

Bio of Mike Dalton from Alaska Women's Hall of Fame website
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Kathleen "Mike" Michael (Fitzpatrick) Dalton

1925

Categories: 2016 Alumnae, Community Service, Political Activism

Biography

Kathleen "Mike" Dalton is a seemingly tireless activist whose efforts have made waves since her arrival in Alaska from Arizona in 1949. Her six-year tenure in Barrow gave her an understanding of remote regions and those who live there. Residence in the Aleutians broadened her scope. As for Fairbanks, Dalton's home base for more than half a century, she has played a major part in shaping its social, political and economic future as well as that of the state, while preserving a valuable part of our history.

Until the age of 10, Dalton was raised on a Navajo reservation in Arizona where her father worked. A carpenter and construction worker, he and her mother then moved their four children to Tucson where Catholic schooling was available. Following high school, Dalton graduated with a degree in English from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff. Then, to escape the heat and sun, she followed her friend and former schoolmate, Rosie Losonsky, to Alaska. There she took a job with Arctic Contractors and was introduced to the sport of dog mushing through the Libby Wescott Kennels.

Shortly after arriving, Mike met Jim Dalton, the son of Klondike gold rush legend Jack Dalton for whom the original Dalton Trail to Dawson was named, and married him in 1950. At the time, Jim owned nothing but a station wagon and a bean pot, but he was a brilliant engineer who played an integral part in developing the United States petroleum reserve 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 Barrow for six years. Following the birth of son George in 1954 and daughter Libby in 1957, they bought 30 acres off Yankovich Road in the Fairbanks area and built a classic log house.

The problem was that Jim's job kept him on the North Slope for weeks at a stretch, and Dalton found herself in the role of a single mother with two toddlers, living in the wilds a considerable distance from downtown Fairbanks. Despite this, she became active in her community with

children in tow, although it was no small job. Just driving Yankovich Road on ice at 50 below zero today remains a challenge.

In the summer of 1962, Fairbanks pioneer Sylvia Ringstad asked Dalton to lick stamps and stuff envelopes for Republican candidates and the young mother joined the Republican Woman's Club in which she now has 50 year tenure. As secretary of that organization she kept the records, dealt with the Alaska Public Offices Commission, raised funds and knocked on doors for an astonishing number of diverse candidates. She has created countless phone and "walking" lists, and collected thousands of email addresses which she still utilizes to keep members and the public informed. She has also participated in most of the party's district and state conventions, while never attending the national event.

Over a ten year period as a reporter for The Fairbanks Daily News Miner, Dalton covered major stories like the 1964 central Alaska earthquake, the 1967 Fairbanks flood, and the oil discovery in Prudhoe Bay through the construction of the 500 mile haul road that opened it to industry. She also ran for a seat on the Fairbanks North Star Borough on its formation in 1964, becoming top vote getter and serving for five years.

"I remember her working all day, coming home, fixing dinner then leaving to town for assembly meetings," daughter Libby recalls. "It happened a lot."

Dalton went on to head Alaska's office in Washington, D.C. under the Jay Hammond administration. Her job as Interior Alaska field office manager for U.S. Senator Ted Stevens ran from 1971 to 1978. In addition, she was on the staff of Sen. Jack Coghill when he served in the Alaska Legislature.

Dalton also managed to attend University of Alaska Fairbanks where she got a two-year degree in petroleum technology and studied Japanese. She followed up with a year at Middlebury College in Vermont for a Japanese program and then traveled to Japan three times on work-related issues.

Yet despite her demanding career and that of her husband, the Daltons were a tight family. Jim Dalton's death in 1977 was a staggering blow, but by that time Mike was so used to doing heavy lifting on the home front, she kept the survivors afloat with little or no interruption to the many community assignments she shouldered and scant financial backing.

Dalton's experience broadened in 1990-91 when she worked for the City of Unalaska helping organize the 50th commemoration of the bombing of Dutch Harbor and the Japanese occupation of Attu and Kiska Islands. In 1991 as the U.S.S.R. was collapsing, she helped organize and participated in the first American delegation visit to Russian Far East and Kamchatka Peninsula.

A dedicated member of the Alaska Pioneers, she has served has in every office including that of president of Women's Igloo # 8 in 1997.

Dalton was one of the first non-Natives to be honored by the Fairbanks Native Association. Her support of early Native leaders played a key part in helping organize the Alaska Native land claims fight.

And, while she claims no expertise as a historian, she has managed to rescue sizable chunks of Alaska's legacy that were imperiled. Typical is the time a Fairbanks News Miner editor, new to Alaska, moved all the newspaper's World War II photo archives to a dumpster and Dalton, waiting until after dark, dived in, dusted them off, and preserved them. She was one of the first to record interviews with old-timers for the University of Alaska Archives. She was also responsible for returning to the state from California 24 painting by Sydney Laurence, Alaska's most famous artist, and documenting the original owner's colorful history.

Because she is as outspoken as she is enthusiastic on her political beliefs, many fail to recognize Dalton's other outstanding community service, quiet charities, and often self-sacrificing contributions to the lives of others.

Few take their community duties as seriously as Dalton, especially at a grass roots level. Be it fund-raising to build a much-needed new hospital, capturing the neighbor's straying dog, concern for ill-cared for muskox under early state stewardship or just showing up daily for the long trial of a good friend thought to be unjustly charged, Dalton has always made the time to be there.

She won't just bring her prized oatmeal cookies to the benefit for an old-timer. She'll transport the old-timer, too, if he or she doesn't have a ride, even if that old-timer lives 50 miles out of town over a nasty dirt road. It's safe to bet that more Fairbanks people have memorized Dalton's phone number, than any other private number you can name.

Dalton has a knack of surreptitiously supporting newcomers to the Alaska who are troubled by its bumpy road to survival. Quicker than most to notice those in need, she provides assistance so gracefully that often those at risk do not realize the depth of her charity or feel any embarrassment in accepting it.

And, shunning recognition, Dalton has always been quick to help fill needs when government fails. Who else each spring would recruit family and ever-present house guests to help jack-up remote road culverts that have been squashed by winter traffic so that they would not dam the spring break-up to overflow, flooding the lowlands?

Dalton is not focused simply on Alaska, but remains current on national issues, too. After the trial of O.J. Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman in 1995, she planted two young spruce trees in her yard in their honor. Recently Nicole's family heard about the Alaskan memorial and expressed their appreciation for the far north commemoration. Those trees are full grown now, and so are Dalton's interests in women's rights and many other national concerns.

While many who have track records similar to Dalton's political involvement have sought office for themselves or personal glory, Dalton has preferred to work behind the scenes on behalf of

others. She is an award winning member of the Alaska Outdoor Council and has been named Republican Woman of the Year, but she is so adamant about self-aggrandizement she refused to attend any event honoring her 90th birthday and did so only when others were honored for their community involvement at the same time.

Because of her broad experience in rough and remote country, many—especially young women—have looked to Dalton for advice. And, although she is outspoken on her political beliefs, her discretion in personal matters have long make her an excellent confidant, which might well be her greatest claim to this honor.

Induction ceremony acceptance speech <https://youtu.be/zMhAhzotVnI>