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Melanie J. Mayer and Robert N. DeArmand. *Staking Her Claim: The Life of Belinda Mulrooney, Klondike and Alaska Entrepreneur*. Athens: Swallow Press / Ohio University Press, 2000. 415p.

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Mayer and DeArmand's *Staking Her Claim: The Life of Belinda Mulrooney, Klondike and Alaska Entrepreneur* meticulously and sympathetically documents the remarkable life of Belinda Mulrooney (1872-1967), frontierswoman and pioneer in the Klondike and Alaska. Rather than a theoretical study, this is a biography of a unique personality of whom most readers will never have heard. Mayer and DeArmand's biography details the many significant accomplishments of a woman whose entrepreneurial spirit placed her out of sync with mainstream late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century views of a woman's place in society, but was a perfect match for the ambitious, adventurous spirit of the Yukon goldfields and beyond. While Mulrooney experienced failure as well as success, and not all her actions and business dealings were admirable, she thrived on physical and economic challenges that left many of her contemporaries devastated, and weathered the loss of two fortunes with pluck and dignity.

Belinda Agnes Mulrooney left Ireland as a young girl when her parents sent her to live with relatives in Pennsylvania. After a limited education, Mulrooney moved to Philadelphia at age 17, where she worked for two years; the money she earned launched her life as an independent businesswoman when she moved to Chicago in 1893 and became actively involved in the real estate boom accompanying the World's Fair. Mayer and DeArmand suggest that the significant involvement of women activists in the development of the World's Fair perhaps reinforced Mulrooney's determination to succeed in life on her own terms. Her success in Chicago led her to consider new opportunities further west; in 1894, she moved to San Francisco, where, at age 22, she had already achieved more than many of her contemporaries.

After fire destroyed Mulrooney's investment property in San Francisco, she talked herself into a job as the first stewardess working on a ship running from San Francisco to Juneau, Alaska; in this job, she quickly branched out into retail sales, providing both necessity and luxury items to passengers travelling on the ship. Her travel and merchant experience at this time (1895-96) established valuable personal and professional contacts for her future. Restless by nature, Mulrooney joined the gold rush into the Klondike, trekking over the Chilkoot pass and travelling the Yukon River to Dawson, arriving in June 1897. Mulrooney was soon in business in Dawson, selling dry goods, building cabins, and running

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a restaurant. Later, Mulrooney helped establish a new town, Grand Forks, where the hotel and bar she built became the center of community life; here, she also acquired and worked on mining claims as well. As unusual as her business activities were for a single woman of this era, she was widely admired and respected as a prominent citizen in the Yukon. And, while Mulrooney was quite accomplished in delegating her business activities to others and engaging in complicated partnerships, she also spent much of her time involved in the hands-on activities of running her hotels and restaurants, and the physically demanding labor of gold mining on her claims.

In October 1900, Belinda Mulrooney married a self-proclaimed French Count, Charles Carbonneau. Although the Carbonneaus lived in high style in both the Yukon and Europe over the next few years, the couple separated in 1904. Unfortunately, Charles Carbonneau turned out to be a sophisticated con artist; the marriage cost Mulrooney her first fortune, and left her with legal tangles regarding her Klondike business dealings that took years to settle. Mayer and DeArmand examine these legal challenges in depth, providing many insights into the complexities facing women at this time, particularly the legal ambiguities about the rights of both married and unmarried women in Canada and the United States.

Mulrooney started over again in Fairbanks, Alaska, in 1905, where she established a bank with a younger sister, Margaret, and began building her second fortune. In December of 1906, she was granted a divorce from Charles Carbonneau. Mulrooney never remarried; she supported her parents and helped educate younger siblings and their families throughout the remainder of her life, through times of financial stability as well as loss. Most of the text focuses on Mulrooney's life through 1909; her life in Washington State from 1909 through her death in 1967 is succinctly covered in the final chapters of the book.

In 1927-28, a journalist from Spokane, Helen Hawkins, conducted a series of interviews with Belinda Mulrooney that provided many details of her life as a Klondike pioneer. It seems that Mulrooney had become a legendary figure and she enjoyed having the opportunity to "set the record straight" about her accomplishments, while remaining mostly silent about her failures, including her marriage to Charles Carbonneau. By drawing upon the extensive manuscript materials left by Helen Hawkins and other primary and photographic sources, Mayer and DeArmand have provided an illuminating examination of the life and times of an unforgettable woman, as well as a balanced assessment of her personal and professional activities. Belinda Mulrooney was justifiably proud of her hard work, her adventures, and her contributions to the development of her beloved Yukon and Alaska territories. As a woman who lived a life of accomplishment and ad-

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venture on her own terms that stands in significant contrast to the predominant social conventions of her time, Mulrooney's story is both inspiring and refreshing; it is a valuable addition to the history of women in the United States and Canada in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Mayer and DeArmand's close examination of Mulrooney's life and times ends on a sadly ironic note; when Mulrooney died at age 95, "her death certificate ... described [her] as a housewife, the one occupation she assiduously avoided" (343). *Staking Her Claim* celebrates one woman's life and entrepreneurial spirit, while demonstrating that significant human accomplishments need not be limited by such factors as harsh geographical territory, economic disasters, or constricting social conventions.