of presentation that I attempt in this biography.

Rollyson, in his 2005 book, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography*, uses a biographical approach to perform critical analysis of biography. Rollyson, a prolific biographer of still-living people, makes no apology for biography: "Writing biography is a shameless profession, an exercise in bad taste, and a rude inquiry. Most biographers I have met prefer not to say so in public."³ Rollyson then biographizes biographers and their reviewers, underscoring the inevitability of political charges in biography through anecdotal tales as well as research into other people's research habits. For example, he states that after Lillian Helmann closed her archival collection to all but the biographer she had authorized, Rollyson re-created the collection from the doctoral theses written about her while the collection was still public.⁴ Most audacious is his position that biographers can be as "blood-sucking" and "cold-blooded" toward their subject and subject's friends as possible because ultimately biographers turn the subject's life into their own experience. Both Tridgell and Rollyson argue that an appropriate response to a biography is another biography, a position that suggests biography might best be considered a letter awaiting a response.

Discussions of biography frequently turn to the rarity with which biographies are considered contributions to art or to academic discourse. In her essay in *The Seductions of Biography* (1996), Phyllis Rose describes feeling misunderstood as a biographer: "My

book about Josephine Baker was to be as much about the racial ideologies that lay behind and prepared for her triumph in Europe in the twenties—both enthusiastic primitivism and proto-Nazi racism—as it was about her individual life. Biography's bias toward individual life increasingly frustrated me."⁵ I identify with Rose's frustration because often when I explain to people what kind of biography I am attempting to write, my own interest in narrative effects and questions of identity and representation meet with less enthusiasm than when I just tell people about Margaret herself.

That the life of a person is the skeleton of every biography can result in unsophisticated reading of biography. Tridgell attributes the lack of literary analysis of biography to "the tendency of literary critics to treat biographies as 'transparent' containers of knowledge."⁶ Rollyson criticizes treatment of biography that questions the subject's worthiness, argues ways in which the biographer has mis-read his or her subject, and views the biography as "a story to be retold as if the reviewer wrote the biography."⁷ Similarly, in a brief 1990 article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Elizabeth Young-Buehl points out that reviewers of biography focus on the quality of the subject's life rather than the quality of the biography.⁸ Most succinctly, William H. Epstein states in his Introduction to *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Post-modern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism* (1990): "[B]iography and biographical criticism have commonly been treated as conservative, if not reactionary, generic formations, as defenders of the status quo and therefore unlikely agents of change."⁹ Biographies are evaluated based on their correspondence to notions of what is real and true, not necessarily for the ways in which they make meaning.

That this almost exclusive focus on veracity bothers so many biographers seems to point to questions of value. In her 1999 study of prize-winning biographies, *Reflections on Biography*, Paula R. Backscheider delineates between academic and professional biography. She critiques academic biography: "[A]cademics are taught to 'survey the literature', to locate and know everything written on the subject. Obvious dangers of the academic approach are tendencies toward encyclopaedic recitations of facts. . .and an unwillingness to assign and exploit the drama suggested by configuration of facts," and further, "most academics feel at least some degree of distrust for average readers."¹⁰ This definition of academic biography can help toward understanding why biographies are not given the status of novels in both the academic study of literature and in the book review industry.

One of the jobs of a literary critic is to analyze character in terms of an overall structure and meaning. But what gives the literary critic license to speak freely and authoritatively on the question of character is the assumption that the character is the creation of a mind and not a representation of someone who really lived. Reality is not assumed to be at stake; therefore, in literary criticism of fiction the narrator is often treated as an additional character and is not assumed to be the writer. The writer is thereby assumed to be consciously putting on a rhetorical persona and to be deliberately making narrative choices. However, in biographies, just as the characters are representations, so is the narrator assumed to represent the writer. While deception, sneakiness, and trickery in narrators are frequently celebrated in literary criticism and theory, they are not tolerated in biography. The limitation of what really happened on the

writer (assumed to be the narrator) and on the reader (believed to stand in equal relation to what really happened as the writer) precludes the writer's power to dabble in the creative. While I do not engage many fictional strategies in this biography, I do attempt to play with the assumption that the narrator's voice is necessarily the voice of the author.

Because I embarked on this biography with the desire to somehow engage Margaret in collaboration, discourse on ethnography has been extremely influential. Although I do not believe I succeeded in collaboration, the problems that ethnographers face through the fact of their subjects' ability to continue speaking have greatly informed my choices. Corinne E. Glesne, in her 1998 essay "Ethnography with a Biographic Eye," argues that the most fundamental difference between the ethnographer and the biographer lies in the former's identity as researcher and the latter's identity as writer: "Ethnographers use the 'story' metaphor, but their stories sometimes fail to mesmerize."¹¹ Glesne's point is that ethnographers can learn from biographers "that emotional involvement can also be an effective form of communication."¹² She concludes with a brief meditation of how she could imagine herself becoming more like a biographer: "I imagine that I would be moved to delve more deeply into my own emotions and ways of being, to explore the autobiographical nature of biography. I imagine too that I would learn to convey my insight in a way that *spiritually connects* as good music connects with complete strangers [emphasis hers]."¹³ The power of biography to engage the reader in self-reflection lies at the heart of the ordering of chapters in this biography and is influenced by experiments in reflexive ethnography. The autobiographical tendencies of biography are brought to the forefront in chapter six.

The relationships between writer and subject, writer and reader, and reader and subject that are fundamental to all life-writing parallel the multi-dimensionality of influence that can often be overlooked in other approaches to history. For example, in “Retelling the Death of Barbue, a Gwich’in Leader” (1996), Shepard Krech III provides an ethnohistoric study of the dynamic between the Gwich’in, Hudson's Bay Company, and other traders on the basis of a biographical study of a Gwich’in leader: Barbue. By using a biographical approach, Krech is able to analyze not only the changing cultural practices among the Gwich’in in their relations to Euro-American traders, but also to emphasize the influences and effects of these Gwich’in practices on the Euro-American traders.¹⁴ Biography is uniquely able to emphasize the relational aspects of human interaction in such a way that highlights a more complex reality than subordinated and subordinator. Exploring mutual influences between individuals and institutional policies lies at the heart of chapter three.

Parallel to the relationships depicted in life-writing are the relationships formed in the *process* of life-writing. Just as Glesne finds that ethnographers can learn from biographers, biographers can learn from ethnographers’ explorations of the dynamics between writer and subject. In his 1986 essay “A Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document,” Stephen A. Tyler focuses on the experience of reader. He argues for polyphony in ethnography in order to *evoke* a listening experience that can lead to ethical meaning. He expounds: “Since evocation is nonrepresentational, it is not to be understood as a sign function, for it is not ‘a symbol of,’ nor does it ‘symbolize’ what it evokes.... It is not a presence that calls into being

something that was absent; it is a coming to be of what was neither there present nor absent.”¹⁵ Tyler interlinks author, text, and reader in relation to the way in which meaning is created in ethnographies. His objection to representation rests on the problems of power that accompany any kind of writing, which he attempts to circumvent by presenting “the author-text-reader [as] an emergent mind.”¹⁶ For a biographer the following holds true as well: “Her text depends on the reader’s supplementation. The incompleteness of the text implicates the work of the reader, and his work derives as much, if not more, from the oral world of everyday expression and commonsense understanding as it does from the world of text.”¹⁷ Tyler’s exposition on the relationship between author, text, reader, and meaning strongly influenced the experimentation I attempt with narrative voice, particularly in chapter five of this biography, and it describes the kind of reading I would like to foster.

That readers might experience a heightened sense of their own particularity and contingency when reading life-writing was an important impetus for many of the narrative choices I made in this biography. In response to the collection in which Tyler’s piece appears, ten years later (1997) Allison James, Jenny Hockey, and Andrew Dawson published *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*. In the Introduction, the editors suggest that the consciousness that subjects represent from within a particular and contingent situatedness necessitates that the researcher acknowledge his or her own particular and contingent situatedness as well. Although the particulars will differ, the existence of this dynamic provides a universality of human experience that cannot be denied.

In “Representing the Anthropologist’s Predicament,” Lisette Josephides describes an approach to ethnography that highlights the researcher’s self-consciousness: “The self-reflexive ethnographic approach is understood as one that questions its authority but does not abandon interpretation.”¹⁸ This stance assumes that the writer and reader have a common understanding already, and it assumes that the writer has been in “constantly negotiated positionings” with the subjects that has achieved some stability, that has involved a “personal commitment for the ethnographer, which results in her transformation.”¹⁹ Barring truly collaborative *writing*, with its own attendant complexities, it seems difficult to avoid the primacy of the writer’s interpretation, or at least the appearance of such primacy. But Josephides interested me in trying an ordering of material that would provide less overt interpretation in early chapters in order to give more weight to the subjects’ own interpretations of events. Nevertheless, because the final presentation of each subject’s point of view is the result of my selection and ordering of material; my interpretation is necessarily a driving force in the story.

Josephides denies that an ethnography can be formed based on pre-conceived theoretical knowledge: “There can be no blueprint on how to do fieldwork. It really depends on the local people, and for this reason we have to construct our theories of how to do fieldwork *in the field* [emphasis hers].”²⁰ Such a position underscores the theory-defying quality noted by biographers, and it is certainly the experience that I had as the material itself began to narrow and guide my narrative choices. I began to see the work of biographer as analogous to that of a sculptor: the essential material inspires, and can only be shaped, not fundamentally transformed.

The various materials I had to work with in telling Margaret's story were far from uniform, and the realization that this biography could be presented in chapters that were also not uniform I owe largely to Richard Holmes' *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (2000). Holmes explores the lives of twenty characters he encountered as peripheral to his larger biographical pursuits. The glimpses are connected by short introductions that serve as Holmes' autobiographical explanations and asides. In spite of the similarities in theme and focus of the individual pieces, their genres and structures are remarkably varied, from the essay to the sketch to the radio play to the love story. Holmes' narrative strategy explicitly highlights the ways in which material guides structure and question.

Perhaps to maintain a sense of pleasure rather than work, Holmes dispenses with all documentation. He paints scenes and moods and conversations without mention of their sources. Nevertheless, the reader is inclined to believe the narrator because of the inclusion of speculative declarations, such as this one about Mary Wollstonecraft: "She had always longed to go to America, and had she lived, I suspect she would have persuaded Godwin to make a new life there."²¹ Nothing warrants this statement but Holmes' hunch, and yet his pieces convince us that his hunch is substantive. Similarly, Carl Rollyson explains in both of his books that much of the material that he leaves out in his biographies, he feels the reader will still grasp. As an example he writes: "Hellman used sex or flirtatiousness as a form of control. She also just enjoyed flirting. I didn't say either of these things, because I had built up a pattern in the book that did not require me to explain."²² In this way both Holmes and Rollyson suggest ways in which knowledge

can be legitimized through voice rather than documentation. Chapters five and six were influenced by their stances toward voice and source.

What the subject really thought at any given moment is necessarily a construct of the biographer's imagination, albeit informed. Backscheider is particularly creative and interesting when discussing the problem of what the subject really thought. Offering a personal anecdote from her childhood, in which her sister cut off her hair on only one side of her head and then stopped, Backscheider delves into descriptions of the many ways a biographer could explain this event. She then asks her sister to explain it. Her sister has no idea why she did it and posits: "'Lots of kids cut their hair...maybe it's a kid thing.'"²³ Rollyson similarly examines: "How to enter another's mind? On the other hand, how to know one's own mind? the biographer might reply. No one can know himself or herself in the round, so to speak."²⁴ To make explicit why I have made the interpretations of Margaret that I have—to the extent that I am aware of the reasons for my own hunches—is the strategy I adopt in chapter six.

Dabbling in questions of what it means to be a person at all can place creative power into the hands of biographers. Interesting responses to Backscheider's opening warnings that "only an enemy touches the very soul" and "biography is wonderful and terrible" can be found in both Rollyson and Tridgell.²⁵ Rollyson would certainly declare that an enemy can be a very good biographer. He would say: let's revel in the terrible; the terrible is what makes biography wonderful. His reasoning is intriguing, though counter to generally accepted conventions of privacy and respect:

To admit of such an interest [wanting to speak with her housekeeper] in Susan Sontag's housekeeping is considered scandalous by those who treat literary figures and literature as somehow detachable from the life that everyone else lives. What I like about biography is that it is a great leveler. The high and the low, the great and the small, make their beds and sleep in them.²⁶

While Rollyson does not present a systematic discussion of what constitutes a person and a person's life, he loudly asserts that everyone is many selves and stories, and we all have the right to narrate. In this way Rollyson was a constant counter-voice for me as I attempted to make narrative choices grounded in the discourse on ethics provided by the ethnographers.

Tridgell's entire book is a deeper look at questions of what constitutes a person and how a person makes meaning of his or her own life as well as the life of another; and as such, it most closely fed my initial interest in biography as a genre. In her attention to narrative structures, she examines recent criticisms, especially within some feminist and post-modern theories, of linear narrative. Tridgell wants to re-value a linear narrative self and demonstrates that there are problems inherent in views of selves both as continuous and as discontinuous. She argues that a linear narrative does not have to be equated with belief in *the* self; there can be many linear narratives of *a* self. Similarly, James Clifford states in his 1978 article "Hanging Up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners":

Ethnobiographical Prospects": "Biography, relying on little theoretical sophistication but placing its faith in the storyteller's arts, manages with surprising consistency to make us believe in the existence of a self."²⁷ Tridgell's literary discussion of narrative voice, perspective, and structure is invested with questions of ethics and morality. She identifies a cultural anxiety about the complexity of reality: "The wide range of impressions which

biography can give of their biographical subject may initially seem unsettling: but this is only a problem if we think of people as simple objects which can be seen in only one way.”²⁸

The notion that every person to some extent conceives of his or her life as a narrative or a series of narratives is potent and makes a good case for the poly-vocal narrative approach that I have attempted in this biography. Rollyson argues explicitly that all people are concerned with control over how they are perceived. He declares that biographers must daringly assert their own perception in narrative: “There is no purely apprehended life, and where there is no purity, there is evil, corruption.”²⁹ His metaphors are brutal: the biographer devours and consumes and ultimately cannibalizes. Underneath this violence, however, Rollyson calls for the ethical importance of biography: its ability to make everyone count. This stance was what finally liberated me from anxieties over how I would make Margaret and her contingents look, even while using their own words.

Considering the general popularity of biography, Rollyson’s complaint that reviewers and critics refuse to read biography literarily suggests that when it comes to biography, readers are more sophisticated than reviewers and critics. Therefore, Bakscheider's claim that a good biography must absorb the reader is worth closer attention. Rollyson's metaphors of the biographer devouring and consuming the subject are in Bakscheider more applicable to the relationship between the biographer and the reader: the biographer through his or her writing devours the reader. The metaphor Bakscheider uses for this relationship is soul-mates, and she calls readers “long-imagined magic beings.”³⁰ Drawing on the physiology of reading, Bakscheider explains:

In a state of absorption, the reader is transported into the content of the book and is hard to distract; in entrancement, she or he is harder to distract and, when interrupted, feels a momentary confusion as though awakening from sleep. Research has proved that during the latter, the consciousness of readers is altered, and their respiration, skin tension, and heart rates fall.³¹

This description suggests that reading is similar to drug-taking, implicating the biographer as a pusher or a doctor with tremendous power over the reader, which Bakscheider also acknowledges: “Strong narrative in particular aids in absorption and it is an especially powerful and dangerous part of the biographer's art.”³² Although she doesn't fully explain what “strong narrative” means, she paints this devouring of reader as necessary for successful biography.

Bakscheider's description of good biography is devoted to an ideal of reading as removing the reader from everyday living and interruptions as much as possible. The narrative voice should focus on subsuming the reader into a world, without comments that will bring to the readers' attention that they have not actually been incorporated. In other words, the narrative voice should appear to be an invisible and unintentional, naïve force, the precise position that Rollyson and Tridgell take issue with and that Holmes counters with his creative narrative strategies. I attempt to foster more self-reflective reading habits in the narrative choices I have made in this biography.

Tridgell was again a guide for me. She emphasizes the consumptive power of the illusion of a naïve and unintended narrative. She points to ways the biographer looms over his or her subject in an unequal relationship: “The invisibility of the biographer's private actions (and the reader's) in contrast to the way in which the biographical subject's actions are exposed, makes the biographer into a giant powerful figure, the

subject into one who is ‘rather under life size.’”³³ I have tried to incorporate self-reflexivity and to highlight the reality that I, the researcher and writer, am also a human being in chapter six.

Tridgell emphasizes the interconnection between narrative and moral accountability. She critiques philosophical and sociological views on what constitutes a self that depict the subject in such a compassionate light “that his or her victims may slide out of focus.”³⁴ The most compelling case study in Tridgell's book is her look at two biographies by Gitta Sereny of nazi officials Franz Stangl and Albert Speer. Sereny's method interweaves the subjects' own narratives with those of holocaust survivors; while she aims to depict the men's inner lives, their victims are not invisible or silenced. Tridgell presents her explication as an illustration that the notion of a narrative self does not necessarily suggest that that self perceives accountability for the narrative. Her discussion helped me to understand how concealing some of the less admirable events in Margaret's life could present injury to the other characters in Margaret's story.

These concerns of biographers with respect to their subjects, their compositions, and their readers highlights the slipperiness of biography as a genre. Narrative experimentation is perhaps biography's most fundamental theoretical underpinning. The form of each biography will be determined by the research details in combination with the biographer's own pre-occupation at the time of composition. In such a way biography provides unique opportunities for studying narrative itself. In addition, approaching any topic through a biographical lens will reveal dynamic relationships between people; between subjects and researchers; between people and institutions; and between readers,

writers, and subjects. Biographical approaches to phenomena can be used in all academic disciplines and would enrich each one.

This Biography

Biography as a form inspired me to embark on this writing project far more than interest in an individual person. In fact, I did not choose the subject for this biography until I was satisfied with my knowledge of forms of life-writing across several disciplines. The order of my interests makes me somewhat unusual as a biographer, according to Carl Rollyson: “Most biographers, in my experience, do not know the history of the genre. They are attracted to biography because of the subject, not because biography per se intrigues them.”³⁵ I began to think of my presentational options long before I found my subject, and the form I thought this biography would take changed many times over the years of research. However, my initial ideal—that I would write a biography that was not authoritative—has not been broken.

As the form developed, I most certainly experienced the force of the material in the composition and identify closely with the ideas presented here that link method and theory with the substance itself. Many times I tried to imagine a narrative that did not absorb the reader in a desire to counter Backscheider’s claim. I thought of texts I had read and films I had watched that seem to aim to alienate their audiences. I attempted such narratives, and I liked them poetically, but eventually I had to concede that they would likely turn most readers away. I would still like to write such a narrative, but it was not feasible within the venue of a dissertation. I would label this biography an academic

biography; however, I have certainly not sought every shred of information I could have sought, nor will readers find here more than a fraction of the information I did locate. I agree with Rollyson that knowledge about Margaret will come through to readers even if they do not know every single detail that I know, because my knowledge will be in the pitch of the narrators' voices.

I wanted to experiment with narrative voice more than I have achieved. I essayed many narratives along the way with different voices. I tried a lengthy piece in which I narrated my own life story in the voice I imagined Margaret would have and from her perspective. It was a scary enterprise, and I would never share it. But it did help me to clarify some of our points of similarity and difference, and what ideals I feel she truly held, and what actions I take in daily life that are utterly hypocritical vis a vis my own ideals. I attempted more lyrical passages written in the first-person from Margaret's perspective, but they always felt like a total fabrication, as if I were forcing Margaret's voice to sing in a vocal range that her larynx could never accommodate. None of these writing exercises is in this dissertation; however, they greatly inform it.

This biography is in five chapters. It begins when Margaret is 51 years old. The first two chapters encompass the last decade or so of Margaret's teaching career, and I ask the reader to jump in with only sparse background on her life up until then. I do this in an attempt to play with the ways in which biography can be similar to getting to know a person over time. I ask readers to acquaint themselves with Margaret based on relationships she had with two women who did not end up liking her very much. These two chapters are narrated in what I would call an editor's voice, in which the narrator

allows the characters to speak as much as possible in their own voices via their letters. The narrator provides information about era, location, historical background, and character background. The narrator tries to limit her judgment to speculation as much as possible. I took Tridgell's style of offering readers alternative ways of interpreting the events when it seemed appropriate.

Chapters three and four are written in an academic voice. Chapter three offers readers my perspective on the material in chapters one and two with respect to the documents on which those chapters are based, the order in which I found the documents, and the ways in which my perspective on that era of Margaret's life changed over time. Chapter three also backtracks in order to offer readers a glimpse into Margaret's career up until her arrival in chapter one. Ideally, I would want readers to reconsider their assessment of the events of chapters one and two in light of chapter three. In other words, I am not concerned with absorbing the reader in chapter three, as I am in chapters one and two; instead, I am concerned with asking for critical reflection on readers' own readings of chapters one and two.

Chapter three also attempts to enter the conversation emerging in education studies that is grounded in the use of biographical material. Four uses of such material are described by Barbara Finkelstein in her essay "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History" (1998):

[a] the use of biography as a lens through which to explore the origin of new ideas..., [b] biography offers a window on social possibility..., [c] biography provides an aperture through which to view relationships between educational processes and social change..., [d] and biography can be constituted as a form of mythic overhaul—a way to see through the over-

determinacies of historical story-telling—and glimpse the variables and complexities of life within a single era or over long periods.³⁶

In relation to educational history, biographies offer a way to show limitations and possibilities of education structures by having an individual glimpse. Finkelstein concludes that biographical studies “provide the documentary context within which to judge the relative power of material and ideological circumstances, the meaning of educational policy, the utility of schooling, the definition of literacy and the relationship between teaching and learning and policy and practice.”³⁷

William F. Pinar and Anne E. Pautz (1998) describe the importance of biographical studies in curriculum theory as ways to understand the multiple calls to teach and the relationships between teachers and students. They praise biography for being able to break out of theorizing rhetorics: “We cannot patronizingly invite others to speak if their voices are the objects of our desires, our fantasies of our own power and pedagogy. Rather, we might act the way midwives act, providing support for other voices.”³⁸ And Jane Martin (2003) describes her work as discovering the “creative intersections between human agency and social structures.”³⁹ In her examination of the minutes and political campaigns of the London Board of Education, she discovers that little-known women were instrumental in shaping educational policy, and their rhetoric adheres to ideas of “the good woman” in their use of visuals of femininity to substantiate their power. Informed by these biographical approaches to educational history, and with an ethnohistoric eye, chapter three presents the problems of rural schools in the territory of Alaska as well as problems facing female teachers.

Chapter four is a work of literary analysis that attempts to critique Margaret's autobiographical manuscript using the reactions to it of her contemporaries as a framework. I was attracted to Margaret as a subject first because of her manuscript *Alaska Periscope* and the attending correspondence. I began with an interest in the ways others have used her manuscript in historical studies, quoting and paraphrasing the document as if it did not have a context outside of itself. Then I became intrigued by Margaret's insistence that the manuscript was complete, and only over many years did I develop what I consider to be a solid opinion on why she would not make revisions. I identify with Margaret's ethic of writing that eschews revision. As a writing teacher, I have mulled over her position repeatedly and am interested to continue grappling with it.

Chapter five grows directly out of chapter four in that a chronological biographical narrative of Margaret's life is presented inspired by Margaret's ethic of writing. I attempt to construct a narrator whose voice is inflected by Margaret's presentation of herself in her writing, but whose knowledge is grounded in my own research on Margaret. In order to write a complete draft that should not withstand a revision, I read *Alaska Periscope* again as quickly and in as few sittings as was practical, and then composed the narrative in two sittings as soon after the reading as possible. Inspired by Tyler's suggestion that text is an evocation, and that writer, reader, and subject combine to make meaning, I use a narrative voice that tries to merge Margaret's style and opinions with my own. The lack of transitions and the sparseness of the narrative leave room for the reader's style and opinion as well.

The final chapter provides a commentary on chapter five. The relationship between chapters five and six is heavily influenced by Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* (1962). In this novel the fictitious John Shade writes a poem entitled "Pale Fire," which the fictitious Kinbote edits with a commentary that reveals the latter's delusion that the poem is Shade's biographical tribute to Kinbote. In chapter six I write as my personal self. I have shaken my academic voice; I have shaken Margaret's voice. I speak from my personal experience with Margaret, her materials, and this biography directly to you, the reader. In such a way I attempt to offer the reader a sense of my own contexts and contingencies, as well as to provide more detail on what aspects of chapter five are based in verifiable fact and what aspects connote my own ascriptions. Originally rooted in the desire to use life-history methods in this biography, chapter six began as a commentary on chapter five in the spirit of pretending that chapter five was Margaret's oral narration. Therefore, chapter six is a series of fragments inspired by phrases in the text of chapter five. As Kinbote appeals to his readers, I invite you to read the commentary randomly, chronologically, side by side with chapter five, or even, before you read chapters one, two, three, and four. Chapters five and six do not contain overt documentation. Inspired by Holmes and Rollyson, I opt to allow the stories to unfold without the intrusion of academic citation. Instead, I have included a Note on Sources section, which is organized according to topic, and which contains all of the sources consulted for these chapters.

The form of this biography is not novelistic. I have tried with these various approaches to the material to reach a wide audience. Some will like some chapters more

than others, depending on where their own interests lie. I hope that readers will take from this biography not just a sense of who Margaret was as a living, breathing human being, but also a sense of how the life of a human being can be told in myriad ways. I could, but I won't, write this biography again and again. Each composition would reveal something new about Margaret and about me and probably about you as well. And that is the nature of biography.

Note on Names and Quotations

Margaret's parents named her Sarah Margaret Keenan; she went by Sadie until she left Ohio to study in Indiana, at which time she dropped the Sarah part of her name altogether. Sadie must have seemed an entirely unsophisticated name to her, but I don't know why Sarah was an unacceptable substitute. I have always loved my name, primarily because it seems serious to me and is not easily turned into a diminutive. I never refer to her as Sarah Margaret Keenan Harrais anywhere else but here because she clearly wished to shrug that Sarah.

In chapters one and two I refer to all parties by the names in the letters. Therefore, everyone except the children and Edward Jackson are named with titles. Both Margaret and Marie refer to Edward Jackson as Mickey in spite of the fact that his wife is referred to as Mrs. Jackson and the other fathers of the children are referred to as Mr.. I don't know the reason for this fact. In the rest of the dissertation first and last names are used the first time I mention someone; after that, I use just first names unless ambiguity necessitates repetition of last names. The exception to this rule is when I refer to the

people whose scholarship supports my discussions. In those cases I stick with the academic tradition of referring to people by last name only.

Similarly, when I quote published sources, typographical errors are denoted by [sic]. However, when I quote from unpublished archival materials, typographical and spelling errors are corrected with brackets. Punctuation—including dashes, hyphens, ellipses, underlines, capitals, and parentheticals—used in the letters and *Alaska Periscope* is reproduced exactly. When Margaret and Marie used thirteen dots in their ellipses, I counted them and reproduced them; I did likewise with the number of hyphens that create dashes. I used this method primarily because I am in love with the particularity that their era of letter-writing afforded that we have since lost with word processing programs. I do it as a tribute to the individual personality that was conveyed in punctuation before autoformat.

1. Carl Rollyson, *Biography: A User's Guide* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 46-47.

2. *Ibid.*, 118.

3. Carl Rollyson, *A Higher Form of Cannibalism?: Adventures in the Art and Politics of Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005), 178.

4. *Ibid.*, 137.

5. Phyllis Rose, "Confessions of a Burned-Out Biographer," in *The Seductions of Biography*, eds. Mary Rhiel and David Suchoff (New York and London: Routledge, 1996), 134.

6. Susan Tridgell, *Understanding Our Selves: The Dangerous Art of Biography* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), 26.

7. Rollyson, *Cannibalism*, 60.

8. Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, "The Complexities and Rewards of Biography Should Be Better Appreciated on Campuses," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 10, 1990, B1.

9. William H. Epstein, "Introduction: Contesting the Subject," in *Contesting the Subject: Essays in the Postmodern Theory and Practice of Biography and Biographical Criticism*, ed. William H. Epstein (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue UP, 1991), 2.

10. Paula R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), xix.

12. Corrine E. Glesne, "Ethnography with a Biographic Eye," in *Writing Educational Biography: Explorations in Qualitative Research*, ed. Craig Kridel (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 39.

13. *Ibid.*, 41.

14. *Ibid.*, 42-43.

16. Shepard Krech III, "Retelling the Death of Barbue, a Gwich'in Leader," in *Reading beyond Words: Contexts for Native History*, eds. Jennifer Brown and Elizabeth Vibert (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1996), 182-215.

17. Stephen A. Tyler, "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California Press, 1986), 129-130.

18. *Ibid.*, 133.

19. *Ibid.*, 138.

20. Lisette Josephides, "Representing the Anthropologist's Predicament," in *After Writing Culture: Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology*, eds. Allison James, Jenny Hockey, and Andrew Dawson (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 17.

21. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, 32.

24. Richard Holmes, *Sidetracks: Explorations of a Romantic Biographer* (New York: Vintage, 2000), 236.

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25. Rollyson, *A User's Guide*, 80.
 26. *Ibid.*, 98.
 27. Rollyson, *A User's Guide*, 93.
 28. Backscheider, xv-xvi.
 29. Rollyson, *Cannibalism*, 63.
 30. James Clifford, "Hanging up Looking Glasses at Odd Corners": Ethnobiographical Prospects," in *Studies in Biography*, ed. Daniel Aaron (Cambridge and London: Harvard UP, 1978), 44.
 31. Tridgell, 46
 32. Rollyson, *Cannibalism*, 56.
 33. Backscheider, xvii.
 34. *Ibid.*, 11.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. Tridgell, 148.
 37. *Ibid.*, 101.
 38. Rollyson, *A User's Guide*, 138.
 39. Barbara Finkelstein, "Revealing Human Agency: The Uses of Biography in the Study of Educational History," in Kridel, 47.
 40. *Ibid.*, 50.
 41. William F. Pinar and Anne E. Pautz, "Construction Scars: Autobiographical Voice in Biography," in Kridel, 71.
 42. Jane Martin, "The Hope of Biography: The Historical Recovery of Women Educator Activists," *History of Education* 32.2 (March 2003), <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?hid=107&sid=4dc11f54-d7f3-445a-9a80-975d726102a4%40sessionmgr114&vid=4&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=aph&AN=10316767> (accessed March 3, 2011).

Chapter 1

Battle for the School, McCarthy, Alaska 1924-1931

When Margaret Keenan Harrais arrived in McCarthy, Alaska in August of 1924, she had a successful career as a teacher and administrator in Idaho under her belt, had recently recovered from a near-fatal bout with the 1918 flu, and was newly married. She was 51 years old. Her husband, Martin Luther Harrais, was prospecting in the Upper Chitina region and was about to stake a claim. He planned to file a homestead claim as well. Mrs. Harrais had been living in La Mesa, California, gardening and raising chickens; Mr. Harrais spent some of each winter with her but had to attend to his Alaskan claims most of the year. When the McCarthy school needed a new teacher, Mrs. Harrais wrote to Territorial Commissioner of Education Lester Henderson that she was interested in the position. Mr. Harrais had a long-standing friend in McCarthy who would support her as teacher, but Mr. Harrais expressed his doubts that his wife would last as McCarthy's teacher. She insisted that she would hold her own there:

Martin is not at all optimistic over the situation; thinks I may succeed in teaching out this one year, since I have an iron-clad contract, but that I must not expect a renewal of the contract for another year. I accept the challenge. I have nailed my colors to the mast and have no intention of dipping them to the powers that be. If I do not teach in McCarthy, I am just heady enough to think that will be McCarthy's loss, not mine.¹

Mrs. Harrais' motivation to continue teaching rested on the belief that Alaska would enact a teacher pension program, and she knew she would need more years as a teacher in

the territory to qualify for it. But teaching was also a passionate endeavor for Mrs. Harrais, who was restless by nature and believed in her ability to improve life for those who wished to work hard. She went to McCarthy with hope for the future.

The town of McCarthy was about four miles from the Kennecott copper mine, which employed 550 men as miners and millers.² The mine had strict rules concerning alcohol, gambling, and women, but the town of McCarthy did not. The approximately 120 residents of McCarthy became known for bootlegging, gambling, and prostitution, and many of the families at Kennecott believed no self-respecting parents would live in McCarthy with their children. In a 1990 interview, Mildred Erickson Reis and Oscar Watsjold recollected their childhood memories of McCarthy. Oscar stated, “McCarthy was a ‘sin’ town. None of the girls [from Kennecott] got to go to McCarthy.”³ Mildred who later lived in Kennecott, elaborated:

My mother and dad and I had lived there [in McCarthy] so I had little friends down there. Mother would let me go down to visit my friends and stay the night, Mother thought it was fine because her mother was a nice lady and they weren’t all bad. She got criticized for it. So people would say little things like ‘why do they let her daughter go down to that place?’ Mother felt there were nice people everywhere and you just had to behave yourself where you were.⁴

When Mrs. Harrais began her work as teacher there in the fall of 1924, the school had eleven pupils.

Mr. Harrais’ skepticism that Mrs. Harrais would fare well in McCarthy stemmed in part from her life-long commitment to temperance. While Mrs. Harrais traveled aboard the *Northwestern* toward Alaska in the summer of 1924, she wrote to Mr. Henderson that she was now the president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union for the territory

of Alaska, and she wished to begin dissemination of “a wealth of beautifully written literature on narcotics, drugs, alcohol, and social purity” throughout the schools in Alaska; “I haven’t much enthusiasm for trying to benefit society any other way.”⁵ Mr. Henderson and Mrs. HARRAIS had known each other at least since his appointment as the first commissioner of education in 1917; given that Mr. Henderson taught in Emmet and Twin Falls, Idaho, it may be that they had known each other much longer. They often saw eye to eye on educational affairs, and he sought her input when trying to pass teacher pension legislation. He was amenable to her desire to implement the WCTU’s educational program across Alaska. Having that role as well as a friendly ear for her legislative concerns, along with her continued work through correspondence with her friends in Idaho on their teacher pension legislation, satisfied Mrs. HARRAIS’ penchant for activism in spite of her remote location.

Mrs. HARRAIS was excited to teach at McCarthy. Although she missed some of the more prominent and powerful teaching positions she had held in cities, she was determined to bring her strengths to the children of McCarthy and the community in general. She was satisfied with the supplies at the school and found the library to be especially rich. After boarding with John and Josephine Barrett, on whose homestead the town site of McCarthy was established, Margaret moved into a cabin that she liked. An old friend of Mr. HARRAIS’, J. B. O’Neill, was the owner of one of the stores, and his two daughters were school aged. Mrs. HARRAIS made friends early on, engaged the children in performances and Junior Red Cross, and looked forward to the summer when she could join Mr. HARRAIS at his mining camp and homestead.

At the time of Mrs. HARRAIS' arrival in McCarthy, all territorial schools were run by school boards that were elected by the residents of each community. The school boards held control over the retention of teachers and the school budgets. School board members could request certain kinds of teachers from the commissioner of education, and they could vote teachers out of office. These boards wrote ample letters to the commissioners of education expressing their desires, concerns, and the general affairs of the community. School boards could be contentious both toward the teacher and among themselves. They sought the commissioners' intervention frequently, and each school board, no matter how far from the commissioner's seat in Juneau, expected a personal visit from and relationship with the commissioner. In turn, the commissioners relied on communication from the teachers and the school boards as to conditions of the school properties, numbers of children in attendance, and categorization of children into "white" and "mixed blood" or "half-breed." While Mr. Henderson held his position from 1917-1929, subsequent commissioners served for only two, three, and seven years.⁶ In the seven years she taught there Mrs. HARRAIS and the residents of McCarthy were under the administration of three different commissioners.

