

## **Fairbanks Daily News-Miner article by Kris Capps, 1/31/19**

FAIRBANKS — Kathleen “Mike” Dalton was a force of nature who never stopped advocating for what she believed was best for Alaska.

When she celebrated the new sign dedication for the Dalton Highway last September — named after her husband, Jim Dalton — she pointed out that she outlasted four governors to get that project accomplished. Friends finally helped make it happen.

“I tried to do it very quietly and professionally,” she told a group at the Pioneer’s Hall last fall.

Dalton died this week at 93, leaving behind a treasure trove of memories intertwined with Alaska history. She was here before Alaska became a state and then not only became a part of that history herself, but also kept track of it all.

“You could go to her and ask her a question about what happened at such and such a time, to who and why, and she could tell you,” said longtime friend Francine Mears. When Mears heard the news, she said she “felt such a sense of loss.”

“That history is gone,” she said.

Dalton was always known as “Mike” because her Irish father wanted to name his children Pat and Mike. Her sister, Patricia, became Pat and Kathleen became Mike.

She headed to Alaska in 1949 with a girlfriend and a degree in English from Flagstaff’s Northern Arizona University. Born in Arizona, Dalton spent her early childhood years on a Navajo Indian reservation where her father worked.

Shortly after arriving, she met Jim Dalton, the son of Klondike gold rush legend Jack Dalton, for whom the original Dalton Trail to Dawson was named. They married in 1950.

He played a crucial role in developing the Federal National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska on the North Slope and served as a contractor there for the Department of U.S. Navy in oil and gas exploration. The couple lived in the Inupiat village of Utqiagvik, formerly known as Barrow, for six years. After the birth of son, George, and daughter, Libby, they moved to Fairbanks, on 30 acres off Yankovich Road. The state eventually named the road headed north in Jim Dalton’s honor.

Mike Dalton worked for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner for about 10 years, covering stories including the 1964 earthquake in Southcentral Alaska, the 1967 Fairbanks flood and the discovery of oil in Prudhoe Bay.

“Anytime we’d go someplace, we had to throw that camera case in the car,” said her daughter Libby Dalton Slane. “Then we’d come across a story and we’d get out of the station wagon, get the story, take the picture.”

During the 1967 flood, Dalton arranged to meet Gov. Wally Hickel when he arrived to inspect flood damage. She knew him from her Republican political connections.

“He had this assistant with him,” Slane recalled. “Gov. Hickel says, well, I’m getting on a helicopter to go see the valley. Come with us, Mike.”

He then turned to the assistant and said, “You’re going to have to catch the next ride. I’m taking Mike.”

“That assistant was so bent out of shape,” Slane added.

To visit her husband, who continued working even farther north for long periods of time, Mike Dalton got creative at finding transportation north to see him.

“I got really good at hitching rides,” she said during her Pioneer Hall presentation last September. “I made 12 trips above the Arctic Circle during the winter of 1968-69.”

In the summer of 1962, Fairbanks pioneer Sylvia Ringstad asked Dalton to lick stamps and stuff envelopes for Republican candidates. Dalton joined the Republican Women’s Club and was a staunch Republican from that moment on. She was instrumental in raising funds and organizing support for Republican candidates. She loved politics.

She won a seat on the Fairbanks North Star Borough Assembly when it was formed in 1964. She went on to manage the state of Alaska’s office in Washington, D.C., during Gov. Jay Hammond’s administration, worked as Interior Alaska field office manager for U.S. Sen. Ted Stevens from 1971-78 and also worked for Sen. Jack Coghill during his tenure in the Alaska Legislature.

In 2013, she was honored as both the Ruth Burnett Republican Woman of the Year and the Republican of the Year.

After retiring, Dalton spent some of the winter months in the Tucson area, but she wasn’t lounging around.

“She went to the Veterans Administration Hospital and volunteered,” Slane said. “She loved it. She liked just being productive.”

“Her big thing was being productive,” she said. “That’s how she ticked. That’s what made her happy.”

As word of her death spreads, those who knew her are finding ways to pay tribute. Commenting on a recent online blog report, Nick Stepovich of Fairbanks described her as “a great, great lady” who was both family and mentor to him.

“She spoke to what was right and fair,” Stepovich wrote. “Many a governor, U.S. or state senator, party chairman or legislator has heeded Mike Dalton’s advice. I should know. I was one of them.

“Believe me, you didn’t want to feel the wrath of Mike Dalton.”

Alaska has lost a trailblazer, leader and pioneer, he said.

The family plans a Pioneer of Alaska memorial service sometime in February. The date is pending.

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