Mrs. HARRAIS' first two years at the McCarthy school went well. Or presumably they went well because no letters of complaint can be found in any of the various collections. Mrs. HARRAIS' annual end-of-year letters to friends and family described successful Christmas pageants and charitable efforts on the part of eager school children, and she reported to Mr. Henderson: "The little school is the one point of light that glows clear and steady thru a pretty dark atmosphere."⁷ But by the spring of 1926 Mrs. HARRAIS

began to view school board elections as a potential problem. The school board had three members, elected on a rotating basis for three-year terms. Since the school boards held the power to offer or not to offer another year of employment to the teacher, the turnover of board members and teachers created tremendous instability. Mrs. Harrais suggested a change in the method with which school boards in unincorporated towns were elected, and Mr. Henderson put these suggestions forth but to no avail. Mrs. Harrais argued that since “ninety percent of the population are engaged either directly or indirectly in bootlegging and associated vices,” they remove teachers based on nothing to do with ability to teach; nevertheless, the “[e]lection passed off very pleasantly here. The bootleggers...were very painstaking in writing in the names of my particular friends. Never get the little bug quite sized.”⁸ That Mrs. Harrais was able to gain the support of the bootleggers of McCarthy surprised her very much as they were aware that “as a citizen and President of the W.C.T.U., I asked the President to appoint only dry officials, and asked the Judiciary Committee to confirm only dries, on the ground that any officer should himself be a law-abiding citizen.”⁹

The spring of 1926 also marked the return to McCarthy of the Seltenreichs, who had been in Seattle for a year. The Seltenreich family had three sons around ages 10, 13, and 14. Mrs. Harrais appeared to get along well with these boys and their mother in spite of the fact that “[t]heir home is a little restaurant and bootlegging joint.”¹⁰ The number of McCarthy’s school-aged children was dwindling, as Mrs. Harrais put it: “Decent people all get away before their children reach the age of understanding, and the others do not have many children.”¹¹ The return of the Seltenreich boys coupled with favorable school

board election results must have significantly eased Mrs. HARRAIS' worries for another year of teaching. The two older boys had begun 8th grade in Seattle but having not finished, attended 8th grade in McCarthy during the 1926-27 school year. Mrs. HARRAIS wrote, "Have never yet been able to discover one single thing they learned during the year in Seattle."¹² Although the boys had to work to support themselves during the day, Mrs. HARRAIS taught them in the evenings and was thereby able to enter them into the school enrollment record. In addition to the civic activity this afforded her, as she strongly felt she was assisting the boys to a better life and keeping them out of trouble in the evenings, Mr. Henderson promised her a raise if the enrollment of the school were to increase. Indeed a few months later she thanked him for the raise: "Mr. Pugh showed me your letter in which you comply with his request for an increase in salary. Thanks, Old Tap."¹³ At the same time, Mrs. HARRAIS was hopeful that the Idaho legislature would enact a teacher pension plan under which she would be eligible.

While teaching the Seltenreich boys in the evenings, Mrs. HARRAIS began to think about teaching high school students in general at McCarthy, and she wrote to Mr. Henderson stating that the school board had asked for a 9th grade for "[t]he hard-headed pioneer reasons that the school equipment is here, the children are here, the teacher is here; why shouldn't the needs of the community be met, even if it is a bit irregular?"¹⁴ But the idea also stirred up trouble. Mrs. HARRAIS pushed to be able to teach high school to the Seltenreich boys and Ida (Dearie) O'Neill. Meanwhile, Bessie Trim, a widow and the mother of two boys in 3rd and 6th grade, complained to Mr. Henderson that Mrs. HARRAIS would neglect the little children if she could teach high school. She remembered a year in

which the previous teacher, Mrs. Refior had taught high school: “the primary will only stand still. Like they did the year Mrs. Reefer [Refior] taught Laurance Barret high.”¹⁵

Mrs. Trim may have been motivated by personal feelings or financial jealousy. Both the O’Neills and the Barrets were friends of Mrs. Harrais; at the time Mrs. O’Neill was the only school board member in town, and Mrs. Trim complained that she catered to Mrs. Harrais’ whim.

Mrs. Trim complained further that Mrs. Harrais was making far too much money as she also collected the janitor salary and that the money was why she wanted the school so bad. She continued, “I would not kick but J. B. O’Neill certainly [o]ught to be able to send his girl outside. As all the rest have done.”¹⁶ Mrs. Harrais was not given permission to teach high school at McCarthy, and the O’Neills did send their daughter to Seattle for high school. It is not likely that anyone really believed that Dearie O’Neill would attend high school at McCarthy as she had an interest in music and had attended school in Seattle for several years. Mrs. Harrais and her friends on the school board regularly overestimated how many children would return to school the following year, a practice that was prevalent throughout the territory. But Ted and Fred Seltenreich remained in McCarthy, and Mrs. Harrais continued to teach them in the evenings.

Mrs. Harrais was not deterred, nor was she necessarily aware of the complaint as, worried about backlash, Mrs. Trim requested her letter be confidential; no replies to Mrs. Trim exist in the files. The following year Mrs. Harrais was still pressing to teach more than her five elementary pupils. She now wanted to begin a day school for adults, which would take place side by side with the teaching of the elementary school. One woman

and two men of McCarthy had expressed interest in vocational courses in bookkeeping, algebra and geometry, and commercial arithmetic in order to be able to advance in their careers or further their educations. Mrs. Harrais made her case: “The situation appeals to me powerfully—the isolation, the almost insurmountable difficulties, the aspirations of these people. There may be others who have not yet realized the possibilities of the little school. I am willing to teach until the cows come home, provided it meets with your approbation.”¹⁷ Teaching adults appealed to Mrs. Harrais for several reasons. For one, it would provide for a more dynamic and challenging classroom, but also she was always motivated by improving the lot of individuals in the desire that the whole community be uplifted. Mrs. Harrais liked to build things; this desire to expand the scope of education in the McCarthy school was very much in keeping with her previous work with schools in Challis, Idaho, and Skagway and Fairbanks, Alaska. However, the people of McCarthy may not have been interested in the kind of improvement she had in mind. Although none of the files contain replies from Mr. Henderson on the matter of day school, Mrs. Harrais listed the three adults on her 1929 Annual Report.

The 1928-1929 school year also marked escalation in Mrs. Harrais’ interest in having a hand in the shaping of Alaska’s teacher pension plan. The Idaho plan that she had been working on, and which would have provided her a small pension, fell through, thus increasing her stake in an Alaskan plan.¹⁸ She corresponded eagerly with Mr. Henderson, who kept her up to date on the Alaska teacher pension debates and who shared his proposal with her, which she commented on heavily. She argued that a pension plan would legitimize teaching as a profession and help to allay the problem of the tourist

teacher: “The major purpose is to stabilize the profession—make it possible for the really professional teacher to stay in the work and discourage the vagabond or wandering type of teachers.”¹⁹ She also felt strongly that contribution to the pension plan must be mandatory because the tourist teachers would not contribute voluntarily, since they intended to leave the state or the profession, and because the Idaho plan had failed on this actuary basis. She was adamant that the territory be required to contribute to the plan as well because the pension plan would increase the quality of teaching across the territory and because, without the territory’s assistance, teachers soon to retire would not be able to benefit from the plan. Mr. Henderson believed that incorporated cities should match a territorial contribution from their individual school funds. Much of this correspondence proved futile, as Mr. Henderson was not re-elected commissioner for the 1929-1930 year. Mrs. Harrais received an admonishing letter from William Paul, President of the Alaska Native Brotherhood, for her support of Mr. Henderson. The letter outlines all of the reasons Mr. Henderson failed as commissioner and takes Mrs. Harrais to task for stating that the schools in Alaska were doing well.²⁰

In 1928 Eleanor Tjosevig began 1st grade. Eleanor had been living with her mother and father at the Green Butte mine, but once she became school aged, her mother Jean Tjosevig moved with her to McCarthy so that she could attend school. For the next three years no love was lost between Mrs. Tjosevig and Mrs. Harrais. According to both women, everything started out amicably, with Mrs. Tjosevig praising Mrs. Harrais’ abilities to teach the children, but none of this is recorded except as preface to the ensuing problems. Eleanor Tjosevig Eidemiller has been active in a wide variety of historical

projects related to McCarthy, Kennecott, and the surrounding area. In her *Kennecott Kids* interview, the interviewer Sande Faulkner asked direct questions about the school at McCarthy and the teacher. Eleanor recalled no details although she spoke vividly on many other matters. The story between Mrs. Harrais and Mrs. Tjosevig has to be pieced together from haphazardly collected letters.

With the benefit of hindsight, the first sign of trouble can be read between the lines in chapter XII of *Alaska Periscope*. While Mrs. Harrais usually took pains to keep her letters upbeat and emphasized on adventure and the wonders of Alaska, chapter XII, written between Christmas and New Year's Eve 1929, attempted to reckon cheerfully with the rise and fall of expectation: the Christmas mail was all lost in the sinking of the *Northwestern*, including the supplies for the children's Christmas program, but fortunately Alaskans were tremendously innovative and the kids incredibly good, so the program was a success; the weather was pleasant at Christmas but now the mercury was so low one couldn't tell the temperature; her eyesight and teeth were failing, but luckily she got new glasses and had some dental work; she was chosen to be a representative on the fifteen-member Women's National Committee for Law Enforcement and was asked to move back east to serve as its leader, but "[t]his was out of the question since there was no place for the Skipper [Mr. Harrais] in that scheme of life." To top off the disappointment, her picture did not reach the convention in time for her to be featured in the literature due to ice on the railroads blocking the mail for forty-two days.²¹ The chapter is most reminiscent of the way Mrs. Harrais wrote about her last year in

Fairbanks: she wanted to air her complaints while framing them as features of her success.

Chapter XII is the last chapter written from McCarthy that focuses on anything other than Mrs. Harrais' summer adventures with Mr. Harrais, or on Mr. Harrais' travel and prospecting. Although it was written before the public strife between Mrs. Harrais and Mrs. Tjosevig began officially, it is unlikely that Margaret kept the disappointment to herself of having missed the opportunity to shine on the Women's National Committee for Law Enforcement and of not being able to attend to the convention. She would have wanted to be acknowledged for the achievement; she may have bragged a bit.

Alaska's territorial schools, also called Nelson schools, funded only grades 1-8 in unincorporated towns. Eleanor Tjosevig in 1st grade and Bud Seltenreich in 7th grade were the only school-aged children in the school for most of the 1928-1929 school year. But Mrs. Harrais also taught Ted and Fred Seltenreich, around 16 and 18 years old, and two adult women that year. This situation could not have pleased Mrs. Tjosevig very well as she was no great fan of Mrs. Seltenreich. But Mrs. Tjosevig and Mrs. Harrais attempted to befriend each other, and in February of 1929 they founded a literary society, later named the Regal Reading Club, whose main function was to establish and maintain a library for the community. Establishing reading clubs or literary societies was well in keeping with the kind of community outreach that Mrs. Harrais had engaged in throughout her career, but she felt particularly strongly that in McCarthy such work would provide badly needed recreation that was not based in vice. She missed no opportunities to highlight her achievements with the library in her letters to the

commissioners of education. Although working toward a common good and both professing to loathe the “underworld” of McCarthy, Mrs. HARRAIS and Mrs. TJOSEVIG did not remain friends for long.

In spring of 1929, shortly before Mr. Henderson was to step down from his service as commissioner of education, Mrs. HARRAIS sent him a brief letter in which she requested high school geography books for further instruction of the Seltenreich boys. In the letter she also updated Mr. Henderson on the developments with Mrs. TJOSEVIG and the McCarthy school board. Mrs. HARRAIS wrote: “Mrs. TJOSEVIG has an old friend in Illinois who would like to come to McCarthy to teach, Mrs. TJOSEVIG would like very much to have her come; so she forgot overnight that I was the most wonderful teacher she had ever known.”²² Later letters suggest the situation was not at all so simple. The flurry of letters from Mrs. HARRAIS, Mrs. TJOSEVIG, and Mr. PUGH, the railroad commissioner and a member of the school board, show each side claiming the other side catered to the bootleggers and underworld. It is difficult not to pity the poor commissioners of education who had to spend time on such bickering. Because of Mrs. HARRAIS’ reputation as an accomplished educator, community activist, and the friends she held in high places, it seems likely that the commissioners often favored her version of events over the versions of the parents. Mrs. TJOSEVIG would be easy to paint as a bored, frustrated, and jealous woman. But she can also be imagined as legitimately concerned about her daughter’s education and the influence of Mrs. HARRAIS, who seemed determined to change the purpose of the school from elementary to adult education.

According to Mrs. HARRAIS, the Regal Reading Club was established by a group of women that included Mrs. Seltenreich. This group were designated the charter members and in the subsequent constitution a method of electing new members was established. At some point Mrs. Tjosevig changed her mind about the inclusion of Mrs. Seltenreich and called for an election to determine if the latter be in or out. Mrs. HARRAIS refused to hold such an election on the basis that Mrs. Seltenreich was a charter member and not subject to election as new members are. Mrs. Tjosevig quit the club “and has been sharpening her knife for my scalp ever since.”²³ Perhaps this really was the beginning of the trouble between Mrs. HARRAIS and Mrs. Tjosevig; perhaps all of the additional complaints Mrs. Tjosevig launched against Mrs. HARRAIS and the school board were rooted in this one personal incident. Perhaps Mrs. Tjosevig never did agree to Mrs. Seltenreich’s inclusion in the club and Mrs. HARRAIS strong-armed her. Mrs. Tjosevig had arrived in McCarthy ten years before at the age of thirty-one to visit her father who ran a blacksmith’s shop.²⁴ Perhaps Mrs. Tjosevig saw herself as the matriarch in McCarthy, and Mrs. HARRAIS had come along to step on her toes. Mrs. HARRAIS later claimed just this: “She throws to the breezes the defiant declaration, ‘I am the First Lady of this town’, then fights like a badger to make good her declaration.”²⁵

In the summer of 1929 the commissionership of education was handed over to Leo W. Breuer, who had most recently served as the superintendent of schools in Nome and then Cordova.²⁶ Either Mrs. Tjosevig felt that she would have more luck airing her complaints with Mr. Breuer than with Mr. Henderson or her frustration finally rose to the

point of action; in October of 1929 she made her first attempt in the records to oust Mrs. Harrais. She outlined four main complaints.

Her first complaint was that the Seltenreich boys were being taught in spite of having passed 8th grade. Her argument was that since Mrs. Seltenreich was on the school board, Mrs. Harrais would teach the older boys to keep favor with the school board so that she could retain her teaching position. Mrs. Tjosevig felt that since the boys worked, they had enough money to go to high school elsewhere, “but their money is spent in pool halls and red light districts.” She also claimed that they had been “diseased” over the summer and should not be allowed to expose the other children.²⁷ In Bud Seltenreich’s interview in the *Kennecott Kids* oral history project, he described that since he had a truck that he normally hauled wood in, when Prohibition Agents would come into town on the train and the conductors would blow smoke as they were coming around the corner to warn the bootleggers, Bud would sometimes be enlisted to drive the booze out of town.²⁸

But he followed up:

Even though McCarthy was (?) as a gambling, bootlegging, whorehouse town, it never dawned on me to follow that (?). (?) in running a respectable business most of my life, I had no interest in it. I had seen that other and (?) and I knew there was money in it, but I wasn’t interested in money so much as I was interested in doing what I like to do.”²⁹

Unfortunately the interviewer did not ask questions about school or teachers. Mrs.

Harrais claimed that “the boys would like to get away from” the bootlegging activities of their parents, and that “by...teaching them at night...[they] were kept out of the pool halls.”³⁰ When weighing her own daughter’s education against the good done for the Seltenreich boys, Mrs. Tjosevig felt the balance tipped too much against Eleanor.

Mrs. Tjosevig's second complaint involved her assertion that Mrs. Harrais was being paid the \$25.00 janitor fee, but contracting the work out for only \$5.00 and pocketing the \$20.00. Nevertheless, the floor to the school was never mopped on the weekends, the school was never cleaned in the summer, and two children complained of excessive chalk dust and dirty windows.³¹ A few years earlier Mrs. Harrais had complained to Mr. Henderson about the insufficient salary for the cost of living at McCarthy. She made \$175.00 per month and the \$25.00 janitor wage was paid to a janitor. But "when the budget plan for the year was received...the janitor wages had been cut to \$20.00"; since Mrs. Harrais had already agreed to pay the janitor \$25.00, she claimed the additional \$5.00 per month were coming out of her own salary.³² Probably both Mrs. Tjosevig and Mrs. Harrais exaggerated the janitor wage situation. Mrs. Tjosevig later claimed that the janitor wages were \$35.00 when the school treasurer, Mr. Pugh, reported it to be \$25.00. Mrs. Harrais' entire teaching career involved pursuing positions of greater and greater salary. It was not uncommon for teachers to take on the janitor duties for additional money. Mrs. Harrais' salary did not include housing as the McCarthy school building was not a teacherage, but whether she paid rent in the cabin in which she dwelled and, if so, how much is not known.

Mrs. Tjosevig's third complaint was that the parents of the children in the school could get no cooperation from the school board because "they simply refer it to Mrs. Harrais and she very diplomatically gets things her way as conditions do not improve."³³ The McCarthy school board had been in disarray when Mrs. Harrais arrived. The first year of her teaching there, "all three members of the Board left McCarthy, the treasurer's

business was handled by one of the bondsmen until he left, then by his clerk in the pool hall. When the accounts were turned over to the new Board in the spring of 1925, they were in such bad shape.”³⁴ At this time, Mr. C. F. Pugh, the railroad agent, stepped in to act as treasurer. At other times, Mr. Iverson, whom Mrs. Harrais first counted as a friend, acted as treasurer. Mrs. Harrais, with her direct connections to Mr. Henderson, often took on the treasurer’s duties herself. Mrs. Tjosevig had a legitimate complaint since the school board was largely comprised of people who were not parents of McCarthy’s school children, but the school board problem may have had more to do with general transience and lack of interest on the part of a community that had very few children than a concerted effort to cater to Mrs. Harrais specifically.

Mrs. Tjosevig’s final complaint was that Mr. Harrais was grub staked, and since it was not possible to prospect in winter and he was able bodied, why could he not support his wife instead of vice versa? This complaint was typical of the era and was launched against several married women teachers in the territory. Even commissioners of education occasionally asked to be furnished with a married woman’s proof of need for a teacher’s salary before she would be considered for a position. Mrs. Tjosevig ended the letter with a request for advice. Mr. Breuer’s reply cautiously acknowledged her letter and promised to look into matters, but his letter feels distinctly like a declaration that he had no idea yet how to perform his job.

Late in the spring of 1929, the Watsjold family arrived in McCarthy from Norway with their three children, Oscar, Stella, and John, all of school age and speaking no English. The Watsjolds ran one of the two general merchandise stores in McCarthy,

while Mrs. Harrais' friends the O'Neills ran the other. The school children were the Tjosevig and Watsjold children as well as the son of Mrs. Hart, Gene Garrity. Mrs. Hart was a seamstress and did "all of Mrs. Tjosevig's sewing."³⁵ All three families were friends. All three families turned on Mrs. Harrais.

Mrs. Harrais did not expect animosity from the Watsjolds. She invested time in teaching them English, and during a bout of illness, Stella visited her every day and brought her food.³⁶ Mrs. Harrais later speculated that Mrs. Tjosevig had been able to poison them against her by being the first person to meet them when they arrived at McCarthy. She further thought the Watsjolds might harbor hard feelings because Mr. Harrais did all of his outfitting at the O'Neill store since he was long-time friends with Mr. O'Neill. She then claimed an unnamed source told her that actually the Watsjolds had nothing against her, but rather Mrs. Watsjold wanted to get the children away from Mr. Watsjold, who could be a tyrant.³⁷ The speculations escalated.

Oscar Watsjold was interviewed as part of the *Kennecott Kids* oral history project, and in his memory the reason for the hostility against Mrs. Harrais was that she "was always writing to Valdez complaining about the bootleggers and the bars.... Bob Reynolds, he was the U. S. Marshall, and he'd make a token raid or something once in a while, and that was it."³⁸ Yet Mrs. Tjosevig repeatedly cited Mrs. Harrais' support from the bootleggers as the reason she retained the school in spite of parents not wanting her. Oscar Watsjold's wife Nell replied to my letter of inquiry the fall after Oscar had suffered two strokes and could no longer write. But she said he still retained good memories of his youth and was able to convey the following story:

When they began school neither of the 3 children spoke english but by spring of the next year, they were able to converse with the other children. Oscar remembers that she was quick with the paddle and on one occasion she was unhappy with him and he told her in norwegian to shut up. I suppose that she knew a few words by then and came at him with her paddle. He ran out and went home. After an explanation of why he was home, his father used his own paddle.³⁹

I could assume that Mr. Watsjold was supportive of Mrs. HARRAIS' methods. I could assume that Mrs. Watsjold did not approve of either Mr. Watsjold's or Mrs. HARRAIS' methods. I could assume that Mrs. HARRAIS may have been correct in believing Mrs. Watsjold wanted to remove her children from Mr. Watsjold's influence. I could believe Mrs. HARRAIS' assertions that Stella Watsjold said, "My mother likes Mrs. HARRAIS. She thinks she is a fine teacher. Mrs. HARRAIS is awful good to us,"⁴⁰ and Mrs. Hart said, "She [Mrs. HARRAIS] has done wonders for Gene, and I think her a grand woman."⁴¹ Or I could believe Mrs' Tjosevig that Mrs. HARRAIS was no longer an effective teacher:

My daughter who is 8 years has been in School 3 years is doing the same artwork as when she started in School in fact she could do more and better work before she entered School. Her subject on report card called neatness she gets grades of 95%. Her preparation of work is poor. I know she does not apply herself but do know she can, why give her the grades of 95, is it to keep us quiet[?]⁴²

Any interpretation would be conjecture.

By the spring of 1930 it was evident that there was no going back to congeniality and cooperation, even had they once prevailed. The school board consisted of Mr. Pugh, Mrs. Seltenreich, and Mrs. Snyder, who had, however, been in the states since the previous fall, but who said when she left that she would return in spring. Mrs. Snyder had been one of the adult students Mrs. HARRAIS enrolled in the 1928-1929 school year. In February, Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Seltenreich agreed to rehire Mrs. HARRAIS, who promptly

signed her contract. In April, Mrs. Snyder had not yet returned, but Mr. Pugh called for election for only one seat: Mrs. Seltenreich's. His own seat was not up for re-election that year. Mrs. Tjosevig protested that since Mrs. Snyder had not been in McCarthy all year, her seat should be in the election as well. Mr. Pugh would not budge. Mrs. Tjosevig was elected as Mrs. Seltenreich's replacement. Now the board consisted of Mr. Pugh, Mrs. Tjosevig, and the absent Mrs. Snyder. Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Tjosevig agreed that if Mrs. Snyder did not return by May 1, her seat would be declared vacant. But there was a catch: a vacant seat after the annual election would mean that Mr. Breuer, the commissioner of education, would appoint the new member because it was a foregone conclusion that Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Tjosevig would not agree on anyone.

The letter-writing campaigns began at once. Mrs. HARRAIS, concerned that her contract from February for the following year might be undermined with the new school board, explained in great detail to Mr. Breuer why it was necessary to offer teachers contracts so early in the year. She then assured Mr. Breuer that if he could just keep the peace and the school going for one more year, she would be joining Mr. HARRAIS in the Upper Chitina region because his patents there would finally be secured.⁴³ Mrs. Tjosevig later claimed this was an annual tactic of Mrs. HARRAIS' in order to hold the school: "The excuse of Mrs. HARRAIS, that she only wants the school until spring is an old stall of hers as she has said this for the last three years."⁴⁴

Mrs. HARRAIS explained that Mrs. Tjosevig now had the bootlegging element on her side. In the previous fall the District Attorney had tried to shut down the red light district, so the underworld moved, and opened beauty salons and lunch counters, and

proceeded to attend social events that they had not attended before. Of these “denizens” “two were particularly objectionable,” and when a community dance was held, the Deputy Marshall was asked to tell the two women they could not attend. Instead he told them all that they could not attend. “I asked him why he told them all, and he answered that it was for the sake of a future policy. You can imagine the tempest in a teapot that created among them and their satellites, and how eagerly Mrs. Tjosevig capitalized it.”⁴⁵ In her next letter Mrs. Harrais continued along the same lines: “Mrs. Tjosevig stampeded them [bootleggers] all into her camp by circulating the report that I reported their names to the authorities. I have never done that, because the ethics of our profession restrain me from becoming involved in local questions.”⁴⁶

Mrs. Tjosevig explained that a special election had been held and that Ben Jackson, the postal clerk, had won the election for the replacement of Mrs. Snyder.⁴⁷ Mr. Pugh explained that because Mrs. Tjosevig had in her camp the U.S. Commissioner, the U.S. Marshall, and the U.S. Postmaster, no one but the most respectable citizens in town could vote against her without fear of being removed from town. He reiterated his position that a single woman could not become a teacher at McCarthy as it was not suitable for single women to live there. He recommended that Mr. Breuer appoint Mrs. Seltenreich back to the board because she had children and experience on the board. Mr. Pugh warned that Mrs. Tjosevig would no doubt say that he himself wanted back on the board, which he dismissed: “if it was not for the kind of town McCarthy is I would not have given my time to the care of the School for the pas[t] five years, when ne[i]ther Mrs. Tjosevig or Mr. Ben Jackson would have stepped two feet to e[i]ther help or assist in any

manner whatsoever, until Mrs. Tjosevig became angry at Mrs. HARRAIS.”⁴⁸ Attached to this letter is a tally of the special school board election along with Mr. Pugh’s enumeration of which voters are bootleggers, involved in Sport (prostitution and gambling), or not eligible to vote due to not living within the school’s boundaries. For reasons nothing in the records explains, Mr. Breuer sided with Mr. Pugh and appointed Mrs. Seltenreich to the board for the 1930-1931 school year.

By the spring of 1931 Mr. Breuer was no longer commissioner of education having been replaced by W. K. Keller, who had experience as superintendent in the Fairbanks and Juneau schools.⁴⁹ Having a new commissioner meant a chance for all parties to tell their story again. Mrs. Tjosevig’s most succinct account of the troubles in the record is found in a letter from spring 1931. Mrs. Tjosevig stated that she had heard bad things about Mrs. HARRAIS before Eleanor started school, but that she believed in forming her own opinions, and she and Mrs. HARRAIS had gotten along well. But then Mrs. HARRAIS began a reading club and eventually a public library, and the bootleggers and underworld element had taken control of it so that no self-respecting person could participate. Mrs. Tjosevig harshly criticized Mrs. Seltenreich who, Mrs. Tjosevig said, could not read well enough to keep or even read the minutes of school board meetings. Mrs. Tjosevig complained that the only purpose of the meetings was for the other members to make fun of her and report back to Mrs. HARRAIS. She said her daughter had learned nothing from Mrs. HARRAIS: “for Mrs. HARRAIS’ teaching ability she certainly has fallen down on the job. If she paid as much attention to her duties as a teacher as to her library and political game I don’t think the parents would have any complaints.”⁵⁰ At this

point Mrs. Tjosevig inquired as to whether Mrs. HARRAIS had applied for a teacher's pension as she had heard she was eligible.

Mr. Keller's answer is brief: if the school board election was legal, then Mrs. HARRAIS' contract is valid. If it was illegal, file a complaint. No, Mrs. HARRAIS was not eligible for a pension.⁵¹ In March Mrs. Tjosevig organized a Parents Committee of School Children, drafted a letter of complaints, and sent one to the commissioner of education and one to the governor of the territory. The latter referred the matter back to the commissioner, who by now was becoming exasperated. He reiterated to Mrs. Tjosevig, quoting from his own previous letter, that unless the school board election had been conducted illegally, he could do nothing. Mrs. Tjosevig then pulled Eleanor from school with a few weeks remaining in the year.

In response to this action, Mrs. HARRAIS felt compelled to present her side of the story to the new commissioner of education. She explained that Mrs. Tjosevig was "a sore loser" and had been trying to wreck the reading group, the library, dominate the school board, and now had her sights on wrecking the school. She claimed that Mrs. Tjosevig stated each spring that she and Eleanor would be going out for the year, but each year, they were in town and Eleanor was in school. Mrs. HARRAIS assured Mr. Keller: "Her defeat in the school election this year was not the result of any organized effort, but merely the back-wash from her former hectic campaigning and misrepresentations."⁵² Mrs. HARRAIS then followed with a lengthier account in which she also expressed motivations for Mrs. Tjosevig's and the Watsjolds' claims that they would remove their children from the school. Here she asserted for the first time that "Mrs. Tjosevig

attempted to wrest from her step-mother the entire estate of her father,” and that the step-mother and Mrs. Seltenreich had been friends.⁵³ Mrs. Harrais defended herself by stating that Mrs. Hart had no problem with her teaching but, as a dress-maker, relied on Mrs. Tjosevig’s wealth for business and therefore had to side with her. Mrs. Harrais congratulated herself on the successes of the Watsjold children in learning English and advancing in their age-appropriate grades. She concluded the letter with a statement of her own financial straits and a plea that Mr. Keller place her in a new school if the McCarthy one was not to be continued.

Indeed, neither Eleanor, Oscar, Stella, John, nor Gene returned to the McCarthy school in the fall of 1931. Mrs. Tjosevig received permission from Kennecott to rent an apartment. She and Eleanor moved there, and Stella was sent to board with them. John and Oscar accompanied Mrs. Hart and Gene to Seward, where they continued their schooling. That summer, Mrs. Tjosevig wrote multiple letters pleading that a new teacher be sent. Mrs. Tjosevig argued that the lack of attention to the concerns of the parents in McCarthy was tearing families apart. She received no sympathetic response.

Mrs. Harrais asked again in August that Mr. Keller help her find a new position if the school was not to re-open. Mr. Keller, relying on statements from both Mr. Pugh and Mrs. Harrais that the children would return to school as they had in previous years in spite of stating they wouldn’t, allowed for the school to re-open. In attendance were Mr. Pugh’s daughter, now five years old, and Bud Seltenreich, in 10th grade. Mrs. Harrais also took in three adults. By any measure, this was now a school that was not eligible for funding by the territorial government.

In December, Mr. F. A. Iverson, whom Mrs. Harrais had years before counted as a friend, weighed in on the McCarthy school situation for the first time, writing to Mr. Keller that he would now report the waste of public funds to the governor and threatening: “You will find yourself in the same condition that friend Mr. Bre[u]er found himself after appointing a bootlegger on the McCarthy School Board.”⁵⁴ On December 4, 1931, Mrs. Tjosevig wrote two short letters, one to the Department of the Interior and one to Mr. Keller stating that a public waste of funds was taking place at McCarthy, where a school was being held for only two children not even of school age. She signed both letters Nils Tjosevig.⁵⁵ On December 6, 1931, Mrs. Harrais wrote one letter addressed to both Mr. Keller and the governor of the territory in which she pleaded that the school not close until she could be placed in a position elsewhere.⁵⁶ Her concern was for the salary she would lose, but more significant was the loss of a year of teaching to be credited toward the fifteen years of Alaskan teaching experience required for a pension.

The school at McCarthy, Alaska closed in December 1931 and never re-opened. The unused McCarthy school supplies were sent to Kennecott and Chitina for the schools there, and Mrs. Harrais was asked to arrange for the boarding up of the school. Mrs. Harrais continued to teach the Seltenreich boys in her home at no remuneration according to Oscar Watsjold and Mrs. Harrais. In the battle for the McCarthy school, Mrs. Tjosevig and Mrs. Harrais both lost.

1. *Alaska Periscope*, 126, Folder 1, Box 2, Harrais Family Papers, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, AK [hereafter cited as Harrais Papers].

2. William R. Hunt, *Golden Place: The History of Alaska-Yukon Mining with Particular Reference to Alaska's National Parks* (Anchorage, AK: National Park Service Alaska Region, 1990), http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/yuch/golden_places/chap13.htm (accessed December 20, 2010).

3. Mildred Erikson Reis and Oscar Watsjold, interview by Al and Lynda Shaw, June 15, 1990, transcript, page 12. In *Kennecott Kids Oral History Project*, edited by Ann Kain, Anchorage, AK: National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, 1991 [hereafter cited as *Kennecott Kids*].

4. Ibid.

5. Henderson to Harrais, August 19, 1924, Folder 129, Box 3, Lois M. Morey Papers, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, AK [hereafter cited as Morey Papers].

6. Evangeline Atwood and Robert N. DeArmond, *Who's Who in Alaska Politics: A Biographical Dictionary of Alaskan Political Personalities 1884-1974* (Portland: Binford & Mort, 1977), 43.

7. Harrais to Henderson, April 23, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079 Matanuska (Finger Lake) through Ninilchik, Series 1 Correspondence Territorial School District 1916-1961, Record Group 117 Commissioner of Education, State of Alaska Archives, Juneau, AK [hereafter cited as Box AS 4079].

8. Harrais to Henderson, April 7, 1926, Folder McCarthy School Board 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

9. Harrais to Henderson, April 23, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

10. Harrais to Henderson, July 23, 1927, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

11. Harrais to Henderson, April 23, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

12. Harrais to Henderson, July 23, 1927, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

13. Harrais to Henderson, July 2, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

14. Harrais to Henderson, April 21, 1927, Folder 129, Box 3, Morey Papers.

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15. Trim to Henderson, June 24, 1927, Folder McCarthy School Board 1927-1929, Box AS 4079.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Harrais to Henderson, August 27, 1928, Folder McCarthy 1927-1929, Box AS 4079.
 18. Harrais to Henderson, November 20, 1928, Folder McCarthy 1927-1929, Box AS 4079.
 19. Harrais to Henderson, February 25, 1929, Folder McCarthy 1927-1929, Box AS 4079.
 20. Paul to Harrais, June 20, 1929, Folder 1, Box 1, Harrais Papers.
 21. *Alaska Periscope*, 147-153, Folder 1, Box 2, Harrais Papers.
 22. Harrais to Henderson, April 10, 1929, Folder McCarthy 1927-1929, Box AS 4079.
 23. Harrais to Breuer, April 5, 1930, Folder McCarthy 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 24. Eleanor Tjosevig Eidemiller, interview by Sandra M. Faulkner, June 17, 1990, transcript, page 2, *Kennecott Kids*.
 25. Harrais to Keller, April 30, 1931, Folder 129, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 26. Atwood and DeArmond, 10.
 27. Tjosevig to Breuer, October 31, 1929, Folder McCarthy School Board 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 28. Bud Seltenreich, interview by Logan Hovis, June 16, 1990, transcript, page 12, *Kennecott Kids*.
 29. Ibid., 15.
 30. Harrais to Henderson, July 23, 1927, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.
 31. Tjosevig to Breuer, October 31, 1929, Folder McCarthy School Board 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 32. Harrais to Henderson, February 8, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.

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33. Tjosevig to Breuer, October 31, 1929, Folder McCarthy School Board 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 34. Harrais to Henderson, May 31, 1926, Folder McCarthy 1925-1927, Box AS 4079.
 35. Harrais to Keller, May 14, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 36. Harrais to Keller, November 30, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 37. Harrais to Keller, November 30, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 38. Mildred Erikson Reis and Oscar Watsjold, page 11, *Kennecott Kids*.
 39. Nell and Oscar Watsjold, letter to author, September 29, 2005.
 40. Harrais to Keller, November 30, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 41. Harrais to Keller May 14, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 42. Tjosevig to Keller, February 24, 1930, Folder 128, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 43. Harrais to Breuer, April 5, 1930, Folder McCarthy 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 44. Tjosevig to Keller, December 4, 1931, Folder McCarthy School Board 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
 45. Harrais to Breuer, April 5, 1930, Folder McCarthy 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 46. Harrais to Breuer, May 2, 1930, Folder McCarthy 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 47. Tjosevig to Breuer, April 12, 1930, Folder McCarthy School Board 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 48. Pugh to Breuer, May 2, 1930, Folder McCarthy School Board, 1929-1931, Box AS 4079.
 49. Atwood and DeArmond, 54.
 50. Tjosevig to Keller, March 25, 1931, Folder 128, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 51. Keller to Tjosevig, April 4, 1931, Folder 128, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 52. Harrais to Keller, April 30, 1931, Folder 129, Box 3, Morey Papers.

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53. Harrais to Keller, May 14, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
54. Iverson to Keller, December 1, 1931, Folder McCarthy School Board 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
55. Tjosevig to Department of Interior and Tjosevig to Keller, December 4, 1931, Folder McCarthy School Board, 1931-1933, Box AS 4079.
56. Harrais to Governor Parks and Keller, December 6, 1931, Folder McCarthy 1913-1946, Box AS 4079.

Chapter 2

The Treasurer and the Teacher: The School at Ellamar, Alaska 1932-1935

With the school at McCarthy closed for good in December 1931, Mrs. Harrais continued to hold lessons in her cabin for Bud Seltenreich. But Mrs. Harrais began at once to look for a new position, preferably one that she could pick up mid year. Having taught only two and a half months before the McCarthy school closed, Mrs. Harrais faced losing an entire year toward the fifteen she needed of Alaskan teaching experience to qualify for a pension. In December she inquired as to whether she might be given a high school appointment. Mr. Keller apparently explained that she was no longer eligible to teach high school in Alaska because the new law required one year of post-graduate work. However, his own biennium report ending 1932 stated that the new law would go into effect July 1933, so Mrs. Harrais should have been eligible for the 1932-33 school year.¹ Mrs. Harrais expressed her disappointment:

I am too near the close of my professional career to go back to school for a whole year, so will get myself located to the best advantage possible for the next few years and try to be content. I am confident that I can teach in circles round the young postgraduates, but I do not expect strangers to know that. It is always a sorry day for us when a pharaoh arises who knows not Joseph.²

She focused her efforts on finding out which schools in the territory paid the highest salaries. However, no work was forthcoming for finishing out the year, and her request

was denied that she be credited for a year of teaching for the two and a half months in McCarthy.

In spring Mr. and Mrs. Harrais moved to Cordova, where Mr. Harrais was asked to take over management of a failing sawmill. Mrs. Harrais busied herself with bookkeeping, cooking, and cleaning for the loggers and millers, and doing other odd jobs as needed. May had come and gone, and Mrs. Harrais was still without a teaching position, which exacerbated the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Harrais had not weathered the Depression well. According to Mrs. Harrais, investments the couple had made in a Seattle office building from the sale of her house in California were utterly lost. The remainder of their savings followed suit when the Puget Sound Savings and Loan crashed. And worse, their application for the homestead tract was denied because it had not been properly surveyed. That spring Mrs. Harrais, having lost her salary and unable to communicate with her husband while he was at his mining claims, decided to sell Mr. Harrais' supply of explosives to support herself through the spring. She wrote to friends and family with a, by now, familiar positive attitude but sparing no tragic details:

Youth was gone, enthusiasm was gone; all that remained was one another and a grim determination to keep our chins above water and be self-sustaining.

What matter the details? If we can't make light of our troubles, at least we can keep them in the dark. A bank failure, receivership for the finest office building in Seattle in which we invested our old-age security, the closing of the McCarthy school, the mining claims left up a blind alley by the closing of the railroad---the usual run of the experiences of the period. Thus you have the "short and simple flannels" of the Harrais family. Forget it.³

Mrs. HARRAIS appeared to have enjoyed the summer at the mill, but the equipment had been badly abused, and the finances from the previous manager were in such disarray as to be unsalvageable, so the milling effort went the way of the mining efforts.

In late May, Louise Milner Corbett, teacher of the one-room school in Ellamar, Alaska suddenly backed out of her contract for the next year, and Mr. Keller offered the position to Mrs. HARRAIS. According to Mrs. HARRAIS:

[A] teacher's contract to teach the Ellamar school dropped like a ripe plum into my lap. I did not know where Ellamar was, did not even know there was such a school, but did I hesitate? Not so you could notice it. I promptly answered, "Yes. Where is it?" There was security for next year anyway, and my spirits soared. Ellamar: No post office, no store, mail once a month, oil lamps, melted snow for water---no matter. Other people lived there and I could too.⁴

Ellamar was located in Virgin Bay of the Prince William Sound, southwest of Valdez and northwest of Cordova. It was established as part of the Copper Rush in 1900; however, the mine closed in the 1920s. By the 1930 census, twenty-two residents were recorded, the majority of whom were Alutiiq or part white part Alutiiq. The native village of Tatitlek was within an hour walking distance and had a population of around 150. The school at Tatitlek was under the administration of the Department of Interior's Bureau of Education, Alaska Native School, Medical and Reindeer Service. Its teachers were employed directly by the federal government; such schools were commonly referred to as "government schools."

The school at Ellamar had originally been established to serve the white children of miners. The school continued to function after the mines closed under the provision in the Alaska school laws that allowed for attendance in territorial schools of "children of

mixed blood living a civilized life,” which described the children Mrs. Harrais now found before her. When Mrs. Harrais updated her friends and family on her new position, she was optimistic about the new opportunity, the beauty of the setting, and the children themselves, whom she found much easier to teach than the children in McCarthy:

There is not a white child in the school, part are half and the remainder three-quarter Indian. They are clean, well-mannered and unbelievably good. I asked them to select a song for opening exercises. They selected “How Firm a Foundation”. I gasped mentally. We sang the grand old hymn and I asked for another selection. They called for “Lead Kindly Light”! That from eight little Natives in a land where I have taught white Eighth Graders who had never heard of the crucifixion.⁵

As Mrs. Harrais often did in letters home when times were trying, her reports about teaching in Ellamar focused on the Christmas programs put on by the children. She condensed the narrative of her three years teaching there into a single chapter of *Alaska Periscope*.

A brief history of the Ellamar school in the several years before Mrs. Harrais arrived there is necessary for understanding the extent to which Mrs. Harrais’ experience was particular or typical. The school at Ellamar had been closed for the years 1929-1931 with no maintenance. Due to a leaky roof, both property and supplies were damaged by mildew and mold. Before the two-year closure, the teacher had been Mrs. Borigo, whose previous experience teaching in Alaska had been in federal schools. Federally employed teachers were expected not just to serve as teacher, but also to make reports on the conditions of the people and lifestyles, to teach western culture, and to administer medical services. Mrs. Borigo struggled as the teacher in Ellamar since she was accustomed to being more comprehensively involved in the daily life of residents, but

found doing that difficult. In her first weeks, she wrote to Marie Drake, the secretary to the territorial commissioner of education, for clarification:

May I ask please, just what is the requirement, in a social way, expected by the Territory of the teacher? That is, I mean, is a teacher expected to mingle in all their social affairs and give them instruction in this that are not strictly school matters. The Bureau you know expects it. Someway their parties don't just appeal to me—they drink “not wisely but too well.”⁶

Two months later Mrs. Borigo wrote again requesting a different placement for the following year. Mrs. Borigo's letters are sparse in the Morey files and gracious in tone. She was a widow with two school-aged daughters. She requested several times to be placed back at Ellamar once her daughters reached high school age because they could attend high school in Cordova, where she could see them regularly. Ironically, the people of Ellamar would not rehire Mrs. Borigo because “she seemed so immersed in a good time all of the time that there was very little school taught at any time.”⁷ The teacher before Mrs. Borigo, Miss Kronquist, had been run out by Ross Paden, a white man with no children who appeared to have viewed himself as the father of the town. A near-by resident came to Miss Kronquist's defense: “Miss Kronquist is a fine teacher and if need be said, perhaps better than any so far.... As for me, I think that Mr. Paden has some grudge against the School teacher and is trying his best to get rid of her. He is not well liked himself and is not making any friends.”⁸

Immediately preceding Mrs. Harrais, the 1931-1932 teacher at Ellamar was Mrs. Corbett who had had several years of rural teaching experience before arriving in Ellamar. Her letters in the Morey files suggest she was able to withstand quite a bit of adversity, but she also ran into hostility along the way. In 1923-1925 she taught in

Nushagak where she inquired that since the entire school had to sit on boxes, perhaps chairs would be warranted. The chairs never arrived.⁹ In 1925-1926 she taught in Clark's Point, and upon leaving that position argued strongly that only a male teacher should be sent to that village.¹⁰ Before that Mrs. Corbett had had problems in Kiana where she complained of food shortages and similarly advised: "Do not send a young white woman.... No men fit to associate with, every one living with a native woman."¹¹ Mrs. Corbett believed that children born to white fathers who had not married the native mothers should not be entitled to a territorial education.¹² Fortunately, all of the parents of the children at the Ellamar school were married, and although Mrs. Corbett advised Mr. Keller that the school should be closed and the children sent to the government school in Tatitlek, she was welcome there. In December she felt compelled to move out of the teacherage at her own expense: "I have been obliged to move from the rooms at the schoolhouse, renting an empty Native's house, which is in better condition and weather proof so am more comfortable, as I had to buy a heater. Nothing can be done to the upstairs rooms of the school as it would take too much money, then not be satisfactory."¹³ Mrs. Corbett signed on for an additional year at Ellamar in March, but evidently changed her mind in May.

In spite of the warnings as to the conditions of the teacherage that Mrs. Corbett reported to Mr. Keller, when Mrs. HARRAIS wrote the summer before her arrival that she had heard the building was in poor condition and could something be done to improve it, Mr. Keller merely replied: "We are advised that the teacher's quarters are in somewhat poor condition, although we believe that the school's property is in fair shape. I will be

pleased to have your reaction to the condition of the property after you arrive at Ellamar.”¹⁴ Fortunate for Mrs. HARRAIS, Marie McDonald lived a few miles across the bay on Busby Island and was invested in the Ellamar school. Mrs. McDonald was the school board treasurer and recognized that Mrs. Corbett had left likely due to having to pay rent. The board decided to invest in a stove for the teacher’s quarters, in hope of mitigating the draftiness. And in the mild month of September, Mrs. HARRAIS reported: “There is nothing wrong with the teacher’s quarters except the stairway. It is more like a ladder than a stairway. The stair tread is so narrow that you have to go sideways in order to have a place to set your feet. We have to melt snow here for water in winter time, and it looks an impossible task to get enough snow up that stairway. Help!”¹⁵ No help was forthcoming.

Mrs. HARRAIS found the children likable. She was concerned that they could not read, but she admired their skill in drawing. Mrs. Corbett had tried to get teaching credentials based on her experience as a drawing teacher in California, so it is no surprise that she had focused with the Ellamar children on drawing. Mrs. HARRAIS may not have been a proponent of drawing instruction, considering that one of Mrs. Tjosevig’s complaints involved her daughter’s failure to advance in drawing. Beyond her work at the school, Mrs. HARRAIS found pleasant companionship with Mrs. McDonald.

Mrs. McDonald lived with her new husband Angus McDonald on his fox farm on Busby Island. Mrs. McDonald, formerly Frantzen, was a veteran federal teacher who had taught in the village of Tatitlek in 1925-1926, when she presumably met Mr. McDonald. In spring of that term, she had expressed concern for the Ellamar school to the federal superintendent, who advised her to stay out of it: “it behooves us not to take any part in

the territorial school matters. The school at Ellamar is for the whites and the mixed who lead civilized lives and therefore we should take no part in the controversies concerning same.”¹⁶ Mrs. McDonald then taught at Kokrines 1926-1929. In 1928 she attempted to return to the Virgin Bay area by inquiring as to whether she could receive a territorial credential to teach at Ellamar. She was advised that since she did not have Normal school graduation, she could receive a one-year permit to teach but would have to pass teacher examinations after that.¹⁷ She chose to remain in Kokrines.

Any interpretation of Mrs. McDonald’s letters and records would result in the picture of a woman who dearly loved children. Mrs. McDonald was dedicated to her work with both the children and those parents who desired to follow the western ways. She took very seriously the Bureau’s requests for cultural and ethnographic information, resulting in detailed logs of the daily actions of people in the villages in which she taught. Anyone interested in the minutiae of life in Kokrines in the late 1920s must visit her collection. She certainly viewed herself as an expert on native people and had little tolerance for the interference of other white people. For example, she requested:

Please do not send me to either Koyukuk, Galena, or to Ft. Gibbon. Am sure that my usual success, would be cramped in those places by the white people, beyond all endurance for me. Have had enough of white people[’]s interference here, and know from all reports that it would be a lot worse in these three places. I mean the ones who live here abouts, whose pet diversion, is to fight the Government school and the teachers, to the natives.¹⁸

In the fall of 1928, Mrs. McDonald fell while painting the school building in Kokrines, and from that point on was adamant that she must leave. She broke her foot or leg and without access to surgery, it was not healing. She was able to attain a position in a newly

opening federal school for the native children in Valdez in the fall of 1929, and she informed the territorial board of education that the natives of Ellamar would be sending their children to school in Valdez now, which closed the Ellamar school. Her assessment of the situation was as follows:

The Ellamar natives never did get along with the Tatitlek natives in the Tatitlek School, that was the experience I had with them, when I was there before. Other teachers had the same experience as I had with them....

It seems very apparent to me now that the school board is trying to eliminate the "breeds" that have been going here for years to the Territorial school, and of course now, the out-of-town natives.¹⁹

Then in November or December she married Angus McDonald, and in December she resigned from teaching entirely.

Although no records speak to why the Ellamar school was re-opened, it must have been due to the efforts of Mrs. McDonald. She was promptly elected to the school board, and although she obviously despised Mr. Paden, she and he worked well enough together to lobby for a teacher for the 1931-1932 year. Mrs. McDonald's epithet for Mr. Paden was "unscrupulous." Other people wrote disparagingly of him as well, but the vehemence of Mrs. McDonald's hatred may be attributed in some sense to her general feeling that white people interfered in teachers' abilities to provide effective education to native children, and more even to a letter she received when she was considering returning to Ellamar to teach, in which Mr. Paden wrote tactlessly about Mrs. McDonald's future husband: "Angus is here every day or so. Of course I never learned anything from him, he is getting fat as a Pig."²⁰ Mrs. McDonald remained the appointed treasurer for the Ellamar school even after rural school boards were dismantled in 1933.

Mrs. McDonald was the territorially appointed treasurer of the Ellamar school, but Mrs. HARRAIS began to order supplies for the school and the teacher's quarters directly from the commissioner, Mr. Keller. One of Mrs. Tjosevig's complaints about Mrs. HARRAIS had been that she bought supplies directly from the stores in McCarthy without approval from the school board. Presumably Mrs. HARRAIS carried on this habit from her days as principal in Skagway and Fairbanks, which preceded the establishment of a commissioner of education. Because Mrs. McDonald resided on an island, communication between the two women had to take place largely by letters which were ferried across by various residents out fishing or on errands. Occasionally Mrs. HARRAIS was able to visit Mrs. McDonald in person, and Mrs. McDonald sometimes paid the school a visit as well. Some time in December Mrs. McDonald evidently became alarmed at the amount of money Mrs. HARRAIS had spent and advised her that all orders must be filed through Mrs. McDonald, the bonded treasurer. Mrs. HARRAIS wrote a defensive letter back that was masked in lightness:

Give yourself no more anxiety over my spending more school money. You told me at the time of my first visit to the Island that the funds were exhausted. Right then I quit spending school money and began to spend my own....

I am inclosing a check for the nine yards of curtain material at 25c @ yard = \$2.25. Now it is mine and I'll use it as and when I darn please....

...That scolding about spending your money has a loving laugh back of it.²¹

In that same letter Mrs. HARRAIS offered Mrs. McDonald bookkeeping advice on how to cover the overdraft for repairs to the school by subtracting it from next year's budget.

Mrs. McDonald and Mrs. HARRAIS worked together amicably to secure flour from the Red Cross for the Tiedemann family, whom they deemed the least well off. Mrs.

McDonald attributed the family's problems to Mr. Tiedemann's laziness, but Mrs. Harrais appeared to have a good relationship with him. The Tiedemanns had four children in the Ellamar school, but the family spent a lot of time in Cordova or Valdez in the early fall and late spring when there was work there for Mr. Tiedemann. In the fall of 1933, two of the three families at Ellamar moved to Valdez for work, leaving only two children in the school for over a month. Mrs. Harrais reported to Mrs. McDonald: "Just what this means in terms of school I do not know, and I do not know whether anything can be done about it. I am simply reporting the situation as it comes to us and leaving the rest to your judgment—you know them better than I do. I am teaching as faithfully as there were a roomful, that is all I know to do."²² At this point Mrs. Harrais caught a cold and had to close school for several days.

Mr. Harrais was living with Mrs. Harrais in the teacher's quarters for the 1933-1934 school year. Mrs. McDonald reported to the new commissioner of education, Mr. Karnes, that the janitor pay should be made out to Mr. Harrais as he was bringing in all the wood and coal, but she hastened to mention that the couple were allowing the Tiedemann children to do light chores in order to pay them with food lest they starve through the winter: "I hope this is ok, with you, as it was the only way that we could figure out how to keep these four little tots in school, again this winter."²³ The Tiedemanns had two additional children too small for school at home.

Mr. and Mrs. Harrais appeared to have enjoyed the company of Mr. and Mrs. McDonald. They invited them to Christmas dinner and had planned to spend Thanksgiving with them on Busby Island in 1933 although that plan fell through. Mrs.

Harris was still somewhat under the weather; she and Mr. Harris had no boat of their own and were reliant on Mr. McDonald or Mickey (Edward) Jackson, the father of two of the school children, or the mail boat for transportation. Mr. and Mrs. Harris were lonely for company:

The week-end has come and gone and no word from you. “The best laid plans of mice and men aft gang agley”, and that is certainly true of Alaska. The mail boat came late, I was sick with a cold—did the turkey fail to come down—were you sick? A half-dozen other obstacles may have arisen....

... Will you and Mr. McDonald come and eat Christmas dinner with us? You know and understand the conditions—not ideal—but we would love to have you.

Let us know at your earliest convenience. If some other day is more convenient for you, any time within Holiday week, just say so. It will not make much difference as to the exact day, but we are looking forward to dinner with you as the highlight of the year in Ellamar.²⁴

The McDonalds did come for Christmas dinner, and according to the Harraises it was a lovely time.

By this time, it was evident that Mrs. Harris had had some difficulties with the Jackson and Paulsen families, both of whom had children in the school. Though Mrs. McDonald did not publicly air the problems with the commissioner of education, she privately kept a log of Mrs. Harris’ mis-steps. According to Mrs. McDonald, rumor that Mr. and Mrs. Harris had a \$1000.00 liberty bond in the Cordova bank and that Mrs. Harris was a member of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union preceded her arrival. The Jacksons and Paulsens felt that she did not need the money from the job, nor did they want her to interfere in their wet parties. Mrs. McDonald claimed that she had smoothed out these difficulties, but then new problems arose when it became known that Mrs. Harris

had repeatedly admitted to the Padens and others that she was, she felt crucifying her pride to be under a Native school-board, and to teach native children. Although the patrons [parents of school children] were all doing their utmost to please her, and her demands were many every day, doing things, such as, errands to town, both Valdez and to Cordova, at the school etc., until they were all run to death, about, their nerves on edge and run ragged. They again came to me with she is a good teacher but she orders us around until we can't do our work.²⁵

Mrs. McDonald ended this account by stating that the board retained Mrs. Harrais for the 1933-1934 school year only because she had “made such a good showing with the pupils in their school work.”²⁶ Mrs. McDonald later wrote that Mrs. Harrais had many bouts of asthma which the parents took to be infectious, and Mrs. McDonald had had to smooth that problem over as well.

Mrs. Harrais knew that all was not perfect with the parents, but she did not appear to take the complaints very seriously or believe that her position could be in jeopardy. In the fall of 1933 she told the children in the school that the territory did not have enough funds to cover the cost of wood and coal and that they would have to pay for it themselves. When the children reported this information to their parents, more trouble ensued. Again Mrs. McDonald stepped in as diplomat. Mrs. Harrais claimed that it was all a misunderstanding: “She stated that she was, as is her usual custom, to caution the children not to waste the school supplies, paste, etc, that next year may not have enough money to have a school for so few pupils.”²⁷ In January of 1934, Mr. Karnes decided that the school would close in March after a seven-month term rather than an eight-month term. Mrs. Harrais took the news badly. She wrote to Mrs. McDonald to inquire whether the McDonalds' house in Valdez might be for rent for the summer; she thanked Mrs. McDonald for the lovely letter she had written to the children; then she expressed her and

the children's dismay that school would close a month early: "I am sorry about losing the 8th month and the children looked as tho they were at a funeral when I told them.... It is exactly what I was trying to teach them last fall when they lost their heads."²⁸ The next day Mrs. HARRAIS wrote to Mr. Karnes expressing her regret that the school be closed early, assuring him that nevertheless much progress had been made by the children, and finally depicting a far different view of the conditions than her previous stoic reports:

The salary is not the salary of one, but of two people. No woman alone could possibly meet the conditions here this winter. The building is old and badly weathered. The rain beats thru both walls and roof. The wind blows thru the living quarters so strongly that heavy curtains sway in the breeze, and heavy weight must be placed against pantry doors---in addition to a reasonably good catch---to keep them closed. We have to get all our water from a little creek back of the schoolhouse. The creek glaciers all over the place. Mr. HARRAIS puts on rubber hip boots, scrambles over ice and thru slush overflows away up into the woods, chops out ice, scrambles back with it, and melts it for all household purposes. All essential living conditions are hard. There are no conveniences. No men can be hired to do such work, as they are not here much of the time, and the children are too small.²⁹

She ended with a plea that she be considered for a more secure position.

Mrs. McDonald either did not understand that the school was certain to close on March 23, or she believed that Mrs. HARRAIS would persuade Mr. Karnes to keep it open another month. She wrote to Mr. Karnes advising that the school not remain in session past March 23, and hinting that it should not re-open in the coming winter. The letter began with praises for the Christmas program, for which "Mrs. HARRAIS deserves a lot of credit"; then it quickly descended into Mrs. McDonald's first official letter of complaints about Mrs. HARRAIS in the files. Her previous letters focused on needing to keep the school open for the grateful patrons. Except for Mr. Tiedemann, Mrs. McDonald appeared to

have liked the parents of the children in the school, and she had claimed to Mr. Keller that the parents all agreed Mrs. Corbett had been a fine fit for Ellamar. But to Mr. Karnes she portrayed a different picture: “Well, they are poor providers, when it comes to fuel, that we all know. And the three white people, thereabouts, live worse than the Indians do.... They are such a thankless lot in Ellamar.... These are so unappreciative, and no teacher at Ellamar for the past several years has ever been able to please them.”³⁰ She complained that it took too much of her time to keep the peace between the parents and the teacher, and she wished that Mrs. Harrais had just kept her mouth shut about being happy the school board had been dismantled. Then she launched the joint complaint, which she later frequently repeated, that Mrs. Harrais was too ill to teach and that Mr. Harrais wished she would quit:

Mrs. Harrais has so many attacks of colds on an Asthma basis, and really I think a very sick woman, and too ill to keep teaching, after about March 23rd, and she is very irritable and cross, at times, and most every time I see her and especially around the holidays she was ill and crying. She does nag us all quite a bit. I like Mrs. Harrais and we have gotten along very well. But it seems to me that when Mr. Harrais disapproves of her working, and complained to me bitterly, that if she was not working, that he would be given work, enough to support them very comfortable. He himself says she is not able to teach, and that he wants her to stop working so that he could hold up his own as provider.

He too, is a very fine man, and does everything that he can to take as much of the work off her as can be done around the school premises.³¹

On the one hand, it seems believable that Mr. Harrais was frustrated with the situation and that Mrs. Harrais really ran the show between them. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that Mr. Harrais would have said such things about his wife to Mrs. McDonald. Perhaps he said them to Mr. McDonald. Perhaps he never said them, but rather it was the prevailing opinion of people that a married woman should not be supporting the family.

At this point it appeared that the Harraises had nowhere else to live since Mrs. Harrais asked if they could stay in the teacherage until summer even though the school would be closed. By all accounts the spring and summer of 1934 did not suggest a promising future for Mr. and Mrs. Harrais.

However, Mr. Karnes decided to keep the Ellamar school going in the 1934-1935 school year with Mrs. Harrais as teacher. Mr. Harrais was appointed the U.S. commissioner and probate judge at Valdez, and the Harraises purchased a house there, which Mrs. Harrais says Mr. Harrais “presented to me on my last birthday,”³² while Mrs. McDonald explained: “Mrs. Harrais has purchased a home for herself where Mr. Harrais would live.”³³ Mrs. Harrais appeared to continue to fear that the Ellamar school would not enroll enough children to open, and she needed to teach two more years to qualify for that pension. She began to look into enrolling the youngest of the Ellamar children, though they were not yet school aged. It is possible that while in Valdez she was looking around for other children whose parents might be persuaded to move to Ellamar. In any event Mrs. McDonald wrote her a chilly letter before she arrived in September: “Mrs. Harrais—Annabelle Donaldson is only three years old—so cannot enroll her for another year at least—and [Ju]nior Jackson is younger than she is.... And I know that Mr. Karnes is very indignant and about the ‘strict rules’ that no children from other towns or districts must be enrolled—just to keep up the enrollment here.”³⁴ She launched into a historical overview of the problems between the government school in Valdez and the territorial schools, in which she likely had personal investment from her days as teacher in Valdez. In response, Mrs. Harrais defended herself: “In regard to the Valdez family moving out to

Ellamar---you said they were not desirable citizens, and that was the end of the matter so far as I am concerned.”³⁵

By now, Mrs. McDonald was fed up with Mrs. HARRAIS, who, however, appeared not to notice. But the letter Mrs. HARRAIS wrote upon her return to Ellamar in the fall of 1934 was the last straw, as Mrs. HARRAIS effectively asked Mrs. McDonald to lie for her:

Speaking of money makes me think of Mickey. He doubted the assertion that money was so short, said “That’s what they always say, but I notice that they always manage to find a little more.” In order to convince him that there was real need for economy, I told him that for the first time I was not allowed the teacher’s quarters as part of my salary. Now whatever Karnes does about it, please do not let me down on that. Just leave it at that, as I think it will have a wholesome effect. All the others seem very willing to do a little extra without pay. I told Mrs. Jackson the same thing, and she is very helpful. They had the idea that the government is rich and they might as well have all they could get, but the idea of my paying rent for the quarter struck in, similar to the cutting off of one month last year did. It takes a bump to convince them that we are not holding out on them.³⁶

Mrs. HARRAIS no longer had the help of her husband, as he was now needed full time in Valdez, so it was imperative that she receive help from the parents and children of Ellamar. After this request, while Mrs. McDonald continued to try to uphold a semblance of civility with Mrs. HARRAIS, her tone became impatient, even irritated. She implied that Mrs. HARRAIS had purposefully left behind a key to the teacherage that did not actually work. She reiterated the precariousness of the school and Mr. Karnes’ determination not to enroll any more native children in territorial schools: “And this had better be listened to, I have warned those people for a long time. [Karnes] is more than ever, determined to not let any natives attend the Ellamar school and other little schools.... He has asked to be informed at once if any of the natives from anyplace enroll in the Ellamar school.”³⁷

Mrs. McDonald did not at this point let on how upset she was at having been reprimanded by Mr. Karnes for spending money on school improvements.

The purchases Mrs. McDonald made do not sound extravagant particularly considering what everyone agreed were abysmal conditions at the school. She purchased ink, a few chairs, dishes and cooking utensils, and generators for the lamps. She explained to Mr. Karnes that she had not received the letter outlining the shortage of funds until after such purchases had been made. She offered to pay for them herself and send the chairs back to the store at Valdez where they bought used furniture. But she argued for the validity of the purchases: liquid ink is not affected by being frozen, while the cheaper powdered ink is of no use once it freezes; the teachers for years have had to ask people to bring their own cups and saucers if they had guests, and when someone didn't know, he or she would go without eating; visitors have had no place to sit and very often these are mothers with babies. The only purchase Mrs. McDonald would not defend were the generators for the gas lamps:

My husband says that he has no lantern or lamp that such straight generators can be used on. The teacher says, "she just has to have them." So, we have tried to appease the teacher, for these old-time (20 years teaching in the Territory) teachers will nag, and nag until they get what they want.....and they want so much, that I wonder at the new teachers coming from the states, getting along, at all, in these rural schools, with so little, as compared with the Territories['] old-time teachers, that are still teaching, grumbling, and wanting the moon.....and more ill, than anything else. They are wonderfully good teachers, but my, why can't they adapt themselves to their surroundings, better? [ellipses hers]³⁸

The generators must have made quite an impression on Mrs. McDonald, for in her scrapbook, she kept the box that one of them came in.

Ironically perhaps, the next letter Mrs. HARRAIS wrote to Mrs. McDonald was uncharacteristically cheerful and positive. She glowingly reported that the parents of the children were all being very helpful with the fuel and the water and the stove pipes. She reported that the quarters were much improved with the purchases Mrs. McDonald had made, that things could be better but since she did not pay rent, she was satisfied. She thanked Mrs. McDonald for the lovely dinner she had sent over, and she remarked that the children came over to keep her company so regularly that she had to be a bit less cordial. Perhaps Mrs. HARRAIS was catching on that Mrs. McDonald had become annoyed. Perhaps Mrs. HARRAIS' spirits were so profoundly lifted by the purchase of the house in Valdez and the promise of Mr. HARRAIS' future as commissioner that she could not curb her cheerfulness. Or perhaps she felt concern for Mrs. McDonald, who had suffered heart problems after gaining weight from not being able to move around well from the leg that never healed properly; Mrs. McDonald had spent the summer in treatment in Seward and was convalescing in Valdez. For whatever reason, Mrs. HARRAIS' letter was downright chipper.

As Mr. HARRAIS now resided in Valdez, Mrs. HARRAIS took a boat in to spend the Thanksgiving holiday with him. She was also on a medical mission for Alice Jackson, one of the Ellamar students who suffered from what everyone called Infantile Paralysis and needed leg braces to walk. Alice, whom some called Tiny, was in the hospital in Seattle but was expected to be able to return soon. Alice's inability to walk well had been one of Mrs. McDonald's main arguments for why the Ellamar children could not attend school at Tatitlek, 2.5 miles away. But by now Mrs. McDonald reported to the

commissioner that Alice would not be able to attend any kind of school outside the home, and so should not be counted among the number of students. Mrs. Harrais canceled school for the three days before Thanksgiving ostensibly for the purposes of arranging for Alice's braces and her return trip from Seattle. She informed Mrs. McDonald that the days could be made up "on Saturdays, Washington's Birthday, or some other convenient time."³⁹ While in Valdez she visited the doctor, learned that her persistent cold was bronchitis, and was given medicine that made her hopeful for a recovery. Immediately following Thanksgiving, storms moved in, preventing Mrs. Harrais from returning to school for the next Monday.

Mrs. Harrais found herself delayed in Valdez for two more weeks due to weather and miscommunications, or perhaps, as Mrs. McDonald suspected, on purpose. Mrs. McDonald and Mrs. Harrais wrote accusing and explanatory letters over the course of the days, but such letters could not be sent until boats were running again. The McDonalds' boat had been damaged in the storms, but they were able to cross the short distance to Ellamar to deliver the Christmas donations they had picked up in Valdez early in December. Mrs. McDonald informed Mrs. Harrais: "we were met at the school steps, by quite a group of seemingly disgruntled school patrons"; she went on to state that she and Mr. McDonald had offered to take Mrs. Harrais to Ellamar on their boat on December 1st, but she said she'd be going with Mickey on the 3rd; now it was the 11th, and so "I thought that if you did not get down by Christmas that I would go over to Ellamar, and give out what I had taken over."⁴⁰ Mrs. Harrais meanwhile described her side of the story in several letters amounting to the argument that everyone had been misinformed about how

Mrs. Harrais was to return to Ellamar, and consequently everyone thought someone else was going to take her: “It is of no use to start round the circle to check up on the story. I shall not even discuss it. Cannot see that anything will be gained by starting a neighborhood row.”⁴¹

Throughout the letters Mrs. Harrais’ primary concern appeared to be how to report the missed days to Mr. Karnes: “I hate like the mischief to admit in my report to Karnes that the plan miscarried so badly, because no one who has not lived in a remote place like Ellamar and dealt with its people could possibly understand.”⁴² She seemed confident that Mrs. McDonald would not doubt her earnest efforts to return on time and that she had no fault whatsoever in the miscommunications. Of course no one can know what really happened, but if Mrs. Harrais was covering for a deliberate extended vacation, she certainly picked the right people to blame: Mr. Paden and Mickey. Mrs. McDonald’s reply to Mrs. Harrais’ explanation mildly scolds Mrs. Harrais: “You see one cannot flirt with the boats and the weather man during the winter months here on the coast.”⁴³ But she also was sympathetic to the explanation:

and I--have been worried that you would be caught in a “jack-pot” by the unscrupulous...just as you mentioned in your letter. They have been just waiting to do this...as they do every teacher that has ever been in Ellamar for the past several years....12 years that I know of. If they do, do a little for the teacher, why, they think that is enough....and leave her stranded ever-afterwards, if they get the chance.

I think Mickey was really caught in a “jack-pot” himself this time, all right. But I do not put anything past him, either. So I have warned you too, my dear during the past three years past. Now you will believe me...one who knows these people better than they know themselves [ellipses hers].⁴⁴

Mrs. McDonald, then, brushed off the missed three weeks of school, said Mrs. HARRAIS would just have to make up the time, but would not hold the incident against her to her face. However, the rest of the letter reiterates the reprimand of the year before that Mrs. HARRAIS must not spend any more money without Mrs. McDonald's approval. The reprimand is long and meandering, with a hint of deflected anger.

Mrs. McDonald explained the missed school to Mr. Karnes, but hastened to add that Mrs. HARRAIS was making up the time on Saturdays and had taught school through the holidays, and that the children liked to go to school, so everyone was satisfied with this arrangement. The letter began by assigning little blame to Mrs. HARRAIS, but soon Mrs. McDonald revealed what she believed to be the true problem:

To be more explicit. Mrs. HARRAIS is the assistant Missionary at the Congregational church in Valdez, and that takes a lot of her time. Then Mr. HARRAIS cannot use the typewriter...and she went to help him before Thanksgiving time, that made two trips with delays since October 1st, she is worrying herself so...that he won't be able to keep up his Commissionership work without her.

I do not hesitate to say, that I do not know how in the world..she can keep up her school work...with so many irons in the fire, in Valdez. 30 miles of dangerous stormy weather during five months of winter here is to[o] serious a prop[o]sition to flirt with both the weatherman and our little gas launches out this way [ellipses hers].⁴⁵

In the meantime Mrs. McDonald wrote two letters to Mrs. HARRAIS taking her further to task regarding school expenditures, perhaps accusing her of trying to usurp the duties of treasurer, and warning her of the unscrupulous people in Valdez. These letters are not in the files, but Mrs. HARRAIS' reply suggests that Mrs. McDonald was becoming more forward about her complaints.

Mrs. Harrais wrote four letters in response, three of which are in the files. She was cordial, on the defensive, but firm that Mrs. McDonald had misunderstood her intentions. She made out a check for some of the school supplies she had recently ordered. The letters piled up before she was able to get them over to Mrs. McDonald, so Mrs. McDonald received all four at the same time along with the check. In one of these letters Mrs. Harrais demonstrated the only acknowledgment in the files that there was strife between the two women: "I have checked this letter over from every angle, and it seems to me it answers all questions. If it does not, let me know, and I will make another attempt. Let us not have anything festering in our own minds. That is bad medicine."⁴⁶ By now Mrs. McDonald's irritation flared up to exasperation: "Your volumes of letters received also the 2nd personal check of yours....which you say to pay for school supplies, of which I know nothing about. You will have to quit sending personal checks to me as this is the 2nd one that I have returned to you within the past few weeks. No one is charging you with school supplies that I know of."⁴⁷ She assured Mrs. Harrais that she had never resented ferrying her to and from Busby Island for visits, and she refuted the implication that she had not welcomed Mrs. Harrais in her home: "for you had not come for a visit you said, before you had even sat down in a---chair. It makes no difference that you get such things all mixed up, if you wish to."⁴⁸ Finally she brought up the key that did not work from the previous summer:

And again do not forget to leave the "Key", with me to the teacher[']s quarters, when you leave at the end of the school term. You sure played a trick on us last summer, didn't you? Giving us a "Key" that never was intended to work in that lock. We wanted to take measurements of the kitchen floor, and attend to the

pipe...and above all to the flues...but no, the key would not work. Now listen!
You must see that the “keys” are left with me.⁴⁹

No reply to this letter is in the files. Perhaps Mrs. McDonald never sent the letter; maybe writing it was enough of a venting to satisfy her for the moment. Since Mrs. McDonald was now under the erroneous impression that Mrs. Harrais would not be returning to Ellamar to teach, she may have felt she did not have to maintain as high a standard of cordiality.

No other letters between Mrs. Harrais and Mrs. McDonald are in the files until Mrs. Harrais’ final short note returning her duplicate key. In March, Mrs. McDonald reported to Mr. Karnes that Mrs. Harrais was very upset at her paycheck having the two weeks she missed being deducted, but she had signed the voucher nonetheless, so that was that. By April Mrs. McDonald realized that Mrs. Harrais intended to return to teach another year at Ellamar. She then sent off a plea that the Ellamar school receive a new teacher, a young one who could play outside with the children. And she attached the list of Mrs’ Harrais’ mis-steps that she had evidently been keeping over the years. The complaints were no different from what had been in evidence in other letters, but Mrs. McDonald now granted only that Mrs. Harrais was a good teacher in the class room when she was not ill; she had no other virtues, was constantly complaining about everyone at Ellamar, and spent far too much money without authorization. To illustrate the tone of this very long letter, a few paragraphs will suffice:

She is so very rude and sarcastic, with us all...that I do not see why she even wanted to come back to Ellamar, at all. She was not at all satisfied with the supplies sent to her from School supply house last fall and she just was about to

“kill me with her” constant nagging, and it is still going on. She never lets up. Something, I wonder if the woman is exactly sane, at-times.

One of the patrons was just telling me that she was ill, at her school all winter...and that she “carried a hot-water” bottle on her chest, all winter in the school room...that the children has a lot of fun at times—they get so amused, when she gets after them the “hot-water bottle,” falls out of her bosom, then he says the “kids just giggle, and giggle.”⁵⁰

Mr. Karnes did not receive the letter before Mrs. Harrais had already signed a contract for the following year, the last year she needed toward the fifteen for the pension.

By mid-summer Mr. Karnes invited Mrs. Harrais to transfer to the Dayville school at Ft. Liscum, which was closer to Valdez. The school there had been a special school, but now had enough children to warrant territorial funding. Mr. Karnes depicted his offer of this school as an act of kindness in order to aid Mrs. Harrais in continuing to teach another year while being near her home and husband. Mrs. Harrais thankfully took the offer in that spirit. It is doubtful that she ever knew that Mrs. McDonald lobbied so forcefully against her. Her final letter to Mrs. McDonald ended: “Fort Liscum is much more convenient, but I surrendered the Ellamar contract with a great deal of regret. Both Mr. Harrais and I appreciate every kind thing that was done for us there.”⁵¹ At Ellamar the new teacher was a man, Mr. Stoneman. The Morey files contain nothing about him.

Mrs. Harrais taught out her fifteenth year at Ft. Liscum, while acting frequently as Mr. Harrais’ deputy while he continued to pursue mining ventures. In the fall of 1936 he was appointed to the University of Alaska’s Board of Regents, and put forth the resolution that led to the establishment of the Geophysical Institute. But Mr. Harrais died of cancer in December of 1936. Mrs. Harrais was appointed the new U.S. commissioner and probate judge, and began a new life as a widow, judge, and gardener. Mrs. Harrais

was soon appointed to the Territorial Board of Education where she was instrumental in finally passing a teacher's pension act, from which she herself drew some of the first benefits. She retired from her judgeship on her ninetieth birthday in 1962.

1. Department of Education Territory of Alaska, *Report of the Commissioner of Education School Biennium Ended June 30, 1932*, by W. K. Keller. Juneau, AK, 1933, 45.

2. Harrais to Keller, January 29, 1932, Folder 129, Box 3, Morey Papers.

3. *Alaska Periscope*, 172, Folder 1, Box 2, Harrais Papers.

4. *Ibid.*, 177.

5. *Ibid.*, 178.

6. Borigo to Drake, September 26, 1928, Folder 116, Box 3, Morey Papers.

7. McDonald to Keller, July 10, 1932, Folder 118, Box 3, Morey Papers.

8. Nielsen to Henderson, April 28, 1928, Folder 120, Box 3, Morey Papers.

9. Corbett to Henderson, June 11, 1924, Folder 29, Box 1, Morey Papers.

10. Corbett to Henderson, February 15, 1925, Folder 29, Box 1, Morey Papers.

11. Corbett to Henderson, June 12, 1920, Folder 63, Box 2, Morey Papers.

12. Corbett to Henderson, April 20, 1921, Folder 64, Box 2, Morey Papers.

13. Corbett to Keller, December 29, 1931, Folder 117, Box 3, Morey Papers.

14. Keller to Harrais, July 8, 1932, Folder 118, Box 3, Morey Papers.

15. Harrais to Keller, September 9, 1932, Folder 118, Box 3, Morey Papers.

16. Mozee to Frantzen, May 15, 1925, Folder Tatitlek 1, Box 1, Marie McDonald Papers, Alaska and Polar Regions Collections, University of Alaska Fairbanks Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, Fairbanks, AK [hereafter cited as McDonald Papers].

17. Henderson to Frantzen, March 15, 1928, Box 2, McDonald Papers.

18. Frantzen to Bureau of Education, March 2, 1927, Box 2, McDonald Papers.

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19. Frantzen to Cooper, August 1, 1929, Folder Valdez 1, Box 1, McDonald Papers.
 20. Paden to Frantzen, May 3, 1933, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 21. Harris to McDonald, December 12, 1932, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 22. Harrais to McDonald, October 9, 1933, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 23. McDonald to Karnes, October 15, 1933, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 24. Harrais to McDonald, November 19, 1933, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 25. McDonald list of actions 1932-1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Harrais to McDonald, January 8, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 29. Harrais to Karnes, January 9, 1934, Folder 118, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 30. McDonald to Karnes, January 20, 1934, Folder 119, Box 3, Morey Papers.
 31. Ibid.
 32. *Alaska Periscope*, 184, Folder 1, Box 2, Harrais Papers.
 33. McDonald to Karnes, November 10, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 34. McDonald to Harrais, September 10, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 35. Harrais to McDonald, October 1, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 36. Ibid.
 37. McDonald to Harrais, no date [November 1934], Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 38. McDonald to Karnes, November 10, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 39. Harrais to McDonald, December 11, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 40. McDonald to Harrais, December 11, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 41. Harrais to McDonald, December 13, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 42. Harrais to McDonald, December 11, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.

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43. McDonald to HARRAIS, December 15, 1934, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 44. Ibid.
 45. McDonald to KARNES, January 2, 1935, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 46. HARRAIS to McDonald, January 16, 1935, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 47. McDonald to HARRAIS, February 24, 1935, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 48. Ibid.
 49. Ibid.
 50. McDonald to KARNES, April 5, 1935, Box 2, McDonald Papers.
 51. HARRAIS to McDonald, August 9, 1935, Box 2, McDonald Papers.

Chapter 3

The Course of a Teaching Career:

A Reflection and Analysis

The Letters

In *Alaska Periscope*, eight of twenty-five chapters pertain to Margaret's life in McCarthy and Ellamar, preceded by eight chapters devoted primarily to Fairbanks, and followed by nine chapters written from Valdez and ending in the year 1948. This middle era of Margaret's life struck me as most weighty and conflicted, and perhaps it is no coincidence that these years are documented so heavily through correspondence. No reader of *Alaska Periscope* would have reason to suspect the controversies and difficulties Margaret faced during these years, but even without the knowledge afforded by the correspondence, a bittersweet flavor comes through in the manuscript. Although Margaret and Martin were married for seventeen years, they never lived together for an entire year. Much of their capital pursuit ended in failure, and when it started to look as if their golden days had arrived, Martin died. Just how devastating yet opportunity-granting his death was for Margaret does not become as evident without the details of the letters.

I chose to begin this biography with Margaret's final years as a teacher because I view them as a turning point, a near-tragic fall transformed into a happy ending that poignantly coincided with the end of Old Valdez. But I also began with these two episodes in Margaret's life because they are the most richly peppered with voices

Margaret did not control. I wanted readers to imagine what it was like for Jean Tjosevig and Marie McDonald to have relationships with Margaret without shaping the readers' perspectives by extensive background on what Margaret had done in her life previously, how others had depicted her, and how she had depicted herself—all information Jean and Marie were not privy to from the start. I wanted to give balanced voices to the women in an effort to explore the episodes with as little of the narrative structure of protagonist and antagonist as possible.

As the stories of Margaret's experiences in McCarthy and Ellamar are told primarily through letters, they are by essence multi-vocal. The collections from which the letters come are neither systematic nor complete. The Morey files are particularly mysterious. Lois Morey was obviously interested in the history of education in Alaska, and in addition to the letters, her files include a comprehensive bibliography of education-related materials. How she compiled the letters, how she chose them, and how they came into her possession are not transparent. It is not clear if she was interested in particular themes or people or areas, for example, although it is clear that the rural schools were of most interest to her. In the commissioners' files, the letters were also not systematically collected. The state archives has a dozen files on correspondence related to McCarthy in the 1920s and 1930s, but none on Ellamar until the 1940s, although many letters were written. The story of Margaret and Marie can only be told because of Marie's scrapbooks. Margaret herself did not keep any reference to her years there except for the single chapter in *Alaska Periscope*. Biographical sketches of her generally fail to include Ellamar in the list of places she taught.

In order to establish to what extent Margaret's experiences were typical, I read most of the letters in the Morey files. Given the great size of the territory, commissioners had to rely heavily on correspondence from teachers, parents, and school boards to understand the dynamics at any given school. These letters could be petty, full of lies, or elegantly argued. Clearly the commissioners had to rely on something like blind faith or intuition to make sense of the situations.

My first encounter with Margaret's files demonstrated that the McCarthy position had ended badly, but it seemed obvious that Jean Tjosevig's personal vendetta was entirely to blame. I knew that Margaret was a "salty" woman, to use the description Kensinger Jones made in an email to me, as her stubbornness comes across clearly in *Alaska Periscope* and in descriptions of her by former students and biographers. I knew it was possible that Margaret rubbed Jean the wrong way. But still, Jean seemed unreasonable. Once I had gathered the letters from Morey's files and the commissioners, the strife between Margaret and Jean seemed vastly more complicated, and so I have tried to depict it with respect to both of their versions of events.

Similarly, I was excited when I came across Marie McDonald's scrapbooks because they offered a perspective on Margaret that was very different from the glowing and celebratory accounts that Margaret herself kept. For a long time I considered Marie to be crazy, an opinion I based primarily on the manuscript of a novel in her scrapbook. The manuscript is typed; the sentences make very little sense, some of it is in all caps, everything is underlined, ellipses abound. It seems to shout. I would never have known it was a novel if she had not referenced it as such in a letter. So my first interpretation of the

strife between Margaret and Marie was heavily in Margaret's favor. Studying Marie's and Margaret's letters and placing them within the context of other letters in the Morey files, however, made Marie's account sound more plausible. I believe her when she wrote that Margaret was often ill and crying. I believe that Margaret was experiencing one of the most difficult times of her life, and I believe that Margaret was capable of being as annoying as Marie came to find her. Instead of crazy, Marie now strikes me as especially kind and caring, the kind of woman who would continue to be nice to someone even after feeling she had been taken advantage of.

Stories constructed from letters are by nature dynamic. I learn more about Margaret from letters to, from, and about her, but I am also able to interpret those letters by knowing her. Similarly, my understanding of the conditions for parents, teachers, and commissioners in regard to rural schools is shaped by the experiences Margaret had, and at the same time her experiences are more vivid to me after comparing them to the experiences of other teachers in the Morey files. Further, the glaring discrepancy between the depiction in the letters of Margaret's years in McCarthy and Ellamar and her own depiction in *Alaska Periscope* color any further interpretations of Margaret's account of her life.

The Career

Margaret's account of her career until her return to Alaska in 1924, along with the numerous documents she filed for and about herself, can help to contextualize her experiences in McCarthy and Ellamar. Margaret's teaching career had been marked by

ambition for her own and others' education, positions of administrative power, and general civilization building. After teaching in small schools for nearly a decade in her home state of Ohio, she completed a Normal School education in northern Indiana. After several years as principal, she returned to college at Valparaiso University for a BS degree, whereupon she was elected the county superintendent in Custer County, Idaho. By all accounts Margaret was an intelligent, energetic, and talented teacher and administrator: "She gained the respect and obedience of her pupils not so much by ordering as by interesting them," wrote James Duncan of Bridgeport, Ohio.¹ Of her achievements in college, H. B. Brown wrote:

She was one of the best students we ever had, was always among the first and ready for her whole duty. She is thoroughly qualified to take charge of a school of high grade and is a superior teacher. She possesses much more than ordinary ability, is a lady in the fullest sense of the term and will be valuable not only in the school room but in the community as well. She is a fine organizer, good in government and especially apt at imparting instruction.²

In her duties as county superintendent of schools in Custer County, Margaret established teacher training institutes in the summers to better prepare locals for teaching in Idaho's schools.³ Three months after her election to the position of county superintendent, for which she was unanimously endorsed by every party,⁴ her sister Martha arrived in the county to teach. In 1972, Lilly J. Eichelberger interviewed Douglas Hilts, who had been Margaret's student in Idaho:

[Douglas Hilts] was fortunate in having an early teacher, Miss Margaret Keenan, who with her sister Martha was quite famous among teachers. Miss Margaret asked that she be allowed to organize a class to train for teachers' examinations in fundamentals. This request was granted with the promise that if her pupils could pass certain requirements the board would establish a high school.⁵

May Scott Worthman, under whose direction as Idaho's state superintendent of schools Margaret had been county superintendent, later recommended her to the territory of Alaska, where she by then also resided in Juneau:

I have personally known her and her school work for the past fifteen years; and I unreservedly state that we had no better teacher nor county superintendent in the schools of Idaho.

...She knows the difficulties and needs of the most remote mining camp to the best city schools of the state, and was frequently called into consultation in drafting school legislation and course of study for Idaho schools.

Her inexhaustible energy and resourcefulness, coupled with her devotion to the profession, make her a leader in whatever branch of work she takes up.⁶

The newspaper glowingly described her and Martha's successes with the students of Custer County; and the enrollment of the Challis school, particularly by girls, skyrocketed.⁷

Margaret's career was effectively put on hold for a decade while she was married to George McGowan, whom she had met in Challis. In the first term of the Challis school following her marriage, the newspaper reported: "It is well [that school is closing] as far as the upper department is concerned. There has been little or no discipline in that department since the commencement of term."⁸ Margaret's sister Martha was elected as her replacement, and Martha later wrote a signed affidavit declaring that Margaret had served as her deputy during her tenure as county superintendent.⁹ Given the date of the affidavit coinciding with the beginning of legislation in Idaho for a teacher pension plan, it is possible that Martha merely invented these deputy duties after the fact, since she herself had married well and did not need a pension. However, it is difficult to imagine that Margaret did not help her sister in whatever ways she could. Margaret continued to

teach in one-room schools throughout her marriage, occasionally incurring subtle comment from the newspaper as to the salaries she received; for example, in reference to her position at the Custer school: “Custer county pays good salaries for its school teachers.”¹⁰ She continued to attend the state’s Teacher’s Institution meetings,¹¹ and she delivered a speech at the reception for the Boise superintendent of schools in Challis.¹² She busied herself establishing and acting as president of the Instar Omnium Literary Society in Challis.¹³ In spite of being ineligible, as a married woman, for prominent teaching or administrative positions, she stayed active in the educational arena.

Following Margaret’s divorce she returned to a position as principal, this time in Nampa, Idaho, where she also taught all the high school mathematics courses. Upon her leaving that position, a newspaper reported: “Miss Keenan has taught four years in Nampa, during which time she has made many friends in social as well as educational circles.”¹⁴ The Chairwoman of the Teachers’ Committee wrote her recommendation:

She has taught in the schools of Nampa...exhibiting a great deal of disciplinary power, ability to impart knowledge, and to upbuild the independence of her students to the end of making them strong, self-reliant citizens.

We never had a man Principal who did as thorough constructive work; kept as closely in touch with all school interests; maintained as good control; or worked honestly, thoroughly, conscientiously, and competently for the general welfare of the school work and the individual welfare of each pupil. We regretted greatly when she left us to take a better position.¹⁵

Margaret left Nampa for Boise, where she was employed in a government position as assay clerk for two years.

Evidently aspiring to become the Idaho state superintendent of public instruction, Margaret returned to the education field, accepting a position as principal of the high

school in the newly established railroad town of Hollister, Idaho, where the school had been closed, apparently due to the incompetence of its first principal and the inability of his temporary replacement to improve conditions.¹⁶ After being hired on this emergency basis, her success at turning the school around was so impressive that she was asked to stay at considerably higher salary; however, she declined.¹⁷ Margaret impressed the people of Hollister not only with her skill in the school, but also her participation in the Ladies Debate programs: “The star debater was Miss Keenan, who not only has a pleasant voice but delivered her arguments in an easy and convincing manner.”¹⁸ She left her duties in Hollister with the following recommendation from the school board: “We cheerfully recommend Miss Keenan as a woman of broad intellect, firm disciplinarian, quite superior in a social way and of a character fit for the simulation of any boy or girl who may be so fortunate as to attend school under her.”¹⁹ Although she entered her name into the running for state superintendent in Idaho, she was not elected.

However, Margaret had other options and had already been offered a position as the principal of the school in Skagway, Alaska. Margaret’s success, both professionally and socially, in Skagway is unquestionable. On only rare days did the *Daily Alaskan*, the Skagway newspaper, not feature a story of one of her achievements either with the school children or in playing bridge. The people of Skagway wanted a high school; Margaret developed a high school curriculum. She established a parent teacher association that provided entertainment and discussion groups on all kinds of civic matters, not just school matters.²⁰ She was designated Chairwoman of the Motherhood Committee.²¹

Margaret proposed the adoption of a creed for the school, and the pupils voted to accept it:

I am a citizen of Skagway, of Alaska, and of the U.S. It is my right and my duty to make an honest living and to be comfortable and happy.

It is my privilege and my duty to help others to secure these benefits. I will work hard and play fair.

I will be kind to all, especially to little children, to old people, to the unfortunate, and to animals. I will help to make Skagway a clean, beautiful, and law-abiding city.²²

After instituting domestic science for girls and manual training for boys, Margaret set the children to decorating the school and Skagway. She engaged the children in gardening, “a novel exhibit” of which they entered in the Horticultural and Industrial Fair.²³ She had the children gathering plants from the woods and planting them on the school grounds. The children transplanted trees as well, one for each grade. They gave names to their trees, and the first graders named theirs Margaret Keenan.²⁴

The parents of Skagway were proud that under Margaret their school was participating in pedagogical programs that were among the cutting edge in the states. One of these was enrollment of the children in the Junior Red Cross, for which they raised funds through entertainment programs and lunches put on by the domestic science pupils. Another program was receiving school credit for extra-curricular work:

Thanks to the progressive methods introduced into the Skagway public school by Principal Margaret Keenan...the pupils have many of the advantage [sic] enjoyed by children of the great cities throughout the country. Among these is the crediting to pupils of merit marks for home work of whatsoever nature; in fact, it goes even further than that, and gives them credits for any kind of useful employment in which they may see fit to engage outside of school hours.²⁵

As Chairwoman of the Motherhood Committee, Margaret gave a speech to the public on how to handle their boys' and girls' adolescence, including emotional, spiritual, social, and reproductive organ changes. Her main point throughout the speech is that parents must take their children seriously, treat them like human beings, and above all never laugh at their concerns: "I have scant tolerance for the adults who get their amusement out of life teasing children. All the finer attributes of the soul are stultified by the grilling process and the unfortunate traits cultivated."²⁶

In Margaret's first summer in Skagway, The Women's Christian Temperance Union, under the leadership of Cornelia Hatcher, held its first Alaskan convention there. Margaret quickly befriended Cornelia, attended the convention, and then spent the rest of the summer with her at her residence in Seattle:

A letter from Mrs. Cornelia Templeton Hatcher states that Miss Margaret Keenan is with her and that they are enjoying all the comforts of "Bachelor Girls' Hall." When two congenial, clever and witty women are together they know just what to do and say for a good time. Miss Keenan is only "lent" to Mrs. Hatcher, she belongs to Skagway.²⁷

The residents of Skagway, as painted by the *Daily Alaskan*, appear to have embraced the WCTU, so Margaret's participation in the organization would not have been generally frowned upon. Nevertheless, she did not become an official member until the following summer when she and Cornelia journeyed through Fairbanks up the Yukon River to Dawson in Canada. During their stay in Fairbanks, Margaret was offered a much higher salary to do for the Fairbanks schools what she had done for Skagway's. The Skagway school board expressed their regret at losing her: "[H]er services were highly satisfactory

in every respect.... We were sorry to lose Miss Keenan's services, but had no desire to stand in the way of her bettering her condition."²⁸

In Fairbanks Margaret found the condition of the school, both physically and pedagogically, to be wanting. Even after her two-year tenure she reported to Commissioner Henderson: "The arithmetic is down all through the upper grades, due to four consecutive years of instruction (?) by teachers who graduated from the local high school and began teaching here without further training. The only comfort I can find is that where they used to grade 0 or 20 on a standard test they now average 40 or 60."²⁹ She immediately planned for the re-organization of space in order to provide an assembly room large enough for the whole school to assemble twice a week, and the transformation of the basement into a center for manual training. As in Skagway, she instituted manual training and domestic science curricula and argued that the school building should be accessible to the public for recreation in the evenings and on weekends: "Throughout the whole country the state boards of education and the United States board of education are urging broader use for school buildings. Instead of being locked up from 3 o'clock in the afternoon, until 9 the following morning, the public property is put to good use."³⁰ She explained that schools were now widely expected to provide practical life skills in addition to academic preparation:

In the opening part of her talk, Miss Keenan pointed out and urged the parents to remember that schools of today are made up of but two classes; home-makers and home-providers of tomorrow. The school girls of today are the mothers and home-makers of tomorrow, and the school boys are the fathers and home-providers of the future, and the superintendent's view is that their whole education should be with that end in view.³¹

The work of the children in these practical fields was to be used for raising funds for sponsoring hospital beds, donating to the Red Cross, and promoting of agriculture in the Tanana Valley.

As she had in Idaho, Margaret conducted school without tolerance for absence or tardiness, and with the expectation for duty and studiousness among the children. E. L. Bartlett, later an Alaskan Senator, had been a student while Margaret was principal: “I recall hearing the late Senator E. L. (Bob) Bartlett tell about his last licking in school, administered by Mrs. Harrais [then Miss Keenan]. Bob added, ‘It was done in typical Margaret Harrais style – with love, justice, and old-fashioned thoroughness.’”³² Another student, Margaret Murie, naturalist and author of *Two in the Far North*, also remembered Margaret: “Then there was high school, and the outstanding and strong principals were women. First there was Miss Margaret Keenan of the military bearing and the absolutely no-nonsense formula for school hours. But she was also a marvelous math teacher and teller of stories of her adventures as a young teacher in some out-of-the-way town in Montana.”³³ Margaret’s insistence on keeping strict school hours occasionally caused disgruntled parents. During January 1916, a severe cold spell hung over Fairbanks as it often does, and school remained opened: “One thing stated by an irate parent this morning was that freighters and woodhaulers would not take out their horses this weather [sic], nor would dog mushers take out their teams, but little children would be compelled to go to school or stand the consequences.”³⁴ Margaret’s solution was to allow the children to bring their lunches to school instead of go home for the noon hour.³⁵

While Margaret worked for the betterment of the schools in Skagway and Fairbanks, her sights were set on the new position of territorial commissioner of education. She submitted her name for consideration, but ultimately the position was offered to L. D. Henderson, who appointed Margaret to the Textbook Commission. She accepted the appointment but remarked that she may not be able to attend meetings, and she advised that books to be placed on the lists should be voted on because three of the five members were “too far apart to argue it out through the mails to anything nearer an agreement.”³⁶ Many years later Margaret explained to an interviewer that her name had been dismissed for the commissionership due to the belief that the physical demands of the position would be too strenuous for a woman.³⁷

In Fairbanks Margaret’s efforts to raise funds for the Red Cross through the work of the school children, as well as a Liberty Bond drive met with considerable success. Her lectures to the public and to the children that the money must be earned rather than given resulted in the children’s engagement in wood chopping, water delivery, baby-sitting, cooking, and cleaning for the community.³⁸ When brought to her attention that since she had instituted these fundraising efforts, the church offerings had fallen noticeably, she corrected the problem immediately: “[I]n order to be thrifty, one need not neglect to do his share in society. It has now been reported that the Sunday school collections have returned to their normal conditions.”³⁹ By Margaret’s account in *Alaska Periscope*, the Red Cross declared the Fairbanks’ fund drive to be among the most successful of all, and the letter recommending her upon her departure from Fairbanks expressed the same to be true of the Liberty Bond drive:

Imbued with the truest principles of thrift and patriotism, Miss Keenan has made the Fairbanks schools famous because of the individual investments of the children in Liberty Bonds.

Her generous bestowal both of private funds and personal effort in behalf of every war activity animated others and helped make the district always “go over the top.”⁴⁰

In her final report to Commissioner Henderson, Margaret summarized the school’s contributions to have been \$3192.50 in Red Cross memberships and \$7217.75 in Liberty Bond purchases.⁴¹

The Fairbanks school board’s letter emphasized her patriotism throughout, likely because the war warranted that kind of emphasis in general, but also because Margaret’s patriotism had been called into question, resulting in her losing her position as superintendent. While Margaret had the support of a wide segment of the population, she had also secured enemies. Her friendship with Cornelia Hatcher was well known, and while she apparently attempted to remove herself from the dry legislation of the fall of 1916, her position was clear to all. In a report on the passing of the dry law, the governor’s office printed: “The fight in this district was led by Miss Margaret Keenan, territorial vice president of the Alaska W. C. T. U., and principal of the Fairbanks public schools.”⁴² The *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner* immediately began a campaign to absolve Margaret of participation: “From the statement that Miss Keenan LED the Prohibition campaign in this district (she didn’t even mix in it) down to the finish, the Governor’s secretary could not have guessed more wildly.”⁴³ Six weeks later, the newspaper raised the issue again in an article warning Alaskans that legislation was needed immediately to provide revenue for schools that was lost due to the abolishment of liquor traffic. The

editor's intense desire to control who was perceived as responsible warrants a lengthy

quotation:

We note the fact that Mrs. Hatcher has been lobbying in Washington and has obtained the credit for bringing Prohibition upon Alaska, but we cannot see or feel or believe that she is entitled to the credit. It was Representative Snow who discovered the need for Prohibition in Alaska and who secured the plebiscite upon the question—nobody can deprive him of full credit for that. And, in local politics, it is as plain as a pikestaff to us that of all the workers in the Prohibition cause Dr. Aline Bradley did more work and better practical politics and more of them for her cause than any other worker in the Interior; that she owes none of her success to Mrs. Hatcher. Shorthill, Governor J. F. A. Strong's secretary, tried to give Miss Keenan, principal of the Fairbanks schools, credit for the Prohibition victory in the Interior, and the first one to rebuke him was Miss Keenan.⁴⁴

The newspaper's support of Margaret was unquestioned. She had edited the special Thanksgiving Women's Edition, a fundraising effort that provided for hospital beds in France. And the editor had endorsed her in civic matters before; in reaction to the suggestion that an all-woman city council be established, Margaret was among one "whom the News-Miner believes would be safe and sane":

Miss Keenan, the principal of our schools, is one of the National Vice Presidents of the Woman's [sic] Christian Temperance Union, under the auspices of which Alaska was voted "dry," yet Miss Keenan had that sense of eternal proprieties that caused her to believe that she should take no part or voice in the campaign then on, and she took no part therein, so far as we ever heard. If she is competent to conduct our schools, and she undoubtedly is, she is entirely competent to be a member of our council, and would be an admirable councilwoman, although we do not believe that she would allow her name to be used in that connection.⁴⁵

But the newspaper was not able to keep Margaret in her position in the schools.

The explanation for leaving Fairbanks that Margaret offered to her family and friends, as documented in *Alaska Periscope*, was that she grew frustrated with the lack of supplies needed to teach properly. But actually she had been voted out of her position as

superintendent. She described the events to Commissioner Henderson with what sounds to me like a sense of humor:

Every dog has his brief day in Fairbanks and I have had mine. In the prohibition election Fairbanks went dry by only sixty-seven votes and people have been steadily leaving the country for the past nine months though I do not know of one saloon keeper or bar tender who has gone out. We had had just three months of dry regime, hoarded supplies were running low, and the wets correspondingly irritable. Yet, I do not believe the wets could have gotten me had I not incurred the personal enmity of L. T. Erwin, Marshal of Fourth Division. I made it possible for a woman to escape from his unholy clutches, and sent her home to friends and safety. He waited until three days before school election, sent thirty henchmen into the cigar stores, barber shops, redlight district and along the water front to hammer in the idea that I was pro-German and was teaching pro-Germanism in school. It was like a match to tinder and in places where my friends couldn't combat it.⁴⁶

Perhaps the idea of Margaret's pro-German stance was derived from a speech she gave on compulsory education in which she used the German system as an example.⁴⁷

But Margaret was somewhat relieved, I think, to be leaving Fairbanks. She assured the commissioner that she had a new position in the Lower 48 already under contract, and his reply to her notification that she would not be serving on the Textbook Commission or in any other capacity for Alaska was supportive: "The Fairbanks superintendency from my observation must be a somewhat difficult position to fill successfully for any great length of time. It is unfortunate that the community adopts such an attitude because their position absolutely prevents the working out of any constructive policies to a successful conclusion."⁴⁸

Margaret left Alaska with a glowing recommendation from the Fairbanks school board:

During her tenure she has vitalized and unified both grade and high schools in all their activities.

Thorough, versatile, systematic, firm yet courteous, her administration has been progressively satisfactory.

Her system has effected the best attendance, highest punctuality, scholarship and morals, our schools have ever attained.

...

We deem her a superior superintendent, citizen, woman; unquestioned as to integrity, honor and purity of character; big – physically, intellectually, psychically, yet cultured and refined.

...

In every field of work essayed she has left the perfect, finished product of a brilliant mind.⁴⁹

She moved to Shenandoah, Iowa, where her youngest brother lived, and became principal of a junior high school. But shortly thereafter Margaret contracted the 1918 influenza virus, had to leave her position, and sought convalescence in various cities throughout the west. Finally she recovered in La Mesa, California, where she was able to purchase a house. Before leaving Fairbanks, Margaret had met and fallen in love with Martin Luther Harrais, a long-time miner and entrepreneur in the Yukon and Alaska. Martin had recently lost most of his investment in the failed town of Chena, when Margaret arrived in Fairbanks. He had no means to support her, but when she left Fairbanks, they intended to carry on a long-distance relationship. Martin headed to the Jumbo Mine near McCarthy after Margaret left.

Margaret taught only one year during the five years she spent in California. She gardened and raised chickens, occasionally Martin spent what time he could living with her there, and in 1920, they were married. Cornelia Hatcher at that time lived in Long Beach, and Margaret and Cornelia continued their friendship and working partnership. One of their joint ventures was the establishment of a gymnasium in conjunction with a

beauty parlor for women: “all who would be beautiful must don their gym suits and prepare to exercise their muscles.”⁵⁰ In 1924 Margaret left California to become the teacher at the school in McCarthy, Alaska, at which point Cornelia suggested she take over the presidency of the Alaska WCTU chapter. Margaret continued her teachings on natural beauty, imploring her female students to stay away from cosmetics. One McCarthy student, Mariane Wills, wrote the following news story: “Friday morning Mrs. Harrais talked to us about painting our faces with artificial coloring, etc., because two of us girls came to school all painted up like ‘Injuns on the Warpath’, as we know now. We talked about beauty, and found that people who are beautiful not only have perfect features but beautiful thoughts, also.”⁵¹

This focus on inner beauty and health illustrates that in addition to valuing a stringent academic rigor, Margaret placed emphasis on the health and well-being of the whole person through physical exercise, diet, and practical training in the skills men and women need for every day life. She believed that fostering good habits was the best protection against falling to the temptations of vice: “Education should do two things for us,—give us enough practical training to enable us to hold our own in the struggle for existence; and fortify us from within against loneliness, and dependence on exterior conditions for our entertainment.”⁵² Therefore, Margaret’s actions in McCarthy are completely in keeping with her previous career efforts. However, McCarthy was a different kind of town from those in which she had met with such success.

Margaret’s experiences in McCarthy and Ellamar illustrate her as a strong-willed woman who wanted more for herself than she got. Especially frustrating to her must have

been the ill health she suffered after her bout with the 1918 flu and subsequent pneumonia, as she had prided herself all her life on her robust constitution. Once Margaret became settled in Valdez, she appears to have been much revived. Aside from her work as U. S. Commissioner and Probate Judge, she was appointed to the Territorial Board of Education in 1939, she acted as an official for the National Surety Corporation, and she organized Valdez's statehood club. She was active with El Nathan's Children's Home while it was in Valdez, and advocated for the building to be transformed into a school for native children once the Home was moved to Palmer.

She became a celebrated elder, friends with the bigwigs in Alaskan politics, instrumental in shaping the territory's educational policies in the 1940s and 1950s, a lobbyist for statehood, and finally was revered for her knowledge of history. And she got to work in her garden every day that weather permitted, selling seeds to the neighborhood, winning prizes for her flowers and preserves, and continuing to advocate for beautification programs. Her friend, Helen D. Blair, later recalled: "For years on end, Margaret was Valdez. Her home was a mecca for all visiting dignitaries and VIP's. Anything pertaining to Alaska was first approved and passed on by Margaret. Legislators, governors, congressmen all sought her advice."⁵³

The Rural School

The close examination of Margaret's last twelve years of teaching reveal more than details of her character. Looking at these episodes through the letters of the people who participated in them demonstrates both how individual experiences and relationships

help to shape institutional histories and policies, as well as how the policies and histories influence the individual experiences. Margaret's final years as teacher illustrate some of the problems faced by married women of her era in securing employment and financial stability as elders; some of the challenges the commissioners of education faced in supervising rural schools; as well as some of the challenges facing teachers, parents, and school boards.

The Alaska Territorial Board of Education was established in 1917, before which schools in the territory were largely unsupervised. Appointed by the Board, the position of commissioner was to be responsible for overseeing schools in incorporated and unincorporated towns.

The first territorial Commissioner of Education had the job, on the one hand, of developing a system of control over city schools through processes similar to those found in the various states of the United States and, on the other, of performing all of the duties of administrator for the schools under territorial control in rural areas not incorporated as cities, nor a part of the federal system.⁵⁴

Schools in incorporated towns were funded by city taxes with a supplement from the territory; their finances were overseen by the communities themselves. In unincorporated areas, schools were funded solely by the territory; budgets were given to local school boards who were responsible for making purchases and paying the teachers and janitors. Monthly reports were filed with the commissioner. The territory had approximately 50 unincorporated schools and a dozen or so incorporated ones when Margaret arrived in McCarthy.

In 1917 the territory of Alaska enacted a Dry Law. Since the majority of funds for city schools were from alcohol licensing fees, the Dry Law was considered by some to be

anti-education. From the establishment of Alaska as a territory in 1912 until 1917, the territory had no legal means to control its schools. Margaret considered herself an instrumental character in the persuasion of the United States Congress to confer to the territory the responsibility to educate its children: “The sleep I lost over that situation that winter would have averted the terrible breakdown in health from which I have suffered the past ten years.... I bombarded the Delegate and Congress with enough telegrams, at five dollars per paid out of my own pocket, to secure the introduction and passage of the measure in just nine days.”⁵⁵ Others substantiate her role: “Not only Fairbanks but all Alaska is poorer because she returns to the States for she has been largely instrumental in securing Territorial enactments for school and society which have uplifted every community and person in Alaska.”⁵⁶ With the establishment of the Territorial Board of Education, the territory’s school system was officially three-tiered, with city schools, rural schools, and federal schools administered through the Bureau of Indian Affairs for the purpose of educating Alaska Natives. In some areas this meant that two schools were run side by side, one for the white children and one for the native children.

Since many of the territorial schools in rural areas had been established at times of mining booms, when mines closed many of the white children would move away while mixed and native children who had been attending the schools remained. Therefore, some native children were participating in a federal education and some in a territorial education. While the federal government paid tuition to the states in the United States for the education of the native populations there, no such tuition was available to the territory of Alaska. It is estimated that one in three Alaska Native children attended territorial

schools. The commissioners of education, therefore, had considerable financial stakes in encouraging native and part native families to send their children to federal schools, decreasing the costs of education to the territory.

The discrepancies between the state of the school buildings in McCarthy and Ellamar, as well as the availability of supplies for the school and teacher, can likely be explained by the fact that the school at Ellamar served native children while the school at McCarthy served white children. Given the numerous letters in the Morey files that expound on dismal conditions of buildings, supplies, and furniture in rural schools across the territory, it is safe to assume that Ellamar was not an exception. The commissioners made little attempt to make life in these rural schools pleasant enough for teachers to be retained for any length of time. Parents of children in these schools must have felt their lack of importance, and many of the school boards consisted of white residents, such as post masters, store owners, and commissioners, who did not even have children in the schools. A prevailing assumption that to serve on a school board one must be able to read exacerbated the lack of balance.

As the instance of the McCarthy school board troubles bears out, rural school boards could be the commissioners', teachers', and parents' biggest obstacle. Several other series of letters in the Morey files exemplify that in rural areas personal differences, conflicts, and even feuds often played out within the school boards. The commissioners repeatedly wrote letters to school boards ordering them to work out their problems locally rather than try to drag the commissioner into making decisions for them. During the years in which the commissioner's position was elected by the citizenry rather than appointed

by the Territorial Board of Education, parents and school board members routinely threatened to withdraw or offered to provide support depending on the commissioner's willingness to grant this or that favor. When parents found they lacked representation on their school board, they frequently wrote to the commissioner threatening to withdraw their children from school; this happened repeatedly in efforts to oust teachers.

Disagreement appears to have existed among parents as to how involved teachers should be in the everyday affairs of village life. It was all too easy for teachers to become embroiled in already existing power struggles. Teachers often remained very much outsiders in communities and yet had to lead a public life. Their actions were scrutinized, with some people feeling they should keep to themselves and others finding the same behavior offensive. While working in Fairbanks, Margaret gave a speech pleading with the community to give teachers some room to be human. In the words of a newspaper reporter:

Starting out in life, teachers were normall [sic] individuals, she said, and had feelings and emotions that might be expected in others. But due to the fact that the public demanded so much of them, and the fact that they must ever hold themselves up as examples before the children, it was hard work for them to retain the same standing in life as others. Parents could help teachers enjoy life more and could help them not to become prigs by using them as ordinary mortals and not forever as "examples."⁵⁷

Rural teachers could not satisfy every one even if they tried. For Margaret this problem was double-edged. She was an older woman when she arrived in McCarthy and Ellamar; she was accustomed to being treated as a superior due to her education and the class it conferred upon her. As a city teacher in white schools in both Idaho and Alaska, she had gained admiration and respect from parents who shared the values she was imparting to

their children and who appreciated the work she performed toward helping to build those urban communities. In rural Alaska Margaret ran into problems because she did not see herself as part of the communities in which she taught. Seen through Marie's letters, she even went so far as to feel demeaned by the work.

In 1933, the Territorial Board of Education abolished school boards in rural areas. The case of McCarthy specifically demonstrates why the discontinuation of rural school boards was necessary. While the Board did not cite petty infighting as a reason, the general corruption they do cite is emblematic. Karnes' biennium report ending 1934 states that the Board abolished school boards in unincorporated towns because they squandered funds: putting treasury funds into their own businesses instead of a bank, performing work themselves at exorbitant prices, failing to call for fuel bids and instead supplying the fuel themselves at exorbitant prices, overspending, and refusing to follow the advice of commissioners to hire teachers from within Alaska.⁵⁸ The report claims that already within the first year the territory had saved bundles on fuel costs alone. It does seem that without a school board, rural communities lost some control over their schools. But given how quickly Margaret was removed to a different school after Marie officially asked for a new teacher, it is possible that the commissioners were better able to meet the needs of communities than their school boards had been. However, it would also seem that the abolishment of local school boards handed over even more power to literate community members who could correspond with the commissioner.

A recurring request in the letters of the Morey files is for a male teacher or a married couple in rural schools. The commissioners identified the need for Alaskan

teachers in rural schools as instrumental in providing consistency, but they did not have much success. Many of the female teachers in the Morey files were married or widowed; the married teachers did not appear to be with their husbands, however. The opinion prevailed that married women should be given last consideration for teaching positions since their husbands should provide for them and further “no married woman can give her best efforts to a school room and be thinking what she is going to give [her] husband for dinner tonight.”⁵⁹ Commissioner Karnes himself agreed with this position and required married teachers to provide a letter explaining their financial need before he would place them. Some schools flatly refused to hire married teachers, such as the school at Chitina, which was close to Martin’s mining claims and therefore a desirable teaching post for Margaret: “I personally feel Mrs. Harrais is one of the very best teachers I ever knew. Aside from this, however, there is a tradition of quite long standing in Chitina that the teacher must be unmarried.”⁶⁰ The hostility directed at Margaret for making a living while married in both McCarthy and Ellamar was not unique. Coupled with the complete lack of stability in any teaching position and no provisions for retirement, older married women faced precarious financial circumstances if their husbands were unwilling or unable to support both of them.

Additional difficulties faced teachers as they aged in that educational requirements changed over time. No provisions were made for awarding educational equivalencies for experience, and attaining further education was both financially and geographically burdensome. It appears that the assumption was not uncommon that a woman experiencing menopause was at a considerable mental disadvantage. For

example, Louise Corbett, who must have herself been at least nearing menopause, wrote to complain about a fellow teacher: “besides [she] is going thru the menopause which unfits any woman to teach.”⁶¹ Even once a teacher pension law was enacted, the requirement of fifteen years of experience in the territory made it necessary for teachers to continue teaching perhaps beyond their enthusiasm for the work.

Educators are becoming increasingly interested in documenting past trends in education beyond legislative actions, by looking through the eyes of administrators and teachers. To this end, letters play an instrumental role in establishing relationships between teachers, parents, school boards, and administrations, as well as documenting conditions of school and life. By studying the experiences of teachers, students, parents, community members, and administrators, one can envision a more comprehensive picture of the motivations underlying legislation and the effects of compulsory education. Because the people of Alaska have held tightly to their letters, the archival holdings in this state provide a unique opportunity for close study of the conditions under which education takes place. The biographical approach to studying such documents sheds light not just on Margaret as an individual with personal and professional motivations, but additionally illustrates the extent to which specific experiences of individuals participating in education—from administrators to teachers to parents to community members to students—are enmeshed.

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2. Brown letter of recommendation, September 21, 1907, Folder 7, Box 1, Harrais Papers.
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 4. *Silver Messenger*, October 18, 1898
 5. Lilly J. Eichelberger, "Douglas Hilts," in *Pioneer Women Teachers in Idaho*, ed. Lucile Parsons, Evelyn Keppner, and Mary Rae Faraca (Idaho: Alpha Nu State Research Committee Delta Kappa Gamma Society, 1972), 21.
 6. Worthman to Governor of Alaska, July 2, 1915, Folder McCarthy 1913-1946, AS 4079.
 7. *Silver Messenger*, July 11, 1899.
 8. *Silver Messenger*, March 12, 1901.
 9. Martha Keenan affidavit, August 1, 1921, Folder 7, Box 1, Harrais Papers.
 10. *Silver Messenger*, August 25, 1903.
 11. *Silver Messenger*, September 8, 1903.
 12. *Silver Messenger*, October 15, 1901.
 13. *Silver Messenger*, December 17, 1901.
 14. *Idaho Statesman*, December 25, 1910.
 15. Lamson letter of recommendation, July 18, 1913, Folder McCarthy 1913-1946, AS 4079.
 16. *Hollister Herald*, January 10, 1914.
 17. *Hollister Herald*, June 6, 1914.
 18. *Hollister Herald*, February 7, 1914.
 19. Duvall letter of recommendation, April 14, 1914, Folder McCarthy 1913-1946, AS 4079.
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 33. Margaret Murie, "Margaret Murie," in Cashen, 39.
 34. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 4, 1917.
 35. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, January 5, 1917.
 36. Keenan to Henderson, January 8, 1918, Folder Fairbanks 1917-1918, Box AS 4074.
 37. "Mrs. Margaret Keenan Harrais Has Unusual Record," *The Alaska Woman* May 1942, Folder 2, Box 3, Harrais Papers.
 38. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, November, 9, 1917.
 39. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, December 16, 1916.
 40. Hamilton letter of recommendation, March 25, 1918, Folder McCarthy 1913-1946, Box AS 4079.
 41. Keenan report on school fund drives, March 21, 1918, Folder Fairbanks 1917-1918, Box AS 4074.

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 50. "Unique Beauty School Is to Be Established Here: Gym Suit First Requisite," no date, newspaper clipping, Folder 2, Box 3, Harrais Papers.
 51. Mariane Wills, "School Notes, McCarthy, Alaska, 1928," Folder 2, Box 3, Harrais Papers.
 52. Harrais, "Our Yardstick," Folder 4, Box 5, Harrais Papers.
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Chapter 4

Alaska Periscope:

The Life of a Manuscript

Margaret Keenan Harrais' autobiographical text *Alaska Periscope* consists of a series of letters. She wrote these letters as general texts to a wide audience of friends and family who lived untravelable distances from her. The letters are not intimate. They are documentary, sometimes philosophically or politically argumentative, and written in a Victorian style. The letters have been interpreted by writers on Alaska as conveyors of fact; no one has attempted to contextualize Margaret's writing within either a tradition of writing about the West and North, or a tradition of women's self-representations, or even against the backdrop of her own life as it existed beyond the manuscript. Although Phyllis Demuth Movius' 2009 book entitled *A Place of Belonging: Five Founding Women of Fairbanks* contains biographical background information from Margaret's early years as well as additional information about her service with the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the story told is largely based on accounts in *Alaska Periscope*; the purpose of Movius' study is not textual interpretation or critique. Margaret's biographers have tended to repeat what she wrote or said in their own words, inflected by historical objectivity and argument.

These letters were maps for Margaret. In them she could stake out who she was to her family and friends with whom she no longer had the opportunity for close

relationships. The letters are necessarily distanced, when one considers their purpose as one-size-fits-all reports to those she had known. Her brother Thomas once complained about their generic quality, a complaint which Margaret later said put an end to further writing of them.¹ The letters can be interpreted in a variety of ways; if we interpret them as art, then it will not matter that we can never know exactly what the foundations in reality are. Historical interpretation can be described metaphorically as, among other descriptors, prophetic or apocalyptic. Prophetic interpretation is a smooth globe at great distance; not a loosening ball of string, looping and knotting. Prophetic interpretation is a story told largely by those in control at the time of its telling, a looking back on events as if to show the present in its inevitability. Apocalyptic interpretation is a tentative poking and sorting, not a tying up. It is an interpretation of history as told by voices traditionally silenced in the master narrative; it focuses on what else happened.

Because *Alaska Periscope* exists in archives as a manuscript, it is becoming a distant globe. Margaret's words are becoming truth. Her world that she invented and wrote to people with whom she was no longer intimate, but whom she remembered intimately, has not collapsed over time. So her strings are tightening and smoothing. I think she would be quite pleased with the way in which her writing has been put to prophetic use in the short sketches of her. Ultimately it suggests that her deliberate control over the self that we perceive has been successful. She likely would not thank me for my efforts to portray her in the more dimensional ways I am attempting.

The metaphors used in the theorizing and criticism of both biography and autobiography are violent and inflected with corporeality. Biographers speak of

devouring, absorbing, digging up, animating, and cannibalizing in reference to both their subjects and their readers. Paul de Man's seminal metaphor is autobiography as defacement, in which mortality is "restored" in a way that "deprives and disfigures."² Feminist theories that focus on the experiential foundations of autobiography exploit the metaphors of body with terms such as re-cover and re-member. Feminist and Queer theories that are derived from psychoanalytic models play particularly fondly with the body's boundaries and its penetrable surfaces.

These metaphors of the body are exciting ways to complicate boundaries, such as cultural ins and outs, public and private realms, and inner and outer states of being. They also finally bring the tendency of early feminist theory that focused on differentiation of the sexes in essentializing ways to a critical halt, as clearly the boundaries between surface and depth of bodies is folded and fluid, not cut and dry. New feminist and especially Queer theories exploit the biological fact of a sexual continuum rather than duality to critique all kinds of cultural phenomena; surely the postmodern near-obsession with "breaking down the binary" is also related. The development of these metaphors of body illustrates a fundamental difference between approaching autobiographical writing as a means to elucidate *women* and approaching autobiographical writing as a means to elucidate *writing*. The playfulness of metaphor can lead to expansive thinking about writing and the self.

Alaska Periscope is a body of many parts. Even though the Harrais Papers contain several combinations and drafts of the chapters, a version is now definitively bound and in the Valdez Consortium Library, accessible without restriction to the public. Margaret

had sent parts of the whole to magazines, family, friends, publishing houses, and agents over a twenty-year period. She recombined these parts repeatedly, but the parts themselves remained fairly stable over time. During their conceptions, these parts were intended for public viewing as it was a habit for friends to publish letters they received from afar in their home newspapers. Several of the chapters were published in newspapers across the United States when their recipients found them worthy of sharing. As the parts accumulated, friends urged Margaret to create a whole body of the parts, which she did. The first such manuscript on which Margaret received comments was dated 1932. It consisted of five chapters about Fairbanks and the general problems of family life in the far north.

Margaret received critique of the five chapters from her niece Margaret, who was employed by the University of Michigan's Early Modern English Dictionary Project. The aunt first sent the niece the first chapter followed by an outline, which piqued the latter's curiosity but which already gave her cause for suggestion: "[I]f you delete some of the sentimentality I think you will find a speedier market. That is to say, contemporary writing is hard, brittle, and very much to the point – urbane, yes; philosophical, certainly; but a little on the downgrade when it comes to displaying emotion."³ At the niece's invitation, Margaret sent the entire manuscript for comments. The reply was a four-page letter, which makes specific and general criticisms and also reveals a young woman who is in temperament as equally steadfast in her opinions as her aunt.

The younger Margaret suggests that the manuscript has interesting potential, "but I must confess that I have been unable to fit the whole thing into a pattern which can be

analysed and studied objectively.”⁴ She categorizes her critique into four sections—*subject matter, individual characterization, emotional significance, and style and language*. For *subject matter* she attacks Margaret’s chapter on her successes with the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner’s Women’s Edition*: “[I]t is not an experience that cannot be duplicated in any other part of the civilized world and as a consequence carries very little interest. With women taking such an active part in all walks of life including newspaper work the whole thing loses any uniqueness that it might have had at that time.”⁵ She also advises Margaret to excise all patriotic recounting of World War I from the body of the text: “The preoccupation with the war and the intense patriotism which usually accompanies any statement connected with the war has done more to keep alive the spirit of hate than any other one thing.”⁶ She describes her aunt’s characters as “colorless, goodhearted and dull,” and as an example for specific improvement she suggests:

I should like to see the Malemute Kid in all his profanity and all of his high colour and questionable taste. Vigour lies in realistic approach and in sympathetic understanding of background, and an opportunity to observe such people not on dress parade but in usual daily occupations is a thing which is not possible for all and which should be seized as a golden opportunity.⁷

Her criticisms under the category *style and language* remain mainly on the level of sentence structure and demonstrate the changes in preferred wording that occur from one generation to the next.

Margaret’s discussion of the *emotional significance* of her aunt’s work is a thinly cloaked personal statement of morals, and it is quite entertaining as such. But it must have rubbed the elder Margaret in an aggressively hostile way, which the younger

predicted with a final feeble explanation for herself: “I hope that I have not offended you in my outspokenness and that if I have you will put it down to youthful ignorance and to innate conceit.”⁸ The niece’s way of viewing the world does not allow her to read her aunt’s manuscript in the way it is intended at all. I am compelled to quote at length:

I have found that I am happier if I let my reason guide my heart and if I tear aside the fiction of diplomatic lying and face the truth and be honest in my criticisms and frank in my relationships. And as you see, sentimental attachments have no place in my thinking. Let’s discuss this whole thing from the point of moral interest and let me ask you several questions. Are you shocked when you hear a good round oath? Are you horrified when you see a prostitute approach a man and when you see them walk off together? Are you shamed when you hear a frank and intelligent discussion of sex problems in mixed company? Do you feel the ultimate cleanness of your own life and the sanity of your point of view are ruinously affected by such experience? Do you feel that sex education in the schools is detrimental to the subsequent moral health of young children? I must very frankly and honestly answer no to all of these questions.⁹

The chapters that elicit this line of query include the story of Margaret’s dog sled trip from Fairbanks to Nenana and back, during which she shared company with men and women with whom she generally would not have socialized. She uses veiled and vague descriptions. And in order not to offend her intended audience, she expounds on her safety in such company as well as how it has not tainted her respectability in the least. Her niece thought this chapter was the best of the three and, likely therefore, singled it out for lengthy critique.

Margaret’s description of the Malemute Kid is full of admiration and tolerance for his “oaths,” but she also writes: “The man seemed suddenly to realize what he was saying and who was hearing; for from that moment forward throughout the four days of travel together his language might have been the Court language of France. That was no mean

tribute to womanhood, and I appreciated it as the days wore on and provocations multiplied.”¹⁰ The described multiplied provocations include resting at a roadhouse where no woman had been in two months, but “I was not afraid, I instinctively knew I was safe.”¹¹ And later an accident on the trail necessitates an emergency stop at an establishment where women were known to be seen, but “[u]sually the only women who travel the trails in the dead of winter are of the oldest profession known to women.”¹²

Near the conclusion of her chapter, she muses:

There is something queer about our application of Ten Commandments to women. A woman may break nine of them and keep one and still rate a good woman. Another woman may keep nine of them and break one and she is eternally damned. I wonder. In my bible reading I had always skipped the “Begats” —chapters of genealogy; but since coming home I have dug out of them a startling fact—of the four women mentioned in the genealogy of the Christ, three would have been barred from polite society, probably denied church membership in most communities. Yet they played a great part in the history of the world. Echoing Pilate, the perplexed jurist at the trial of the Christ, “What is truth?”¹³

I have always found this aside evidence that Margaret was concerned that her friends and family would think she had lost her upright morals, but that simultaneously her experiences were providing her with a more critical point of view of what lay at the heart of the morality. Her niece, however, reads these passages as merely demonstrating her aunt’s prudishness, which she appears to want to belittle.

These exchanges took place in 1932. I assume that the first letter was written in the spring of 1932 after Margaret had lost her position at McCarthy but was still residing there awaiting her husband’s return from the mining claims. The irony of her niece’s provocations regarding language and prostitutes at this time in Margaret’s life must have been hard to bear. The critical letter must have reached Margaret in her first months at

Ellamar. Her reaction can well be imagined, and perhaps to regain her own point of view, Margaret sent the chapters out again sometime in the spring of 1933 to her friend Catharine Corboy, who was now the Alumni Secretary at Valparaiso. Catharine's reaction to the chapter is more in line with Margaret's intention:

In these days of nauseating sex-stories think what a parent will feel when he places the chaste story related in 'The Lone Trail' in the hands of a cherished son or daughter. The reading of it made me tingle with delight that my idealized Margaret was not found lapsing, with not even the naming of forbidden things to be found in her writing."¹⁴

Maybe Margaret sent the chapters along with a description of her niece's criticisms to satisfy herself. The references are certainly uncanny. But Margaret's niece's failure to read the way Margaret intended did give Margaret pause; she did not pursue further publication or comments until 1938.

Once Margaret began to send the chapters to people of her own generation, friends urged Margaret to make the whole body public. The main friend assisting Margaret in her endeavor was Marie Drake, the secretary to the commissioners of education since the establishment of that position in 1917 until she was promoted to deputy commissioner, which she remained until her retirement in 1945. Marie shared Margaret's chapters with many, including old-time Alaskans and people with connections to the publishing world. While all replies were more encouraging than Margaret's niece's had been, no one would endorse the whole body. For example, Jeannette Nichols, author of the 1923 book *Alaska: A History of Its Administration, Exploitation, and Industrial Development during Its First Half Century under the Rule of the United States*, made a tour of Alaska with her husband and met Margaret in Valdez. Upon reading the chapters,

she assesses the content and style to be as they should be but the whole to be in need of a new structure. She suggests a revision strategy:

This kind of a job perhaps is easiest done if you outline your chapters—a mechanical device which quickly shows you where material needs shifting from one chapter to another. For example, the present chapter on marriages is very interesting, but you probably would want to build the Harrais sequence gradually by little inadvertent references to him in the narrative as he gradually became more important in the total picture; and then let the reader get tremendously excited by the budding romance in a chapter in which that theme dominates.¹⁵

But far from discouraging, the letter declares Margaret's book is sure to become a best-seller. Jeannette's husband, Roy Nichols, a historian at the University of Pennsylvania, advises Margaret to send her work to the University of Oklahoma Press.¹⁶ Ann Coleman, a librarian to whom Marie Drake gave the manuscript, advises in the paraphrase of Marie: "[T]here is a certain lack of continuity.... [T]he motif of the Viking is tied to that of Alaska and—instead of being covered in one chapter or section, there should be recurring strains—faint—or pronounced as the case may call for—but none-the-less there as an integral part of the whole—Alaska."¹⁷ Margaret did not keep copies of any replies she may have written to these friends.

In 1940 Margaret sent the chapters to John McAnerney, a former Alaskan miner now living in New York City, with instructions that she wished it to be placed with

a good publisher, but I shall not go down and jump into the Bay if it isn't.

I have dreamed of having it accepted by a big, well known publishing house, and would like to have you try that first---one can always reef in one's sails if necessary. However, I am not asking you to turn yourself into an errand boy for me. Hire a messenger whenever one can be used and pass on the fee to me.

...

Again let me try to express my appreciation for your generous offer of assistance. Without it, I am not sure that I would have had the courage to finish

the task. The task of marketing a manuscript seems almost hopeless, when one is unknown and so remote. You look like Santa Claus to me; not personally, but in spirit.¹⁸

She asks that if he fails to place it, or if after reading finds it unworthy of placement, she would like for him to pass it on to the literary agents at the Writers' Workshop, the address for whom she had received from her niece Margaret. John was not able to place it, nor does it appear that he sent it on. In January 1943 Margaret inquired from the agency whether it would be interested in looking at her chapters and received her first reply from Anita Diamant of the Writers' Workshop inviting her to send the book. Anita's compliments and criticisms are the most extensive in the records and are largely in keeping with previous ones. However, she details far more changes necessary for publication. Unlike other correspondence regarding the manuscript, Margaret kept copies of her own replies to Anita.

A sense of Margaret's growing weariness at seeking publication, seen first in her letter to John McAnerney, develops in the letter she sent to Anita accompanying the manuscript. She describes the work, the praise it has received from her Alaskan cohort, her inability to gauge if it would meet with an Outside audience's interest, but her insistence that it is a true Alaskan story, and then she asks for advice on titles and subtitles. She says she has considered titling it *Alaska Sourdough—Feminine Gender*, *Alaska Periscope*, or *Alaska Kaleidoscope*: "I would like your slant on these; also, on the sub-heads. This is all so stale to me that I lost out on headings, even left some without heading toward the last. You or some of your staff are much better equipped to select catchy or clever headings, and to edit the ones I have used."¹⁹ I have the distinct

impression that Margaret thought her book was finished except for minor details, and further, she was a busy woman with her work as judge, on the board of education, as an official of a National Surety Corporation, continued service with the WCTU, and in myriad other public service. I can hardly imagine enough time for an extensive revision.

Anita frames all of her praise and criticism from a marketing perspective. She explains that the agency is interested in the story but that it was unmarketable in its present form: “Books of personal experience written by people who would not ordinarily be known to the reading public, have been selling very well these past few years, for they allow readers to have many wonderful vicarious experiences. But of course the sale of such a book does depend not only on the material that is used, but also on the way the book is written and presented.”²⁰ Her criticisms then center on a missing sense of realism. She echoes the desire for more personal touches expressed by previous readers:

It will be more important for us to understand your personality, and in order to do this, you can give us some introspective analysis. You also do not give the individuals in the book enough of an emotional quality. When you decide to marry, and when you decide that you are in love with Mr. Harrais, this should be in warmer, more appealing tones, than to merely mention the fact. We also feel that you never made Mr. Harrais quite real to us, and he does play an important part in the story. We’d suggest you bring him into the story from the time you first met him and allow us to see your affection for each other as it developed.²¹

Next she suggests that “good, crisp conversation” be used to help portray a more vivid picture, as “the dialog in this book is not as real and natural as it must be. You allow yourself every now and then to fall into a somewhat dated style, where you use many clichés, or familiar expression, and these tend to rob the style of its spontaneity.” She suggests that some physical descriptions of characters would help readers visualize them.

Finally, she advises Margaret to add in more detail about daily life, how she set up her household after marriage, how she got along with her pupils, more details on the work she performs as commissioner, and what effect the war has had on daily life in Alaska. She declines to act as agent for the book but hopes Margaret will make revisions.²²

Margaret's knee-jerk response to the letter must have been written the moment after she read it. She recognizes that Anita has not read the manuscript in the way it was intended and implies that Anita is frivolous:

The manuscript and your analysis just received. We seem to have approached the subject from widely different viewpoints. You ask for a personal manuscript, I was writing Alaska, and I cannot see that the color of my eyes or whether my eyebrows beetle—or whatever eyebrows do—has any bearing on the subject.

The self styled heroes of the North affect us with great weariness. So, if I have to prattle about myself, we will just forget about it and I'll go on helping to build Alaska.²³

But Margaret has more on her plate. Two weeks before, she sent Anita a manuscript “written years ago” about a baby.²⁴ This was the story of Margaret and her sister's search to find a baby to be adopted by a childless couple whom they knew in Idaho. The story begins with Margaret turning down a marriage proposal, continues with the search for the baby, and ends with the experience convincing Margaret that she wants to settle and have a family after all and reviving the romance between her and the rejected suitor. This story is not among the several drafts of stories in the files, but it is certainly at the foundation of the introductory chapter to *Alaska Periscope* that Margaret added some time after Anita rejected the manuscript. In addition, Margaret now inquires as to the cost of publishing herself the manuscript her husband Martin had extant, entitled *Gold Lunatics*.

She explains to Anita that it is “of a serious nature.... It was not accepted because it was not personal enough. The outside world seems to think we are still in the Jack-London-Rex-Beech era, and still demands tall stories and personal ballyhoo from Alaska.”²⁵

Anita responds in a business-like manner regarding the cost of self-publishing, and then suggests to Margaret that if she wishes her book to be understood as a book about Alaska in general rather than about herself in Alaska, she might consider writing it in third person. But she reiterates: “If you would make your story more personal, it would still present a very vivid picture of Alaska, and you would achieve your purpose in this way.”²⁶ A little over a week later, Anita critiques Margaret’s baby story; again she expresses the agency’s interest in the material were it revised in approach and style. Her letter is extremely detailed in its criticisms and suggestions, and from this letter a vivid picture is painted of the original story that led to the cut down version in the final *Alaska Periscope*.

Anita objects to Margaret’s assertion that the story is about searching for a baby and not at all about “John,” the name given to the suitor: “[T]his is not true for you do prove that the trip you made influenced you in your decision to marry John. You cannot bring a theme into a story and then abandon it entirely.”²⁷ Given that Anita’s attempt to restructure the story lies in part at the heart of Margaret’s indignant response, Anita’s suggestion is worth a lengthy quotation:

[Y]ou might open the story where you put John off when he asks you to marry him, since you feel that you are not ready to settle down. Then, you visit your friends Lois and Frank and feel that there is something missing in their lives. You determine to bring up the subject of a baby, since this is what you feel they need. They discuss it and decide this will make them happy. Then you can tell us

how you went away with your friend and how you went from place to place until finally you were successful in locating the little girl. But we would suggest that you tell us a little more about the places you went to, since you skip over this material too rapidly now. And finally, as you go from place to place and see the children, you find that you are becoming more and more interested in a home and a family and you decide to return and accept John. And you can end the story where you present the child to Lois and Frank and see them happy, and then a rather amusing scene at the end of the story between John and yourself, would make a satisfactory conclusion.²⁸

In the final version of this episode in *Alaska Periscope* Margaret undertakes the journey with her sister, not a friend: “We had friends in Challis who were heart-hungry for the baby that never came, so I had the audacity to offer to secure a baby for them.”²⁹ The bulk of the story describes the two women’s travel from California to Idaho with the baby. The only reference to Margaret’s own courtship is in the final paragraph:

All down through the callow years I had saucily sung, “I’ll have no wife (husband) to bother my life, no lover to prove untrue; I’ll never sit down with a tear or a frown, but I’ll paddle my own canoe”. Brother Jim called it my battle hymn. I passed swiftly into the night, trying to sing it with the old-time defiance; but it stuck in my throat. Nothing interested me just then but triangles. How does a perfect lady go about substituting a “yes” for a “no”, and still leave the unsuspecting male the illusion that he re-opened negotiations himself?³⁰

It would seem that Anita’s ability to understand motivations Margaret believed she had masked did inspire Margaret to revise away much of the frame story.

Anita continues her critique and suggestions focusing on language use, advising Margaret to cut to fewer than 4000 words as meets current market needs, and to read more stories in magazines such as *Redbook*, *Collier’s*, and *Cosmopolitan*, where such a story could be placed. She takes issue with the style, repeating her assessment of *Alaska Periscope*: “[T]he greatest difficulty with the story comes from the fact that you’ve used a rather Victorian style in writing it. This alone would keep the story from going across,

for the whole trend in modern writing is toward the very simple and straightforward expression.”³¹ Her criticisms become more scathing as she points out particular problems: “‘They had waited sixteen years for the little heavenly messenger,’ is the type of writing we do want to urge you to avoid”; and “[T]he sections where you think to yourself, are all over-written and not particularly effective. The talk about Scotch Margaret and Peggy Self is never as light and humorous as you obviously intend it to be” and finally, “[D]o delete all that paragraph about the ‘est’ baby, for this not only coins your own word, but it is a bit cloying in its sentimentality.” After Anita suggests Margaret use conversation to express these internal musings, she again refers to Margaret’s book manuscript: “We shall be interested to know, too, whether you have decided to do anything with your book, which seems to us to present interesting possibilities.”³²

Anita’s criticisms strike me as astute; they closely resemble those made a decade earlier by Margaret’s niece although they are more tactfully phrased, less self-indulgent, and far more constructive. Margaret does in fact make some of the revisions Anita suggests. But she also attempts to make fun of Anita’s preferred style even in these revisions. The most fun example is the following:

I suppose I should occasionally stop and tell you how the birds twittered on the left and the ground sloped on the right: also how he shrugged his shoulders and she elevated her eyebrows. Please take it for granted that the birds did twitter, the ground did slope, the shoulders did shrug, and the eyebrows did elevate, in all the right places, and let me get on with the story of the bigness and fineness of Alaska.³³

Years later the Juneau editor of the Arctic Press, Minna Lee Coughlin, advises “omission of the ‘shoulder-shrugging-bird-twittering[?]’ paragraphs in both places where they occur,

since they tend to focus the reader's attention on an omitted method which he might not otherwise be conscious of."³⁴ The Scotch-Irish references appear in many places in Margaret's writing; it was a heritage she was immensely proud of. The general gist of the opposing ethnicities is illustrated in the following exchange narrated to have taken place after delivery of her most prized lecture "Our Yardstick" at the State Teacher's Association in Boise:

I still stuck stubbornly to my guns, insisting that there were some things that we were not doing well. My heart sank as I saw Dr. McLean threading his way through the crowd in my direction. He towered above me, gave me a long, quizzical look and said,

"What nationality are you?"

"Scotch-Irish."

"How do you work it—the two strains of blood within you?"

I did not yet know his position in the storm that I had so unwittingly precipitated, but I answered after a moment's consideration, "I'm Irish when I want to be pleasing and Scotch when I tell the truth".³⁵

Margaret uses this perceived dichotomy to describe herself with frequency, so its attack by Anita must have stung.

Margaret may have been reminded of what she surely perceived as an impertinent line of questioning regarding sex and sex education in her niece's letter due to the similarities in general of the two women's reviews. Whatever the reason, she felt compelled not just to take Anita's point of view as differing from her own, but rather to punch back:

No I shall not attempt to do anything with either manuscript along the lines that you suggest. I am not writing fiction. In the baby manuscript I was hammering the type of education of the period, not merely taking a baby to Lois and Frank. I cheerfully admit to being Victorian if failure to admire the enclosed is Victorian. Why the two scraps of cloth? Perhaps they will be discarded in the next five years—the discarding keeping accurate pace with the divorce records. And I do

not wear my collar up to my ears or my dresses down to the floor, either, except for evening wear.³⁶

Whatever the “enclosed” was, it elicited Anita’s response: “I feel I must answer your letter because you just do not understand at all what I refer to as modern writing. Modern writing does not have to speak of sex, and the picture you enclosed has nothing whatsoever to do with my suggestions that you try to write more in the modern vein.”³⁷ But Margaret was not content to leave it here even. She evidently sent off the entire exchange of letters to her friend Marie Drake, with the addition at the bottom of her last letter to Anita that contained the enclosure, in pencil: “She did not like this one!” Marie replied, “I’ll return this most interesting correspondence and thank you for permitting me to enjoy it. Needless to say, it made me ‘hot under the collar’—as these things always do. I took the liberty of letting Ann Coleman read it and she rose up in her wrath.”³⁸ Aside from an obvious generational difference that this episode illustrates, Margaret was not always the nicest lady.

Margaret’s understanding of private or personal to indicate sexual intimacy, as exemplified by the offensive picture she sent to Anita, is partly a symptom of her Victorian worldview in which inner thoughts are privileged over experiences of the body. Margaret’s entire educational philosophy is built on creating avenues for a good life based on one’s inner state. In a speech on thrift, for example, she emphasizes, “individual preparedness to live useful, steadfast lives for the benefit of humanity—individual preparedness to withstand temptations that always come with prolonged prosperity.”³⁹ In Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s 1998 anthology, Mary Jean Corbett’s examination of

several middle-class nineteenth century women's memoirs may illuminate the difference between Margaret's and Anita's senses of private: "what contemporary bourgeois criticism constitutes as the truly private takes place not in the drawing room or even the bedroom. . . . The 'private' inhabits the interior of the body as consciousness and unconsciousness, and 'inner space.'"⁴⁰ To Margaret any rewriting of the surface would seem to taint the inner space of the body of the text.

But also, much of what *Alaska Periscope* contains reveals the extent to which public and private were intricate and difficult to delineate in Margaret's experiences. Her public persona of school teacher invaded her privacy not only when she lived in school houses, but even as a heavy, burdensome shell; she was often constrained in her other public roles by the precedence of her position as teacher. She lost her Fairbanks position as superintendent of schools due to her temperance activities, and even if one is to believe that she lost the position due to a pro-German stance, that is a private opinion affecting her public career. In a school assembly, she explained: "The teachers are responsible for the instruction, physical care, and morals of the children from 8:30 a. m. until 4 p. m., with a possible respite of one hour at noon. This hour the teachers need. Their bodies must be replenished with food, fresh air, and a bit of exercise; their spirits must have a bit of relaxation."⁴¹ Her entire career, with the exception of the years she taught in McCarthy and Ellamar, which had no newspapers of their own, her actions were on public and even published display to be scrutinized. And once Margaret shifted careers from teacher to judge, she held court in her living room and kept Valdez's misdemeanor complaint files

in her private home. For Margaret public and private were inextricable, and she found it imperative to keep a tight hold on appearances.

Eventually Margaret must have decided some of Anita's suggestions were worthy, for she did make revisions that echo them. In 1944, she sent the manuscript back to New York and asked another niece, Josephine Kremer, who was a professor at New York University, to assist her in seeking its publication. This niece offered no reading of the manuscript herself but did send it around to various publishers for almost two years. Margaret appears to have held Josephine more in esteem than niece Margaret: "I am very proud of you as you were—your picture is always on my filing case just before me. You are doing the things I would like to have done, maybe could have done with a little more backing."⁴² In 1952 Margaret made her last attempt at publication, seeking the advice of Loel B. Schuler, a retired woman who had been in the publishing industry, now living in Juneau. Loel's reading of the manuscript results in the suggestion that the opening chapter on Margaret's life before Alaska be omitted entirely, but that the material there would be worthy of separate publication. Echoing reviewers before her, she writes: "To make it into a potential book would require a good deal of rewriting, reorganization, and both deletions and additions. It badly needs a thread of continuity."⁴³

Margaret respected Loel and had by now had twenty years to formulate an articulation of exactly what she wanted her manuscript to achieve; therefore, her response provides the most succinct statement of the life she wished the body of work to lead. She explains its origin in "annual letters to a wide circle of friends in an attempt to portray Alaska as I found it. It was the circle of friends who began clamoring for publication."

She defends its structure: “You say the manuscript lacks in continuity—True—hence the name, ‘Alaska Periscope’. The periscope emerges for a look-see, then submerges. There is no continuity in its view.” She outlines an ethic of writing: “If I could not write acceptably for publication while the experiences were new and vivid, it is not reasonable to suppose that I could do so now.... When I get a thing thought through, it seems to me so everlastingly simple and plain that I hesitate to express it to anyone else.”⁴⁴

Rewriting for Margaret would taint the purity, the finality of the long-lost perspective; she was not interested in re-covering or re-remembering her self. The body was complete and appropriately clothed.

Margaret’s appeal that her text is more than an autobiography places her rhetorical stance parallel to the autobiographies of many other women. In the introduction to *American Women’s Autobiography: Fea(s)ts of Memory* (1992), editor Margo Culley roots American women’s autobiography in a Puritan tradition marked by “reading the self” as a discipline in which one measured oneself against “the scriptural metatext.”⁴⁵ She remarks on a contradiction of self-valorization and pronounced humility. Women often pretext their autobiographies with the assertion that others had asked them to write it, so “the real defense against unseemly egotism is the social positioning of the text.”⁴⁶ Uncannily similar to the purpose Margaret declares for her manuscript, Culley describes: “[S]cores and scores of women feel that the first-person female can be generalized and that they are writing as part of a community. . . . With a variety of strategies, the writers submerge the personal in some ‘larger’ purposes in order to become the vehicle for conveying a message about history.”⁴⁷

Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her examination of three eighteenth century female letter writers, comes to similar conclusions: “The problem of egotism explicitly concerns all three of these women.”⁴⁸ She describes how they use a “ritual politeness” to speak of themselves in order to give preference to the needs of each letter’s recipient: “The ideology of self-subordination implies, among other things, suppression of narrative about the self. Even when these letter writers experience their own emotional drama, they frequently fail to report them directly.”⁴⁹ In similar ways, Margaret’s explanations for why she leaves various positions and makes various choices place her personal reasons firmly in the background and highlight instead general political, financial, bureaucratic, and even geographical necessities.

Corbett takes up the conflict of self-aggrandizement and self-debasement within late Victorian women’s autobiographies with strikingly similar language. In memoirs the women she studies “master their anxieties about being circulated, read, and interpreted only by carefully shaping the personae they present and, more especially, by subordinating their histories of themselves to others’ histories.”⁵⁰ Corbett’s premise is that memoir as a genre is particularly suited to this tightly constructed persona as it “legitimizes the telling of [the writers’] own lives without demanding that they commit full disclosure.”⁵¹ Such memoirs give the pretense that the text is not centered on the author but is rather a text of “a participant-observer in and of public history” whose aim is to document a kind of living or society.⁵² While Margaret would certainly not concede that her manuscript was a memoir, her depiction of herself as channeling the composite

Alaskan experience is in keeping with the explanation for writing that Corbett observes.

Margaret understands the limitations of her position , however:

If I were a good cook I would like to go out to some of the camps and cook long enough to gather the stories of their romances---some grotesque, some tragic, some beautiful. There is a literary field worth gleaning. It is foolish to sit at one's desk and cudgel one's brain to write imaginary love stories, when other more unique and vivid than can possibly be imagined are being lived next door. But the inquisitive stranger will never get those stories. They will be told only when a fortuitous combination of emotion and circumstances throw them to the surface.⁵³

She considers, therefore, that many stories of Alaska must be told: "Alaska is too big, too diversified for anyone person to interpret adequately all her phases. Like a huge diamond, she reflects back light from many faces. No one person can ever hope to know all her scintillating facets."⁵⁴ Margaret's readers perceive the chapters as being a personal story, and, therefore, failing in personal appeal, but to Margaret they are merely anecdotes in the larger history of Alaska.

The kind of writing Margaret engages in *Alaska Periscope* closely resembles the stories published in the *Alaska Sportsman* magazine between the years 1938 and 1948. During that decade twenty-two articles written by teachers, mostly in the employ of the federal government, were featured. The refrain that the authors write to debunk misperceptions about Alaska and Alaskans in these articles and in Margaret's chapters underscore the way in which the new residents of Alaska wished, on the one hand, to portray the uniqueness of their experiences, while, on the other hand, to impress upon readers that Alaska was every bit as civilized as the rest of the United States. Margaret writes:

Alaskans have the highest per capita magazine tonnage in the world. We have three elements necessary to produce this result---the time, the intelligence and the lack of other diversions. Also, by actual statistics, Alaska has a higher per cent of college and university graduates than any other division of the United States. I wish these two facts could be pasted on the hatbands of all the cheechakos who come to Alaska under the impression that they must tell us how to do everything and what is going on in the world. We do get so tired listening to their half-baked criticism. We are just as white as they are, we were educated in the same universities, we have read far more than they have, and we have an Alaskan education in addition.⁵⁵

The focus of the articles in the magazine varies greatly, but they are all written in a documentary style and feature similar themes as Margaret's letters, including weather, mail, school activities, and loneliness. Jay Ellis Ransom's series "I Took My Bride to the Aleutian Islands" contains almost no references to the village's inhabitants, focusing instead on weather, food, communication, and transportation.⁵⁶ Kenneth L. Cohen's series "Letters of a King Cove School Teacher" depicts the activities of villagers mechanically and technically but does not include details as to habits, beliefs, or personality.⁵⁷ In contrast, J. Lester Minner's articles "Muktuk" and "Arctic Voyage" convey an intense self-reflexivity; nearly every cultural description is accompanied by speculation on how his own presence effects certain kinds of behavior and repeated references to his own ignorance of why villagers behave in the ways described. He emphasizes that his young son is much more accepted than he, and therefore, more privy to frank discussion.⁵⁸ And Dorothy Fay Nielsen's series "Cannery Village" is driven by criticism of federal education policies and an underlying sense of guilt at prevailing conditions. Her descriptions of the villagers focus on the school children, their preferences of activities, and the inadequacy of the teaching material and structures that

are culturally irrelevant.⁵⁹ While these authors focus on different problems and use varying narrative strategies to offer the information, all are concerned with depicting an authentic portrait of their experiences using a somewhat ethnographic approach.

Of all these authors Kenneth L. Cohen most forcefully articulates frustration with outsiders' ignorant perceptions of Alaska, which he blames on the writings of tourists. He emphasizes, as Margaret does, the differences between different places and kinds of experiences in the territory:

I have long wanted to make a phrase that would be applicable to some writers who come to Alaska, travel a month or two over a minute part of the vast Territory, then pass as authorities on Uncle Sam's most northerly possession. Usually they finish up by writing a book about Alaska, and set forth therein the results of their profound observations while in the country.

....

Now I ask you, how could a person learn a great deal about some 586,400 square miles of territory, its peoples, resources, and industries, in such a short space of time?

We very definitely do not need the books these writers put out.

...

Please bear with me on the lecture. [My wife] Rose and I have lived in Alaska three years, and we are both "fed up" on the flood of false and unsound literature about our Territory that has been deluging the press and literary world.⁶⁰

Both in style and content this excerpt could easily be from *Alaska Periscope*. This frustration at outsiders' lack of understanding of conditions, the desire to demonstrate the unique experiences enjoyed and endured, and yet the conviction that Alaska could be just as good as the Lower 48 combined in many narratives of Alaska to create a self-contradictory style. Margaret's lack of skill at or unwillingness to depict her experiences with a stronger personal voice culminated in misreading by the general audience. In a revision to the chapter in which she describes her adventures editing the *Fairbanks Daily*

News-Miner's Women's Edition, she inserts an argument with her niece Margaret: "With all due deference to the fact that she is a literary critic for a big eastern publication, I dare say that the experience could not be duplicated anywhere else in the world, because the essential elements and obstacles could no where else be duplicated."⁶¹ Margaret could not concede that a lack of understanding of the experience resulted from her own failure to communicate the full dimensions of the experience.

That readers of *Alaska Periscope* who were long-time Alaskans believed it worthy of publication can likely be attributed to their familiarity with the kind of documentary, ethnographic reporting on Alaska that was regularly featured in publications such as *Alaska Sportsman*. Others who were friends but not Alaskans were similarly interested due to their familiarity with Margaret's life before her move to Alaska and her general values and beliefs. For example, before launching into her criticism, niece Margaret writes: "I shoul[d] find the book interesting as it stands (in outline) chiefly I will admit because of my interest in you but I am quite sure that my contemporaries around the university might not find it interesting when robbed of its appeal on personal grounds."⁶² The criticisms of all of her reviewers, be they friends, family or strangers, focus on the presentation, not the content. *Alaska Periscope* met with satisfied readers because of the text's relationship to Margaret, not because of its relationship to the readers.

Leigh Gilmore takes up the equation of autobiography with autobiographer in her 1994 book *Autobiographics*. This historical analysis of theories of autobiography focuses on the delineations between humanism and feminism, on the one hand, and

deconstructionism and feminism, on the other. Because she rejects positions that look for “a shared ‘female experience,’”⁶³ and because she rejects generic approaches to autobiography, she focuses in on truth and reality: “autobiographical identity and agency are not identical to identity and agency in ‘real life’; rather, they are its representation” and “to thematize ‘a’ question or ‘a’ goal toward which autobiographers tend is to privilege. . . a history of truth over a history of ‘truth’ *telling* [italics hers].”⁶⁴ Gilmore hereby highlights the particularity of life-writing and denies that the life can be extricated from the expression of the life. Her stance is strikingly similar to the problems voiced by biographers in that the author and the narrative voice are presumed to be identical and the significance of rhetorical stance is subordinated.

Gilmore describes how the “[h]istorical,’ ‘textual,’ and ‘writing’ selves” can be conflated into a single entity by using the example of Clint Eastwood, who as an actor, a variety of characters, and a mayor can still be perceived as the same person by his audiences even when the characters he plays have different names.

The tension between ordinary language and literary language is evident here, for the artlessness of autobiography, its way of seeming uncomposed, results from the assumption that the *I*'s coherence operates in autobiography as it does in ordinary discourse and not as it does in fiction. Plot is inherited, determined by memory and circumstance; personae are extrinsic to autobiographical discourse.⁶⁵

For Margaret’s Alaskan audience, her persona could be read as her self because such readers could recognize realism in the places about which she wrote, because people were accustomed to reading texts written from the documentary writer persona, and also because Margaret was, by the time Marie began spreading her text around, already somewhat of a celebrity among long-time Alaskans. In a similar vein, Ann D. Gordon

writes of suffragists Abigail Scott Duniway and Elizabeth Cady Stanton: “these leaders created themselves as their followers knew them. To do otherwise would suggest some discomfort with or rejection of their well-known presence.”⁶⁶ Like these women, Margaret had an image to uphold.

Gilmore’s observations about conflated selves are doubly interesting in relation to *Alaska Periscope* because each letter was written at a different time and place and Margaret refused to change these rhetorical presences into retrospectives. Each letter was written within its particular temporality, so each piece operates under unique circumstances. And barring her inner perspectives or interpretations of events in any but fairly clichéd ways from the narrative stance, Margaret’s attempt to contain these pieces under a unifying theme is ultimately unsuccessful due to its lack of *plot*. So an inherited plot still must be plotted rhetorically to achieve narrativity.

Gilmore’s study of the difference between truth and truth telling highlights that generic expectations are what finally make *Alaska Periscope* unsatisfying to readers. Characterizing autobiography as growing fundamentally out of confessional genres, Gilmore states, “Autobiography cannot in this context be seen to draw its social authority simply from a privileged relation to real life. Rather, authority is derived through autobiography’s proximity to the rhetoric of truth telling: the confession.”⁶⁷ Margaret’s friends and others who supported and encouraged her in her endeavor to publish *Alaska Periscope* viewed her text as a way to agree communally on what kind of Alaska is *true*. Anita Diamant and others who critique the manuscript and call for rewriting were not at all concerned with the content of a true Alaska; rather, they were concerned that the text

failed to depict emotional and physical realities in a way that is *true* to historical or autobiographical narrative of their own time and place. We see this miscommunication of purpose again in Gordon, who concludes her study of the two suffragists with a wistful criticism:

They did not foresee that my generation would want to rediscover the process of awakening an age, that we would have vital political interest in understanding how private and public lives collide, sometimes to overwhelm and isolate the individual woman and other times to uproot her to be released into collective and political action.⁶⁸

Though self-consciously, Gordon wants these authors' purposes to meet her needs more than their own.

Anita Diamant's characterization of Margaret's writing as Victorian is, therefore, a correct reading of the generic tradition within which Margaret was operating though it could not satisfy Anita Diamant's generation. Margaret's distanced voice and sometimes clichéd, sentimental depictions were clearly intentional ways to mask realities deemed inappropriate for public display and to depict life and society in such a way as to highlight her own role in its development. In Gilmore's critique of ways in which autobiography has been theorized and criticized, she in fact describes the way Margaret wanted her text to function: "Much thinking about autobiography is antirepresentational in precisely this sense, for it neglects the narrative dimension of the text, neglects the autobiography's textuality as anything other than a transparent view onto reality. This is an interpretation of autobiographical reality as a metaphor for the unambiguous real."⁶⁹ Margaret is stubbornly supportive of her impersonal mission and her ability to represent an unambiguous Alaska. Her letters are a Victorian performance, intending to conceal the

personal in order to emphasize the traditional. The text was not a metaphor; it was literal. Therefore, Margaret asserted that her presentation was already real and true; there was simply no need for a re-presentation.

A handful of writers have been interested in retelling Margaret's story in a variety of ways. Most have been historical writers participating in the trend of publishing women's accounts of their lives that resulted from the feminist call to bring women's experiences into the public history. These historical sketches read *Alaska Periscope* as Margaret would have them do so. In the 1940s, a young soldier by the name of Kensinger Jones took an interest in Margaret, spent time in fascinated conversation with her, and finally was granted her permission to read through her manuscript and attempt a novel with her life as its basis. He made a detailed outline, drafted several chapters, and sent them to her. Margaret was close to outraged. She said his novel depicted teachers on the frontier as the exact opposite of what they really were: resilient, resourceful, strong, and adventurous. Kensinger had bought into the stereotype of frontier teachers as timid, shy, and looking for husbands. Finally, Margaret insisted that Kensinger cease with his writing: "It is too close to reality for fiction, and too loose for biography."⁷⁰ The draft of his novel continues to live in her archival files.⁷¹ He went on to be a celebrated advertising executive and professor of advertising in Michigan.

Others who have desired to publish revised versions of *Alaska Periscope* have been prevented from doing so by her brother's descendents. According to Gloria Day of Valdez, a grand-nephew of Margaret's who "is in something relative to book publishing" said he would not object to the publication of *Alaska Periscope*, but "it has to be printed

word for word the way she wrote it.”⁷² It was with considerable trepidation that I embarked on telling a version of Margaret’s life quite different than she may have wanted you to know. However, this more dimensional Margaret that I have come to know is far more endearing to me and has taught me much more than the other. Her intensity and struggle are what make her a real person, and they enlarge rather than diminish her accomplishments. The ferocity with which she defended her editorial choices illustrate a general personality trait.

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Chapter 5

Margaret Keenan Harrais:

A Life

Introduction

I want to begin with what I do not know. I have diverse suspicions about the silences of Margaret's past although I cannot always articulate reasons. My speculations are bridges between the travelogue newspaper testimonials of her existence and the life she led daily in action, thought, and feeling. The bridge is suspended by my own experience.

To tell the story of Margaret's life in a manner of which I imagine she would approve is the purpose of this chapter. The voice adopted here is an evocation; it is neither the voice of the author nor the voice of the subject. It is an attempt to offer to the reader a brief chronological account of Margaret's experiences, concerns, and personality traits. In an effort to follow Margaret's ethic of writing, I wrote the sketch in two sittings immediately after re-reading *Alaska Periscope*, and I have made only minor revisions since that initial composition. The purpose of this approach was to let her voice seep into me so that I could merge her style with my own, to make sure that I had her version of the story fresh in my mind, and to remain loyal to the authenticity of the original composition. But the sketch is, of course, informed by more than *Alaska Periscope*.

In places where motivations, facts, or causes and effects are unknowable, I have felt free to invent. Without the possibility of conversing with Margaret on the details of her life, my own experience, concerns, and personality had to act as guide for these inventions. Concluding this chapter is a chronology of major events in and related to Margaret's life, which I hope will provide readers with an additional reference for the scope and era of her activities. Following this chapter are comments on the sketch. In these comments I write in my own personal voice, the voice of a person who has taken a journey in which she has grown to know another human being. In these comments I clarify for readers who are concerned with veracity where I have stated known facts and where I have filled in blanks. Some repetition from information in previous chapters will of course be found in these last two chapters. But the purpose of these last two chapters is to give to readers a less academically motivated account of the story. In this sense I view these chapters as a document of the relationship between Margaret and me.

I invite readers to read back and forth between the sketch and the commentary, to read each as an independent entity, or simply to browse. I would further hope that reading these last two chapters will evoke interest in revisiting the first four.

A Life

Margaret's parents demanded steadfast and upright behavior, and she had many chores on the farm. Nothing was wasted, and the family was largely self-sufficient. Her playmates were her siblings and cousins closest in age. She loved being outdoors. Her mother cared for her seven children born within nine years of each other.

Margaret had ambitions for her future and imagined herself, even as a child, traveling and learning. She felt she was set apart from other girls, not as frivolous, possessing a constitution more like a boy's. She was not talented with music, but she was known for her skills in mathematics.

As had her mother and older sisters before her, Margaret began teaching upon completing her high school education. She taught in a variety of schools near her hometown and knew many of the pupils and their families already. Almost everyone shared the common values of moral uprightness, thrift, temperance, and unwavering patriotism.

She was attractive and adventurous, but none of the men who courted her lived up to her high expectations. She was not teaching in wait of a husband; she longed to head west. She would turn her face toward the sunset and imagine the plains and mountains beyond them. Oh, to play a role in the taming of the wilderness, to bring civil right-living to the settlers, to carve a niche for herself in history.

Soon Margaret and her sister and brother closest in age set out to study at the Northern Indiana Normal School in Valparaiso. West at last!

Indiana was not enough of a frontier. With her new teaching credentials, Margaret headed for Dillon, Montana to be assistant principal. On the long journey Margaret imagined herself in the footsteps of her grandparents, sharing their pioneer experience, though admittedly not on horseback. The wide spaces free of the criss-cross of the railroads of the East felt mythic. What a domain to rule.

But Dillon did not work out. The principal altered students' grades to suit his social and political needs. He required Margaret to support his corruption. And Margaret would not. Friends from back home now lived in the new state of Idaho. They suggested Margaret seek a position there. So Margaret headed south to become the principal of the school in Challis.

A more beautiful city could not be imagined. From her home she overlooked a sweeping plain abutting a staggering, snow-covered mountain range. The world seemed larger than ever before. The pupils at Challis were wild-eyed, rode bareback to school, spoke in euphemisms that baffled and delighted her. On the weekends she would travel out to the most magnificent lake-side or river-side meadows for picnics with the local young people. Her life abounded with excitement.

Soon she was pursued by George McGowan, whose family had cattle-ranched in Montana and Idaho since territorial days. But Margaret, now superintendent of the schools in all of Custer County, had no intention to cut her promising career short for marriage. Her sister Martha was now teaching in the area as well. And they had serious travel plans.

Margaret and Martha befriended a couple who could not conceive children. They wanted a baby more than any other thing, but there were no orphanages or adoption offices nearby. Margaret and Martha took up the adventure one summer to travel to California, where orphanages were more abundant. They searched and searched for the perfect baby. Finally finding one, they learned the basics of its care, and headed back to Idaho.

Being nearly the last children in their own family, neither sister had much experience with babies. They were surprised at the fortitude required for feeding, burping, diapering, and keeping the baby in good spirits on the long and dusty stagecoach ride. Accustomed to prim and clean attire, Margaret was astonished at the incongruence of being a lady and being a mother. Yet the desire crept into her.

Margaret nestled up a bit closer to George after that summer. She allowed him to visit with her more privately and in less formal gatherings. She had turned down his proposal once, and she labored over how to encourage him to ask again without being inappropriately forward. At last he understood, and they were married.

She continued to teach at small schools in the local mining areas. They visited Challis often as George's family was there, and Margaret continued to assist and advise in school matters. She and Martha began to train students to prepare for teaching exams after high school. Martha became the superintendent of Custer County schools, and Margaret helped her whenever she could.

George and Margaret went on a long journey together to St. Louis to attend the World Fair. Martha had been there earlier in the summer and recommended it highly. Margaret began to notice things about George of which she could not approve. George began to wonder why they had still not had a child. Upon their return to Idaho, George bought a pack-train. After that, he did not reside with Margaret again.

The humiliation and disappointment flared up within Margaret. She could not continue down the promising career path while married. But she did not benefit from either the company or financial support of a husband. So she devised a plan. She had

heard of divorce though disdained it as immoral her entire youth. Yet staying married seemed a worse fate.

The state of Idaho would not permit divorce for anyone who had not been a resident for ten years. So Margaret was obliged to wait out her resolve before she could file her papers. During this time, she and Martha continued their adventurous travel, ever farther west. They studied glaciers and mountain ranges of the northwest all the way up to Skagway in the Territory of Alaska. They made friends along the way.

Finally, Margaret's ten-year anniversary as an Idaho resident arrived. George had now had the audacity to open a tavern. Margaret knew it was a deliberate slap in her face. She wasted no time in obtaining a lawyer. She filed for and was granted divorce on the grounds of neglected support.

Harboring no desire to remain in Custer County, Margaret set her sights on more urban living. Surely as principal of the new high school in Nampa, her prospects for resuming her career ambitions would soar. Nampa was lively and modern. Her pupils were unlike the cattle-ranchers of Challis; they were the children of government officials and railroad executives. They had powerful futures ahead of them, and Margaret delighted in her position as their guide.

However, Margaret was becoming weary of the public life required of teachers. There was no private moment in which one would not be held to a higher standard than everyone else; one must always be a fastidious example. So Margaret was interested when she learned of the assay clerk examinations in Boise.

Her excellence in mathematics paid off, and she was granted a position in the Boise Assay Office. Further, the salary was significantly higher, and she looked forward to participation in the prestigious ladies' societies of Boise. But it was not long before she found herself missing teaching, and Boise was not feeding her desire for a pioneering life. When the new town of Hollister lost leadership for its school, Margaret signed on as temporary principal.

She had her sights set on the superintendency of public instruction for the state of Idaho. Many of her friends encouraged and supported her, including previous superintendents. Margaret had led the way in higher education for teachers in the state, they lauded. She worked tirelessly and knew both urban and rural schools. Newspapers speculated she would win the election, but in the end she did not.

Margaret knew it was time to quit Idaho. She had exhausted her career path there and sought a new frontier. Ever since her arrival in Idaho, the newspapers had been abuzz with news and rumors from the mining activities in the far north. A friend she had made on travels with her sister recommended Margaret to the Skagway school board, and they invited her to become their principal.

Skagway was indeed the frontier! This launching point for the northern mines was like a time-capsule from the previous century's wild west. Margaret was sure she could gain a name for herself in such a place and impress her family and friends back home to boot. She immediately implemented a modern course of study resembling ones she had helped to design in Idaho. Remoteness was no excuse for a lack of civilized academic and

domestic training. The school board celebrated her successes, and members congratulated themselves on providing their students with a school comparable with those in Seattle.

Margaret reveled in her success. Soon she threw in her name for Territorial Commissioner of Schools. She received widespread support. But in the end it was decided that the position could not be held by a woman, the physical demands of travel throughout the territory would be too straining. Margaret was disappointed but moreso she was angered; after all, Idaho's superintendents had several women among them; in Idaho she had had to travel on horseback across vast and hostile distances to visit rural schools. She had even delivered a baby when no one else was available to assist. Too straining indeed!

Margaret took up a new cause. She became fast friends with Cornelia Hatcher who had begun and was president of Alaska's Women's Christian Temperance Union. Margaret thought there was no better place for such efforts and wondered why it had never occurred to her to become involved in Idaho's union. Cornelia immediately appointed Margaret vice-president. Together the two women traveled north to the swampy town of Fairbanks, now a dozen years old and thriving. From there they traveled by steamboat to Dawson, the heart of the Klondike gold rush.

It was an exciting though arduous journey. The society in Fairbanks and Dawson contrasted sharply with the taiga, tundra, and wetlands along the Yukon River. The women avidly wrote about their journey and spread the work of temperance along the way. Upon their return to Skagway, Margaret was settled to accept the offer of the

Fairbanks school board to be their principal and superintendent at double her Skagway salary.

Fairbanks was an exciting town. New off the ground, active with miners heading into the northern hills, it combined the roughness of the frontier with the opportunities needed for career advancement, craved by Margaret in equal measure. She found the citizens to be surprisingly educated and sophisticated. The children were diligent, entrepreneurial, and worked hard. The men were gentlemen and the women ladies.

Margaret thrived in the excitement. She befriended the newspaper editor, and he chose her to edit the Thanksgiving women's edition. He praised her business-like demeanor; he knew she would not gossip. She rallied the children together in a Red Cross drive, taught them the value of work and savings. And she was tickled to ride with the Malemute Kid, mushing down to the newly bustling town of Nenana and back. There was so much to write home about!

In spite of the adventurous spirit of Fairbanks, Margaret began to question whether its remoteness could be compensated for. How would she make a national name for herself from so far off? What was the point of her local prestige if she herself was the only one who could report the success to her past acquaintances? She tired sometimes of hearing of her brothers' prominence in their communities. She tired too, though it was harder to admit, of hearing of her sisters' growing families.

She decided to travel to Seattle for the summer to seek employment, to see if urban life would be better to her liking after the years on the true frontier. While there she attended a Red Cross meeting and learned that her efforts with the Fairbanks school

children had put the remote city in the spotlight: they had exceeded their quota by an unprecedented measure. She was applauded and celebrated, and her fears began to melt away.

She returned to Fairbanks re-invigorated and began at once to lobby for the proposed Alaska Dry Act; she had to handle this carefully so as not to alienate many of her supporters. At her new residence she befriended the man across the hall from her: Martin Luther Harrais. He was a strong, fit, hard-working, and a serious miner and engineer. He had been a football star at the University of Washington, and his record there still held. He had had the foresight to arrive in the Klondike even before the rush began. He was no-nonsense, stimulating; he woke something in Margaret that had long since seemed dead.

Their evenings together were joyous. He knew so much. His childhood adventures as a deckhand at sea never ceased to intrigue her. The way that he advised her not to talk in the bitter cold so as to preserve her lungs warmed her more than any fire could have. She was electrified when their sleeves brushed against each other. But he had no money, no income. He had lost everything gambling that the town of Chena would out-compete Fairbanks. Who could have blamed him though? Chena, still on the Tanana River, was accessible by steamboat all summer long, where as Fairbanks, miles up the narrow and often-shallow Chena, was not. She did not chalk it up to bad judgment, just bad luck.

Margaret began to ruminate on the problem of marriage in these northern outposts. Everything seemed designed to prevent marriage, or to prevent its success. She

saw the problem in her pupils: their fathers were always out at the mines, while their mothers struggled to make a life in town for the sake of the children's educations. And here she was, in love with a beautiful and worthy man, yet restraining herself from any expression. For she could not marry him and retain her career to support them both. How would that make him feel? What would people think?

She felt she could wait him out. He would surely regain his fortune, a diligent and driven man like him. He had friends and connections. But Margaret's future was not to be in Fairbanks. Her activities with the Alaska Dry movement had not gone un-noticed. Some citizens of Fairbanks mistook Martin's foreignness—he was from Latvia—for German, and her acquaintance with him gave those intent on ousting her cause to do so: she was voted out of her position on the grounds of her pro-German stance.

Pro-German! Just because the school provided German as the only foreign language? Just because Martin's native lands had been colonized by them? They had done more harm to him and his family than any other nationality. It was preposterous, and Margaret knew it was just a pretense. Well, if she could not have Martin and could not have her school, then Alaska could not have her. She wrote to all of her friends and family that the slow shipment of supplies necessary to run a respectable school made serious teaching in Fairbanks impossible, and she wished to leave rather than lower her standards.

Her only younger brother Tom, a mathematics professor in Shenandoah, Iowa, upon hearing of her decision to return south, told her of an open principalship at a nearby middle school. Margaret jumped on the position. It would be a perfect way to make a

new start without suffering loneliness. Yet luck struck her down once again: almost immediately she was incapacitated by the vicious 1918 influenza virus. Forced to quit her new position, she had to succumb to being cared for by her sister-in-law until well enough to live independently again.

For months she felt she was lost. She traveled across the west, following friendly advice on the best locations for convalescence. Everyone seemed to have a theory of climate, altitude, vegetation. Finally, in Ouray, Colorado, she nearly died of pneumonia. Given a few hours to live, she feverishly took inventory of her life. How full of promise her future had seemed, how dashed by circumstance. What mattered really? What would give her life shape in the eyes of her siblings' children? It seemed that she had left no discernible marks, her life a shell now crumbling into powder.

Perhaps this letting go, this peace-making with the truth of her foiled ambitions, revived her. Whatever it was, she did not die as predicted. Following more advice, she moved to La Mesa, California. She found a little house with an adequate yard, secured some chickens and began a garden. Oh, the location was perfect! The weather was impeccable. She rejoiced in reviving a little piece of her childhood, gathering eggs, spreading feed, digging her bare hands into the warm and wormy dirt. Martin even came down and helped her build a fancy chicken coop and a shed. And he built her a beautiful white picket fence.

No one knew she had been a prominent teacher and administrator. She shied from activity in ladies' societies and even the WCTU. She lived quietly, breathed finally deeply, reveled in the winter visits from Martin, reveled in her gorgeous flowers. Still

there was this nagging itch. She did miss children. They say such interesting things; they admire your stories; they want to be formed by you. Margaret had given up on reforming adults, she believed. She wanted children in her life again. And moreso, she began to worry about her future.

The life of a teacher is difficult. You can be removed from your position for little reason. Schools were reluctant to keep a teacher on for too long lest they owe her tenure and be stuck with her. Margaret had always managed to negotiate a suitable wage, but there were summers, and there were causes needing donations, and there were no certain provisions for old age. Far too many elderly women were still stuck in classrooms, long after their enthusiasm could be mustered.

Margaret investigated the Idaho teacher pension laws. She had not had enough years to collect one. Why had she gone to Alaska without thinking of provisions for life after teaching? Oh the folly of youth! Martin arrived that fall having had a successful year. He could tell she was in low spirits; an energetic soul like hers would decay persisting in such a mundane existence. He took her hands in his, explained he could promise but little, and asked her to marry him. For a few moments, her worries lifted and she felt fluttery light. They married in a civil ceremony at the YMCA in San Diego.

Margaret's confidence was considerably boosted. She had a new plan for her future. Martin would continue to spend summers in Alaska building his fortune; he had good prospects. In winters they would enjoy each other's company until Martin had enough saved for Margaret to rejoin him in Alaska and her health had fully stabilized.

Martin was busy on what he hoped would be granted as a homestead near the Chitina Glacier. The mining prospects were good. He was saving money. When Margaret learned that the school at McCarthy was in need of a new teacher, she wrote to her old friend, now the Territorial Commissioner of Education, that she wished to work there. Martin warned her that it might not be to her liking, but nothing could stop Margaret from being near her husband, and surely she could turn the school into a success and bolster the community.

Margaret was satisfied with the cabin provided for her winter lodging. She cleaned it up to her liking and took comfort in its interior domesticity during long lonely evenings. She delighted in the school so well equipped with books, maps, and other supplies. The school children were mostly Scandinavian immigrants, their parents a motley bunch. Margaret made several friends among the ladies and gentlemen of McCarthy and for a while overlooked the community's drawbacks: bootleggers and prostitutes thrive in service of the nearby Kennecott Mine.

When Cornelia Hatcher, now living in Washington state, learned of Margaret's return to Alaska, she resigned as the territory's WCTU president and Margaret filled the position. Margaret's goal was to disseminate the WCTU's scientific temperance program to all teachers in the territory. The commissioner agreed to assist, and soon instructional materials were reaching the remotest areas of the north. Margaret was certain that she could shape the future of the land through proper education of its young people. The children would rise above their parents.

In McCarthy Margaret resumed her Red Cross and Salvation Army drives with the children. She delighted in directing their annual Christmas pageants and the wholesome entertainment they provided for the miners. The events were so well attended! She began a ladies reading society and library and encouraged all to participate. She sometimes enlisted the U.S. Marshall to raid various bootlegging operations.

In the summers Margaret's life turned perfect. With Martin and his friends, she would travel out to the homestead's cabin on horseback. She felt a renewed sense of herself as fulfilling that ancestral pioneer urge and imagined herself the first white lady to traverse the area. Martin was satisfied in her fortitude and fearlessness. She brought wild vegetation down from the hills to decorate her yard. She looked forward to the years ahead in which she and Martin would live here together year-round and be utterly self-sufficient.

Back in McCarthy for the school years, Margaret became interested in the education of two boys who had surpassed eighth grade. She petitioned to the commissioner to allow her an additional salary to provide evening high school instruction, but no such provisions could be afforded. So as she had done in Idaho with her sister decades before, Margaret offered the boys instruction without compensation.

As the years passed, Margaret made several fast friends but also, as anyone with strong opinions, found her share of enemies. Shortly before the Kennecott Mine shut down and the communities of McCarthy and Kennecott were deeply transformed, Margaret entered into a feud with one of McCarthy's powerful residents. Children were subsequently pulled from the McCarthy school and sent up to Kennecott's school. The

commissioner was forced to ask Margaret to board up the school's windows and send all left-over supplies to the school at Kennecott.

Until spring, Margaret continued to teach the high school boys. Then Martin received word that his filing for the homestead parcel was denied. Having recently lost their entire savings in a Washington Savings and Loan crash, Margaret and Martin seemed again at the end of a rope. But Martin would not give in so easily. With a few friends he moved to Cordova to rehabilitate a milling company.

Margaret had requested a new teaching post nearby, but in the meantime she was happy to assist Martin and his friends at the mill. She cooked and cleaned for the men and was happy to be quietly assisting. Still she fretted over their financial situation. She was aging; they had no permanent residence. She was five years shy of qualifying for a pension. She had to teach. The commissioner suggested the school at Ellamar. He warned her that the previous teacher had left due to inadequate living conditions, but when Margaret visited, it didn't seem so bad.

The setting was idyllic. The waves lapped just feet below the school steps. The children were well behaved and Christian, much more docile than the rough McCarthy kids. The townsite had been bustling years before when the copper mine was operational, and now some of the Natives and left-over miners married to Natives had taken up residence in the abandoned houses. On a nearby island lived a fellow teacher, Marie McDonald, who shared Margaret's passion for charity. Together they secured the most basic staples for the poorest of Ellamar's families.

Martin was close enough that, barring dangerous weather, he could come out for stretches. To earn additional money, Margaret and Martin accepted the janitor position as well. This allowed them sometimes to hire Mickey, who owned a gas boat, to take them into Valdez for the company of society.

But perhaps harmonious living is not meant to be in small communities. Soon Margaret grew frustrated with Marie's meddling ways. Marie thought she was some kind of bonded treasurer, thought she alone could order supplies for the school. Marie tried to influence the school's parents to turn against Margaret. They began to complain about her and about the government. Margaret was forced to lie to them to stay on their good side. And the Natives of Tatitlek were now against her too.

Margaret's health began to fail. The wind whipped through her room above the school. She tired of carrying buckets of snow up the ladder to melt for water. Her respiratory problems suffered from the damp, and she frequently spent whole weekends idly in her bed with a water bottle. It was difficult to imagine a brighter future.

Then Martin was appointed U.S. Commissioner and Probate Judge for the third precinct. It was not a position one could support a family on, but it was enough additional income that Martin and Margaret were able to buy a house in Valdez. Now Margaret merely had to ride out her last two years teaching, and she would receive a small pension.

Margaret began to spend more extended time in Valdez, sometimes not returning in time to begin school on Monday mornings. It wasn't her fault; the boats were unreliable in the frequently stormy weather. She would make up the days later. But the enrollment of pupils had fallen; the commissioner had become interested in encouraging

Ellamar's students to attend school at Tatitlek or in Cordova, where many of their fathers worked half the year. Soon Margaret received notice from him that she would be better served as teacher at the Dayville school in Ft. Liscum. The school was very close to Valdez, he said.

So Margaret carried out her last year of teaching in what amounted to a fake position. The Dayville school had few children, and the father of most of them was not interested in education for his children; indeed he seemed to believe they would be spoiled by it. Margaret spent most of her time serving as Martin's deputy while he attended to his multiple business pursuits. She made close friends in Valdez.

But then Martin's health took a dive, and suddenly he was dead. Margaret saw him at Thanksgiving, but she was not able to get to Seward, where his rapid decline began. She could not be with him in his last days or hours. She could not attend his burial. And she was now alone again after less than 20 years of happy marriage. The heartfelt condolence of her friends and the citizens of Valdez helped her to cope and recover. She knew she was home in Valdez.

It seemed right that after a long and successful career as teacher and experience as Martin's deputy that Margaret be appointed his successor. She took up her new duties without hesitation, continued Martin's quest for a more reasonable compensation structure for commissioners, and set herself to some serious gardening.

Margaret became a pillar of the community. She immersed herself in further charitable causes and turned her attention to the budding statehood movement. She was soon delighted to be asked to join the Territorial Board of Education. She immediately

began a campaign to create a reasonable teacher's retirement system. The success of these efforts resulted in her own name on the list of the first teachers to receive retirement pay from the territory.

Margaret began to think of her legacy. She had written so many letters about her adventures; she had lived a long life. Many things had changed in the years since her youth, and she felt she had been instrumental in shaping some of the changes. She decided to compile the letters and asked a friend for an opinion. Everyone loved her manuscript. Your life is so interesting, they would write back. Some had suggestions, but all of her friends encouraged her to pursue publication.

The publishers and agents were foolish, however. None of them could understand the purpose of her manuscript. It was not to exalt her individual life, not to be flashy or romantic. It was to reveal the true Alaskan experience, to debunk some of the absurd notions outsiders had. Everyone wanted to rewrite it into something novelistic, frivolous, and dare she even think it, sexy. There was no way Margaret would allow such tampering with the purity of her thoughts and intentions.

Margaret continued to garden avidly and took up crocheting as well. She enjoyed her solitude and the occasional visits from friends. She did not mind dispensing words of advice, wisdom, and sometimes admonishment to the claimants who came before her in her living room. She distributed justice with an eye toward who could be reformed and who could not.

Nothing could have brought her more joy than when her old Fairbanks pupil, Bob Bartlett, became Senator of the now state of Alaska. Margaret knew she had helped to

shape the fledgling state, and she had high hopes for its future. She retired from her duties and serenely crocheted afghans for veterans. When her home and everyone else's homes were destroyed by an earthquake, Margaret evacuated north with her friends. She knew as they drove north that her final days were near. She rested, breathing laboriously in the back seat, and watched the beautiful scenery. Her affairs were in order, and she looked forward to joining long-since passed family and friends. It had been sometimes lonely, but she had lived well.

Life at a Glance

0	1872	Born 9-26 Sarah Margaret Keenan at Batesville, OH
2	1874	Founding of first bank and flour mill in Batesville, OH
2	1874	Establishment of Women's Christian Temperance Union
5	1877	Telegraph line established between Batesville and Spencer Station
7	1879	George McGowan, Sr. arrives in Challis, Idaho; he is originally from Canada
8	1880	Population of Batesville is 369
15	1887	Population of Batesville is 500
16	1888	Father Thomas dies at age 55
16	1888	Graduates from Batesville High School with sister Martha
17	1889	Teaches at Beaver Rural School District, OH
17-20	1889-92	Teaches at Ohio School District #7
18	1890	Idaho is granted statehood

20-22	1892-94	Teaches at Ohio School District #5
22	1894	Teaches at Bridgeport Village School District, OH
23	1895	Graduates from Northern Indiana Normal School
24	1896	Mother Martha dies at age 61
24	1896	Women's suffrage granted in state of Idaho
24-25	1896-7	Assistant principal of high school in Dillon, MT
25-26	1897-8	Principal of high school in Challis, ID
25	1897	Martin Luther Harrais arrives in Alaska
26	1898	BS degree from Valparaiso University
26	1898	Sister Martha arrives to teach at Clayton, ID
26-28	1898-1900	County superintendent of instruction, Custer County, ID
27	1900	Marries George McGowan Jr. on 5-30 or 6-5
29	1901	Sister Martha elected county superintendent of instruction, Custer County, ID
29	1901	Teaches at May, ID
30-35	1902-07	Teaches at Custer, ID
30	1902	President of Challis literary society
30	1903	Visit with sister Martha and brother Thomas to Yellowstone
31	1903	First Nampa, ID high school class
31	1904	Visit with husband George to World Fair in St Louis, MO
32	1905	Visit with sister Martha to Portland, OR; Seattle, WA; Skagway, AK

- 34 1906 Teaches at Salt Lake City, UT—cut short by illness, returns to Custer
- 33 1906 Visit with sister Martha to Ohio, her last visit back east
- 34 1907 Granted divorce on 8-16
- 35 1908 Sister Martha marries Guy Bushnell Mains at Mackay, ID
- 35-38 1907-10 Principal of high school at Nampa, ID
- 38-41 1911-14 Clerk at U.S. Assay Office in Boise, ID
- 40 1913 Women's suffrage granted in Alaska
- 41 1914 Principal of high school at Hollister, ID
- 41 1914 Runs for Idaho state superintendent of public instruction, is not elected
- 41-43 1914-16 Superintendent of schools in Skagway, AK
- 43 1916 Elected vice president of WCTU for Alaska
- 43-45 1916-18 Superintendent of schools in Fairbanks, AK
- 44 1917 Runs for Alaska territorial commissioner of education, is not appointed
- 44 1917 Alaska Dry Law passes
- 44 1917 First meeting of the Territorial Board of Education on 5-5
- 45 1918 Principal of junior high school at Shenandoah, IA, resigns due to illness
- 46 1919 Teaches at Ouray high school in Ridgeway, CO
- 47 1920 Settles in La Mesa, CA
- 49 1921 Marries Martin Luther Harrais in a San Diego YMCA on 10-25
- 49-50 1921-22 Teaches at Idaho City, ID

51-58	1924-31	Teaches at McCarthy, AK
56	1929	Last business closes at Ellamar Mining Company
59-62	1932-35	Teaches at Ellamar, AK
60	1933	School boards abolished in unincorporated Alaska towns
61	1934	Martin appointed U.S. Commissioner in Valdez, AK, purchases house
62-63	1935-1936	Teaches last year at Dayville school in Ft. Liscum, AK
64	1936	Martin dies at Seward, AK at the age of 72 on 12-25
64	1937	Appointed U.S. Commissioner and Probate Judge at Valdez, AK in January
66	1938	Appointed to the Territorial Board of Education in November
73	1946	Among the first teachers approved for retirement on 3-16
82	1955	Retires from the Board of Education in February
82	1955	The last of her siblings, Thomas, dies at age 80
87	1959	Statehood is granted to Alaska
90	1962	Retires from her Magistrate position on her 90 th birthday
91	1964	Earthquake destroys Old Valdez, AK on Good Friday
91	1964	Dies in Glennallen, AK on 4-26

Chapter 6

The Biographer Reckons:

A Commentary

Comments

steadfast and upright behavior (p. 146)

I largely imagine this. Given Margaret's own insistence on thoroughly tempered behavior and her tremendous work ethic, I must assume such parents. She remarked on her father's impatience with frivolous news stories; the harsh undertone of her brother's admonition of her impersonal newsletters also seems indicative of a privileging of sternness. As I try to imagine Margaret as a child, I imagine my father's childhood and his parents' childhoods. Hard work on the farm coupled by an ambition for higher education, an expectation that everyone does his part without complaint, absolute thrift, and a kind of hard stoicism are the traits that I recognize as I read Margaret.

siblings and cousins (p. 146)

One of Margaret's cousins had a daughter named Viola Reed with whom I was fortunate to exchange letters and other documents. According to Viola, Margaret would have spent considerable time with her maternal cousins on family visits, particularly on Sundays after services. In Margaret's memory of these days, her companions were mostly male.

being outdoors (p. 146)

I don't know if Margaret loved the outdoors. However, she presents herself as someone who loved the outdoors. She took pride in her ability to keep up with the boys. She liked to imagine herself as a lone woman in a vast untamed plot of nature. Her writing really comes to life when she is on outdoor adventures, and she was an avid and talented gardener.

seven children (p. 146)

Margaret's father, Thomas, married Tamar Reed and had a daughter, Clara, around 1860. Tamar died in childbirth, and Thomas married her cousin, Martha—in some documents her name is Marie—in 1864. Clara lived with Martha and Thomas until her death in early adulthood. Martha, Margaret's mother, first gave birth to twins, Emmet and Emma in 1865, followed a year later by Ella, two years later James, two years later Martha, two years later Margaret, and three years later Thomas. Margaret's mother lived in the vicinity of extended family.

traveling and learning (p. 147)

Restlessness is a trait that I put on Margaret. She presents herself as wistful about the pioneering past of her forebears. And excitement creeps into her writing at points of adventure. The grades she received in her courses at the Northern Indiana Normal School were outstanding, and in a letter to her niece she remarks that she would have liked to have the opportunity for higher education. Her commitment to the education of children and the continuing education of adults is never something I found forced or doubtful.

possessing a constitution more like a boy's (p. 147)

Here is another point of identification for me with Margaret. Proud to be a girl who is like a boy, so I may put much more emphasis on this than is otherwise warranted. She attributes her survival of the 1918 flu entirely to her days playing with male siblings and cousins. Late in life she remarked that now that she had learned to knit, she may yet make a real woman. She and I seem to accept the stereotype that boys are hardy and girls are frivolous. And yet Margaret also routinely writes about the successes of women, their abilities to endure difficulties. She displays simultaneous pride in her own womanhood and yet belief that she is a different kind of woman than most.

not talented with music, but she was known for her skills in mathematics (p.147)

Although her sister Martha and brother Tom were avid singers, Margaret appears in no record as a performer of any kind aside from giving lectures. Margaret seems more of a director. She is proud of the school programs, especially in Alaska where props had to be thriftily improvised. The photographs of her earlier teaching years demonstrate the important role performance played in education. So I do not think that Margaret was a talented singer. Nor am I. Throughout Margaret's teaching career math and geography were her strong suits. Her stint in Boise as assay clerk also must be attributed to this skill in mathematics. Her files contain copious scrap papers of numerical records. Her histories of Alaska contain lists of percentages, weights of goods, costs of goods, distances and areas, and population tallies. Once I was caught adding together a list of friends' phone numbers, just for fun.

teaching upon completing her high school education (p. 147)

Both paternal and maternal sides of Margaret's family moved west to Ohio as teachers from Pennsylvania and Virginia. All of Margaret's brothers and sisters taught in Ohio upon completion of school except James. My own stereotypical opinion of people in Margaret's day was completely debunked by the fact that all of her sisters were at least 25 before they married; none had a child before the age of 34, three years older than I was when I had my first.

common values (p. 147)

Aside from my own personal experience with the Midwestern Methodist ethic, Viola Reed confirms that most of the families in the area shared these values. Margaret's male relatives were active in the Sons of Temperance organization. And the Women's Christian Temperance Union was founded in Ohio when Margaret was two years old although there is no evidence that her family was active in the organization. Patriotism and pride in the family's ancestry dating to the Revolution as well as its pioneering westward movement are evident not only in Margaret's own writing, but also in the genealogical presentations that occupied her sister, Ella, the only other of Margaret's siblings to have had no children. Margaret liked to say that she went as far as Alaska because she had an extra drop of pioneering blood in her.

attractive and adventurous (p. 147)

When I show pictures of Margaret to people, they all agree that she was striking. Her references to the men who pursued her are spare and veiled in euphemism, but it is utterly

believable that she was sought after as a life partner. Her desire for adventure is evidenced everywhere; she liked to try new things and was not afraid. Here we differ.

high expectations (p. 147)

Margaret would not have settled for anything less than her highest ideal as a young woman. Her aspirations were large, and given the harsh reprimands toward men scattered throughout her lifetime, it is inconceivable that she desired to marry and settle on a farm similar to the one on which she grew up. She once wrote a story based on her life, in which an observer at a train depot explains to another that there was no way one such as she would have been content to stay on the farm.

carve a niche for herself in history (p. 147)

In *Alaska Periscope* as well as in her personal correspondence, the refrain that Margaret has a larger role to play in the historical record demonstrates her ambition. One might argue that this drive is what thrust her westward more than the pioneering spirit that she credits. However, according to Viola Reed, family gatherings often included tales of the pioneering ancestors, and perhaps the desire to be a character in such tales in future generations provided Margaret's original impulse. To that end, she succeeded: my visit to Batesville, Ohio in 2003 was highlighted by a chance encounter in an old gas station parking lot with two local women. My mother began the conversation of course. The women grew excited at the name Margaret Harrais coupled with Alaska; they had indeed heard of her adventures in the north and considered her role in the founding of the state a matter of fact.

Valparaiso (p. 147)

Margaret, Martha, and Thomas attended the Northern Indiana Normal School, which is now Valparaiso University, and graduated with teacher credentials in 1895 and 1896. While Margaret later wrote that she and Martha and Thomas all went there together, the yearbooks show Margaret graduating a year before Martha and Thomas. Margaret returned to Valparaiso in 1898 to attain a BS degree. However, Margaret frequently stated that her BS was from 1906. The Challis newspaper mentions that she returned from a teaching stint in Salt Lake City due to illness that year and she also visited Ohio that year, so perhaps she later confused these two trips east in her mind. My visit to Valparaiso was disappointing in that the buildings Margaret would have lived and studied in were now burned to the ground. However, I walked with my friend Ellen over a beautiful Midwestern mound of grass and fading foundation and huge oaks trees where the buildings would have been.

support his corruption (p. 148)

I base this statement on a single document: a telegram asking Margaret to provide an affidavit that the principal had altered students' grades while she worked there. The telegram is from several years later. While Margaret herself was looser with the truth in her later years than she would want you to know, I have a hunch that in her youth, anything short of the absolutely transparent facts would have been unacceptable. Probably she was fortunate to get out of Dillon before she herself was implicated. Or perhaps she was a whistle-blower.

Friends from back home (p. 148)

This is my assumption based on the fictional story she wrote in which the main character, named Margaret, heads west at the suggestion of friends already out there. Margaret and Martha both went to central Idaho. If we are to believe the story in *Alaska Periscope* that they spent a summer visiting California orphanages in search of a baby for adoption, then it seems likely that the friends for whom they undertook this adventure were close. The Challis newspaper does mention a Reed family, but that's a common name.

new state of Idaho (p. 148)

Statehood for Idaho was granted July 3, 1890, and women were granted suffrage in 1896, the year before Margaret arrived there. Margaret never mentions women's suffrage directly, but she does remark on her pleasure at the first jury trial in Alaska with female jurors: she is proud that not one woman asked to be excused from the jury, and she is proud that they voted to convict, demonstrating, she says, that women will not be more likely to vote emotionally than men are.

beautiful city (p. 148)

Challis backs up into steep foothills and overlooks a wide plain with high, snow-peaked mountains at its border. You seem to be able to see for miles. When you head back through the foothills, trees are abundant, but the plain between Challis and the mountains is sagebrush bare. I was there only once for two days in March 2004 with my mom and my two-year-old son, and I was pregnant. It was spectacular and reminded me of Fairbanks if you stood on the ridge, and the ridge were more gradual and the Tanana

Flats were sagebrush instead. The night I spent in a Challis hotel room I felt closer to Margaret than any other time.

pupils at Challis (p. 148)

A photograph of teenagers, boys and girls, on horseback in 1896, one year before Margaret became the principal there, informs this description. They look like they are having loads of fun, and they are staring confidently, even challengingly, into the camera. Margaret wrote in *Alaska Periscope* about being bewildered with the new language of these young people in the West. She was not too proud to make fun of her own mistakes. She jokes that she thought corned beef was beef from corn-fed cattle, for example. She remarks that she was at first chastised for beginning sentences with the phrase, “Back home we....”

picnics with the local young people (p. 148)

The Challis newspaper chronicled the outings of community members. On several occasions the picnics included Margaret, other teachers, as well as other men and women. Sometimes the outings involved only women.

George McGowan (p. 148)

George’s father, George McGowan Sr., arrived in Challis via Montana from Canada in 1879.

superintendent of the schools in all of Custer County (p. 148)

After completing her BS, Margaret was elected county superintendent of schools. The newspaper reported that she was endorsed by every party. In her first year as superintendent the enrollment in the Challis school jumped from 83 to 120 children. The

summer following her first year as superintendent, Margaret began a summer institute, funded by the school board, to train teachers. When the school board's funds ran out, Margaret continued the institute without compensation.

sister Martha (p. 148)

Martha took a position as teacher in Clayton, Idaho in the fall of 1898, a month before Margaret's election as superintendent. According to a later teacher's recollection, Martha was also involved in the summer teacher training institutes.

serious travel plans (p. 148)

I base this on the Challis newspaper's chronicle of their departures and arrivals. In August 1902 they met up with their younger brother Tom, now living in Shenandoah, Iowa, to visit Yellowstone National Park. In the summer of 1905 Margaret and Martha traveled to Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington, and on to southeast Alaska in order to study glaciers. In 1906 both sisters are reported to have returned from the East. Margaret later wrote that this was the last year she had been in Ohio.

the perfect baby (p. 148)

This entire story is based on Margaret's account in *Alaska Periscope* in the opening chapter, which had not been part of the original manuscript. Editors and agents suggested that she add an introductory chapter to help readers know where she was before coming to Alaska. This adventure is reproduced here as Margaret depicts it. I believe that first chapter to be a compilation of adventure stories that she had already written, in attempts at magazine publication, before the idea of publishing her Alaska letters as a book set in.

I believe that in her youth she attempted to depict her adventures in a more fictionalized way than she later found appropriate.

neither sister had much experience with babies (p. 149)

I assume this although it seems likely that with extended family nearby, they would have been around enough babies to have some sense of their needs. However, Margaret depicts herself and her sister as having very little clue about the care of babies. She emphasizes their education, their ease around calculus, and their division of labor on the journey back to Idaho. The adventure is engaging and leaves readers wishing she had devoted more detail to it.

nestled up a bit closer to George (p. 149)

Margaret's narrative about the baby ends with her subtle suggestion that George had asked her to marry him before and that she had said no, and that this baby-acquiring journey changed her mind. And now she wants to make him ask her again without him thinking that she is asking him. This circumventing way of getting something she wants comes back as a character trait later in more obvious ways. It may well point to the reason she was so able to appear to be on both sides of the fence on many issues in her career. It suggests to me she would have made a fine politician.

they were married (p. 149)

Margaret Keenan married George McGowan, Jr. on May 30, 1900 in Challis, Idaho. Some records say June 5. Their first official appearance together had been at a Valentine's Day dance that year. But Margaret had been frequently in the company of George's sister before that.

teach at small schools (p. 149)

In the fall after Margaret's marriage to George, her sister Martha was elected the new Custer county superintendent of schools. Margaret continued teaching in the local schools first in May, Idaho and later in Custer, Idaho, where she and George lived. They frequently visited Challis for social events. The school she taught at in Custer is now the Custer Museum. I came within one mile of this museum when the road plowing ceased; although the weather was brilliantly sunny and warm, the snow was high and crystal heavy. My mother thought a trek through the snow with who knows what animals out there and my being pregnant, and she and my son waiting in the car, would be unwise.

Margaret helped her whenever she could (p. 149)

Many years later, when Margaret was trying to put together the number of years as teacher and school administrator that she needed for a pension, Martha signed an affidavit declaring Margaret to have served as her deputy superintendent during all of the years of her own service. Martha was not elected to return as superintendent in the fall of 1904 and became the principal of the high school in Mackay, Idaho. In 1907, Martha was re-elected superintendent; a year later she married.

the World Fair (p. 149)

In the summer of 1904 Martha traveled to the World Fair in St Louis. Upon her return, Margaret and George set out as well that October. This is the last travel that the newspaper reports their having taken together. After this trip, George was regularly on the trail with his pack train. In my mind the trip was a save-the-marriage trip, and it did not work. Decades later, a friend, C. F. Pugh from McCarthy, wrote to Margaret and

Martin that they should take a trip outside to the World Fair, that it would make them feel young again. I cringed when I read that letter.

had still not had a child (p. 149)

This is pure conjecture. I am somewhat obsessed with the question of why Margaret and George had no children. Was it a choice? Was it a source of suffering? George went on to remarry and had children in that marriage. Margaret remarried at the age of 49.

Margaret's older sister Ella was married but never had children as well. George and Margaret seem an unlikely match from the beginning. George attended all of the social functions, the masked balls, the dances. Margaret is rarely listed as in attendance. Her position as teacher may have prevented her from appearing at such events. There are many causes that could have led to the failure of their marriage, but I cannot help but think the lack of children was one of them.

he did not reside with Margaret again (p. 149)

I don't know if this is true. But after the visit to the World Fair, the newspaper reports no more events at which Margaret and George are together. In May 1906, George headed off to mine in Nevada, and Margaret attempted to teach in Salt Lake City, Utah. Due to illness she returned to Challis almost immediately. That summer she and Martha traveled back to Ohio.

humiliation and disappointment flared up (p. 149)

I do not think these words are too exaggerated. Margaret was a stickler for perfect behavior. Again and again she demonstrates a lack of tolerance for people who do not follow her ethic. It is clear that her entire family followed this strict code of conduct as

Margaret feels the need to explain her actions that stray somewhat from this code, especially during her time in Fairbanks when she was exposed to a lot of unconventional relationships. Also, Margaret could be quick to anger and was not above saying truly hurtful things at times. In my view the biggest devastation of her first marriage was that it cut her career short, and she found it difficult to pick back up on the path she had been heading.

company or financial support (p. 149)

Financial security is a recurring theme in Margaret's life as well as in the writings of women teachers on the frontier in general. For Margaret financial self-sufficiency was also a moral issue. Loneliness was a fear for Margaret. In her long treatise on the purposes of education, barring loneliness is among the first.

friends along the way (p. 150)

I assume that Margaret made connections with people in Skagway or people in Seattle heading to Skagway on this trip as she later takes up teaching there. Skagway is described by Margaret as a suburb of Seattle, somewhat disparagingly, as it is not a true frontier.

open a tavern (p. 150)

In the 1970s Sylvia Falconer published a biographical sketch of Margaret in which the reason given for Margaret's divorce is that George opened a tavern. I think this was a convenient and simple explanation for what was more complicated. It is true that George went on to run a tavern, but I have not been able to determine when he did so. There was a McGowan's Saloon in Challis as early as 1900, so Margaret would have known such a business was in the family, if it was indeed the same McGowans, when she married him.

Certainly Margaret would have found this a despicable way to make a living. But I find the general trend toward their separation more compelling than this one-action explanation.

neglected support (p. 150)

Margaret initiated the divorce proceedings in April of 1907. Since George had left the state and was now residing in Esmeralda County, Nevada, and since he did not reply to the letter sent to him there, the divorce charge—that George willfully neglected to support her for one year in spite of having the means to do so—had to be run in the newspaper once a week for one month before the hearing could take place. It appears that Margaret at first tried to receive half of George's worth, which she estimated at \$4000.00. However, in the final papers, that part of the charge is scratched through. Margaret was granted the divorce and her maiden name back, but no financial award, on August 16, 1907. George married Julia Peck in 1914 and herded sheep on the plains of Idaho. They had two sons.

Nampa (p. 150)

Nampa, Idaho is now part of greater Boise. It was established in 1891 and owes its growth to the Oregon Short Rail. It was an important railroad depot; other industry included a sugar factory and a brewery. Margaret began as the high school math teacher in 1907 and was promoted to principal the following year; she continued as the math teacher. She resigned in December 1910.

delighted in her position (p. 150)

All newspaper evidence suggests that Margaret led a happy and socially active life in Nampa and was looked upon favorably by the parents of her pupils. Student comments in the first year of the high school's yearbook—1910—depict Margaret as a tough, no-nonsense teacher. Margaret instituted a domestic science course required by students in all grades. This course later won her acclaim in Skagway and Fairbanks, Alaska, and is emblematic of her belief that education involves the whole child: academics, citizenship, and mental well being.

weary of the public life (p. 150)

This was probably not the reason she left her Nampa position. However, the public example that teachers must serve did later come to be an important topic to Margaret, and it is a general theme in the writings of women teachers on the frontier.

salary was significantly higher (p. 151)

Both the Boise and the Nampa newspapers cite an increased salary as Margaret's reason for resignation.

missing teaching (p. 151)

I only surmise that she missed teaching because I have trouble imagining her in a bureaucratic position without the chance for physical exercise and some adventure. And her impetus for moving to Idaho had always been to pioneer. She did not appear to have become active in Boise's women's clubs. I do not know how taxing the position of assay clerk might be. I know nothing at all of her personal life in the two years she was assay

clerk because, without ties to a public school position, she was unlikely to appear in the news.

Hollister (p. 151)

Hollister, Idaho was a railroad town, founded in 1911, and the high school there got off to a rough start. In late 1913, the county superintendent of schools visited and declared that the school was the worst in the county, whereupon the principal resigned; his replacement almost immediately resigned as well. The school actually closed. It would seem that Margaret was brought in on an emergency basis perhaps due to her successes in Nampa. She managed to turn around the school's reputation in the five months she worked there. She was also fully engaged in the women's club scene, giving many public lectures and participating in public debates, the latter for which she was especially lauded.

temporary principal (p. 151)

I do not believe it was ever Margaret's intention to remain in Hollister. I view the months there as a transition period for her. When she arrived in Skagway, the newspaper referred to her as a resident of Emmet, Idaho, the town in which her sister Martha now resided with her new family.

superintendency of public instruction (p. 151)

When Margaret resigned from her position in Hollister, the Hollister newspaper announced that she was debating between a position in Skagway, Alaska and Idaho state superintendent of public instruction candidacy. Apparently she kept both options open as she ran for the superintendent position but lost, whereupon she moved to Skagway. I

often wonder if Margaret's failure to attain the superintendent position in spite of her many career successes resulted from the stigma of divorce.

the newspapers had been abuzz (p. 151)

News stories about mining ranged from informational to downright ridiculous. Jokes about it being so cold that even smoke freezes and the like were printed side by side with news on prices, trails, and payloads.

recommended Margaret to the Skagway school board (p. 151)

Margaret and Martha had traveled to Alaska on a glacier touring trip in 1905. Skagway was one of the stops. Travel between Skagway and Seattle was very common; most of the men who owned businesses in Skagway sent their children to school in Seattle, and Skagway had no high school before Margaret's arrival, so all high school education took place in Seattle. The professionals of Skagway desired a modern school for their children, and Margaret had established herself as able to improve fledgling schools. Episcopal Bishop Peter T. Rowe recommended her to the position.

Skagway was indeed the frontier! (p. 151)

This was Margaret's first impression only. By the time she was in Skagway, it had quit its wild west reputation: Soapy Smith was long gone; talk of statehood was already in the air. Margaret later in life remarked that Skagway had been nothing but a Seattle suburb.

gain a name for herself (p. 151)

Margaret was well suited for Skagway. The community was educated and progressive. It lay at the heart of Alaska's temperance movement. It was well accessible to Seward,

Juneau, and Seattle, and the people of the Interior regularly passed through on their way to the Lower 48.

implemented a modern course of study (p. 151)

The most significant changes Margaret brought to the school system in Skagway were to expand the school to include the teaching of high school students, and to implement the domestic science and manual training curriculum. Margaret met with so much success in Skagway because the community there wanted this kind of citizenship training for their children. They wanted them prepared for a life in society. Children were now given school credit for domestic and manual work at home: helping with cooking, laundry, babysitting, wood chopping, structural maintenance on houses, and building furniture. A town beautification program was also led by the school children. The older girls hosted teas for the city council and women's groups, demonstrating their skill at table setting, decoration, cooking, and manners. The boys outfitted every window in the school with flower boxes.

comparable with those in Seattle (p. 152)

The school board certainly viewed this as the most important contribution she could make. One could not argue so well for statehood if one could not educate one's own youth. The high schools in Juneau and Ketchikan had recently been accredited by the University of Washington, so it was time for Skagway. Under Margaret's principalship the parents and teachers began the first Parent Teacher Association in Skagway. Their meetings included discussion of the school itself but also devoted considerable time to general community-oriented concerns as well as entertainment.

Territorial Commissioner of Schools (p. 152)

The first reference to Margaret's bid for this position that I could find was an excerpt from a Seattle newspaper printed in Skagway's *Daily Alaskan* in the summer of 1915. But the first appointment took place in late 1916.

too straining (p. 152)

Margaret later told a friend that she had not received the position because of the belief that the work, with all its travel, would be too straining for a woman. After her experience in Idaho, she must have found this ridiculous. And if it was true, it really was ridiculous given that many of the teachers sent to the far-flung communities were women. The territory never had a female commissioner.

Idaho's superintendents (p. 152)

Not just county superintendents, but also statewide, Idaho employed women in this position. Margaret's introductory chapter to *Alaska Periscope*, which is the only place we have access to her own impression of her life in Idaho, is written in a style of Romantic Adventures in the Wild West. I am more skeptical to believe that narrative than the rest of the document; in particular, the adventure of happening upon a woman alone in labor and delivering the baby strikes me as cliché and far-fetched. However, if the chapter is to be believed, her work in Custer county did involve considerable skill with horses, wagons, traversing difficult lands, encountering lone cabins in the plains and hills, and even shooting snakes. The latter skill has been found to be a typical boast in the writings of women who went onto the western frontier to teach. Learning to ride horses was written about by such teachers as a special thrill.

a new cause (p. 152)

In the biographical sketches of Margaret published in recent years, her work with the Women's Christian Temperance Union has been somewhat exaggerated. While Margaret certainly was a temperance advocate her entire life, and, according to Viola Reed, her home community advocated temperance, there is no evidence that Margaret was involved with the WCTU before moving to Skagway. Margaret later claims that she held an office in Idaho in the organization, but my search through the newsletters of that state's WCTU during the years Margaret lived there revealed no such involvement. It is true that Margaret remained active in distributing WCTU materials to the schools in Alaska at least until the time of her retirement from the Territorial Board of Education in 1955, and it is astonishing that her final legacy to the organization was close to \$70,000 in savings bonds.

Cornelia Hatcher (p. 152)

Cornelia Templeton Jewett Hatcher was the president of Alaska's chapter of the WCTU. She had been to the headquarters in Evanston, Illinois and participated in national conferences, and she had been the managing editor of its publication *The Union Signal*. She considered herself an Alaskan by marriage, and she maintained a residence in Seattle. It is possible that Margaret met Cornelia before moving to Skagway, but I believe that the two women met during the WCTU convention, and that they were a perfect match in intellect, drive, and temperament. Margaret spent that summer with Cornelia in Seattle, where Cornelia reported the two of them were living the perfect life of bachelorettes. Cornelia's husband presumably was in Alaska.

taiga, tundra, and wetlands along the Yukon River (p. 152)

I have spent a few weeks over three years on the river in the Yukon Flats. Every time I am there, I try to imagine what it must have been like to be confined to a steamship in the bug-ridden heat of an Interior summer. Since very few settlements exist along the routes I have traveled, I imagine I am viewing the exact same landscape she was. I wish that Margaret had written more about this trip.

accept the offer of the Fairbanks school board (pp. 152-153)

Margaret was often driven by money, so the doubled salary must have been a major factor in her decision, but I also think that Skagway was becoming sort of boring. I don't mean that she did not have good company there, friends who were like-minded: she played cards avidly with a circle of friends, attended many social events, and hosted dinners and luncheons. But I think the notion that Skagway was a suburb of Seattle is what pushed her farther north. Fairbanks is no one's suburb. Even today, we struggle to get out. Margaret's desire for ruggedness, for something new, a real frontier must have weighed considerably in her decision. But it must be remarked that she visited Fairbanks in the summer when it is a beautiful place. Used to Skagway winters—during a cold spell of -20 all community activities were canceled—and even Challis winters—by March it is spring, Margaret could not have anticipated the length, severity, and sheer isolation of winter on the Chena.

surprisingly educated and sophisticated (p. 153)

Margaret made it a point in her letters to explain how well read, well educated, and patriotic the people of Fairbanks were. She compiled a list of eastern schools the citizens

had attended. I don't know if she was really surprised, but I am certain she thought her friends and family in the east would be surprised. She did feel that the school was insufficient for the community. Almost immediately, she planted the idea for the expansion of the school building as well as scope of its use, arguing that a gymnasium and manual training room would benefit the community in the evenings and that the facilities would benefit those who could not attend day school.

The men were gentlemen and the women ladies. (p. 153)

This is a point that Margaret emphasizes to her readers in both the Idaho introduction and the chapters about Fairbanks. It does not recur after she leaves Fairbanks. But emphasis on the well mannered men can be found in nearly all narratives of women who went west. One of the driving reasons appears to be that it was not acceptable to be a lone woman in the company of strange men in the east, but in the west there was no way around it. So the gentlemanliness of the men had to be pointed out. The lady was not compromising her morality by being in their company because they could be trusted like a well raised brother.

throve in the excitement (p. 153)

Until the paragraphs in which Margaret constructs an acceptable reason for her final departure from Fairbanks, her narrative is vivid, exciting, and colorful. The Idaho introduction and the chapters about Fairbanks are by far the highlight of *Alaska Periscope*. So I think she was having genuine fun here. The newspaper reports that among Margaret's first actions in Fairbanks was to lift the ban on teachers attending social dances.

Thanksgiving women's edition (p. 153)

To raise funds to pay for hospital beds in Europe, the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, edited at the time by W.F. Thompson, dedicated a special Thanksgiving edition to women's news. The idea, according to Margaret, was Thompson's wife's and he would only concede to do it if Margaret would edit. The relationship between Thompson and Margaret is intriguing and not fully fleshed out. She seems to like that he likes her although she doesn't fully respect him. She quips about the frivolity of some newspapers and their abundance of errors—Thompson has sometimes been nicknamed Wrong Font Thompson. He was decidedly against prohibition, he rails against Cornelia Hatcher and the Dry Act, but he never suggests that Margaret had anything to do with it in his newspaper. In fact he names her as one of three women whom Fairbanksans might safely elect to city council, in part on the grounds that despite her standing as vice president of Alaska's WCTU, Margaret did not actively campaign for the Alaska Dry Act. Later he defends her from a public letter written by W.W. Shorthill, the secretary to Governor Strong, in which the former names Margaret as having led the fight in the fourth judicial division. The Thanksgiving women's edition became a sore spot later as Margaret tried to publish *Alaska Periscope*. Her young niece criticized many facets of the manuscript, one of which was that the episode describing Margaret's work with the newspaper was completely outdated as women were doing that kind of work everywhere now, in 1932. This niece worked in some capacity for the University of Michigan Ann Arbor's Early Modern English Dictionary project. The archival assistant there was unable to give me

more information because the project's holdings are indefinitely on loan to the Oxford University Press.

Red Cross drive (p. 153)

Margaret had done this in Skagway as well. The School Savings program was one advocated by the WCTU although not directly linked to it. The children placed their earned money in a bank savings account that was then donated to the Red Cross.

Margaret published a plea in the newspaper that adults not just give the children the money, as they had to learn not only thrift but also a work ethic. She offered a list of tasks the children could do to earn their savings. She also had to address to the children the fact that one should not spare the church's offering for the sake of the Red Cross deposit. I believe the emphasis on working for funds was a development from her approach in Skagway to give the children school credit for community work. As the mother of little kids though, I like the Skagway plan better since it emphasizes contribution to community over monetary contributions to something abstract. According to Margaret, the people of Fairbanks raised so much money for the Red Cross that the regional headquarters in Seattle celebrated her efforts when she visited there that summer.

Malemute Kid (p. 153)

One of the most entertaining stories in *Alaska Periscope* details a dog-mushing trip from Fairbanks to Nenana, back to Fairbanks. Margaret was the sole passenger, bundled up in clothes and furs. The trip included a night at a public house, the narration of which must be repeatedly qualified by how a curtain separated her from the men. On the way back, a

hot water bottle burst in her lap, forcing them to stop at a less than reputable public house. Again, she emphasizes that she was announced as the Fairbanks school superintendent. And then she expounds on the help she received from the madam, and the injustice of women being judged solely on the basis of their sexual virtue. In this chapter Margaret not only demonstrates a rethinking of her moral code, but she is also full of humorous self-deprecation: the foolishness of traveling with a water bottle; the misunderstanding that the water basin for washing was for her alone, not for the entire public house. This chapter was reproduced in several newspapers across the country. In the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner's* version Margaret deleted the portion of the story in which she marvels at the modernity of Nenana, declaring that she had done more pioneering in Idaho in one day than on the whole Alaskan trip.

national name for herself (p. 153)

I do believe that seeking a higher education and a prominent position in society lay at the foundation of Margaret and her siblings' upbringing. Living in a new and remote place like Fairbanks meant not only reporting on her own achievements but also having to contextualize them continually. Those of us who live here today still hear silly assumptions from those who have not been here; the remoteness is difficult to imagine. But more personally, I identify with this frustration at having to qualify everything with explanation. My own growing up outside of the United States led to this awkwardness in narration ever time I tried to convey my experiences to my American family and friends.

sisters' growing families (p. 153)

This stems entirely from my own curiosity about Margaret's feelings about not having children. Her brothers were successful men: Emmet was a school principal in Caldwell county in Ohio; James was the editor of the *Caldwell Press* and then pursued a degree in law; Thomas was professor of mathematics first at Lincoln State Normal School in Nebraska until its demise by fire, then at the Normal School in Shenandoah, Iowa. By the year 1917 Margaret's sisters Emma and Martha had had seven children, five of whom survived infancy.

to seek employment (p. 153)

I don't know that this was her intention in Seattle the summer of 1917. She narrates the visit as beginning in a re-evaluation of her position in Fairbanks. She explicitly states that she could perhaps do more national good were she living in a less remote place. But her story then transforms as she learns of the Red Cross drive's success; her narrative begins to value the resourcefulness of Fairbanksans. The things she thinks she is missing no longer seem as important.

Martin Luther Harrais (p. 154)

A biography of Martin would be quite welcome. I see him in glimpses through Margaret's eyes. I have not extensively followed the myriad mentioning of him in the records, but it would be worth someone's pursuit. He was born in Riga, Latvia. According to Margaret, he left his family at the age of nine and stowed away on a ship. He spent his youth as a deckhand, eventually landing in Seattle. He attended the University of Washington, where he was a celebrated football player and team captain,

and he received a degree in mining engineering. He was among the earliest miners to arrive in Dawson and eventually followed the rush to Fairbanks, where he was convinced the city would not last since it was inaccessible by steamship when the river fell in summer. So Martin began the town of Chena at the confluence of the Chena and Tanana rivers. According to Margaret he lost \$100,000 that he had invested in coal when the federal moratorium on coal mining was enacted. She also claims he lost that amount in the dismantling of Chena. Martin was instrumental in the founding of the Tanana Valley Railroad, which ran from Chena out to the mines in the Goldstream Valley, Chatanika, and Fox. He believed the unique location made the University of Alaska Fairbanks ideal for the new study of RADAR and authored a resolution which became the founding document of the Geophysical Institute; he served on the Board of Regents. He tried to homestead in the Upper Chitina, but lost that, according to Margaret, due to a filing technicality. He unsuccessfully attempted a mill in Cordova. Finally he was appointed U.S. Commissioner and Probate Judge in Valdez and lobbied for a salary rather than fee system of compensation, a cause Margaret continued after his death. Martin died in Seward in 1936 on Christmas. Although the cause of death was cancer, all reports say that his death was sudden and unexpected. Weather prevented Margaret from reaching him.

he woke something in Margaret (p. 154)

She tries to mask her passion, but it is clear that she liked him and she was very glad he liked her too. Desiring more of a detailed portrait of their courtship, Anita Diamant, a

New York literary agent, suggested Margaret offer more of her personal feelings.

Nothing could have insulted Margaret more.

He knew so much. (p. 154)

Martin was an avid scholar of history and wrote his own manuscript *Gold Lunatics*, a history of the Klondike gold rush, which remains unpublished as well. Margaret was impressed that he had learned English from reading Shakespeare, the anthology of which he carried with him for decades. In general she admired that he seemed self-made.

ruminates on the problem of marriage (p. 154)

A whole chapter of *Alaska Periscope* is dedicated to the difficulty of maintaining a marriage in frontier Alaska. It includes something like an apology for unconventional weddings, many of the anecdotes of which are from general Gold Rush newspaper lore. Then it expounds on the reality of children needing towns for their education and fathers needing the mining fields. The chapter has the feel of having been intended as a newspaper story rather than a letter.

she could not marry him (p. 155)

She insinuates pretty explicitly that she would have married him had he asked her. But he appears to feel that he cannot support her. It is apparent that Martin felt he was from a lower class than Margaret and that he would not be able to live up to her standing or achievements.

voted out of her position on the grounds of her pro-German stance (p. 155)

This is the official reason given that Margaret was not re-elected superintendent in Fairbanks. I surmise only that the true reason lay in her temperance activities. Perhaps my

assumption exposes my own bias that the pro-German argument is absurd. In the winter of 1916 and 1917 Margaret did offer two lectures on compulsory education in which she used the German system as a model. It is true that Martin's original homelands were now under German rule; however, he himself had nothing but disdain for the Germans, causing her, she remarked, some embarrassment at how she had taught the Hanseatic League from a one-sided perspective all these years. The only foreign language taught at the Fairbanks high school was German, whereas the year following Margaret's departure only French was offered. The business sector of Fairbanks was pro-alcohol. People had trouble envisioning how schools would be funded without the alcohol licensing fees. *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner's* editor W.F. Thompson's avid efforts to defend her seem to me, in light of his own objections to prohibition, to demonstrate how detrimental her stance could potentially be.

the slow shipment of supplies necessary to run a respectable school (p. 155)

Margaret writes to her friends and family that the last straw in Fairbanks was when she instructed shipping clerks on two possible ways to ship needed supplies depending on the weather. They did not follow her instructions to her satisfaction. Her letter rants at the shipping clerks Outside and how no one who has not been in Alaska thinks the people there know what they are doing. She complains that she cannot possibly conduct a real school under these conditions. She does not mention that she was voted out of her position. She does not mention that she had exhausted herself working for legislation that would provide for funding of schools in absence of alcohol revenues. I love this depiction

in *Alaska Periscope*. I love its counter to the notion that victimhood is a good excuse. I love what it does not say and how it does not say it.

only younger brother Tom (p. 155)

Tom was teaching math in Shenandoah, Iowa. I merely assume that he helped her obtain a position there. I am sure she would have proved again to be an effective administrator and math teacher and may have had a lifelong summer companionship with Martin had she not been laid out by the flu. Margaret likely did not return to Idaho for two reasons. First, something like defeat might be interpreted. But more, I think, her sister Martha had had by now four children, two of whom died in infancy. Perhaps Margaret did not want to burden them with asking for support. No personal letters from this era are accessible to me.

1918 influenza virus (p. 156)

This virus was a worldwide epidemic taking the lives of, in some estimates, as much as 3% of the world's population. This particular strain used the immune system against the body, and so was particularly devastating to healthy people. In some areas bodies would pile up because not enough people were strong enough to dig graves. The most common cause of death due to this virus was pneumonia. Serendipitously, just as I was looking into information about this flu, my father sat on an airplane next to Kirsty Duncan, who had just written a book on the subject and asked him if he would review it. He asked me to read it for my opinion. Much to my delight, the book itself is an autobiographical narrative of her scientific research endeavors.

succumb to being cared for by her sister-in-law (p. 156)

I have no reason to assert this. I imagine that is what would happen under the circumstance; the number of photographs of Tom and his wife Addie and their children in Margaret's collection suggest they had a closer relationship than Margaret had with her other brothers and sister. Nevertheless, I imagine Margaret would have felt somewhat humiliated by having to be cared for. Her relationship with dependence had not proven very strong. Correspondence between Martin and Margaret is not preserved in any systematic way. But upon Margaret's first leaving Alaska, she was impatient at lost and delayed letters and took Martin to task. Martin began to assume that an accomplished lady like she now desired no further communication from a man from low beginnings who could offer little in life. His reply to her admonishment is forgiving and somewhat groveling. It is the closest thing to a love letter in all of the files. It breaks my heart.

For months she felt she was lost. (p. 156)

I base this on the fact that she moved from teaching position to teaching position. I know that everyone had their own opinion, as they still do, about what climate and altitude are good for convalescence from various ailments. I know, for example, that my own grandmother moved all over the southwest, finally settling in Missouri, during the 1970s and 1980s in search of a magical allergy-free zone.

she feverishly took inventory of her life (p. 156)

This is straight from Margaret. *Alaska Periscope* describes this near-fatal episode with uncharacteristic introspection. A turning point is most certain here. She sought no more prestigious teaching positions. She settled into a quieter life. She was now explicit that

she and Martin did not see eye to eye on the marriage question. She suggests it is because he has not had a near-death experience to make a review of what matters in life. She calls it a clarifying experience.

And he built her a beautiful white picket fence. (p. 156)

I couldn't resist the cliché! There is one picture of her in this yard, and there is a good-sized shed, maybe even garage, a nice little house, and a fence although it is not white. It would seem that Martin came down to visit whenever he could. Apparently she had purchased the house with her savings; according to Margaret, as soon as she and Martin married, he placed the sum of the house's cost into her savings account.

She shied from activities in ladies' societies and even the WCTU (p. 156)

This statement is utterly unsubstantiated. More accurate is that I have not looked into the San Diego years! However, she did say that she delighted in no one knowing that she could read and write. She expounds on her lovely gardens. It does seem that she and Cornelia Hatcher together began a women's gymnasium and beauty school in Long Beach. But the newspaper clipping Margaret preserved is not dated, so I cannot know for sure. The emphasis on beauty is inner health before use of cosmetics.

She did miss children. (p. 157)

I am firmly convinced that this is true. Margaret was kind-hearted in that she believed the right kind of habit-making in childhood would lead to a happy, fulfilled, and meaningful adult life. The small tokens the children gave her and their depictions of her in their school news reports and yearbooks suggest that they liked her severity.

she began to worry about her future (p. 157)

At this point in her life I believe that she was imagining a future with Martin homesteading in Alaska. Yet a steady income was not something she would sacrifice. So she began work in 1921 to compile what amounts to a resume, collecting affidavits from people in schools she taught in Ohio, Idaho, and Alaska. It appears that she taught in the school in Idaho City, Idaho during the 1921-22 school year; however, I have not been able to verify this from any source outside her own files. It seems very likely to me, however, given that Idaho established its first teacher pension program in 1921. In 1922, Margaret wrote to the state of Idaho's teacher retirement fund that she was now retiring after 25 years of teaching and had paid one half of 1% of her Idaho City salary into their fund. She never received compensation from this fund because the Idaho teacher pension program was declared unconstitutional months after its establishment in 1921. Funds were not returned to those who had paid into it until 1929.

an energetic soul like hers would decay persisting in such a mundane existence (p. 157)

This statement is my attempt to say that I believe she was civically active in San Diego, but I have no proof. Leaving Alaska might be interpreted as a kind of passive-aggressive move on her part to motivate Martin to ask for marriage. Nearly dying in the process may have sealed the deal. Honestly, I think they both wanted the same thing but could not compromise expectations that derived from social image rather than personal relationship.

He took her hands in his (p. 157)

This is precisely the kind of statement Margaret would object to, as it is none of your business, and it is, of course, entirely imagined.

what he hoped would be granted as a homestead (p. 158)

Martin had mining claims in this area and had built a cabin. It was within a few days travel of McCarthy. According to Margaret, his savings were deposited in the Puget Sound Savings and Loan, and he invested in an office building in Seattle.

the school at McCarthy (p. 158)

McCarthy, Alaska was a community on the edge of the Kennecott Mines. In June of 1924, the teacher there, Mrs. Refior resigned. The clerk of the school board, Josephine Barrett, requested Margaret and said everyone who knew her in McCarthy wanted her. Margaret had never been to McCarthy, however. The McCarthy school board was habitually riddled with controversy, and the community there seemed to thrive on factionalism. In the spring before Margaret's arrival the biggest story was that an illiterate man, Fred Overlander, had been elected to the school board, which met with objection. Yet no law stated that one had to be literate to be on the school board. The financial books of the school board were in constant dispute. The treasurer, railroad operator C. F. Pugh was one of Margaret's biggest advocates. In 1927 the commissioner of education tried very hard to contact someone regarding the books. At this time, Frank A. Iverson replied that he was not the clerk, and he did not know who was. Yet a few weeks later he was listed as the clerk of the McCarthy school board when he requested to rehire Margaret. However, Pugh signed in Iverson's stead. All the way into the 1930s letters

between the commissioners of education and the McCarthy school board show problems with the clerk and treasurer positions. Pugh was not efficient in releasing bonds. The personal rivalry between Julie Seltenreich and Jean Tjosevig appears to play a significant role in the operation of the school. Are you confused? So was I! The McCarthy episode in Margaret's life seems to me like a dark comedy.

her old friend now the Territorial Commissioner of Education (p. 158)

L. D. Henderson had been appointed the first commissioner of education in Alaska in 1916; Margaret was one of his competitors. Henderson had come from Idaho. I feel they must have, if not known each other, had common acquaintances. Margaret had clearly known them in a personal way during her time in Fairbanks since Henderson sends her greetings from his wife, and Margaret sends him greetings to his child.

Martin warned her that it might not be to her liking (p. 158)

Surely Martin could see the factions in McCarthy and would know that not all the parents would band together wanting the same kind of education for their children. The life Margaret had been accustomed to prepare school children for was not necessarily the life these children needed to be prepared for. This was not just a matter of place; it was also a matter of changing times.

delighted in the school (p. 158)

Margaret wrote with much warm affection about the school children at McCarthy. Her chapters on her years there show more personal involvement with the actual students than any others. She began a library for the community as well. And she was as firmly invested in providing entertainment for the young men of the Kennecott Mines as she had

been in using the school facilities for wholesome community activity in Skagway and Fairbanks.

well equipped with books, maps, and other supplies (p. 158)

Margaret actually brags about this in *Alaska Periscope*, suggesting that the people Outside teach in more depraved conditions than she in rural Alaska. To me the contrast between this experience and the frustration at the lack of supplies in Fairbanks is intriguing. A school was also taught at Kennecott, a few miles away. I have never been to McCarthy although my husband and I stood across the river from there after a strenuous drive down a pot-holed, willow-lined, and rabbit-ridden road in the middle of a bright night one summer. We could not get across to McCarthy as there was no bridge. Since this was a decade before I even knew of Margaret, I was not motivated to pursue our options to get across.

scientific temperance program (p. 158)

The WCTU published school curricula that Margaret was determined to institute across the Territory of Alaska.

The children would rise above the parents. (p. 158)

Though in Margaret's youth in Ohio such a goal may have been expected, in McCarthy, Alaska, people were making their way from diverse backgrounds. Not everyone agreed on the desired goal. The success that Margaret had had in schools in Nampa, Hollister, Skagway, and Fairbanks had everything to do with relatively homogenous student bodies and commonly shared hopes for their futures.

wholesome entertainment (p. 159)

Prostitution, alcohol, and gambling were not permitted in Kennecott, so the miners would hike down to McCarthy, where all three could be found. Margaret was determined to provide these miners with an alternative on their breaks. From her own description, which is full of enthusiasm and pride, these men were fully engaged by the children's entertainment programs. Margaret's descriptions of the Christmas pageants in McCarthy and in Ellamar constitute her most lively writings about teaching in Alaska.

raid various bootlegging operations (p. 159)

Margaret may have informed the U.S. Marshall of various bootleggers although she adamantly claims that she did not. According to the recollections of kids from McCarthy and Kennecott, the U.S. Marshall was part and parcel with the bootlegging and made only a pretense of raiding.

first white lady (p. 159)

An obvious claim to fame is being the first white lady to ever... in the writing of women on the frontier. My favorite by far of these was the claim of a black prostitute during the Klondike Gold Rush era who claimed to have been the first white woman to travel the Yukon. In this conflation of phenotype and ethnicity, white means civilized.

wild vegetation (p. 159)

Margaret especially liked ferns, and tried to transplant them from their native locations to the sides of her and Martin's cabin. She packed numerous plants out to the cabin each summer. This is continued indication of her voracity for gardening.

utterly self-sufficient (p. 159)

There is no doubt in my mind that Martin and her wish was to live in this cabin, homestead the land, and make money off Martin's mines. There is doubt in my mind as to whether Margaret would have actually been satisfied with such a life.

offered the boys instruction without compensation (p. 159)

In the anthologized writings of women teachers on the frontier, giving additional lessons or latching on to adult students or otherwise special students without remuneration is fairly common. While Margaret was certainly looking for a salary, she had been teaching these boys in the evenings for a while already.

one of McCarthy's powerful residents (p. 159)

The feud began over the question of membership in the community library and reading group. Margaret apparently allowed membership to a woman who was a known bootlegger. Margaret deemed that since the woman had paid her dues, she should be allowed membership. Most of the single women in McCarthy were in the brothels. According to the memories of the Kennecott kids, these women were treated with a fair amount of respect when in public.

send all left-over supplies to the school at Kennecott (p. 160)

Even though both schools were operated by the territorial government and were quite close together, transportation necessitated two schools.

his filing for the homestead parcel was denied (p. 160)

Even years later Margaret could not mask her bitterness over this denial, which she claims to have been due solely to a clerical error. The loss of their savings was a very serious blow, particularly given that Margaret was now without a teaching position.

rehabilitate a milling company (p. 160)

For several months Margaret worked at this mill with Martin. She described herself as a jack-of-all-trades, helping out with whatever was needed as well as cooking and cleaning for all the men. This is one of few times that Margaret writes about cooking or food at all. She writes about pacing around while she eats and not being able to sit still. She writes about what she and Martin ate on the trail, and that is the only place that actual food items are mentioned: rice, potatoes "in their skins," and pasta, "not all in one meal of course." At one point she writes that three meats in one meal is what has deterred her from being a miner in her own right. I think she would have considered food a sort of necessary luxury that should be pretty bland and certainly not savored. She did twice complain that she would not have time to make a real Thanksgiving meal because school was not out on the Wednesday before. Otherwise, her food references are only about the conversation at meals, or the etiquette of the school children putting on the meal, not the food itself. My feeling is that she didn't enjoy cooking unless it was work related. But her preserves did win prizes in Valdez when she was old. At the end of her life she made breakfast and lunch for herself, but the families of Valdez took turns bringing her dinners or bringing her over to dine with them.

Ellamar (p. 160)

The town on an island in Prince William Sound had been the headquarters of the Ellamar Copper Mine. In 1929, the last business in Ellamar—the store—closed. A resident, Ross Paden, purchased most of the property on the island. Because the town's residents had been primarily white children, the school was operated under the territorial government in spite of the fact that most children in attendance when Margaret was there were native.

The setting was idyllic. (p. 160)

It is clear that Margaret had high hopes for this position. She describes the school in flattering terms and seems excited to try her hand at teaching native children. The children she describes as a pleasant group, well versed in Christian stories and songs. However, she remarks that they are not advanced in math and begins to wonder whether this is a result of nature or nurture. Margaret's stance toward the Native people in general is emblematic of her era. She had one native friend in Cordova, whom she admired greatly for her skills and knowledge of the environment, but she cannot stop herself from qualifying to her family and friends that this native woman is "all white on the inside."

Marie McDonald (p. 160)

Marie Frantzen McDonald hailed from Florida and came to Alaska as a railroad dining car attendant. Soon she began teaching for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in several interior villages. Her position toward native people reflects her BIA training; she feels maternal toward them, judges them as to their civilization worthiness, and makes numerous ethnographic remarks on them. She believes she is unique in her understanding of native people and that any village with too high a white population is impossible to work in

since the white people merely interfere in the teacher's business. Upon marriage to Angus McDonald, a fox farmer on Busby Island across from Ellamar, Marie no longer taught. But she did serve on the Ellamar school board as treasurer until the territory abolished school boards in unincorporated towns in 1933. Thereafter she continued to view herself as the fiscal go-between between the teacher and the commissioner of education. While I have not been to Ellamar, my friends' grandparents now own the house in which Marie McDonald resided. They showed me pictures of it from their last visit in the summer of 2009.

secured the most basic staples (p. 160)

One family in particular benefited from Margaret and Marie's charitable efforts. While it would be cynical to rule out altruism, it is also fact that the family in question was able to keep their children living in Ellamar and attending its school in large part due to the assistance of Margaret and Marie.

Martin was close enough (p. 161)

Occasionally this proximity caused problems, particularly given the unpredictable weather of the Prince William Sound. Margaret sometimes could not return to Ellamar for school on Mondays. It is not clear whether this failure to return was always unplanned. Martin lived with her in the school house at Ellamar for most of her first two years teaching there.

Marie's meddling ways (p. 161)

Margaret was accustomed to dealing directly with the commissioner of education since the time the position was held by her friend L. D. Henderson. Marie would have none of

this direct communication. As Marie began to grow frustrated with Margaret's spending, occasional closure of the school, and likely her small lies, she became more active in complaining to the commissioner. Marie does a complete about face: no longer arguing for why the Ellamar school must remain open, she begins to argue that there hadn't been enough children to warrant the school for a while.

the Natives of Tatitlek were now against her too (p. 161)

If Marie is to be believed, Margaret would occasionally call the U.S. Marshall on the bootleggers of the village of Tatitlek, about two miles away from Ellamar. It is a plausible assertion.

Margaret's health began to fail. (p. 161)

The room above the school was accessible by ladder only. Margaret and teachers before her describe the building as lacking in insulation. Marie complains that Margaret is always rattling in her breathing and never takes the children outside. I believe that Margaret suffered chronic respiratory difficulties at least since her bout with the 1918 flu and subsequent pneumonia, perhaps her whole life. In the coroner's report on her death, he states that she had asthma. She obviously was fond of hot water bottles, so I am inclined to believe Marie's description, albeit full of caricature.

not a position one could support a family on (p. 161)

The U.S. Commissioner positions paid on a fee basis without a base salary. Martin lobbied for a base salary stating that the temptation for corruption was too large for most to bear given that the more cases they heard, the more they were paid. He also lobbied for a courthouse to work in, describing that the dockets were currently kept in his shed,

which had no fire safety measures, and that he had to hold court in his living room. After his death, Margaret took up this cause as well. And although she continued to hold court in her living room and house the dockets in her home until her retirement in 1962, her evaluation is cited in the federal government's official investigation of the U.S.

Commissioner system in the 1940s. According to Marie, Martin did not want Margaret to continue teaching as he felt he might be more employable if she were not employed. It is very hard for me to imagine Martin saying such a thing about his wife. However, it is likely that other people thought something along those lines. Once Martin became the U.S. Commissioner, one of his first cases was the filing of a parent of the Ellamar school against Margaret for holding school on a holiday. Margaret had been accused of holding school on a holiday once way back in Idaho as well.

the commissioner had become interested in encouraging Ellamar's students to attend school at Tatitlek or in Cordova (p. 162)

The commissioner of education had an investment in closing as many small territorial schools as possible, especially when students could attend a BIA school, at no cost to the territory. Most of the kids in Ellamar had fathers who worked for Works Progress Administration projects in Valdez or Cordova whenever possible. Furthermore, Tatitlek was very close to Ellamar. Marie had spent much effort keeping the Ellamar school open on the grounds that one child had a deformity and could not possibly walk to Tatitlek.

teacher at the Dayville school (p. 162)

The commissioner was highly tactful with this suggestion, making it seem that he was doing Margaret a favor rather than capitulating to Marie's insistence that the Ellamar

school shut down. Indeed, it is factual that there were not six children in attendance to warrant keeping the school open. However, the situation in Dayville is somewhat of a mystery to me. Located at Ft. Liscum, very close to Valdez, but difficult to get to with no road fording the river, the Dayville school appears to have consisted of the Day children. It was run as a special school until Margaret's employ there. A special school meant that the territory would provide a teacher, but the building, maintenance, and fuel would be provided by the community. The father of the Day children, who also ran the mail boat around the Sound, was rumored to be disdainful of education for his children. And yet when I spoke to the wife of one of these children, she thought it entirely plausible that Margaret would have taught in Dayville. On the one hand, I assume the position was merely a reward for Margaret's years of service in Alaska as the commissioner of education knew well that she had to teach one more year to qualify for the pension. On the other hand, perhaps Margaret was just the kind of teacher Mr. Day would tolerate.

Margaret spent most of her time serving as Martin's deputy (p. 162)

Margaret's work as deputy commissioner later paves the way for her appointment as Martin's successor. It also suggests that she spent more time in Valdez than would have been likely a full-time teacher at Dayville could manage.

She knew she was home in Valdez. (p. 162)

I often view Martin's death as bittersweet. Margaret lost her companion in life, but she gained a career of the kind toward which she had always aspired. She lived for the rest of her life in the house Martin bought for her. She took immense joy from her extensive flower and vegetable gardens. My sister and our children and I once looked for Martin's

grave in the pioneer section of the Seward cemetery. We had no luck, so we expanded our search to the whole cemetery. We had our children looking for his name everywhere. We never found it, but it was a lovely afternoon.

budding statehood movement (p. 162)

The statehood movement began as early as the 1910s, but after WW II it really got off the ground. Margaret was an avid letter writer, and her campaign for statehood included lengthy correspondence with the Secretary of the Interior's Harold Ickes as well as with the governors and representatives of the territory. She founded Valdez's statehood club and advocated for other Alaska cities to do the same. I imagine it must have been one of her greatest pleasures to witness finally the birth of the state at the age of 87.

join the Territorial Board of Education (p. 162)

Margaret was appointed to represent her district in November of 1938. She resigned from the position in 1955. Service entailed extended stays in Juneau each spring, which gave her considerable joy as many of her old-time friends lived there. Her first concern was a teacher's retirement system. She had been working with administrators and legislators in Idaho on establishing a retirement system there, and she was convinced of the need for the teachers of Alaska as well. In 1946 the first teachers were approved for the retirement system in Alaska; Margaret was among them. Other policy making in which she was instrumental included allowing soldiers to receive high school credit for their service, allowing boys to graduate to join the armed services if they had completed at least half of their senior year, and allowing people over 21 to take special exams to receive a high school diploma. The Board also advocated for a unified school system in the territory,

with the territory and the federal government sharing costs. Margaret supported local control of schools throughout her tenure and repeatedly argued that teachers should have a voice on the Textbook Commission.

Margaret began to think of her legacy. (p. 163)

Margaret had always thought of her legacy. But in her older years people frequently sought her perspective on historical and political matters, and I believe she came to see herself as an Alaskan historian. She collected Alaskana from diverse sources. She had sent portions of her own letters to newspapers over the years, and several had been published across the country. Now friends were suggesting that she compile the letters for a book. In the 1940s a young soldier by the name of Kensinger Jones paid Margaret a visit. He was interested in her stories, and he left their visit with her permission to write a book about her life. She sent him papers, and he composed an outline and draft of several first chapters. It is a fictionalized novel including a romance. I was lucky enough to correspond with Kensinger Jones largely thanks to his unusual first name. He joked that I would have had a much harder time had he been given his twin brother's common first name. He was thrilled to talk about Margaret and told me that her reaction to his draft was that it was too factual for fiction and too fictitious for biography and that he should desist at once. Her sharpest criticism of his draft was that he had depicted the teachers on the western frontier as weak, fragile, and in search of husbands—the exact opposite of what they really were.

The publishers and agents were foolish (p. 163)

Margaret sent her manuscript to publishing companies, agents, friends, and family members. With the exception of a young niece, all friends and family lauded the work as interesting and important. Several editors as well as one agent offered her encouragement, but they all suggested significant revision.

tampering with the purity of her thoughts and intentions (p. 163)

Margaret did follow some of the suggested revisions. She added an introductory chapter that detailed her experiences in Idaho. She sprinkled throughout the manuscript references to her appearance and feelings that are ensconced in criticism of editors who asked for such material. A later agent asks her to remove those references. My first hunch was to believe that Margaret was simply too busy to make a significant revision, but I have since become convinced that her reluctance to revise was actually an act of loyalty to the authenticity of the letters at the time of their composition.

garden avidly and took up crocheting as well (p. 163)

Margaret won awards and prizes for her flowers, vegetables, and berry preserves. Her garden is occasionally referred to as a tourist destination. Everyone I talked to in Valdez who remembers Margaret mentioned her beautiful garden. One woman remembered that as children they used to hang around her house to enjoy the flowers, and they called her Ma Harrais. They were somewhat afraid of her. Once Margaret learned to crochet, she began to crochet afghans for war veterans. She was as avid in this as everything else. Her 114th and final afghan is unfinished and viewable in the UAF archives. It is a box full of orange and brown 6' by 6' crocheted squares.

She did not mind dispensing words of advice (p. 163)

It's hard to say if this is true or not. She wrote frequently that she did not enjoy standing in judgment over fellow men, and this view of her has solidified in biographical sketches. When I met with Gloria Day, the first thing she wanted to do was read a quotation to the effect that Margaret was uncomfortable judging others, and Gloria thought this was very accurate. Gloria repeatedly referred to Margaret as a grand old lady, kind-hearted, and she stressed to me that Margaret never spoke of her judicial cases in public. There is a sense in which I believe this version of Margaret; however, I also don't believe it. All of the descriptions of Margaret from students she once had suggest that she was stern, unbending, yet truly loved the children. The kindness in her heart is no longer in question for me, but that she did not enjoy pointing others in a better direction is hard for me to accept.

distributed justice (p. 163)

Margaret's dockets are bewildering. The majority of the cases are some version of drunk and disorderly, drunk and abusive, public drunkenness. The sentences are wildly varied, with some receiving a small fine and others up to 90 days in detention for seemingly the same offense. One defendant wrote to the attorney general asking for an investigation after receiving a sentence he deemed excessive compared to those received by others. He suggested that Margaret did not have enough knowledge of the law to hold the position. So as I attempted to make sense of her system of justice, I began to assume that since she must have had personal familiarity with the defendants, she gave them sentences tailored to her vision of what they would do with another chance. She remarked once proudly that

she gave someone a very long jail sentence in order to keep him sober until summer work returned. But even repeat offenders do not have obviously increasing sentences. It is clear that Margaret exercised something like charismatic justice. For example, she wrote to the attorney general asking for clarification on adoption laws. She noted that friends of hers had adopted a boy, who had now turned bad and was spoiling their good name; was there a procedure for unadopting him? The attorney general had no sympathy for Margaret's friends. The dockets are difficult to read having sustained water and silt damage from the earthquake of 1964, and they are incomplete, but the overall picture I glean is that she approached the work with her usual systematic bookkeeping and likely offered ample verbal advice and admonition in addition to fines and jail terms. She corresponded regularly with the attorney general attempting to understand the intricacies of laws. My favorite question was whether married women under 21 can legally procure alcohol since, on the one hand, one must be 21 to purchase alcohol, but, on the other hand, women are considered legal adults as soon as they marry.

She retired from her duties (p. 164)

Margaret resigned from the Territorial Board of Education in 1955 at the age of 82. The Board dismissed her with a letter more glowing than any of the other dismissals. They thank her for her lifetime of dedication to education; her loyalty to the work of the Board; her expansive knowledge of the problems facing Alaska's schools, especially rural schools; and her extreme efforts, especially in recent years, to attend Board meetings. I assume she resigned because the travel to Juneau had become unsustainable. Upon statehood, Margaret became worried that she would not be able to retain her judge

position, as only territories used U.S. Commissioners. But she was able to stay on as Probate Judge until her retirement on her 90th birthday. Senator Bob Bartlett entered into the congressional record a public appreciation of Margaret's contribution to the state.

earthquake (p. 164)

On Good Friday 1964, an earthquake obliterated Old Valdez, which had been built on unstable ground. Gloria Day described the experience of the earthquake to me in vivid detail: the ground seemed to move up and down; you could hear the nails squeaking as the walls shifted; little children who were down at the docks awaiting treats from the ship *Chena*, were all lost at sea. A special treat to me was admiring a plant that Gloria Day has in her house, which she had rescued from the earthquake.

Margaret evacuated north with her friends. (p. 164)

According to memories of Valdezans, Margaret was a passenger in the Cliftons' car as they evacuated to Glennallen. Margaret's health was not stellar. Her executor, Louise Segerquist, described that she suffered from bouts of asthma and had not been able to attend church in months. She took two naps per day, yet was up, dressed, and around every day. Louise made sure that Margaret's house was padlocked and its remaining interior items preserved from looters. I imagine that the combination of the shock of losing everything, of all Old Valdez being destroyed, and of being exposed to the chill of April was more than a 91 year-old could bear. I have looked for the cemetery in which she was buried—it was her wish to be buried wherever she died—in Glennallen. My family and I drove all over following everyone's directions. It was almost comical how

many different places people pointed us. We never did find it, but I will try again next time I pass through there.

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Conclusion

This biography is one of infinite biographies that could be written about Margaret. I was interested to manipulate readers' perspective on Margaret primarily due to a belief in the pedagogical value of reading. I believe that reading about other people, their thoughts, and experiences leads to rethinking one's own thoughts and experiences. I was surprised to find how difficult it ultimately was to narrate without judgment. The very choice of words began to make its own meaning. Sometimes these meanings take on lives of their own, so each reader will experience Margaret uniquely, form an individual and particular relationship with her, and also come to some conclusions about me.

Biography as a genre is uniquely suited for studies in narration as well as personhood; furthermore, approaching any historical, cultural, social, or literary problem through a biographical lens will lead to insights into the ways in which interpersonal dynamics shape other processes and institutions. Biography itself straddles history and the literary arts, and, therefore, necessarily implies delineations between different kinds of writing and approaches to human phenomena. This dissertation is a biography that also examines biography with particular emphasis on the reader's experience. As such, it draws conclusions about the course of an individual's life situated within larger historical, social, and literary movements; about the relationship between what constitutes a self in its myriad contexts and the consequences of such dynamics for our ability to describe and interpret events; and about the potential for the interplay of autobiography within biography to promote readers' self-reflection on their own dynamic personhood.

Studies of biography as a genre often focus on its essence—the ways in which it must function to be considered biography—and its uses—the scholarly justification for its composition. Until fairly recently, the majority of biographies aimed to depict the subject as the main character in a larger system, be that system a historical period, an intellectual movement, or other social phenomena. Margaret is a great candidate for such a biography. She lived at a time of broad westward expansion in the United States and left the east (or Midwest, depending on point of view) as it was transforming from frontier family farming to mining and industry. She came of age around the time the first American women were granted suffrage and participated in various manifestations of the women's movements as well as educational reforms of the Progressive Era. She arrived in Alaska as the Gold Rush was settling into general civilization building and remained active in social and political matters until statehood was granted. In other words, her life paralleled general historical happenings.

Margaret was influenced in her actions and writing by American pioneerism. Her view of herself in history combined ethnic pride in her Scottish, Irish, and English origins—for example, her repeated calls for attention to the fact that her ancestors were at the signing of the Magna Carta—with patriotic pride in her ancestral connections to American icons, such as Betsy Ross and crewmen on the USS Constitution, or Old Ironsides, a plaque of which hung on her living room wall. Her grandparents' migration from the east to the frontiers of southern Ohio provided the narrative impetus for her own westward movement; she compared herself to her grandmother in a variety of texts although she conceded that her own pioneering was not quite as strenuous. The hardships

she endured in some living situations were made bearable by reminding herself how difficult her grandmother's life was. She believed that her desire to go to and remain in Alaska, the last American frontier, was due to an excess of this pioneering blood in her veins. In these ways Margaret saw her life's trajectory as embodying the American spirit of conquest and development, a spirit she painted in biological colors, consistent with the rise in emphasis on scientific methods that marked the Progressive Era.

Margaret's movement west likely also resulted from her desire for independence. Large numbers of women traveled west as teachers in efforts to reform westerners, as part of Native missions, and to build their own careers. Margaret's participation in women's movements took the form of reading societies, the temperance movement, general educational reform, and patriotic charities, such as the Red Cross. At the heart of all of these efforts was the belief that the American citizenry should be uniformly educated in practical and academic matters; exercise thrift, self-restraint, and physical health; and demonstrate self-sufficiency through work that provides for the care of those in hardship. Margaret's contradictory attitudes toward womanhood mirror the differences within American white women's approaches to suffrage. On the one hand, women's moral superiority should be exercised through care for family and society, and can be negatively affected by political participation; on the other hand, women's moral superiority dictates a responsibility for social reforms that can only be enacted through political participation. Margaret exercised her political participation primarily in temperance and educational reforms, which was in keeping with women's realm of acceptable work. While Margaret professed her belief that only children could be

positively influenced because adults are already set in their ways, her life-long commitment to continuing education for adults suggests a much broader interest in social reform.

As an elder, Margaret's political activism blossomed, especially with respect to the Alaskan statehood movement. She held the common position that the territory was under the oppression of the federal government and that the federal government had paralyzed the development of the territory through its conservation-based management of resources. Margaret originally believed that the territory would develop into three or four states and would become every bit as developed and populated as the rest of the United States. By the time she organized Valdez's first Statehood Club in the early 1940s, the role that the state would potentially play in the military defense of the country had become evident and refocused the discussion for the importance of statehood. As far as I can tell, none of the positions Margaret held in the statehood debate were unique, yet as an avid and lively letter-writer, her voice was significant.

In all of the ways that Margaret's historical and social contexts are expressed in her own writing, the literary strategies she adopts are also in line with those used by others in similar situations. Her early writings depict her as an adventure-hero: she does not complain about hardship, the men in her depictions of the west are perfect gentlemen, the people of the west are different from but every bit as good as the people of the east, and the west is a vast empty landscape—described in sentimental and Romantic clichés—that can be filled by civilization. All of these tropes appear consistently in the writing of other women who went west. The masking of parts of life that should not be discussed in

public through use of euphemism, as well as the model for behavior requiring extremely careful self-construction underlies the Victorian style.

One of the ways in which women's autobiographical writings have been published is in anthologies of primarily excerpted texts framed by larger social movements, ethnic groups, nationalities, professions, or other cohorts. Often these texts are then editorialized with respect to the kind of experiences that are depicted and the women's expressed attitudes toward these experiences. This emphasis on the content of the writing as well as the context of the woman suggests the potential for biographies to answer questions about the interaction of the various spheres of personhood and to probe to what extent an individual can represent a group. Margaret argued that *Alaska Periscope* depicted the "composite Alaskan," thereby preferring an uncomplicated point of view on what constitutes an Alaskan. However, the details of her observations reveal a much more complex reality.

The most recent theorizing about women's autobiography rests primarily in asserting the writer's skill at subverting traditional models of autobiography, identity, and self. Such theoretical approaches subordinate the content of texts to their contexts and make a very good case for careful and critical examination of archival materials. However, Margaret was not a revolutionary; her role in history, social policy-making, and as a writer demonstrates that she was essentially swept up by larger movements rather than instigated them. Searching in *Alaska Periscope* for evidence of subversion of tradition would be an exercise in futility. Indeed, one can read Margaret's whole life as a fairly common example of her gender, generation, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and

place. Nevertheless, she was an individual, so the manifestations of her machinations within these common larger trends are personal and particular. I recognize in my own approach a resistance to biography as a vehicle for depicting the individual as a representative of a group. More important to me was to highlight the complex, incidental, and vital role every individual plays as groups move through history, using the example of Margaret.

This discussion of the intersections between patterns within groups and the interior motivations of individuals, as well as the expressions of both, leads to questions of the self perceived by self and others over time. Biographers must make decisions as to how their subject will be perceived while maintaining some allegiance to their own honest understanding of the person, which is necessarily embedded in their understanding of themselves. A bewildering line of questions then follows: Is the subject's perception given preference? Is the biographer's perception given preference? Do we mean understanding as a compassionate act, as explanation, as condemnation? Is the understanding to take place from within the subject's sense of individuality at any given moment, as a development over time, or within the contexts that surround the subject? Is the understanding to take place from the historical and experiential perspective of the biographer, or from demands the biographer imagines in his or her readers? In this biography I have tried very hard to answer *yes* to all of these questions, and to depict Margaret from the multiple perspectives that such an answer demands.

That individuals are motivated by multiple and even self-contradictory factors, and themselves behave in sometimes unpredictable or apparently inexplicable ways,

provides for the potential for biography to promote the self-reflective and critical reading I wish to foster. I do not think it is presumptuous to state that I know Margaret better than anyone else alive today does. Because I am in a sense the medium through which readers will come to know Margaret, this biography had to include autobiographical elements. As readers experience Margaret in relationship with others throughout the biography, I become more and more of a character in the biography as it progresses. The problems and successes that I chose to highlight and the details that I chose to exploit for dramatic effect and entertainment value are guided by my biased preference for interpersonal relationships and texts over political and historical events. Nonetheless, the latter are illuminated through the lens of what some might call gossip.

Readers will make sense of Margaret and draw conclusions through their own experience of what is plausible, expected, or exceptional. Meaning in biography is, therefore, made through multi-layered relationships: between the subject and his or her contemporaries, between the subject and the biographer, between the subject and the reader, and between the reader and the biographer. By appearing in the last and longest chapter as a living character in a relationship with Margaret, I model for readers an introspective examination of reaction to the material that went before. I place strong faith in the belief that critical and self-reflective reading promotes tolerance and compassion for others, and a greater understanding of our common humanity for what it is: shared yet particular.

Biography as a genre is uniquely able to engage the reader in self-reflection because its meaning is based in relationships that are presented after careful speculation

on individual motivation and understanding of historical, social, cultural, and literary contexts. Biographies always insinuate a theoretical stance toward personhood even if it is not made explicit. What constitutes a person and how that person is narrated are inextricable philosophical, cultural, political, historical, and literary problems. At the beginning of this dissertation I discussed the prevailing position that biographies are not considered literature, which assumes that the life of the person is what determines the success or failure of a biography to interest readers. I hope that this biography demonstrates that every life is interesting; biography must interest readers through provocation with a clever and deliberate narrative strategy that allows readers to animate the life in their own particular imaginations.

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